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The Horse and the Heroic Quest: Equestrian Indicators of Morality in Lancelot, Don Quixote, and Tolkien

Kirsten G. Rodning

Georgia College and State University, kirsten.rodning@gcsu.edu

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THE HORSE AND THE HEROIC QUEST: EQUESTRIAN INDICATORS OF MORALITY IN
LANCELOT, DON QUIXOTE, AND TOLKIEN

BY KIRSTEN G. RODNING

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“Yet when all the books have been read and reread, it boils down to the horse, his human companion, and what goes on between them.”

--Walter Farley

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Introduction

Medieval and Renaissance studies have been populated with a multitude of scholarly work over the centuries, and the genre of the heroic quest has been a popular area of study for scholars of these time periods. Recently, a new form of literary criticism, called ecocriticism, has arisen to address the need for studies of ecological elements found within literature. Because ecocriticism is currently only a few decades old, there are vast areas of the literary world that deserve a thorough study in the new genre, but have not yet been analyzed to their fullest extent. One such area of study that is longing to be researched in this vein is the genre of heroic literature: in the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and even in modern works. While ecocritics have studied some aspects of the genre of heroic literature, there has been little to no research on animals in heroic works, especially on the most important animal any heroic story may feature: the hero's horse. Critic David Sandner states,

Fantastic literature, an acutely self-conscious literature which necessarily foregrounds its status *as* representation, is well suited to the study of the construction of fictional environments, and so, perhaps paradoxically, the "real" environment. Indeed, setting is always crucial to any work of fantastic literature. (Sandner 285)

Thus anything that may seem commonplace in a regular, contemporary story should intrinsically be studied in more depth in a work of fantasy, such as a work of heroic literature. Included in this detailed study should, especially for the heroic work, be the horse, which holds an important place in the heroic protagonist's world and retinue. Many critics may view the horse as a mere piece of background imagery, but in heroic literature those critics couldn't be more wrong. The hero's horse is his most constant companion and most important helper when it comes to

achieving heroic deeds. Without a horse, the hero would be stationary, which is not a position that allows for any sort of heroic acts.

The heroic genre often features at least one horse for every character named in each story. The popular tales of King Arthur and his Knights grew through a series of stories written, told, and sung across Europe, and gave rise to the chivalric and heroic genres. One thing that a reader can be sure to find in each of these stories is at least one horse. This is especially notable because the word “chivalry” stems from the French word for “knight”: “*chevalier*.” This derives from the root word “*cheval*,” which means “horse” in French. By this definition, a knight cannot be a knight without a horse. And a hero cannot commit heroic deeds without some reliable means of transportation, so for hundreds of years of human history this meant that any sort of hero must have had a horse. Knights in Medieval and Renaissance works have always been found riding a horse, whether they are traveling to defend their kingdom or commit acts of bravery, or performing in sports such as jousting. For these reasons alone it is important to study the use of horses in heroic texts, as horses play such a large part in the lives of heroes, but when one studies said texts closely, one will find that the horses play an even larger role than expected.

One way in which authors have used horses in their works is to portray the treatment of a rider’s horse as a direct window into the soul of the character. The way a character treats a horse directly correlates with the level of compassion with which he treats other characters in the story, and how he interacts with his environment. Chrétien de Troyes and Miguel de Cervantes represent their respective time periods and use characters’ treatment of horses in similar ways to make a point about the personality of their characters. Chrétien’s *Lancelot* represents a medieval perspective on horses and the level of compassion that riders can show for their horses. Cervantes’s *Don Quixote* is a parody of the medieval romance, but also provides an in-depth

look at the horse-rider relationship in a Renaissance setting. If not for the horses in their stories, Chrétien and Cervantes would not have had a vehicle through which to show readers how compassionate (or lacking in compassion) their characters are. Because contemporary readers in the time in which Chrétien and Cervantes were writing used horses as the fastest means of land travel, either by riding on their backs or being carried in horse-drawn carts (the only alternatives being to walk or ride a slower animal)¹, they could easily understand that if a character treats his horse badly, that character must also have flaws in other aspects of his personality. Their horses were very valuable possessions, if nothing else, and thus horses had to be treated well. As historian Joyce E. Salisbury states, “Throughout most of the Middle Ages, horses were considered the highest-status animals” (Salisbury 22). J.R.R. Tolkien lived in a more modern time period, but still one in which horses were often visible and cars had not yet entirely taken over the transportation scene. Tolkien similarly uses horses in his works to portray the morality of his characters and their closeness to nature.

The study of horses in *Lancelot*, *Don Quixote*, and Tolkien’s *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* is an important field of inquiry because it is clear that the authors of these works deliberately used the characters’ horses as indicators of personality, yet very few critics have even acknowledged the horses in these works. Ecocritically, contemporary Medieval and Renaissance critics overlooking horses can be explained. A medieval or Renaissance person’s view of animals was potentially much different from modern readers’ learned perspectives. Peter Edwards tells us that the Bible and the writings of Aristotle, among other influential works, taught pre-modern readers that animals were objects to be used and abused:

¹ “Horses’ speed also made them particularly useful for hauling goods in carts. With all but the heaviest loads, hauling speed for horses was about twice that for oxen” (Salisbury 17).

Man's alleged special position in the natural world ostensibly validated his exploitation of animals[. . .] It might also condone ill treatment of animals. Descartes, for instance, likened animals to automata, without souls, devoid of speech or reason, and by implication incapable of feeling pain. Beasts of burden certainly suffered. While it made sense to look after an economic asset, sheer necessity forced many people [in the Renaissance] to overtax their animals, beating them into action if need be. Moreover, riders broke in young horses by instilling fear into them. (Edwards 2011, 76)

Thus it is ecocritically important to notice when an author writing in this time period is actually using compassion towards horses as a selling point for his characters, as compassion towards animals is not always the norm. Both Chrétien de Troyes and Cervantes use compassion towards horses (or a lack thereof) to inform readers on how they should understand the major characters in their works. Edwards does state that, “[D]uring the late sixteenth century critics of cruelty toward animals became more vocal. By 1600 writers on horse management had softened their tone, emphasizing the need to cherish their charges rather than chastise them. Proanimal writers began to question the basis of man's superiority” (Edwards 2011, 76). Chrétien was a very early promoter for animal welfare, but according to Edwards' estimates, Cervantes was writing in the midst of a revolutionary new way of looking at animals, especially horses.

It is especially ludicrous, however, that modern critics have spent so little time studying horses in Medieval and Renaissance literature because before cars and trains came into popularity, the horse was one of the most important possessions a person could own. It was, in fact, the most efficient means of transportation at the time. According to Catherine Johns,

The role [horses] have played in human societies since they were domesticated some six thousand years ago has been so crucial that it is no exaggeration to say that the development of nations and cultures would have been quite different had they not existed. (Johns 9)

Horses are historically important to human existence due to their influence on the evolution of transportation and farming, yet many critics and writers over the decades have chosen to either ignore their presence and importance or fit them into a small, obscure part of their argument. Frances Gies, author of *The Knight in History*, exhibits this tendency well. Her book gives a well-written historic and literary account of the history of the knight, yet fails to speak as much on the knights' horses as it should, considering their importance to knighthood in general. She herself states in her introduction that “The institution of knighthood summons up in the mind of every literate person the image of an armor-plated warrior on horseback,” (Gies 2) yet when she goes on to compare the popular image of knighthood with the true historical institution she doesn't mention the knight's horse at all. Instead she discusses the types of armor worn by knights and the historical titles and positions they held in society. Richard Francis, a behaviorist who has written on animal and human concurrent evolution, even exhibits disdain for the species, stating, “Though I certainly admire horses for their grace and beauty, I find myself on the low end of the horse appreciation scale” (Francis 207). Francis is especially clear on this matter in that he doesn't cover horses in his book on domestication of animals until the penultimate chapter – after his chapter on reindeer and before the one on rodents. In a book about humanity's history with domesticated animals, one would think that the horse, one of the most useful animals that humans have domesticated, would merit an early chapter.

Even in the field of ecocriticism, horses have not been studied thoroughly in many literary works, especially *Lancelot* and *Don Quixote*. The study of horses in literature is an important subject in modern literary scholarship because it fills a gap in ecocriticism. According to Hubert Zapf, “It is the aim of ecologically inspired literary and cultural studies [. . .] to focus on the interaction and interrelatedness of culture and nature without neglecting the inescapable linguistic and discursive mediatedness of that interrelationship” (Zapf 1-2). In other words, Zapf states that ecocritics study the natural world as it occurs in literature while still primarily analyzing the literary and cultural importance of the work they are studying. Most ecocritics focus on literature’s relationship with the earth as a whole, and many ecocritics focus specifically on flora in literature. When animals are studied under the lens of ecocriticism, most often the animals being analyzed are wild, or the critics are looking at animals as part of nature as a whole entity. Few literary critics have turned a scholarly gaze to domesticated animals such as horses. This may be because these critics fall victim to the same problem authors and scholars of other literary genres face: the idea that horses are so commonplace they are easily overlooked. Zapf further lists some important factors “which reveal some kind of basic structure of the new literary-ecological paradigm” (Zapf 4). One of the factors Zapf lists is, “An *ecological ethos*, which regards the interconnectedness of man with the nonhuman world as a necessary context of human responsibility” (Zapf 4, italics his). The concept of ethics in ecological literature can lead to a multitude of possible candidates for scholarly work, and one such topic that has yet to be studied in great detail is the ethics used in writing about horses and their relationship with their riders in heroic literature. As of yet, few, if any, scholars have written about this “ecological ethos” in relation to horses and their riders.

As stated above, critics and scholars from all schools of thought have ignored or misinterpreted horses' roles in heroic literature, including ecocritics and scholars of medieval and Renaissance history and literature. Edwards and Graham explain the phenomenon of estrangement between humans and horses in their introduction to the text *The Horse as Cultural Icon* when they write,

Horses are unexpected visitors in contemporary everyday life: not quite exotic, but not familiar either. This estrangement between humans and horses has occurred abruptly and relatively recently. From antiquity until the 1930s, horses were fully present in the day-to-day world, a situation that only a small and rapidly dwindling cohort of elderly people can now recall. (Edwards and Graham 1)

Wendy Williams, a horse owner and scholar, comments on a mindset that horse owners and others who affiliate themselves with horses in the modern day tend to have: "Many of us, myself included, were raised to think of horses as simple automatons that we human beings, as masters, must dominate, direct, and control" (Williams 7). Williams continues with an argument that horses are significantly more intelligent than they are given credit for, but the popular mindset regarding horses that she presents is likely one that has been held by horse owners for centuries, and accounts for the lack of notice that is given to horses in many historical documents and works of literature. Instead of being directly noticeable, horses in literature tend to be background figures that, to a pre-modern reader or writer, are as easy to mentally process and accept in a story as a car would be to a modern reader. Modern readers may not notice a car under usual conditions, but when a character's car is regularly destroyed the character is automatically branded by the reader and writer as a poor driver or otherwise lacking in some

ability to keep their car in good condition.² Alternately, if a modern character takes wonderful care of his or her car and the author mentions said vehicle regularly, readers are more likely to remember the car.³ If horses were treated in the same fashion before cars were the primary mode of transportation, it would make sense that horses would fall into the background unless they are specifically singled out by a particular author.

Edwards and Graham continue to discuss the effect that this separation of horses from human life has had on the minds of everyday people, and especially on critics. They mention the “[S]cant scholarly attention paid to the significance of horses. Paradoxically, it is, in part, the taken-for-granted centrality of horses to human lives in the past that has rendered them almost invisible to history” (Edwards and Graham 1). One scholar mentioned above, Francis, seems to fall into the category that Edwards and Graham have outlined: that of the modern scholar who takes horses for granted to such an extreme extent that he fails to remember them until nearly the end of his book. The invisibility mentioned is especially evident in another scholar’s work: that of Edward Condren. Condren writes on *Lancelot*, and seems to be baffled by the presence of multiple horses in Chrétien’s work. He tries to explain the horses away with discussion of sexual symbolism. Most critics don’t seem to understand the horse’s role in literature (with a small few exceptions) and thus either overlook the horse entirely or try to fit its presence into a category of their own design, such as the theory that the horse is an ever-present symbol of sex and virility. While this symbolism has been used by numerous artists and writers through the centuries (Henry Fuseli’s famous 1781 painting entitled “The Nightmare” is a prime example of said

²In Janet Evanovich’s popular “Stephanie Plum” mystery series, the titular protagonist regularly has her car bombed by criminals that she is chasing. The lack of a regular car due to her misfortunes becomes a character trait for Stephanie that readers learn to expect in each volume of the series.

³Nancy Drew, famed for the series of the same name, drives a blue convertible which is mentioned in almost every entry in the series. Many adults today read Nancy Drew when they were children, and the blue car is a memorable image for most readers.

symbolism), it is far from the sole reason a horse could be present in a work of literature. It would be foolish to write with such a focus that views horses in any story or work of art as merely fulfilling a symbolic need for sex or virility; there are plenty of other symbols that can fill this perceived void, and horses must be present in any work of medieval heroic literature because they are so necessary to the hero's lifestyle. Gillian Rudd states, "For a medievalist, the question of how animals appear in a text is often linked to questions about how allegory works, but by no means all animals in medieval texts are allegorical" (Rudd 29). In heroic works like *Lancelot* and *Don Quixote*, the horse is not included because the author felt that a symbol or allegory was needed; the horse is there for the same reason that the hero has hands, or a sword – they are necessary to the hero's way of life. In the works of J.R.R. Tolkien, Tolkien himself specifically states, "It is neither allegorical nor topical. [. . .] I cordially dislike allegory in all its manifestations, and always have done so since I grew old and wary enough to detect its presence" (*Lord of the Rings* xvi-xvii). Thus while many see allegory and symbolism in many aspects of Tolkien's works, it was not intended by the author. Tolkien's horses, like other parts of his stories, are meant to be viewed as horses and for their own merit – not as symbols for other things.

