# EQUESTRIAN KNOWLEDGE AND THE MIDDLE-CLASS MAN, OR THE PECULIAR MERITS OF FALLING OFF

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> There's many a spill twixt the find and the kill.
> – Nineteenth-century foxhunting proverb[1]

> This book is an account of the way in which I gained whatever knowledge I may possess about horses [. . .] And as I have often found mistakes to be more enlightening than inspiration, I relate them both.
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> – Matthew Hayes, *Among Men and Horses* (1894)

This is an essay about the way the acquisition of equestrian knowledge presented problems of class and gender instability in nineteenth-century Britain, and how different representations of equestrian failure worked to resolve those instabilities by producing new kinds of knowledge and identities. Men falling off their horses, bumbling through the foxhunting field, being cheated out of their money by horse-dealers – all these images recur constantly in sporting texts and novels, staple comic depictions of failures of both masculinity and class mobility. But the varied forms and contexts in which these depictions arise do not so much point to the foreclosure of social revisions as they illuminate competing and multiple models of legitimacy and manhood circulating in the heyday of equestrian sport (1840 to 1880). Sporting magazines, equestrian manuals, and foxhunting novels proliferated in the latter half of the nineteenth century, as a middle-class, autodidactic readership sought to attain the status and the pleasures associated with riding. But the entry of the middle-class man into a horse-rider relationship proved troublesome on several fronts: for the aristocracy seeking to protect its echelon; for writers attempting to define bourgeois masculinity in *contrast* to an aristocratic model of social legitimacy; and, most of all, for the middle-class man himself, because taking on the field of horsemanly know-how meant not only perfecting a physical skill, but entering into a relationship of deep understanding with another being. At the center of bourgeois negotiations of social place, as Pierre Bourdieu has importantly argued, is the acquisition of social power through intellectual

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[1] Quoted in A. Henry Higginson, *Letters from an Old Sportsman to a Young One* (146).

knowledge.[2] The field of equestrian knowledge adds a twist to this equation: combining intimacy with social practice, horsemanship is figured as a potential means of self-definition through emotional connection, not just intellectual development. The failures of this particularly Victorian brand of affective knowledge provide narrative resolution but not necessarily social restabilisation, and in so doing reveal the problems of middle-class masculinity to be primarily problems of intimacy.

In sporting novelist R.S. Surtees' *Handley Cross* (1838-9), would-be-horseman/merchant John Jorrocks – himself perhaps the most famous enthusiastic but failed Victorian rider – gives a comedic "sporting lector" to the members of the Handley Cross hunt, concisely expressing the kinds of knowledge particular to equestrianism:

> To 'unt pleasantly two things are necessary – to know your 'oss and to know your own mind. An 'oss is a queer critter. In the stable, on the road, or even in a green land, he may all mild and hamiable – jest like the gal you're a courtin' of – what when he gets into the matrimony of the 'unting-field among the other nags, and sees the 'ounds, which always gets their danders up, my vig! it's another pair of shoes altogether, as we say in France. Howsomever, if you know your 'oss and can depend upon him, so as to be sure he will carry you over whatever you put him at, have a good understandin' with yourself afore ever you come to a leap, whether you mean to go over it or not, for nothing looks so pusillanimous as to see a chap ride bang at a fence as though he would eat it, and then swerve off for a gate or a gap. (332-3)

The kinds of knowledge Jorrocks espouses are just those that arise in Victorian equestrian manuals and sporting magazines: a "feeling knowledge," an understanding of the horse and the self that potentially culminates not only in personal pleasure but also in social reconfiguration. Likening the relationship between horse and rider to a relationship of heterosexual pursuit, Jorrocks' words suggest a level of intimacy that goes beyond that of a rider and his mount; the implication that such an intimacy is solidified in tandem with the rider's access to his own intention and desire suggests that masculine identity is created in a relational context, one in which self-knowledge hinges on knowledge of another. Jorrocks' speech is complicated, however, by the fact that he himself cannot access *either* kind of knowledge. His Cockney accent is the first giveaway that this speech is meant to be taken ironically, but the real comedy in this speech comes through its

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[2] I refer here to Bourdieu's well-known notion of "cultural capital." See his *Distinctions: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*.

context, for although Jorrocks may preach the gospels of good horsemanship, in the field, as the novel's many hunt scenes attest, he cannot practise them and ends up most often chasing after his runaway horse on foot.