What should be studied, then, is not what obscure symbol a horse should embody, but rather how the author of a work uses the relationship between a human and his horse to inform readers on how they should view said human. Equestrian scholar Tamsin Pickeral quotes a proverb that states, "There is nothing so good for the inside of a man as the outside of a horse" (Pickeral 6). As such, the way that a person interacts with his horse is a telling window into his soul – if a character mistreats his horse, as Lancelot does in Chrétien de Troyes's *The Knight of the Cart*, it is likely that he will mistreat other aspects of his life (like his allegiance to his king).

Similarly, if a character holds his horse in a higher esteem than most people, as Don Quixote does with his horse, he is likely thoughtful and empathetic in other aspects of his life. Haymonds states that “Pony stories [. . .] are overtly moral and didactic, for the world of horses has an uncompromising code of ethics” (Haymonds 51). This ethical code is clear in stories such as *Don Quixote*, *Lancelot*, *The Hobbit*, and *The Lord of the Rings* where heroes can be cleanly judged by their interactions with their horses.

In his historically important article which names and defines the genre “High Fantasy”, which is a sub-set of the heroic genre, Lloyd Alexander writes that “The fantasy hero is not only a doer of deeds, but he also operates within a framework of morality. His compassion is as great as his courage – greater, in fact” (Alexander 176). Alexander's definition of a hero places a great amount of importance on compassion, a trait which is most easily demonstrated by the way in which a hero treats his constant companion: his horse. A hero who does not treat his horse well cannot, by Alexander's definition, be a hero at all, as he is lacking compassion for the most common creature in his retinue. Compassion is a defining characteristic for Don Quixote, who shows compassion not only for his horse but also for the people he is trying to help. Likewise, a lack of compassion is a notable trait of Lancelot, who thinks of nothing but his own wants. Thus readers are shown that Lancelot is a poor hero – though he performs the occasional heroic-seeming deed, he also commits acts of barbarity and obscenity.

While there are many modern and older works of heroic literature that include horses in their stories, this study focuses specifically on the ways that horses are treated by their riders in Chrétien de Troyes's *Lancelot*, Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, and Tolkien's *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. These works include detailed portrayals of the horse-rider relationship and how those interactions between humans and horses can be indicators of the

humans' moral compass and level of compassion. They are also each good representations of the time periods in which they were written, *and* of the authors' intent for their characters.

Chrétien de Troyes's *Lancelot*

One of the most influential heroic series of tales of all time is that of King Arthur and his knights, and of those knights Lancelot is easily the most well-known. Chrétien de Troyes created Lancelot in his additions to the existing Arthurian legend in the 12th century. Lancelot was conceived when Chrétien's patron requested a steamy adulterous love story; Lancelot's primary purpose is to sleep with the queen, a notably married woman, and cause romantic friction. Chrétien, a clergyman and a strong supporter of marriage⁴, was not happy to be writing about an adulterous relationship, and thus uses every literary tool at his disposal to decry Lancelot's character. This includes showing readers that Lancelot has the worst horsemanship in the land, such that he even kills every horse he touches.

In Chrétien de Troyes's "Lancelot: The Knight of the Cart," Lancelot is shown in many ways to be a less than virtuous knight. At several points, his unholy character is shown in the cruel ways in which he treats the horses that he rides (which are often not even horses that belong to him). The first instance of horse abuse that Lancelot exhibits is also the first scene in which he appears. He is met as a stranger by Gawain and King Arthur's other knights, who have just set out to find the missing queen. Gawain "Saw a knight approaching slowly on a horse that was sore and tired, breathing hard and lathered in sweat" (Chrétien de Troyes 210). This stranger is Lancelot, and at his approach he asks Gawain, "My lord, do you not see how my horse is bathed in sweat and in such a state that he is no longer of use to me?" (Chrétien de Troyes 210) Not only can readers see that Lancelot has not treated his horse with appropriate care, but it is also evident that Lancelot is aware of the horse's state and is unabashed. He only sees the horse a tool, and because the horse is tired and bathed in sweat, he is no longer useful, and thus Lancelot

⁴ Most of Chrétien's other works are about couples whose romantic tale ends in a happy marriage.

no longer wants to be burdened with him⁵. Lancelot continues this line of discussion by stating, “I believe these two warhorses are yours. Now I beg you, with the promise to return you the service and favour, to let me have one or the other at your choice, either as a loan or gift” (Chrétien de Troyes 210). Even in the Middle Ages, it was likely improper etiquette to ask a stranger to give away one of his expensive possessions, especially a horse. According to Catherine Johns,

Fine horses, those that were handsome and well-trained, were valuable luxury possessions, and the ownership and mastery of them became a sign of superior social standing. The mounted man is physically set above those who are on foot, and his ability to control a large, strong (and often male) quadruped symbolized his power. (Johns 16)

Similarly, Jeffrey Forgeng tells readers that in the thirteenth century a good carthorse, which would be less valuable than a nobleman’s horse, was worth 65-70 sous parisis (roughly equivalent to \$2,500 today), while a knight’s average wage per day was 39 deniers parisis (\$100 today). (Forgeng 67-68). Michael Prestwich even explains that

In 1343 Pedro IV of Aragon was faced by angry troops at Barcelona. They demanded [. . .] compensation for horses lost on campaign. Pedro told them that [. . .] he had not agreed to pay for lost horses. [. . .] [A] horse is a major investment, and it is hardly surprising that knights want to have some form of insurance in case it is killed in battle, or dies on campaign. (Prestwich 78)

That Gawain was willing to gift one of these horses to Lancelot is a sign of Gawain's true knightliness, but Lancelot proves himself quite unlikeable because of his insistence that Gawain

⁵ According to Brewer, a poem written circa 1200 in Switzerland gives Lancelot a detailed background, in which Brewer says Lancelot is given “a horse he does not know how to control” (Brewer 4), after having been raised in a sheltered lifestyle by fairies.

should give him a horse. Lancelot also does not make any sort of promise to return the borrowed horse. He seems to expect that it is his right to be given outright a horse belonging to one of the King's men. He does claim that he will return the favor, but he is not specific about how or when he will do so; with his track record with horses, it is unlikely that he will ever have a suitable horse to give Gawain if asked. This is further proven by the fate that befalls the horse given to him by Gawain. Because Gawain is a true and generous knight, he tells Lancelot to “Choose whichever of the two you prefer” (Chrétien de Troyes 211) and, true to character, Lancelot “did not take the time to choose the better, or the more handsome, or the larger, rather, he leapt upon the one that was nearest him, and rode off full speed” (Chrétien de Troyes 211). In just the very next paragraph, after Gawain had attempted to follow Lancelot but had failed to match his pace, he “Came upon the warhorse that he had given the knight. It was now dead” (Chrétien de Troyes 211). The text leads readers to believe that Lancelot does not spend very much time with the great horse given to him by Gawain. Just as with his first horse, Lancelot forced the new horse to run as fast as possible, until it dropped dead from exhaustion only a short while later.

The fact that the readers' first glimpse of Lancelot consists entirely of horse abuse by the knight is important. Chrétien uses many metaphors and symbols to describe his characters, but one of his most frequent devices throughout his stories is a character's treatment and use of his horse – and the fact that other knights, including the notorious Kay, treat their horses well does not win any favors for Lancelot in Chrétien's eyes or in the eyes of the reader. This has been made clear by a number of critics, including Rupert Pickens, Marjolein Hogenbirk, and Paul Rogers.

Pickens focuses heavily on horses and their purpose in his book, *Perceval and Gawain in Dark Mirrors*. Within said book, Pickens includes six different illustrations of horses with the

intent purpose of imparting knowledge of the differences between various types of horses in Chrétien's time to his readers. Pickens mostly studies Chrétien's "Perceval," and paraphrases the text as he analyzes it. Many of his passages, however, specifically look at Chrétien's use of horses as indicators of character. This inspection can help readers to know Chrétien's intentions when he uses horses in his texts. In one passage, Pickens tells us that Gawain has become confused by the sight of a knight's effects laying unattended near a horse that would never be ridden by a knight:

Gawain is immediately struck by an incongruity he immediately perceives in a setting fraught with narrative possibilities. In a brilliant example of Chrétien's deft experimentation with visual perspective, Gawain [. . .] first observes a shield hanging in the oak tree with a lance standing next to it, but he is astonished to discover a breach of equestrian propriety: with the armor he sees [. . .] a small Norwegian palfrey. (Pickens 88)

Pickens tells readers that a palfrey is "[Not] the horse [. . .] of a knight errant, but a mount suitable for women" (Pickens 89). Pickens also states that "A knight's aversion to palfreys is played out in the walled city's inner garden when Gawain does not lead the Malevolent Maiden's horse across the plank bridge, much less ride it, but instead drives it ahead of himself" (Pickens 89). Thus it is clear that not only does Chrétien use a horse's condition to indicate the standing of a person, but also the horse's breed. It seems that every aspect of a horse provides clues as to the character of the horse's rider.

Pickens shows this pattern again when he discusses "[A] squire, who soon reveals himself to be excessively impertinent and unruly, approaching them riding a broken-down nag" (Pickens 89). Pickens accompanies this passage with an illustration of a horse with a very

unhealthy appearance, and labels the illustration as a “Roncin,” much like Don Quixote's horse. Pickens continues: “Gawain turns about and sees that the squire is extraordinarily ugly. His wild hair and beard and his misshapen head and upper body in fact mirror the monstrosity of the Hideous Damsel, and he is indeed as worthy of his nag as his counterpart is of her tawny mule” (Pickens 89-90). Again Chrétien has matched a character with a horse who fits his personal appearance as well as his unpleasant personality. This squire is very much the opposite of the perfect and knightly Gawain who knows the rules of equestrian propriety and rides a horse that is just as perfect as Gawain himself. This is yet another example of Chrétien proving that his knowledge of proper horsemanship is excellent, and that he uses this knowledge extensively in his stories to add depth to a character's attributes and prove that each character perfectly fits the mold he has created for him or her.

Hogenbirk similarly stresses the importance of horses in Chivalric Romance, though her focus is mainly on Gawain's horse, Gringalet. After a lengthy discussion of the Gringalet's extensive literary history, Hogenbirk tells readers that Gringalet is mentioned in the stories of Chrétien de Troyes. She states, “In the romances of Chrétien de Troyes, Gavain's horse is mentioned by name from the beginning” (Hogenbirk 67). Here Hogenbirk is referring to a reference made in *Erec and Enide* where the horse is called “Le Gringalet.” Though there are few details in this story about the horse, Erec is able to recognize the horse when Gringalet is borrowed by Kay, thus indicating that Gringalet is so important, other characters are able to recognize him on sight as Gawain's horse. Hogenbirk also tells readers that,

It has been suggested that Chrétien used the name antithetically, since in later Old French it could have had the meaning of 'bony-back' or 'white and hard back'. The most recent and satisfactory interpretation is 'hard, firm back' [. . .] It seems

obvious that a knight would give this particular name to a horse on which he would be sure to keep his seat in every adventure. The definite article *Le* may have been used to indicate that there is only one, very special horse of this name. (Hogenbirk 67)

This interpretation of Gringalet's name is very interesting, because the translation of “bony-back” is quite similar to the description given of Don Quixote's horse, Rocinante. As opposed to Rocinante, however, Gringalet's bony back, or hard back, is interpreted as being a good thing for the rider. Because the horse's back has such strong, hard bones, the rider, Gawain, is sure to remain on the horse at all times. This is important to Lancelot's story because, while Gawain rides a horse that is perfect for a knight in every way, Lancelot uses no discrimination when choosing a horse, and doesn't care whatsoever about the horse's well-being. Gawain is also “sure to keep his seat in every adventure” whereas Lancelot loses his seat quickly each time he finds himself on a horse. This further proves that while Gawain is an excellent example of a perfect knight, Lancelot fails in even the most simple of knightly traits.

In many books on the knight in history or in literature, medieval illustrations fill the pages to provide readers with a real visual of what the time period looked like to those who lived it. If one were to study these illustrations in depth, one would find that a large majority of these illustrations contain at least one horse – even if the subject of the illustration does not involve transportation or even if the picture takes place inside a building. For instance, Frances Gies's historical study, *The Knight in History*, contains a number of medieval illustrations and paintings. One such example, entitled “Courtly Love: David and Bathsheba,” (Gies 58) shows a diorama of a castle, in which the actions of different people can be seen in different rooms. In what appears to be the throne room or reception area of the castle, five or more people are

appealing to the king. One of these people has led his horse inside the castle! It is clear in illustrations such as this that horses are so relevant to people from the middle ages that they see them as important figures which may be included without irony in any sort of setting or situation.

Throughout the rest of his story, Chrétien uses a number of different metaphors and character traits to show that Lancelot is *not* a noble and worthy knight. According to Gies, “The rules of conduct that the poetry of the troubadours prescribed were mainly social: a knight should be courteous, generous, well-spoken, discreet, faithful in the service of love; he should have *'pretz e valors,'* excellence and worth, as well as good sense” (Gies 77-78). Lancelot shows almost none of these qualities, and the fact that the first example of Lancelot's lack of worthiness is shown in his treatment of horses means that Chrétien expected his audience to be shocked and appalled by Lancelot's behavior. A knight, by nature, must have some sort of relationship with the horse upon which he rides. The French word for knight is “*Chevalier*,” which includes the word for horse within: “*Cheval*”. The same rule is applied to both the Spanish and Italian words for knight: “*Caballero*” (“*Caballo*”) and “*Cavaliere*” (“*Cavallo*”), respectively. A knight thus cannot be a knight without a horse.

While Chrétien uses these technical definitions of knighthood to demean Lancelot's position, he also uses satire to show his readers that Lancelot is not to be taken seriously. In one passage, Lancelot finds a comb that had been dropped by Guinevere and which, apparently, contains a tiny bit of her hair. Lancelot's reaction to the discovery of the comb (and especially the hair) is so ridiculous, readers of any generation can't help but laugh at him. When Lancelot finds the comb, it is said that he “Did not have strength enough to keep from falling forward and was obliged to catch himself upon the saddle-bow. [. . .] Indeed he had come quite near fainting, for the pain he felt in his heart had driven away his speech and the colour from his face”

(Chrétien de Troyes 225). Upon first seeing the comb and hearing to whom it belongs, Lancelot is so moved that he nearly faints. When he removes the queen's hair from the comb, however, his demeanor becomes even more ridiculous: “[H]e began to adore the hair, touching it a hundred thousand times to his eye, his mouth, his forehead and his cheeks. He expressed his joy in every way imaginable and felt himself most happy and rewarded” (Chrétien de Troyes 225). The passage says that as long as Lancelot has the hair on his person, he will never have need of medical attention and will never wish for any treasure. This is clearly a parody of the concept of courtly love that Chrétien's patron wished him to write. A tiny bit of hair should not hold such high esteem, and readers are meant to laugh at Lancelot's behavior when he finds the hair.

A similar event takes place at another point in the story, when Lancelot is traveling alone on horseback (on yet another ill-fortuned steed). Lancelot is so wrapped up in his personal fantasies about Guinevere that he lets his horse choose their route and destination:

The Knight of the Cart was lost in thought, a man with no strength or defence against love, which torments him. His thoughts were so deep that he forgot who he was[. . .] He remembered nothing at all save one creature [. . .] he was so intent upon her alone that he did not hear, see, or pay attention to anything. His horse carried him swiftly along[. . .] His horse, by now quite thirsty, saw the good clean water and galloped towards the ford. (Chrétien de Troyes 216)

The horse brings him to a ford, which he is told repeatedly not to cross by a knight standing on the other side of the water. Of course, Lancelot is unable to hear the knight because of the deep thoughts clouding his head, and thus he follows his horse's choice and crosses the water, only to find trouble on the other side. Once again Chrétien has created an utterly ridiculous situation that any other knight would not encounter. Lancelot's “deep thoughts” are so extreme and dense that

nothing else is in his head, not even his own name. Chrétien again uses a horse to portray Lancelot as less than admirable. Lancelot's poor horsemanship causes him to let his horse wander straight into danger while he is atop the horse's back.

Chrétien's reason for portraying Lancelot in a negative light is multifold. First, he was not happy about the story his patron wished him to write. This can be seen in the disclaimer at the beginning of the story, which states, "Since my lady of Champagne wishes me to begin a romance, I shall do so most willingly, like one who is entirely at her service[. . .] I will say, however, that her command has more importance in this work than any thought or effort I might put into it" (Chrétien de Troyes 207). Here Chrétien passes the responsibility of the contents of the story to his superior, and does not claim any personal responsibility for the misdeeds revealed. According to Pearsall,

[T]his was a characteristically medieval way of displacing responsibility for the invention of new and possibly controversial material. The introduction of a fashionably adulterous liaison for Guenevere and the conjuring into existence of Lancelot [. . .] were certainly the stuff of animated controversy, and perhaps Chrétien, who was a cleric, and whose other love-romances deal with courtship and marital love, felt a particular need to distance himself from such incendiary material. (Pearsall 27)

Pearsall shows the firm yet polite manner in which Chrétien informs readers of his disinterest in the subject matter of this story. Chrétien was clearly a firm believer in marital love, having written several stories on the subject. Writing about an adulterous relationship was out of character for Chrétien, and he makes sure his readers are fully aware of this.

C.S. Lewis also tells readers that, “when he began to write he seems scarcely to have accepted [. . .] the new conceptions of courtly tradition[. . .] We must conceive him as [. . .] one of those rare men of genius who can trim their sails to every breeze of novelty without forfeiting their poetic rank” (C.S. Lewis 23). Lewis later says that

It is [Chrétien's] fate to appear constantly in literary history as the specimen of a tendency. He has deserved better. And the tragedy of the thing is that he himself was never really subdued to that tendency. It is very doubtful whether he was ever dazzled by the tradition of romantic adultery. [. . .] He tells us in the opening lines of *Lancelot* that he wrote it at the command of the Countess of Champagne, and that she furnished him with both the story and the treatment. What does this mean? I am probably not the first reader who has seen in the fantastic labours which Lancelot undergoes at the bidding of the Queen, a symbol of the poet's own genius bent to tasks unworthy of it by the whim of a fashionable woman. (C.S. Lewis 24)

Peter Noble similarly perceives Chrétien's feelings about the text:

Le Chevalier de la Charrete differs from all Chrétien's other romances as he deliberately disclaims responsibility for both the *matiere et san*, presumably the plot and interpretation. [. . .] It seems possible therefore that the theme was not entirely to Chrétien's liking, which would explain his care in making clear the source of the plot and the interpretation and his failure to finish it. (Noble 65)

These critics indicate that though Chrétien likely did not embrace the details of the story he was instructed to write, he was able to shape the story to make it more palatable for himself. The accreditation to Chrétien's patron found at the beginning of *Lancelot* is very different from other

introductions Chrétien has written; at the beginning of *Erec and Enide*, Chrétien claims, “Now I shall begin the story that will be in memory for evermore, as long as Christendom lasts – of this does Chrétien boast” (Chrétien 37). For the tale of *Erec and Enide*, Chrétien is proud to claim the story as his own. This is obviously not the case for *Lancelot*. Lancelot's story is primarily about an out-of-marriage affair with the king's wife, which likely left the author, who previously had written stories centered around the sanctity of marriage, disturbed with the subject matter. Because the story is entirely ensconced with Lancelot's lack of faithfulness to his king (by bedding the king's wife), Chrétien uses every literary device available to him to show that Lancelot is in no way a saintly and upstanding knight. Peter Noble emphasizes this point when he says that “By humour, irony and contrast he brings out the failings and the disadvantages of other sorts of love, particularly the adulterous or unmarried love advocated by some of his contemporaries” (Noble 9). As Noble states, irony and contrast are seen immediately when Lancelot appears and is shown to be vastly inferior to the other knights searching for the queen, particularly Gawain. Humor is a tactic that Chrétien employs later when Lancelot's love for the queen is so strong that he behaves in hilariously incorrect ways, such as the instance where he finds a comb with a bit of the queen's hair still in it, and he falls into such an extreme euphoria that one may almost believe he is having a seizure. Noble discusses this, stating,

[T]his scene can be interpreted on two levels. Superficially Lancelot is behaving like a perfect courtly lover, adoring some token of his mistress in her absence[. . . .] On another level, however, [. . .] the exaggerated reaction and behaviour make the reader wonder if Chrétien is wholly serious in this approach to Lancelot.

(Noble 69)

As with Lancelot's treatment of horses, his behavior when presented with one of Guinevere's belongings is so over the top the reader has to stop and wonder why Chrétien is portraying him in such a light. Chrétien goes out of his way to show that Lancelot kills any horse he touches, while also showing that Lancelot is a ridiculous figure who should in no way be taken seriously.

Thus readers can see that Lancelot is a man full of faults, most of which are ill-befitting a true knight of King Arthur's court. Lewis neatly summarizes Lancelot's faults by stating,

[Lancelot] is driven through the streets where the rabble cry out upon him and ask what he has done and whether he is to be flayed or hanged. He is brought to a castle where he is shown a bed that he must not lie in because he is a knight disgraced. He comes to the bridge that crosses into the land of Gorre – the sword-bridge, made of a single blade of steel – and is warned that the high enterprise of crossing it is not for one so dishonoured as he. (Lewis 27)

All of these instances in which Lancelot is displayed as being dishonorable refer in some ways to the metaphor of his ride in the cart, but that ride, like all other despicable things Lancelot does, is representative of his failure as a knight, as he has betrayed his king by having an affair with the king's wife. One cannot be a true knight when a knight's main purpose, working in service to the king and the kingdom, has been compromised by a personally fulfilling, selfish act such as bedding the Queen. Chrétien drives this home over and over – he wants no reader to misunderstand the intent of his story and believe that Lancelot is a true, just knight. Chrétien feels that this point must be made again and again in order to convey his feelings strongly.

A major way in which Chrétien reveals Lancelot's lack of propriety in his knighthood is by comparing him with the two most extremely different knights in Arthur's court: Kay and Gawain. Kay is known throughout the Arthurian canon as Arthur's lazy brother who just can't

do anything right. Gawain, however, is the most admired of Arthur's knights and is featured in a large majority of stories in the Arthurian canon. Both Kay and Gawain's personalities are also hinted at in regards to their treatment of horses, and thus Chrétien's criticism of Lancelot is tied not only to the way he treats horses, but also in that his treatment of horses is far worse than *any* other knight in the king's court, even Kay.

Lancelot is not the obviously bad knight that is exemplified in Kay. Kay's purpose in Arthurian literature is to provide a bit of comic relief (comic in that he is a hilariously bad knight) and to cause problems that other knights must clean up (since Arthur's knights apparently had very little important political business to attend to). Lancelot is not the bumbling idiot that Kay is – he is instead a bad knight in a very specific way: his badness revolves entirely around his fixation on the Queen and his relations with her. Even in this comparison with Kay, however, Chrétien makes sure to show the readers that ultimately Lancelot is even worse in his knighthood than the notoriously bad Kay. Kay's horse is found by Arthur's knights not dead, but only abandoned and mildly wounded: “As they were nearing the forest, they recognized Kay's horse coming out and saw that both reins were broken from the bridle. The horse was riderless, its stirrup-leathers stained with blood; the rear part of its saddle was broken and in pieces” (Chrétien de Troyes 210). It is not long after this passage that readers first encounter Lancelot and his dead horse. Where Lancelot kills at least two horses (we do not know whether there were other horses killed before the action of the story began), Kay's kill count is still zero, where horses are concerned. Thus the notorious Kay is better in this way than Lancelot. It is very important that the condition of Kay's horse is known: Chrétien intentionally shows readers Kay's horse with the purpose of making Lancelot look even worse when he enters the scene on a dying horse mere moments later.

Chrétien de Troyes also shows Lancelot's lack of knightly character by comparing him with the saintly Gawain. According to Nitze, “Gauvain is held up as a model of what other knights should be. [. . .] He plays a prominent role in [. . .] *Lancelot*, [. . .] but always as a contrasting figure with whom the title-hero is compared” (Nitze 103). An encyclopedia of Medieval Folklore similarly states that Gawain is a “[P]aragon of Round Table chivalric virtues[; . . .] an exemplar of courtliness. Chrétien de Troyes portrays him as a model for his central heroes” (*Medieval Folklore* 170-71). Throughout much of the story, Lancelot and Gawain are side-by-side, and if they are each asked to make a decision Gawain always makes the rational choice, while Lancelot makes the opposite choice, which is often not only irrational, but also illegal, impolite, or just plain idiotic. For instance, both Lancelot and Gawain are present when the dwarf driving the titular cart appears. The dwarf tells them both that he has information about the queen's whereabouts, but will only divulge this information if the seeker will ride in his cart. Gawain knows that a true knight must never ride in a cart, which is intended only for criminals and the most unholy of people. Lancelot, however, after only a brief hesitation, accepts the offer and enters the cart. This is the ultimate metaphor depicting Lancelot's unworthiness as a knight. And the reason he had to ride in the cart at all was because he was lacking a horse – not merely because he wanted the information the dwarf had to offer. After all, Gawain was still astride his horse and he received the same information and was led to the same castle that Lancelot visited. Also important is the fact that Gawain and Lancelot arrived at the cart at exactly the same time. Though Lancelot rode his horse to its early demise, trying to reach his goal as quickly as possible, Gawain somehow manages to arrive at the same place at the same time without causing injury to his own mount.

Gawain is an interesting choice of knight to use as the foil to Lancelot's flawed personality. In the comparison of Lancelot versus Gawain, the treatment of horses is again a very important character trait that Chrétien employs. Of all the knights and other characters who are found throughout Arthurian legend, Gawain is the single knight that is known to have a close relationship with his horse, Gringalet. Where Lancelot needs a new horse every hour or so, due to his extreme neglect, Gawain is found throughout the entirety of the Arthurian literary cannon remaining on the same horse. Though Gringalet is not named in the specific story of *The Knight of the Cart*, the epic horse is named in one of Chrétien's earlier works: *Erec and Enide*. Because Chrétien has already named the horse previously, we can assume that Gawain himself is astride his personal horse throughout the entirety of Chrétien's romances, "Lancelot" included. Critic Marjolein Hogenbirk has contributed extensive research into the history and importance of Gawain's Gringalet, and she tells readers that the horse strongly resembles the *cheval fae* found in the medieval *chansons de geste* genre. *Cheval fae*, according to Hogenbirk, are "[E]xtremely intelligent horse[s], with unexpected, almost human qualities that stay within 'les frontieres du possible'" (Hogenbirk 66). Hogenbirk argues that Gawain's horse is one of these *cheval fae*, at least in certain tellings of his tale. This does not mean that Gringalet is a species other than horse – he is just a very special horse who is very important to his rider. To remind us that the *cheval fae* are not true magical creatures, Hogenbirk states, "It is remarkable that speech is not one of the characteristics of these epic horses; they communicate through their usual neighing and do not become fairy-tale figures, although often they are able to understand human speech" (Hogenbirk 66). That Chrétien compares Lancelot to Gawain, and also uses horses as a major indicator of knightliness and chivalric behavior, is extremely telling – Chrétien likely specifically chose Gawain to act as Lancelot's counterpart just because he is known for his close relationship

with his horse. Gawain's enormous show of love for his horse only makes Lancelot look even more insignificant and unpleasant, since he cannot keep a horse alive for any length of time.

Strangely, some critics miss Chrétien's all but subtle hints about Lancelot's character. Bruhn describes Lancelot “as a kind of messianic figure” (Bruhn 83). Bruhn asserts that “There is no doubt that Lancelot can be read as an allegory of Christ” (Bruhn 80), and even gives a few good examples to support his theory, such as the following: “The prototype of a man who can save a great number of people is the Son of God, and when such a liberator even, like Jesus, can lift an extremely heavy stone (as in the mystery of Resurrection from the grave) the identification seems certain” (Bruhn 84). Bruhn does not take into account all of Lancelot's blatant misdeeds, however. For one thing, Lancelot's lifting of the stone is for Guinevere's sake only – the fact that other people are also rescued is a mere side effect about which Lancelot does not care. There is also no mention of the knight's horse abuse, and though earlier in the chapter Bruhn discusses the theme of adultery, he seems to have forgotten said theme when he begins to venture into the idea of Lancelot as a Christ figure.