The trouble with equestrian knowledge, as Jorrocks himself exemplifies, is how (and whether) it may be procured. Although the aspiring rider may peruse sporting magazines and equestrian manuals, and even internalise the lingo of horsemanship and the protocols of the hunting field as Jorrocks has, the actual ability to *ride well*, according to many Victorian equestrian texts, is accessed through feeling and for precisely that reason must be somehow instinctive or innate. As Francis Dwyer rather deflatingly asserts in his manual for erstwhile horsemen *On Seats and Saddles, Bits and Bitting, and the Prevention and Cure of Restiveness in Horses*,

> Some men, and these are the naturally good or born riders, possess the sort of knowledge in question instinctively, and frequently without being able to account either to themselves or others for the way in which they have acquired it, or give satisfactory reasons for the adoption of their methods. Such men are most usually, although not invariably, of the peculiar build, unnecessary to describe, which combines strength and vigor with lightness and dexterity; and must possess in all cases that happy admixture of courage, prompt decision, patience and perseverance that constitute the rider's temperament, and which arrive at their greatest perfection when coupled with an unselfish love of that noblest and most beautiful animal, the horse. (17-18)

This seems a rather strange way to begin a text intended to help men learn how to ride – for if intimacy with the horse and equestrian skill are bred in the bone, and involve tapping into a well of instinctive, "natural" knowledge, what then is the goal of the equestrian manual as a genre, ostensibly written for those who seek a relationship with horses to which they have *not* been born? While Dwyer provides a picture of inherent horsemanliness, other writers on the subject contend to the contrary that good riding is "an *acquired instinct*," something that can come to be a kind of second nature (Herbert 281, emphasis in original). Blurring the boundaries between what is learned or bought and what is innate, good horsemanship thus presents the possibility for class transgressions that go deeper than behaviour; if one can actually acquire instincts, how could anyone tell the difference between the "real" and the merely procured?

Arguments about equestrian knowledge highlight anxieties over the possibility of attaining status without inheritance, and thus of upsetting the distinctions between the classes. In short, equestrian knowledge presents a familiar Victorian conundrum – how to distinguish the socially legitimate from those who aspire to legitimacy – in

a new way: emphasising the importance of intimacy with the horse (understanding and loving the creature ridden) and with the self (tapping into intention and instinct), equestrian knowledge has the potential to revise social hierarchies through feeling rather than wealth or even intellect. And if to know by feeling might be to move (upward) toward a stable social role, it also potentially redefines masculinity in such a way that emotional connection signifies as the primary marker of successfully enacted manhood.

The failure to achieve this kind of knowledge-through-understanding thus comes to be a charged topic in nineteenth-century novels and sporting texts: often played for comedic effect, à la Jorrocks, scenes of men in conflict with horses also function to resolve anxieties about the implications of equestrian success. But this is a productive failure, generative of social revisions that work to mediate the instabilities equestrian knowledge presents, although it may not resolve them. Rather than restricting bourgeois manhood to one narrow model, representations of equestrian failure negotiate conflicting definitions of middle-class masculinity, showing it to pivot on precisely the questions of intimacy that Jorrocks' speech raised: an understanding of another being and an understanding of the self (or, as men falling off horses imply, their *mis*understanding).[3] This essay's argument takes place in two parts, both of which explore the problem of equestrian knowledge and the way authors with divergent ideological aims used equestrian failure to renegotiate social distinctions. In section one, I elaborate on the depiction of horsey knowledge in Victorian equestrian manuals and other sporting works, and explore the instabilities that this particular kind of knowledge presented. The problems posed by equestrian knowledge prove to be problems in the conjunction of intimacy and ownership – the acquisition of "instinct" versus its inheritance, and the acquisition and management of the horse, itself a highly unstable form of property. In the essay's second section, I look briefly at the conventions of the sporting novel as exemplified in Surtees' works, in which equestrian mishaps provide a resolution to aristocratic anxieties over bourgeois mobility: defining middle-class identity as immutable even despite equestrian success, these texts imply that while horsey know-how may be gotten, the instabilities that knowledge consists of guarantee its ultimate failure. I then investigate at greater length the contrasts drawn between aristocratic and middle-class riders (and lovers) in novels by Anthony Trollope and George Eliot – two authors who, I argue, effectively invert the tropes of the nineteenth-century sporting texts and thus redefine bourgeois manhood in a way that makes inheritance and intimacy possible without threat to the extant social order. By depicting young men falling off horses, that is, Trollope and Eliot present a model of middle-class masculinity centred on a knowledge of the self – a process fostered and

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[3] The interest in gaining knowledge through failure is, in fact, a fairly common theme in equestrian manuals, a number of which contain chapters on the "right" way to fall. See, for example, *The Horse and the Hound* (1842) by "Nimrod" (a.k.a. Charles Apperley).

tempered by heterosexual intimacy – that functions not in tandem with but in contrast to a knowledge of the horse.