Condren, on the other hand, interprets the entire story as being about sexual impotence. While Condren does not raise Lancelot on a pedestal, his interpretation of Lancelot's treatment of horses is also extremely contrived. Condren notices Chrétien's use of the horses as symbolism, and states, “When [Lancelot] finally appears on the scene his only distinguishing characteristic is the terminal condition of his horse” (Condren 443). Condren also mentions the fresh horse provided by Gawain, and the death of said horse shortly thereafter. Condren then muses over why the second horse entered the scene at all, stating,

The death of a horse is itself perhaps not sufficient reason for us to take significant meaning from the scene. Indeed, Chrétien must have Lancelot on foot

in time for his meeting with the cart. Yet one fails to understand why he put him back on a horse after once successfully getting him down. The author could simply have omitted the detail – really a rather unusual one at that – of Gawain’s taking extra horses with him when he left court. (Condren 443)

The conclusion that Condren draws from his questioning of this scene seems to be very off-base and is not really supported by the text itself. Condren’s belief is that the horses are present and attention is drawn to them because they are a symbol of sex. To back this theory, Condren lists other, completely unrelated works that use horses as such a symbol: C.S. Lewis’s *The Great Divorce*, Prudentius’s 19th century work *Psychomachia*, and a brief but mostly unexplained reference to Plato. The first two texts mentioned were written centuries after Chrétien’s time, and Plato’s inclusion in this discussion is not elaborated upon enough to be convincing. Furthermore, Condren’s confusion about the inclusion of the second horse further proves Condren’s complete lack of understanding of the text. Lancelot’s second horse is very important, as the way he obtains it shows his disrespect for his fellow knights and Arthur himself, and the way the horse dies tells much about Lancelot’s priorities and lack of concern for anything other than Guinevere. Condren goes on to say, “The appearance of a horse in poetry does not *always* mean sexual appetite; nor, when it does, must we understand it as *uncontrolled* sexual appetite. But if an author seems to be calling specific attention to a horse we should certainly test it for this kind of symbolic use” (Condren 445). Condren’s so-called test of the textual situation, however, is lacking. He is on track when he says, “[W]e should assume no more than that the horse may signify some integral part of the man riding him” (Condren 445), but then Condren continues this line of thinking in stating that, “[T]he integral part probably pertains to the rider’s physical, rather than rational capabilities” (Condren 445). Condren gives readers no reason whatsoever for

his assumption that the horse must be used as a symbol of *physical* characteristics, and outright rejects, without a single thought, the idea that the horse could represent something rational, mental, or emotional in the rider. There is evidence throughout history that horses have been used as sexual symbols by a variety of artists and cultures; Rowland tells readers that, “[T]he horse is a symbol of virility. In ancient times, with its glistening body, swift movement, and tossing mane, it was a god or the fiery steed of the god of sun or sea or wind. Today it retains significance as a phallic symbol” (Rowland 103). The fact remains, however, that Condren does not reference any text that proves his theory. He uses no textual evidence from Chrétien himself to prove the thesis of this chapter of his article. This is a large flaw in Condren’s argument, and hurts the entire line of his reasoning after this point. The rest of the chapter is based on this line of reasoning, and soon leads to the idea that if horses represent sex, and Lancelot is constantly without a horse, he must then be impotent. Though this is an interesting argument on Condren's part, he is just so lacking in primary-textual and any other form of support on this topic that one should not be swayed by his line of reasoning. If Lancelot could be proven to be impotent, it would sway the entire plot of the story, as the plot revolves around Lancelot’s (presumably sexual) affair with Guinevere. Condren does nothing to prove Lancelot impotent, however, and so his argument falls flat.

Chrétien used horses to show readers that Lancelot is not to be trusted or idolized, in fact, we should view him in an exact opposite manner. Lancelot's destructive use of horses is representative of his destructive feelings towards his king and country, his own personal well-being, and any other person or object he comes across. Gawain is present in this story to serve as a marker indicating how a proper knight should behave at all times. For the most part, Gawain's appropriate actions work just as effectively as Lancelot's egregious ones, until the end of the

story when the queen is ultimately saved by Lancelot and not by Gawain. From an ecocritical standpoint, it is very important to study the interactions of Chrétien 's characters and their horses to understand Chrétien 's purpose in creating the character of Lancelot and in telling this tale of King Arthur's knights, as each of the knights has a prominent interaction with at least one horse and Chrétien used these interactions to portray the knights' personalities.

Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quixote*

In *Don Quixote* by Miguel de Cervantes, readers find a new type of hero being introduced to an audience that is expected to not only already know the common chivalric tales, but be uninterested in them. Don Quixote is a knight in a time when knights are no longer fashionable, and as such Cervantes's tale is both a parody of chivalric literature and a commentary on contemporary Renaissance literature and culture. In this tale, great focus is given to Don Quixote's horse, Rocinante⁶. Unlike Chrétien de Troyes's Lancelot, who mistreats or kills every horse he comes in contact with, Don Quixote treats his horse with a deep level of respect and admiration. Lancelot, a character that is meant to be viewed as deeply flawed, greatly mistreats his horses to the point that he rarely has a living horse for long periods of time. Don Quixote, however, not only has a single horse for the length of Cervantes's very long novel, but his horse is cared for with the deepest respect a man can give. Rocinante is already old when Don Quixote begins his quest. That this elderly horse is cared for and treated as the most important steed in history throughout the novel is an indicator that Cervantes does not wish for his readers to view Don Quixote as a flawed man, like Lancelot, but rather as someone to whom readers should look as a paragon of compassion and decency.

Chrétien de Troyes's *Lancelot* and Cervantes's *Don Quixote* have similar comedic values: Lancelot goes over-the-top in displaying his worshipful relationship with Queen Guinevere, while Don Quixote goes over-the-top in almost all of his actions, from deciding upon a name for himself to finding his own damsel to court. While most readers agree that *Don Quixote* is a parody or satire, however, many take Chrétien's work at face value. The fact of the matter, however, is that both title characters are ridiculous in their own ways. Chrétien uses Lancelot's

⁶ There are multiple ways to spell Rocinante. I have chosen the spelling found in the original Spanish text.

ridiculous actions to try to convince readers that Lancelot is not as perfect as he may seem at a cursory glance. Alternately, Cervantes uses ridiculous behavior in his protagonist to invoke sympathy. Readers already know that Don Quixote is silly – Cervantes says that immediately at the beginning of the story. So the differences between Lancelot and Don Quixote are two-fold: first, their authors had different purposes for their protagonists. Chrétien wanted to convey the idea that courtly love, when it is adulterous, is morally wrong. Chrétien, however, had to convey this idea subtly while still writing on the subject that his patron had requested. Cervantes instead uses Don Quixote to represent a parody of courtly knighthood in a good-fashioned sense. Cervantes doesn't tell readers that courtly love is wrong – instead he conveys a sense that it is harmless and fun. Don Quixote, the man of which Cervantes's story tells, is a harmless old dotard, and so, says Cervantes, is chivalric literature itself. Cervantes shows readers that romantic tales of knights and magic are not offensive, just simplistic and outdated.

While the first difference between *The Knight of the Cart* and *Don Quixote* is the author's purpose in creating an imperfect hero, the second major difference between the two works is the hero's moral outcome. Lancelot's choices are all morally wrong, or so Chrétien would like readers to believe. Don Quixote, however, is a bit more ambivalent. Minor characters within the novel would have everyone believe that Don Quixote is wrong for acting on his desires and fancies. Cervantes seems to show, especially through Don Quixote's treatment of his horse, that the knight is actually just in his beliefs. According to Michael Schmidt, “[W]hat matters is [Don Quixote’s] moral consistency in service[. . .] Don Quixote is buffeted, broken, but never in himself humiliated” (Schmidt 128-29). In this way, Don Quixote is the moral opposite of Lancelot, who, by titular definition (being the knight of the cart) is a humiliated knight. Lancelot is humiliated because he has chosen to act without morality, but Don Quixote is steadfast in his

morals. Lancelot avoids morality just as he has trouble keeping a regular horse beneath him. Don Quixote is steady in everything he does and is: his morals remain the same throughout his saga as does his horse.

Don Quixote has influenced a large variety of works over the centuries – so much so that even the name Quixote has been transformed into a fairly common word in the English language: “quixotic.” Quixote's horse, Rocinante, has also had a great influence on culture over the centuries. Often the name is used as a reference to compare a protagonist to Quixote himself, but Rocinante, like his rider, has also been transformed into an English noun. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary “rosinante,” as a word, means “a broken-down horse” (Merriam-Webster). Biographer Michael Schmidt explains Cervantes's characters' influence as follows:

Don Quixote ventured from La Mancha across the whole of Europe and America. Nor is he confined to any particular period. His author is at home in the English eighteenth and later centuries quite as much as our native writers are. [. . .] Indeed, Cervantes's down-at-heel hidalgo [. . .] and his skeletal horse Rocinante [. . .] are [. . .] inhabitants of the English imagination just as they are all the imaginations of Europe and its colonies. (Schmidt 129)

Perhaps Don Quixote's esteemed presence across Europe can be attributed to his connection with the great European tradition of creating Arthurian tales. Cervantes could be said to have contributed to the Arthurian cannon with his pinnacle work, as Don Quixote himself frequently describes his occupation as being like that of Arthur's Knights of the Round Table. Don Quixote especially compares himself to Lancelot with frequency throughout the novel. For example, in one of the earlier instances in which Don Quixote must explain his profession to confused laymen he states,

[H]ave you never read the annals and history of England, which treat of the famous exploits of Arthur[. . .] In the reign of that excellent king was instituted that famous order of chivalry, called the Knights of the Round-Table; and those amours punctually happened, which are recounted of Don Lancelot of the Lake, [. . .] from whence that delightful ballad, so much sung in Spain, took its rise: For never sure was any knight / So serv'd by damsel, or by dame, / As Lancelot, that man of might, / When he at first from Britain came.” (1755 Smollett 123-24)

Don Quixote continues his story by connecting Arthur and Lancelot to all of the famous knights he had read about throughout history until he comes back to himself, the last (and least, as he humbly points out) knight errant. Readers familiar with both the tales of Lancelot and *Don Quixote* may wonder, however, if Cervantes was aware of Lancelot's less-than-clean record as a knight, especially shown in his exploits in Chrétien's *The Knight of the Cart*. If Cervantes was keeping Lancelot's truly poor personality in mind, he may have used Lancelot as Don Quixote's prime role model in order to keep the image of Don Quixote humble; it could also have verified the idea that Don Quixote was not entirely engaged with reality – including the reality present within the romantic works of literature that he so loved.

Another very relevant scene appears at the very beginning of the novel, in which there is a passage that provides the very first seen description of Quixote's horse, Rocinante. In Tobias Smollett's second translation, this passage reads as follows: “He next visited his horse, which (though he had more corners than a rial, being as lean as Gonela's, that *tantum pellis et ossa fuit*) nevertheless, in his eye, appeared infinitely preferable to Alexander's Bucephalus, or the Cid's Babieca” (1761 Trans. Smollett 6). In this translation, the term “rial” comes with a footnote that defines it as a Spanish coin with many corners. Thus by comparing Rocinante to a rial, Cervantes

is stating that the horse has many corners, or is very bony and lean. Translator P.A. Motteux similarly translates this passage thus: “The next moment he went to view his horse, whose bones stuck out like the corners of a Spanish Real” (Motteux 11). Other translators have fumbled with this quotation, however. Smollett himself first wrote, “Though he had more corners than a trial” (1755 Trans. Smollett 47). The use of the term “trial” is not explained, nor is the definition or context certain. One must, then, assume that Smollett made a mistake in his first translation of this passage, either thinking that it was a mistake on Cervantes’s part, or completely misreading the word. This passage may, in fact, have been part of the reason that Smollett chose to revise his translation in 1761. The very fact that Smollett took the time to correctly revise this passage when he re-translated the text indicates Smollett’s assessment that the passage is essential to the story that follows.

Other translators have interpreted this passage in completely different and original ways. Walter Starkie translates the passage as, “Then he went to see his steed, and although it had more cracks in its hoof than there are quarters in a Spanish real and more faults than Gonella’s jade, which was all skin and bone, he thought that neither the Bucephalus of Alexander nor the Cid’s Babieca could be compared with it” (Starkie 60). Once again, Spanish coinage is mentioned, but Starkie takes a whole different meaning from it. Somehow, where Smollett compares the horse himself to the corners of the coin, Starkie only mentions the horse’s hoof. Starkie uses the singular form of the word, so by his estimation Rocinante may only have had cracks in one of his hooves, making the horse less downtrodden than Cervantes likely intended. Translator Stanley Appelbaum similarly mentions the horse’s hooves in his passage: “Then he went to see his workhorse, and although there were as many nicks in his hooves as there are nickels in a dollar [. . .]” (Appelbaum 9). Appelbaum includes a footnote at the end of this quotation where he states,

“The Spanish has a pun on *cuarto*, which means (among other things) a crack in a hoof and a copper coin worth about 1/8 of the silver coin called the *real*” (Appelbaum 9). Finally, a translator explains the reasons that so many other translators have changed this passage and have used variations on the coinage and hoof mentions. It seems that Cervantes has written a joke with this statement that various translators from later centuries failed to understand or fully relay to their readers: *cuarto* means both a crack in a hoof *and* a small coin whose value is a small fraction of the Spanish *real*. In Appelbaum's edition, there is also a side-by-side modernized Spanish version of the original text. The same passage presented in modern Spanish is as follows: “Fue luego a ver su rocín, y aunque tenía más cuartos que un real y más tachas que el caballero de Gonela” (Appelbaum 8). It is interesting to note that in Spanish, the horse is initially called a “rocín,” which is the first part of the name that Quixote gives to his horse. One can also see in this passage the words “cuartos” and “real,” meaning that Cervantes did initially intend for these to be his words of choice.

John Rutherford, who translated *Don Quixote* in 2000, writes on the older translators of this text, stating,

[T]hey are inaccurate: their authors had only the most rudimentary dictionaries and other reference books, and their style of translation was much freer than is acceptable now. Motteux, for example, removes entire sentences or even paragraphs, and adds others of his own. He has a particular fondness for inserting his own jokes, which are more scurrilous than funny. He is an example of what we could call the cavalier tradition of *Quixote* translation. (Rutherford xxv).

Rutherford's own translation of the passage in question, however, is the farthest departure from the original mention of coinage and hooves yet. Rutherford's text states, “Then he went to visit

his nag, and although it had more corns than a barleyfield and more wrong with it than Gonella's horse, which *tantum pellis et ossa fuit*, it seemed to him that neither Alexander's Bucephalus nor the Cid's Babieca was its equal" (Rutherford 28). There is no mention of a barleyfield in the original text, so it may be assumed that Rutherford intended his translation for a less educated audience, and thus chose to use a different phrase that he believed would be better understood by his readers.

This passage is a very important one about Don Quixote's horse because it creates a mental depiction of Rocinante's features for the entire rest of the novel. Thus it is also important to read a translation in which the translator has successfully imparted onto the reader an appropriately detailed impression of Rocinante and his importance to Don Quixote. It is also the first instance in which the horse is mentioned, and the fact that the passage about the horse is so lengthy indicates Cervantes's own judgment that his readers should be fully familiar with the horse from the start. In this way Cervantes provides a foretelling that the horse will play a part in many important scenes to come within the story.

Cervantes's description of Don Quixote's horse is followed by a passage that describes the process by which Quixote created his horse's name:

Four days he consumed, in inventing a name for this remarkable steed; suggesting to himself, what an impropriety it would be, if an horse of his qualities, belonging to such a renowned knight, should go without some sounding and significant appellation: he therefore resolved to accommodate him with one that should not only declare his past, but also his present capacity; for he thought it but reasonable, that since his master had altered his condition, he should also change his horse's name, and invest him with some sublime and sonorous epithet, suitable

to the new order and employment he professed: accordingly, after having chosen, rejected, amended, tortured and revolved a world of names, in his imagination, he fixed upon Rozinante, an appellation, in his opinion, lofty, sonorous and expressive, not only of his former, but likewise of his present situation, which entitled him to the preference over all other horses under the sun. (1761 Trans. Smollett 30).

As this incredibly long sentence suggests, the naming of his horse is of the utmost importance for Don Quixote. In fact, Don Quixote takes the time to hash out a name for his horse before he even begins to think of a name for his own knightly persona. In a way, Don Quixote's naming of his horse and himself is like a modern day person creating an online persona for a video game or role-playing game, except that in those situations one is expected to create one's own name before naming any pet or companion that accompanies one's character. Thus even from a modern standpoint it is unusual that Don Quixote puts most of his effort into naming his horse even before he turns to finding a name for himself. This can especially be seen in massively-multiplayer-online-role-playing-games, such as *The Elder Scrolls Online*, where players are asked to create and name their hero immediately upon starting the game. After their hero is created they are asked to choose a pet and a horse and give said pet and horse a name. Though the animals become indispensable allies for the hero throughout the games, one can see that it is conventional to focus first on one's hero and secondly on the hero's animal companions. In earlier heroic literature, this convention is standard, as well. Gawain is a well-known hero in Arthurian literature before his named horse, Gringalet, comes into play in medieval Arthurian tales. Don Quixote very clearly defies this convention.

Once he has decided upon a suitable name for his steed, the hero finally begins to imagine a name for himself: “Having thus denominated his horse, so much to his own satisfaction, he was desirous of doing himself the like justice, and, after eight days of study, actually assumed the title of Don Quixote” (Smollett 1761, 30-31). One should note that though Don Quixote takes twice as much time naming himself as his horse, Cervantes gives very little detail on the naming process that Quixote used to create his own pseudonym. While the naming of Rocinante is described in an eleven-line run-on sentence, the naming of his rider is quickly noted in a brief sentence. This is yet another indication that Cervantes himself wished for readers' minds to fixate more on the horse than on the rider. Readers are intended to remember the many specific details about Rocinante that are given in this passage and thus make a mental connection that Rocinante is an important name to remember, one that will appear often within the story.

The fact that Don Quixote takes so much care in naming his horse means that he thinks very highly of the horse. Had he intended to use the horse for transportation only, or as a temporary steed for one particular journey, he would not have given so much thought to his name. Because Don Quixote *does* put a lot of thought into the naming of his horse, however, it can be assumed that Don Quixote intends to care for the horse and keep him with him on his entire journey, however long that journey may be. If he saw horses as a temporary solution to his traveling needs, and then spent four days coming up with a name for each and every one of them, a lot of time would be wasted. Don Quixote may be viewed by the author, audience, and characters in the book as a madman, but there is no assertion that he wastes time in this manner. Thus the only assumption that can be safely made is that Don Quixote cares for Rocinante. This is a huge personality indicator for Quixote himself: because he cares so deeply for his horse, his

madness must merely be innocent and docile – he is meant to be seen as a righteous yet fanciful man, rather than a chaotic madman who terrorizes the countryside. Don Quixote's care for his horse helps readers understand exactly what type of “madness” applies to Don Quixote's character, and once readers see the care with which he treats his steed they trust that he will treat all others that he encounters with similar care and virtue.

Another passage in which Don Quixote exhibits a high level of respect for his horse can be found near the end of the first volume, where Cervantes specifically mentions that “[Don Quixote] clapt heels to Rozinante (spurs he had none) and at a hand-gallop, (for, we do not find in this true history, that ever Rozinante went full speed) rode up to attack the disciplinants” (1755 Trans. Smollett 360-61). Even when riding into battle, Don Quixote does not try to force his horse to run any faster than he is able (unlike Chrétien de Troyes's Lancelot, who always forced his horses to gallop at full speed). And though full-fledged animal rights movements didn't begin to exist until centuries after this novel was written, Don Quixote refrained from using spurs, which today are frowned upon by animal welfare groups. In Cervantes's time, however, there was no such thing as an animal welfare organization, yet Don Quixote follows their practices perfectly.

There are also many passages throughout the book where Don Quixote or his squire, Sancho, defend Rocinante's name against the names of other famous horses, but Don Quixote's own name spurs significantly fewer arguments. One such discussion can be found in volume two, when Don Quixote and Sancho Panza are deep in discussion with the countess Trifaldi and her duennas. Trifaldi is attempting to send Don Quixote on a quest, and says,

You must likewise know, Malumbruno told me, that whenever fortune should furnish me with our deliverer, he would send him a steed that should be much

better, and less vitious, than any of your return post-horses, as being the very individual wooden-horse upon which the valiant Peter carried off the fair Magalona: he is governed by a peg in his forehead that serves instead of a bridle, and he flies so swiftly through the air, that one would think he was transported by all the devils in hell. This steed, according to ancient tradition, was contrived by the sage Merlin [. . .] [T]here is one great advantage in this horse; he neither eats nor sleeps, nor costs anything in shoeing, and ambles through the air without wings, in such a manner, that his rider may hold a cup full of water in his hand, without spilling a single drop, his motion is so smooth and easy. (1759 Trans. Smollett 838-9).

Though the “horse” being described in this passage sounds unrealistically marvelous, Sancho is skeptical, and replies, “As for his going smooth and easy, [. . .] there is my Dapple, whom (tho’ he does not go through the air, but along the ground) I will match against all the amblers that ever the earth produced [. . .] I should be glad to know, afflicted madam, [. . .] what is the name of that same horse?” (1759 Trans. Smollett 839-40). The woman’s reply to Sancho is long winded and before she gives the name of the great horse she is describing, she lists many other great horses:

[It] is not like that of Bellerophon’s horse, which was called Pegasus, nor does it resemble that which distinguished the steed of Alexander the great, Bucephalus; nor that of Orlando Furioso, whose appellation was Brilladoro; nor Bayarte, which belonged to Reynaldos de Montalevan; nor Frontino, that appertained to Rugero; nor Bootes nor Peritoa, the horses of the sun; nor is he called Orelia, like

that steed upon which the unfortunate Rodrigo last king of the Goths, engaged in that battle where he lost his crown and life. (1759 Trans. Smollett 840)

Sancho is not impressed by this list of famous equestrian names, and states, “I will lay a wager, [. . .] that as he is not distinguished by any of those famous names of horses so well known, so neither have they given him the name of my master's horse Rozinante; a name which, in propriety, exceeds all those that have been named” (1759 Trans. Smollett 840). Sancho is meant to be Don Quixote's link with reality, because though he is optimistic and follows the knight earnestly, he is not touched with the supposed madness that Don Quixote exhibits. Even though Sancho is sane, however, he still defends Rocinante with all of his being. He believes the horse to be the greatest of them all and will proudly declare this to any person he encounters.

Sancho's own steed is a mere donkey, easily overlooked by many other characters in the story. Like Don Quixote, he defends his animal with great care, however, when the donkey's honor or person-hood is questioned. Sancho displays his care for Dapple, his donkey, when he visits a Duke's castle and requests special care for his donkey in the stable. He says, “I wish you would do me the favour, good madam, [. . .] to go to the castle-gate, where you will find a dapple ass of mine, and be so good as either to send or lead him to the stable; for, the poor creature is a little timorous, and cannot bear to be alone, by any manner of means” (1759 Trans. Smollett 776-77). The duenna to whom Sancho is speaking at this time refuses to help him, as she claims it is above her station to do so. Sancho stands his ground, however, and states, “I have heard my master, who is a perfect mine of history, tell as how, when Lancelot came from Britain, ladies tended his own person, and duennas took care of his horse: now, with respect to my ass, I declare I would not exchange him for signor Lancelot's courser” (1759 Trans. Smollett 777). Sancho continues to argue with the duenna for some time, and even the duchess of the castle enters the

discourse. Yet, with multiple nobles against him, Sancho never backs down from his assertion that his donkey requires the utmost in care and treatment. It is unknown whether Cervantes knew about Chrétien de Troyes's depiction of Lancelot and of how said knight cared (or, rather, specifically did not care) for his horses, but it is especially notable that Sancho singles out Lancelot as a knight with whom he would never trade horses. Whether Cervantes did or did not know about Chrétien's horse-intensive storyline, however, Sancho defends his donkey as he would his own child. Sancho shows readers that equines are meant to be respected as individuals, and that they should be important to their riders.

Don Quixote and Rocinante's enduring presence throughout Europe is proven through numerous references to Quixote and his horse throughout centuries of culture and art. Famous and canonical writers, painters, musicians, and other masters of their craft have used Rocinante as inspiration for their work as well as a method of expressing the nature of the protagonist or story being portrayed. Examples of references to Rocinante in culture and art include Steinbeck's *Travels with Charley* and the song entitled "Cygnus X-1" by Canadian band Rush. In both works, the name Rocinante is used as a moniker for a vehicle in which the protagonist is traveling, presumably on his quixotic quest.

In the case of Steinbeck's memoir *Travels with Charley*, the author explains,

I wanted a three-quarter-ton pick-up truck, capable of going anywhere under possibly rigorous conditions, and on this truck I wanted a little house built like the cabin of a small boat. [. . .] In due time, specifications came through, for a tough, fast, comfortable vehicle, mounting a camper top. [. . .] It was almost as easy to handle as a passenger car. And because my planned trip had aroused some satiric

remarks among my friends, I named it Rocinante, which you will remember was the name of Don Quixote's horse. (Steinbeck 6)

In other words, Steinbeck's friends believe that his intention to travel the country in a modified truck is particularly quixotic, so he adopts the idea and thus names his vehicle. Steinbeck refers to the truck by name very frequently throughout the book (he even has the name painted in Renaissance Spanish lettering on the side of the truck), and in doing so causes the truck itself to feel like a character to the reader and likely to the author, as well. This is a testament to the amount of importance that Steinbeck himself places on the idea that his Rocinante allows him to vicariously take the role of Cervantes's faithful wandering knight as he travels the country on his own impossible quest.

The reference by the band Rush has a similar purpose to Steinbeck's. In their story-driven song, "Cygnus X-1," there is no mention of Don Quixote himself, at all. Instead, the lyrics state,

I set a course just east of Lyra [. . .]

Sailed across the Milky Way

On my ship, the 'Rocinante'

Wheeling through the galaxies,

Headed for the heart of Cygnus

Headlong into mystery. (Rush)

Listeners are intended to understand the reference and thus understand that by calling his ship the Rocinante, the protagonist knows that he has embarked on a fruitless but important quest, just as Don Quixote had done. That the songwriter felt that the name of Don Quixote's horse is so well known and important is telling: he did not believe that he even needed to mention Don Quixote himself to compare his protagonist to the knight – he felt that the name of the horse was

sufficient to convey the parallel to his audience. This is just one example of a cultural work that makes the case that Rocinante is just as important as his rider, in both the eyes of the artist and of the casual reader, but one will likely find many such references if close scrutiny is given.

Many renowned artists have created their own depictions of Don Quixote and his horse based on the author's description of Rocinante as being bony and full of corners. For instance, Pablo Picasso's famous portrait (seen on the cover of the Signet Classics edition) shows Don Quixote astride Rocinante, with Sancho looking up to them. Rocinante takes on the bony likeness of Cervantes's words – as Picasso's painting is made up of mostly lines, one can see many angles in the horse's legs, neck, and even tail, most closely matching Smollett's translation. 19th century artist Honorè Daumier painted several illustrations based on *Don Quixote*, and each of them shows the hero riding a bent and bony steed. Ironically, the only prominent illustrations that do not portray Rocinante in this fashion are the original illustrations by Vanderbank, whose drawings, according to critic Betsy Bowden, appeared in, “The very first work of prose fiction in England to be published in a fully illustrated de luxe format. [. . .] The very first fully illustrated work of literary prose ever published in England, I repeat, was in Spanish” (Bowden 204). Many of Vanderbank’s illustrations do contain depictions of both Rocinante and Sancho’s donkey, Dapple. The difference between his illustrations and the illustrations of other artists is that his horses actually look like regular, healthy horses and do not truly fit the description given by Cervantes. Bowden provides a reason for this, stating,

Vanderbank would portray Rocinante, Sancho’s dapple, and other equines essential to the plot in such a way that viewers could focus on action shown, rather than being distracted by horses like Hogarth’s in *Hudibras* and elsewhere,

which tend toward crippled dogs with necks like camels and sheepish looks on their faces. (Bowden 205)

Bowden tells us that Vanderbank did not feel the horses were worthy of readers' attention any more than as plot devices or props, but one may note that the artist who had originally been commissioned to illustrate this edition of *Don Quixote*, William Hogarth, would most likely have followed Cervantes's description and would have illustrated Rocinante as more bent and awkward. In switching the commissioned artist from Hogarth to Vanderbank, then, the commissioner sacrificed accurate depictions of the horses in the story for more realistic or ordinary looking scenes. The fact that the very first translation of *Don Quixote* into English contained these misleading illustrations may have some bearing on criticism written throughout the rest of history which underestimates Rocinante and the important part he plays in Cervantes's work.

From an ecocritical standpoint, it is important to study Don Quixote and Sancho's interactions with their horses because their horses are such monumental influences on the story and on the characters themselves. Rocinante is mentioned constantly throughout the lengthy novel as an important character who moves the plot almost as much as Don Quixote and Sancho. Sancho's Dapple, while a more minor player in the story, is very dear to Sancho and the way in which Sancho treats Dapple is very telling of Sancho's good character, just as Don Quixote's doting treatment of Rocinante is an important indicator of his character. Both the protagonist and his side-kick can clearly be seen by the reader to be morally good people, as they treat their horses with a high level of respect and kindness.

J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*

J.R.R. Tolkien is a heroic fantasy author whose moral message is very similar to that of Chrétien de Troyes. Both authors were Roman Catholics⁷, though their religious beliefs and their moral messages matched the times in which they lived: Chrétien focused on the sanctity of marriage, which to him was one of the most important institutions in the church, while Tolkien saw the industrialization taking place around him as a morally corrupt thing, and equated good morals with kindness towards nature. Like Chrétien, Tolkien reflected good moral behavior in his characters in the ways in which the characters treated their horses. For Tolkien, the most moral characters in his stories were the characters who were closest to nature, and those characters also had deep, meaningful relationships with their horses. Several critics have written ecocritical studies of Tolkien's writing about nature and the forest, but few have done what this study aims to accomplish: to ecocritically study the way in which Tolkien uses characters' interactions with horses in *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* to indicate moral character. The most prominent ecologically central characters in these works include Tom Bombadil, Gandalf, Sam, and Beorn. Other characters whose moral nature is sound but have fewer textually described interactions with horses (albeit, these interactions, when they do happen, are still very positive), include King Théoden and the Rohirrim. Tolkien also used horses to illustrate a lack of morality in some of his characters – even some characters that could be considered protagonists. Obviously evil characters like the ringwraiths and the orcs badly mistreat horses in *The Lord of the Rings*, but there are some more ambiguous characters, such as the dwarves in *The Hobbit*, who also mistreat their horses. These are also characters who have very poor interactions with the environment, so Tolkien is making clear statements about these characters and how he wants

⁷ Tolkien was raised in the Roman Catholic church. According to Carpenter, "Christianity had played an increasingly important part in [Tolkien's mother's] life since her husband's death[. . .] During the spring of 1900 [. . .] they were received into the Church of Rome" (Carpenter 31).

his readers to view them. The rest of the hobbits, aside from Sam, fall into a grey area where their interactions with horses are not cruel but they are also not kind or tender. Tolkien uses each of these characters as compasses to show readers how morally good, neutral, and evil characters should behave and how they should be viewed by the reader.

Tolkien's most prominently moral and horse-friendly character is also one that many readers tend to overlook: Tom Bombadil. It is notable that Tom Bombadil is unaffected by the One Ring when Frodo allows him to hold it – a feat that great characters such as Gandalf himself cannot claim. Interestingly, it is Tom Bombadil's extreme closeness to the forest and the natural world that makes him, in Tolkien's eyes, the most morally sound character in all of Middle Earth. Tom's position as Tolkien's most moral character is what gives him the ability to be unaffected by the evil ring. Bombadil is some sort of ambiguous forest spirit, married to the daughter of the River Man, who can sing to trees and plants and give instructions to the natural world around him. He is said to be the oldest living being in Middle Earth – older even than any elf. Patricia Spacks says of Tom Bombadil,

Goodness is partly equated with understanding of nature, closeness to the natural world. [. . .] Tom Bombadil, who rescues the hobbits from evil in the forest, whose natural power for good is so great that he can see the wearer of the Ring which makes men invisible to all other eyes and he does not become invisible himself when wearing it, is in the most intimate communion with natural forces.

(Spacks 32)

Thus it makes sense that the most moral character in *The Lord of the Rings* is also the character with the closest connection to horses.

When the hobbits meet Bombadil, they each are riding a pony. Tom Bombadil has his own pony, named Fatty Lumpkin, with whom Bombadil is said to have a close friendship. Bombadil first mentions Fatty Lumpkin when he sings a song to call the pony, along with the hobbits' five ponies, to him, part of which is as follows: "Sharp-ears, Wise-nose, Swish-tail and Bumpkin, White-socks my little lad, and old Fatty Lumpkin!" (*Lord of the Rings* 140) Fatty Lumpkin is described as being a friend to both Tom Bombadil and to the ponies that the hobbits are riding. He is even described as having "words of wisdom" for the other ponies to calm their fears. Fatty Lumpkin is not confined to a stable – he roams about the forest just as Tom Bombadil roams the forest as he pleases. Like other elements of nature, Fatty Lumpkin responds when Tom Bombadil sings to him. Bombadil describes Fatty Lumpkin as:

My four-legged friend; though I seldom ride him, and he wanders often far, free upon the hillsides. When your ponies stayed with me, they got to know my Lumpkin and they smelt him in the night, and quickly ran to meet him. I thought they'd look for him and with his words of wisdom take all their fear away. But now, my jolly Lumpkin, old Tom's going to ride. (*Lord of the Rings* 141).

In this passage readers can see that Bombadil has a close relationship with his own pony, but he also trusts his pony to guide and provide advice to wayward ponies that have run away from their riders: namely the ponies that the hobbits have been riding until this point. As Tolkien places importance on the names of his characters, it is also important to note that not only is Tom's pony named, but Tom has also named Merry's ponies that the hobbits had been riding, which until this point had not been given names. The names that Tom gives to the hobbits' five ponies (one of which is a beast of burden) can be found in his song: Sharp-ears, Wise-nose, Swish-tail, Bumpkin, and White-socks. The ponies are said to have "answered to the new names that Tom

had given them for the rest of their lives” (*The Lord of the Rings* 141). Later readers will see that the importance of names is applied to other prominent horses such as Shadowfax and Snowmane.

Gandalf is one of the most prominent and important characters in both *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* and throughout both books he can be seen riding a few horses, which he treats with special care. Gandalf is viewed as the wisest character in both stories, and is an advisor to other characters. In *The Hobbit*, Beorn, one of the most nature-oriented characters who will be discussed below, loans some of his precious ponies to the dwarves, and he loans a horse to Gandalf. While Beorn stipulates that these horses must be returned to him before the group reaches the horses, Gandalf decides to part with the dwarves at the edge of the forest and keep the horse. Unlike the dwarves, who wish to steal their ponies from Beorn, Gandalf has no intention of stealing his horse, but instead plans to make a new arrangement with Beorn, whom he knows has been following them. The following conversation takes place between Gandalf and Thorin upon their parting at the woods: “‘What about the horse, then?’ said Thorin, ‘You don’t mention sending that back,’ ‘I don’t, because I am not sending it,’ ‘What about your promise then?’ ‘I will look after that. I am not sending the horse back, I am riding it!’” (*The Hobbit* 136). Gandalf respects Beorn as a friend, and understands Beorn’s relationship with his horses. Gandalf knows that Beorn views his horses as equal beings, and thus treats them as such himself. Gandalf knows that as long as he treats the horse with care and kindness and does not take it into the forest against Beorn’s instructions he will not make an enemy of Beorn.

This same behavior can be seen when Gandalf first partners with Shadowfax, king of the horses, in *The Lord of the Rings*. Gandalf at first borrows Shadowfax from the king of Rohan, who initially is unhappy about loaning such an important horse. Gandalf describes this

interaction at the Council of Elrond, where he states, “He bade me take a horse and be gone; and I chose one much to my liking, but little to his. I took the best horse in his land, and I have never seen the like of him” (*Lord of the Rings* 255). Gandalf forms a bond with Shadowfax and says, “Never before had any man mounted him, but I took him and I tamed him” (*Lord of the Rings* 256). Though some may read Gandalf’s words as strictness towards the horse, and not kindness, readers must remember that Gandalf and Shadowfax bonded in an instant. Gandalf’s kind nature was immediately evident to Shadowfax, who let Gandalf ride him right away. Gandalf is in a hurry to spread important news and doesn’t have time to use whips or spurs or any other cruel training methods to tame Shadowfax – rather he tamed the horse with his love.

Much later in the saga, in *The Two Towers*, Gandalf and Shadowfax are reacquainted, and they interact with one another as very close friends:

As soon as Shadowfax saw Gandalf, he checked his pace and whinnied loudly; then trotting gently forward he stooped his proud head and nuzzled his great nostrils against the old man’s neck. Gandalf caressed him. “It is a long way from Rivendell, my friend,” he said; “but you are wise and swift and come at need. Far let us ride now together, and *part not in this world again!*” (*Lord of the Rings* 493, italics mine)

Gandalf feels such a strong bond with this horse that he wishes to be with him forever which, for an ageless wizard and a possibly immortal horse, is a very long time. Shadowfax seems to reciprocate these feelings, as he traveled very far to find Gandalf after Gandalf had left him in Rivendell.

A few pages later, Gandalf speaks with Théoden, king of Rohan, about his loan of Shadowfax to Gandalf. Gandalf asks for Shadowfax to be given to him as a reward for rescuing

the king, stating, “[A]lready there is a bond of love between us” (*Lord of the Rings* 511).

Théoden acknowledges that Shadowfax is a great horse and a magnificent gift, and grants Gandalf his request. It is clear from these passages that as the story progresses, Gandalf and Shadowfax have entered into a very strong relationship of mutual love and trust. It is fitting for Gandalf to have such a strong bond with his horse, as he is the focal point of morality in *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*. Gandalf is the wisest character, the person to whom all of the other characters go for guidance. Tolkien uses Gandalf’s relationship with Shadowfax and even with other horses such as Beorn’s horse to prove to readers that Gandalf is truly a good and moral core character.

Another character who was mentioned briefly above but who should be explored in more detail is Beorn, the bear-man who helps Bilbo, Gandalf, and the dwarves in *The Hobbit*. As a man who can change into a bear at will, Beorn is intrinsically close to the natural world around him. Shippey discusses Beorn’s animalistic attributes in *The Road to Middle Earth* where he states,

[Beorn’s] name is an Old English heroic word for ‘man’, which meant originally ‘bear’, so that naturally enough he is a were-bear, who changes shape, or ‘skin’ as Gandalf calls it, every night. He has a very close analogue to Böthvarr Bjarki (= ‘little bear’), a hero from the Norse *Saga of Hrólfr Kraki*, and another in Beowulf himself, whose name is commonly explained as Beowulf = ‘bees’ wolf’ = honey-eater = bear. (*The Road to Middle Earth* 80)

Because Beorn is partially animal, he has a connection with other animals that even the most animal-friendly characters cannot attain. Beorn particularly has a relationship with several horses and ponies, who live in his house and help him with his chores. Gandalf describes Beorn’s

relationship with his equine friends, stating, “[A]s a man he keeps [. . .] horses which are nearly as marvelous as himself. They work for him and talk to him. He does not eat them; neither does he hunt or eat wild animals” (*The Hobbit* 116). Beorn is so connected with other animals that even though he is a bear, traditionally an omnivorous animal, he has adopted a vegetarian lifestyle. Because Beorn is a character who can transform into a seemingly frightening bear, Tolkien takes great pains to show readers that Beorn is actually a very kind and moral person. Tolkien especially does this through Beorn’s interactions with his horses. In one scene,

Beorn clapped his hands, and in trotted four beautiful white ponies [. . .]. Beorn said something to them in a queer language like animal noises turned into talk. They went out again and soon came back carrying torches in their mouths, which they lit at the fire and stuck in low brackets on the pillars of the hall around the central hearth [. . .] [A] pony pushed two low-seated benches [. . .] for Gandalf and Thorin, while at the far end he put Beorn’s big black chair of the same sort. (*The Hobbit* 125)

Beorn’s ponies do not live in a stable, and they are not possessions. They are Beorn’s family members who assist with setting the table when company visits. In this fantasy setting where a man can turn into a bear and his guests include no humans, but instead a hobbit, an Istari, and a gathering of dwarves, it is not out of the question for horses to behave in such a fashion.

Later, when Beorn has lent his ponies to Gandalf, Bilbo, and the dwarves, Gandalf tells his traveling companions that Beorn, “Loves his animals as his children. You do not guess what kindness he has shown you in letting dwarves ride them so far and so fast” (*The Hobbit* 136).

When the dwarves contemplate stealing the ponies from Beorn, Gandalf notifies them that Beorn has been following them, and that to steal the ponies would be a grave error. Gandalf emphasizes

that the dwarves do not know “what will happen to you, if you tried to take them into the forest” (*The Hobbit* 136). Beorn cares enough about his ponies that he will harm anyone who puts his ponies in danger, or will at least threaten harm. As mentioned above, Tolkien emphasizes that Beorn is very peaceful and intimate with nature, which makes him one of Tolkien’s more moral characters, but he can become as frightening as his appearance suggests if his horses are harmed.

Critic Marjorie Burns discusses Beorn’s animal companions and hypothesizes that Beorn’s animals are like lower-class servants that do his bidding. Burns observes, “Beorn’s clean, willing animal servants resemble not thralls but something far more class oriented in a familiar, English way. They are, in fact, closer to personal or house servants, from what we see, though ones of a very exceptional kind” (Burns 42). Burns comes to the conclusion that Beorn’s animals are his servants because they are seen serving food and attending to Beorn’s guests, but the text of the story clearly demonstrates that these animals are no servants: they are family members. As Gandalf said, Beorn views his animals as his children, and as children of many households do, they are tasked with doing chores from time to time. Thus it can be seen that Beorn not only has horses and has relationships with horses, as other characters do, but he has a familial relationship with his horses. This, added to his extreme closeness with nature, makes him one of Tolkien’s more moral characters.

When discussing horses in *The Lord of the Rings*, it is impossible to avoid mentioning the men of Rohan, also known as the Rohirrim. The Rohirrim are a race of humans who are descended from Beorn. According to Paul Lewis, “The nearest kin to Beorn and his clan were the Rohirrim (in Sindarin the ‘horselord people’)[. . .] Their territory was called ‘The Éothéod,’ which in Rohirric means the ‘horse-folk’” (Lewis 146). Beorn’s love of his horses and ponies

extends to his descendants, who play a large role in *The Lord of the Rings*. Shippey discusses the Rohirrim, stating,

The Rohirrim call themselves the ‘Éothéod (Old English *eoh* = ‘horse’ + *þéod* = ‘people’); this translates into Common Speech as ‘the Riders’; Rohan itself is Sindarin for ‘horse-country’. Prominent Riders call themselves after horses (Éomund, Éomer, Éowyn), and their most important title after ‘King’ is ‘marshall’, borrowed into English from French but going back to an unrecorded Germanic *marho-skalkoz*, ‘horse-servant’ (and cp. the name of the hobbits’ Hengest). The Rohirrim are nothing if not cavalry. (*The Road to Middle Earth* 123)

The culture, economy, art, and military of Rohan are all centered around horses. When readers first encounter the riders of Rohan in *The Two Towers*, the riders’ horses are described in detail: “Their horses were of great stature, strong and clean-limbed; their grey coats glistened, their long tails flowed in the wind, their manes were braided on their proud necks” (*The Lord of the Rings* 421). These horses are not only well cared for, but they are decorated with braids and are cleanly groomed. The appearance of the horses speaks of the good nature of their riders. According to Tolkien’s theme concerning horses thus far, these men must be morally good and on the side of justice, as they treat their horses so well. And because they are literally called the “horse people” it makes sense that they would take such spectacular care of their horses. When, at the Council of Elrond, the question comes up as to whether the Rohirrim are giving horses as tribute to Sauron, Boromir vehemently states that “They love their horses next to their kin” (*Lord of the Rings* 256), meaning that they would never sell or give their horses to the forces of evil. It is later revealed that the horses the ringwraiths ride were stolen from them. Éomer explains that, “Some

years ago the Lord of the Black Land wished to purchase horses of us at great price, but we refused him, for he puts beasts to evil use. Then he sent plundering Orcs, and they carry off what they can, choosing always the black horses: few of these are now left” (*Lord of the Rings* 255). In this passage we see a stark contrast between the good men of Rohan and the evil Orcs and other inhabitants of the Black Land, which is emphasized by the way that each treats their horses. The men of Rohan are very respectful towards their horses, while the Lord of the Black Land “puts beasts to evil use.” Tolkien once again uses horses to at once show the goodness of the men of Rohan and the evilness of Sauron and his minions.

The king of Rohan, Théoden, has a notable relationship with his horse, as well. While he and his horse are not a pair that are spoken of often throughout the text, his horse has a name and a lineage. Théoden’s horse is named Snowmane, and according to the gravestone erected upon his death, Snowmane is the descendant of a horse named Lightfoot: “*Lightfoot’s foal, swift Snowmane*” (*Lord of the Rings* 827). Tolkien places great importance on names and histories, so his inclusion of a lineage for this thoughtfully named horse is notable. Tolkien followed medieval tradition with the naming of Snowmane, as in the Middle Ages it was common practice to name notable horses based on their appearances. Joyce Salisbury points out that “The poet in [*The Song of Roland*] related the names of the horses. Of the five heroes’ horses named, three were named for their distinctive colors: Count Gerin’s horse ‘Sorel’; Ganelon’s horse ‘Brown Spot’; and Charlemagne’s horse ‘Ash-Grey’” (Salisbury 23). Tolkien likely knew that it was common practice to name medieval horses for the colors of their coats and manes, and this influenced his naming of Snowmane, most prominently, but also many of the other horses in the story, such as Shadowfax and the ponies that Tom Bombadil assigns names to.

The most significant moment that occurs between Théoden and his horse, however, is the death of both the king and the horse. The two die almost simultaneously as they are attacked by the Witch King and his fell beast. The passage states, “Snowmane wild with terror stood up on high, fighting with the air, and then with a great scream he crashed upon his side: a black dart had pierced him. The king fell beneath him” (*Lord of the Rings* 822). Although the death of the horse ultimately causes the death of the king, none of the Riders of Rohan blame Snowmane for the tragedy. Instead, they bury him with great ceremony: “[F]or Snowmane they dug a grave and set up a stone upon which was carved in the tongues of Gondor and the Mark: *Faithful servant yet master’s bane, Lightfoot’s foal, swift Snowmane*” (*Lord of the Rings* 826-27). Tolkien takes this glorification of Snowmane a step further when he says, “Green and long grew the grass upon Snowmane’s Howe” (*Lord of the Rings* 827). While Théoden himself does get a final moment in which he is able to speak to his heir before he dies, he does not receive a burial scene that is as elaborate as Snowmane’s burial. Tolkien seems to wish to lift Snowmane up in the eyes of his readers to show that this horse was great and that he and his master, Théoden, were a team – Snowmane’s legacy should not be viewed merely as having killed the king.

The most important characters in both *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* are the hobbits: Bilbo, Frodo, Sam, Merry, and Pippin. Of these characters, the most connected with nature and with ponies is Sam. Sam’s primary interaction is with a pony that he names Bill. Sam and the other hobbits meet Bill in Bree, after Merry’s ponies have been scared away and go back to live with Tom Bombadil. Bill travels with the fellowship until they reach the mines of Moria, when it is deemed too dangerous for the pony to continue and Gandalf sends the pony away under a protection spell. Upon hearing that he must part with Bill, Sam protests,

But you can't leave poor old Bill behind in this forsaken place, Mr. Gandalf! [. . .]
 I won't have it, and that's flat. After he has come so far and all! [. . .] He'd follow
 Mr. Frodo into a dragon's den, if I led him[. . .] It'd be nothing short of murder
 to turn him loose with all these wolves about. (*Lord of the Rings* 295)

Gandalf casts his spell on the pony then, saying, "You are a wise beast, and have learned much in Rivendell. Make your way to places where you can find grass, and so come in time to Elrond's house, or wherever you wish to go" (*Lord of the Rings* 295). Both Sam and Gandalf show a high level of kindness towards this pony, and do everything in their power to ensure that the pony is protected and safe from danger. Sam further shows his strong connection to the pony when he "[S]tood sullenly by the pony and returned no answer [to Gandalf's spell]. Bill, seeming to understand well what was going on, nuzzled up to him, putting his nose to Sam's ear. Sam burst into tears" (*Lord of the Rings* 296). In this passage it is made abundantly clear that Bill returns Sam's affection and they have a very tender moment before they part. Sam's behavior towards his pony is in keeping with Tolkien's vision of morality. As Frodo continues his journey after *The Fellowship of the Ring* he has only Sam to keep him on the moral path, and Sam's role is just that – to guide his friend as Frodo delves deeper into physical and figurative darkness. It also follows that Sam, of all of the hobbits, is the closest to the natural world. Sam is a gardener, and his gift from Galadriel is a seed and dirt from her garden which he uses in the end of the story to restore the destroyed remains of The Shire. Sam literally brings nature back to The Shire, just as he rescues Frodo from the evil of the One Ring at Mount Doom. It is fitting, then, that Sam is one of the gentlest characters towards his horse and he is also the moral rock who rescues both the heroic protagonist of the story and the homeland of the hobbits.

The other hobbits fit into a more morally grey area than Sam. Bilbo does not participate in the attempt to steal Beorn's ponies when the dwarves wish to do so, but he doesn't speak up against it. Neither does he speak up when the dwarves leave their ponies to be devoured by the dragon. Smaug, the dragon, specifically tells Bilbo that he had eaten the ponies, and Bilbo isn't portrayed as having any sort of feelings about the ordeal whatsoever. Merry, Pippin, and Frodo are very similar, though they are in fewer situations where ponies are killed or harmed. At the beginning of *The Lord of the Rings*, the hobbits are riding four ponies and they have one extra pony as a pack animal. These ponies belong to Merry, but Merry has not given the ponies names. Instead, the ponies receive names when they meet Tom Bombadil. When the hobbits reach the town of Bree, their ponies are released by an unknown villain. Readers learn that the ponies find their way to Tom Bombadil and are ultimately safe, but the hobbits are not aware of this. They do not feel any sadness for the loss of their ponies – only dismay that they no longer have animals to carry their luggage. This is the point where they purchase Bill the pony and where Sam distinguishes himself from the other hobbits by developing a close relationship with the horse, but as far as the other hobbits are concerned any pony is merely a means of carrying themselves or their possessions.

After Bill is released and after the Fellowship parts ways, Frodo and Sam are on their own for most of the rest of their journey. They do not have any ponies or horses after this point. Merry and Pippin ride on the backs of other peoples' horses at points in their own adventures, but they generally have little interaction with ponies or horses, as well. The brief interactions that the hobbits do have with ponies at the beginning of their journey, however, are enough to show that Tolkien intended to portray the hobbits as neither morally perfect nor morally evil. They may be said to be the most like an average human, which is in keeping with the fact that Tolkien

originally modeled Bilbo on himself⁸. In this way, Tolkien seems to be giving readers the power to form their own opinions of the hobbits, whereas other characters are given precise levels of morality that readers must accept outright. Interestingly, however, Tolkien could not create a race that had no connection at all to horses; the founders of the Shire were named after horses:

Marco and Blanco – the names of the Fallohide brothers, who with a “great following of Hobbits” colonized the shire, are a deliberate parallel to those of Hengest and Horsa, two Germanic chieftains who came to Britain with their warriors in the early fifth century[. . .] *Hengest* is Old English for “gelding, horse, steed,” and *horsa* stems from Old English *hors* “horse,” while *Marcho* is derived from Old English *meorh* “horse steed” (compare Welsh *march* “horse, stallion,” *marchog* “rider”) and *blanca* is Old English for “white or grey horse.” (Hammond and Scull 19)⁹

Just as Tolkien added a small horse reference in Bree with The Sign of the Prancing Pony, he has slipped some horse names into the history of the hobbits’ homeland.

Some of the most prominent characters that Tolkien judges through their use of horses are the dwarves in *The Hobbit*. Just as Chrétien used dead and dying horses to indicate Lancelot’s lack of moral character, Tolkien’s dwarves mistreat their ponies terribly, and this poor treatment is representative of the bigger picture that Tolkien wished to impart to his readers about the dwarves. In general, Tolkien’s dwarves are not meant to be viewed as heroic figures by the reader, and Tolkien makes this very clear through the dwarves’ interactions with their ponies and with nature in general. It is mentioned several times throughout Tolkien’s Middle Earth

⁸ Carpenter states, “Tolkien himself was well aware of the similarity between creator and creation. ‘I am in fact a hobbit,’ he once wrote” (Carpenter 179).

⁹ Tom Shippey draws the same conclusions in his book *The Road to Middle Earth*.

books that the dwarves are a greedy race who misuse the earth for their own purposes. The exception to this rule is Gimli, whose interactions with Legolas and Galadriel allow him to understand the environment and his impact on it. Susan Jeffers states that after Gimli's interaction with Galadriel, he "moves toward that 'language of ecological humility' favored by ecocritics" (Jeffers 60). Jeffers also points out the dwarves' overall greedy nature and its impact on the environment: "[T]heir pursuit of mithril destroyed an entire Dwarven community and woke the ancient evil, the Balrog" (Jeffers 60). The fact that the dwarves destroyed their home in their greedy pursuit for valuable ore indicates that Tolkien views the dwarves as villainous characters, but Jeffers further states that "There is a suggestion that Gimli's new relationship with the Earth, or with Galadriel, is a kind of redemptive move for the Dwarves. Tolkien again refuses to allow the Dwarves to remain easily categorized" (Jeffers 61). Gimli's viewpoint is clearly changed after his encounter with Galadriel and the elves, as he soon is offered a chance to ride a horse and he responds, "I would sooner walk than sit on the back of any beast so great, free or begrudged" (*Lord of the Rings* 428). While Gimli eventually concedes to ride on the back of Legolas's horse, it is clear that Gimli has much more respect for horses than his ancestors did.

So it seems that in *The Hobbit* and early in the story of *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien's own view of the dwarves is that they are scoundrels who abuse their ponies, the earth, and other peoples' property (this last part can easily be seen in their behavior when visiting the homes of both Bilbo and Beorn). Gimli, however, is a descendant of one of the dwarves from *The Hobbit* and seems to represent a new generation of much more conscientious dwarves. In *The Hobbit* the dwarves' actions are anything but conscientious. This is most clear at the end of the book when the dwarves barricade themselves inside the mountain and wage battle against the nearby humans, mainly because there is a dragon's hoard of gold inside the mountain that they are

trying to keep for themselves. Long before this moment, however, Tolkien shows his disdain for the dwarves by writing them as terrible horse-keepers. In the beginning of the novel, the dwarves ride ponies which they clearly view as nothing more than a means of transportation. These ponies are soon stolen by goblins, but before that happens, when the dwarves visit Rivendell, the elves sing, "*Your ponies need shoeing!*" (*The Hobbit* 48) The elves are not-so-subtly telling the dwarves here that they have been neglecting their ponies on their journey.

Later in the novel, after the dwarves have lost their initial ponies, they come to visit Beorn, whose love for his animal companions, including his horses and ponies, is clearly evident. After visiting Beorn the dwarves, with Gandalf's assistance, are able to convince Beorn to loan them some ponies for their journey. Beorn does so very reluctantly, and tells the dwarves that they must return the ponies before they arrive at Mirkwood forest. When the dwarves are near the forest, however, they are disinclined to do as they were instructed. Thankfully for Beorn and his ponies, Gandalf is present and forces the dwarves to keep their word. Gandalf states, "Now you must send back these excellent ponies you have borrowed" (*The Hobbit* 135) and in response, "The dwarves were inclined to grumble at this, but the wizard told them they were fools. 'Beorn is not as far off as you seem to think, and you had better keep your promises anyway, for he is a bad enemy'" (*The Hobbit* 135). Gandalf seems to be suggesting that Beorn has followed the dwarves to ensure that his ponies are cared for, but the dwarves are not quite smart enough to have realized this on their own. Though the dwarves do end up returning the ponies to Beorn, the fact that the dwarves consider stealing the ponies indicates both that they view the animals as mere material possessions, and that they are morally corrupt. They clearly see the ponies as objects and not as thinking, living beings, and they don't even take Beorn's feelings into consideration when they attempt to steal the ponies from him. This is similar to the

way in which Chrétien's Lancelot demanded a new horse from Gawain when he first met the knight and didn't even thank Gawain when he did give up one of his expensive horses. Both Lancelot and the dwarves are very self-centered and think only of their own needs and not of the needs and feelings of other living beings, whether they are human or equestrian.

The dwarves find themselves with ponies to ride once again when they are leaving Lake-Town and are on their way to combat the dragon, Smaug. Once the dwarves reach the mountain in which Smaug resides, they find that they are unable to take the ponies up the steep mountain with them. They leave the ponies tied up on the ground at the base of the mountain, knowing full-well that there is a potentially hungry dragon nearby. When the dragon emerges, the dwarves hide in a nearby enclosure on the mountain and have no apparent thoughts about their ponies, exposed and tied up on the ground below. The following passage describes the scene that transpires: "The ponies screamed with terror, burst their ropes and galloped wildly off. The dragon swooped and turned to pursue them, and was gone" (*The Hobbit* 219). It almost seems as though the dwarves left the ponies on the ground as bait to draw the dragon away from the spot where the dwarves were hiding on the mountain. Thorin, the leader of the dwarves, makes a small mention of the ponies, stating, "That'll be the end of our poor beasts! [. . .] Nothing can escape Smaug once he sees it" (*The Hobbit* 219). If anything, Thorin's words are less about having sympathy for the ponies and more about foreshadowing Bilbo's first encounter with the dragon, in which he has a conversation with Smaug but Smaug is unable to see him (thus Bilbo's ability to escape the dragon). During this conversation, Smaug says to Bilbo, "Let me tell you I ate six ponies last night and I shall catch and eat all the others before long" (*The Hobbit* 224). Tolkien makes sure that Smaug confirms that he has, indeed, killed and eaten the ponies that the

dwarves left unattended to make the point that the dwarves cannot be trusted with the lives of other beings.

From each interaction that the dwarves in *The Hobbit* have with ponies, then, it can clearly be seen that they show no kindness towards horses or ponies. Their first ponies are not properly shod and are ultimately stolen by goblins due to the dwarves' recklessness. The ponies that the dwarves borrow from Beorn are almost stolen by the dwarves, and they only change their mind once Gandalf points out that Beorn, a large bear, might harm them if they do not return the ponies. And the final group of ponies that the dwarves ride end up being eaten by a dragon, again due to misconduct on the part of the dwarves. Add to these facts that the dwarves are no friends to nature, and that they actively harm the ecology of the world around them by mining deep into the earth, and it is abundantly clear that Tolkien did not wish for his readers to sympathize with the dwarves – instead Tolkien wished for the dwarves to be viewed as morally corrupt characters.

The most truly evil characters in *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* are the ringwraiths, the orcs, the goblins, and, of course, their master: Sauron. As with all of the other characters, Tolkien exhibits the evil nature of these characters through their interactions with horses. As mentioned previously, the riders of Rohan testify that Sauron (and his minions) “[P]uts beasts to evil use” (*Lord of the Rings* 426). This is proven by the way in which the ringwraiths ride their horses to their very deaths when they are chasing Frodo: “‘The Ring! The Ring!’ they cried with deadly voices; and immediately their leader urged his horse forward into the water, followed closely by two others” (*Lord of the Rings* 209). Tolkien is quite selective with his word choice here: the first wraith must “urge” his horse to enter the river – it is clear that the horse does not wish to do so on his own. Then the river swells and kills the horses:

Dimly Frodo saw the river below him rise, and down along its course there came a plumed cavalry of waves. [. . .] The three Riders that were still in the midst of the Ford were overwhelmed: they disappeared, buried suddenly under angry foam. Those that were behind drew back in dismay. [. . .] The black horses were filled with madness, and leaping forward in terror they bore their riders into the rushing flood. Their piercing cries were drowned in the roaring of the river as it carried them away. (*Lord of the Rings* 209)

Because the wraiths themselves are non-corporeal, they survived the flood, but they sacrificed their horses in their pursuit of Frodo and the ring.

In case anyone wondered if the horses were also supernatural beings who may have survived the river, Tolkien has Gandalf confirm to Frodo that the horses are indeed real:

“[T]hey are real horses; just as the black robes are real robes that they wear to give shape to their nothingness[. . . .]” “Then why do these black horses endure such riders? All other animals are terrified when they draw near, even the elf-horse of Glorfindel. [. . .]”

“Because these horses are born and bred to the service of the Dark Lord in Mordor” (*Lord of the Rings* 216).

This passage also reveals that even great horses like Asfaloth, Glorfindel’s horse, are frightened at the sight of the wraiths. Only horses that have been in Morder since they were young can endure the presence of such evil beings. Much later in the story Shadowfax faces the Witch King, leader of the ringwraiths, and even Shadowfax is frightened, though he stands his ground:

“Shadowfax who alone among the free horses of the earth endured the terror, unmoving, steadfast as a graven image in Rath Dínen” (*Lord of the Rings* 811). That even Shadowfax is afraid of the wraith is notable; Shadowfax has proven throughout the story that he is rarely afraid of anything.

Another way that Sauron's minions prove that they are abusive towards horses is the way that they obtain horses. Each time we see them obtain horses, it is through the act of theft. The riders of Rohan state that "[Sauron] sent plundering Orcs, and they carry off what they can, choosing always the black horses: few of these are now left" (*Lord of the Rings* 426). In *The Hobbit*, the goblins similarly steal the ponies from Bilbo and the dwarves: "A crack had opened at the back of the cave, and was already a wide passage. [Bilbo] was just in time to see the last of the ponies' tails disappearing into it. [. . .] Out jumped the goblins, big goblins, great ugly-looking goblins, lots of goblins" (*The Hobbit* 59). Tolkien, as a Christian, would certainly view the act of theft as evil, and the fact that all initial interactions that the orcs, goblins, and ringwraiths have with horses is through theft is a clear indicator that they are completely immoral.

While there are many more characters throughout J.R.R. Tolkien's Middle Earth books, the ones mentioned in this study have the most important interactions with horses and nature. Characters like Tom Bombadil, Gandalf, Beorn, and Sam are intended to be read as very morally good characters, and their relationships with their horses are strong indicators of this morality. King Théoden and the riders of Rohan are also clearly good characters, as they also have positive interactions with their horses, though their interactions are a little less personal than those of the previously mentioned characters. The hobbits: Bilbo, Frodo, Merry, and Pippin are a bit more ambiguous. They neither have positive nor negative interactions with their ponies and are meant to be read as more neutral in their moral natures. Alternately, the dwarves in *The Hobbit* are surprisingly antagonistic, even though they travel with the protagonist. They wreak havoc on the ecology of the world around them, they are very greedy, and above all: they are very harmful towards their ponies and towards ponies that belong to other people. Gimli, the dwarf who

appears in *The Lord of the Rings*, is a great departure from his ancestors, and learns to be a friend towards nature and horses. Finally, the minions of Sauron are portrayed as deeply evil by the very fact that horses are terrified of them, and any horses that they acquire for themselves are stolen. Tolkien's fixation on ecology and anti-industrialization played a large role in his creation of these characters, and they fall onto an eco-friendly and equine-friendly spectrum that informs readers which characters are most morally good and which are morally evil.

Conclusion

Both Chrétien de Troyes and Miguel de Cervantes lived in time periods where horses were so commonplace that their inclusion in works of literature could be instantly relatable for any reader. This made it possible for both authors to use horses as compasses by which to easily gauge their characters' level of morality, and therefore how the reader should interpret said characters. On the one hand, if a character treats his or her horse very badly, that character is clearly a wrong-doer who should receive no sympathy from readers. On the other hand, if a character shows the utmost respect for his or her horse, that character should be viewed as a morally superior person. This method is skillfully employed by both Chrétien and Cervantes in their works *Lancelot* and *Don Quixote*, respectively.

For J.R.R. Tolkien, the time period was one of drastic change. Cars and trains were beginning to come into use when he began publishing works in the 1920s. When he published *The Hobbit* in 1937, many people still rode horses and farmers still frequently used horses on their farms, but cars were certainly becoming more visible. Tolkien himself never owned a horse (although he did work with horses during his time in the military)¹⁰, but he also had little experience with cars. In his foreword to the second edition of *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien writes of his childhood, “[M]otor-cars were rare objects (I had never seen one) and men were still building suburban railways” (*Lord of the Rings* xvii). Later in his life he spoke in a letter to Michael Straight of the “present design of destroying Oxford in order to accommodate motor-cars” (*The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien* 235). It is clear that Tolkien himself never fully adjusted to

¹⁰ In Helen Armstrong's “It Bore Me Away: Tolkien as a Horseman,” Armstrong states that “Tolkien was not a cavalryman; and as far as I knew his life showed no sign of leisure-riding. When I asked Priscilla Tolkien about this [. . .] she told me that her father loved horses, and that he had indeed learned to ride while he was in the army, not as a cavalryman, but as part of his basic officer training” (Armstrong 31). Biographer John Garth confirms this, stating that “As an undergraduate Tolkien trained with King Edward's Horse, a cavalry regiment [. . . and] had a strong affinity with horses, which he loved” (Collier)

the presence of cars in the modern world. This follows with the ecocritical anti-industrialization themes that he wrote into his major works. For Tolkien, then, horses were almost as natural in his everyday world as they were in Chrétien and Cervantes's worlds.

Because horses have been so important for almost the entirety of humanity's existence, their presence persists in modern heroic literature. This is especially true within the Fantasy genre, which is often set in a medieval time period or a mythical land that exhibits similarities to Medieval Europe. In further study of the topic of horses in heroic literature, one can find a wealth of modern fantasy works that deal with this topic in a variety of ways. Some works are good at portraying a caring hero-horse relationship while some authors don't understand the importance of the horse in their heroes' lives. The primary thing to remember when studying modern heroic literature is that horses are no longer present in the everyday lives of most people, and even those who do live with horses do not rely on their horses as someone from the Middle Ages or Renaissance would.

While fantasy worlds may seem similar to historical settings, one must remember that the worlds are creations of their authors, and those authors have put some amount of time and energy into creating the ecology and natural setting of those worlds. In this way fantasy works fall into a unique section of ecocriticism and can be analyzed for their level of knowledge about the natural world. Critic Patrick D. Murphy writes of science fiction and fantasy that the genre

Is nature-oriented literature, in the sense of its being an aesthetic text that, on the one hand, directs reader attention toward the natural world and human interaction with other aspects of nature within that world, and, on the other hand, makes specific environmental issues part of the plots and themes of various works. SF also at times shares with both nature writing and other forms of nature-oriented

literature detailed attention to the natural world found in the present as well as to the scientific disciplines that facilitate such detailed attention. [. . .] Large-scope SF novels and series, such as *Dune* and its sequels, often combine a wide array of scientific disciplines that bear on perceiving, interpreting, and understanding the world. (Murphy 263-64)

Fantasy literature in the heroic genre is thus especially important to study for its usage of horses in the text because it is expected by the reader that the work will be somewhat accurate in its presentation of natural entities, horses included. Fantasy writers use nature and animals regularly throughout their works, and readers unconsciously expect the author to be well researched on the natural topics that they present in their works. Fantasy authors are not always well researched, however, and their horses and horse-human relationships end up being unrealistic.

While there are some prominent modern fantasy works that portray a compassionate hero-horse relationship, others fall prey to the lack of notice of horses that so many scholars have been victim of. A striking example of negligence on the authors' part to give horses proper recognition can be seen in the "Noble Dead" series by Barb and J.C. Hendee. In this series a main character not only expresses his disdain for horses constantly throughout the saga, but multiple horses are given terrible deaths in order to display a "close call" from which the heroes have just escaped. While the series occasionally gives characters a chance to show compassion towards horses, more often than not horses are used as plot devices only, and it is clear that the authors do not have a firm grasp on the necessity of their heroes' relationships with their horses.

A fantasy series that portrays positive relationships between horses and humans is Mercedes Lackey's "Valdemar" series. In Lackey's books, an order of knight-like heroes is chosen by highly intelligent horses, and they go on adventures with their horses. Lackey's series

is very horse-centric, but this can be misleading. Lackey's horses are more fantastical than real horses, and cannot be evaluated in the same way that one would evaluate real horses in literature.

"Xena: Warrior Princess" is a television show that can be evaluated for the relationship between the titular character and her horse, Argo. There are many episodes in which the horse is central to the plot. *The Princess Bride*, the novel, is another work that could be looked at. The female protagonist, Buttercup, has a deep loving relationship with her horse, affectionately named "Horse." The male protagonist acknowledges this relationship when he writes her letters – he asks after "Horse" when he writes to Buttercup. Finally, the *Elenium* series by David Eddings features a protagonist whose relationship with his horse is like that of a best friend – though the horse is not magical or able to communicate with him like the horses in Mercedes Lackey's books, Eddings's protagonist frequently speaks to his horse and treats him like an equal throughout the entire series.

Further study of Chretien de Troyes's other works may prove useful and fascinating for their hero/horse interactions, as well. Chretien's *Perceval* and *Yvain* especially have very interesting scenes that involve horses and study of these works could reveal even more about the author's interest in horses and their importance to his protagonists.

These are just a few examples of works that could be examined further in an extended study of horses in heroic literature. Though the current fantasy works' modern placement may affect the authors' knowledge and experience with horses, these texts may apply the same or similar rules of morality as the works of Chrétien de Troyes, Miguel de Cervantes, and J.R.R. Tolkien. In general, an ecocritical study of horses in any work would be useful, as there are few works of ecocriticism that study horses in literature.

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