## Equestrian Knowledge as Social Instability

The popularity of equestrian sport (and foxhunting in particular) hit a high point during the mid- to late nineteenth century.[4] As R.S. Surtees wrote in his autobiography, the cry from readers of *The New Sporting Magazine*, which he edited, was for "horses! nothing but horses!"[5] Publications chronicling the goings-on at hunt meets, turf races, and steeplechases and offering advice proliferated; equestrian manuals and sporting novels served as both entertainment and guides for conduct; and even in novels whose main themes were not at all horsey, scenes of hunting and riding increasingly were incorporated into the plot.[6] Think, for example, of Alec Stoke-d'Urberville's use of horsemanship to effect social and sexual dominance in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*; *Jane Eyre's* many descriptions of long coach trips, and the heroine's initial meeting with Rochester and his skittish horse; or even Kit's encounters with a cantankerous pony in *The Old Curiosity Shop*. But it is Anthony Trollope's novels that record the effect of this historical development most consistently and strongly, a personal and literary interest Trollope writes of in his autobiography, avowing his love of hunting and revealing that

> Nothing has ever been allowed to stand in the way of hunting – neither the writing of books nor the work of the Post Office, nor other pleasures [. . .] I have written on very many subjects, and on most of them with pleasure; but on no subject with such delight as that on hunting. I have dragged it into many novels, – into too many no doubt, – but I have always felt myself deprived of a legitimate joy when the nature of the tale has not allowed me a hunting chapter.[7]

The legitimacy of Trollope's joy in *writing* about riding to hounds and his obvious devotion to the sport, however, are called into question by the lines that immediately

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[4] Anne Grimshaw chronicles the influence of foxhunting on the development of horse-breeding and riding practices in nineteenth-century Britain in the introduction to her *The Horse: A Bibliography of British Books*. Grimshaw notes that the widespread interest in hunting distinguished British riders from their European counterparts, whose focus continued to be on dressage and equitation, fields inherited from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

[5] Surtees' autobiography was published posthumously, with editorial commentary by E.D. Cuming; this quote is taken from Surtees, *Robert Smith Surtees (Creator of "Jorrocks"), 1803-1864* (84).

[6] In addition to *The New Sporting Magazine* were its most well-known and widely-read competitors, *The Sporting Magazine*, *The Sporting Review*, and *Bell's Life in London* (to name just a few).

[7] See Trollope's *An Autobiography* (71-2).

precede these in his *An Autobiography*; describing not only his pleasure but his unsuitability for the sport, the novelist concisely expresses the conundrums of middle-class horsemanship:

> I have ever since [buying my first Irish hunter] been constant to the sport having learned to love it with an affection which I cannot myself fathom or understand. Surely no man has laboured at it as I have done or hunted under such drawbacks as to distances, money and natural disadvantages. I am very heavy, blind, and have been – in reference to hunting – a poor man, and am now an old man. I have often had to travel all night outside a mail coach, in order that I might hunt the next day. Nor have I ever been in truth a good horseman[.] (71-2)

Devoted to a pastime for which he is not *made* (he has "learned to love it"), Trollope, like Jorrocks, may achieve pleasure in foxhunting, but he never attains proficiency or understanding – of the horse, clearly, or of himself (foxhunting being a love that he "cannot fathom or understand").[8] Trollope's lack here is not a lack of feeling, but rather a lack of the *right* kind of feeling: a capacity for intimacy rather than enthusiasm. By knowing the horse one becomes entitled to the sport: as "Nimrod" (a.k.a. Charles Apperley), one of the most famous sporting authors of the nineteenth century, puts it succinctly in his manual *The Horse and the Hound*: "The first step toward perfection in a horseman, is to know and feel how his horse is going" (228).

Indeed, it might be said that knowing *is* feeling, that equestrian know-how depends upon the cultivation of an affective connection between horse and rider. Colonel George Greenwood advises his niece and nephew in 1839, for example, that "nothing is useless which familiarizes the horse; which increases the confidence and intimacy between him and his rider" (97). Familiarising the horse – making him, in effect, a member of the family – is the better part of equestrian success, a knowledge that takes place not through the exterior adoption of hunting accoutrements but through affect. Even the "nerve" so frequently spoken of as a primary sign of

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[8] In Trollope's 1865 novel *Can You Forgive Her?* a minor character serves as a thinly veiled stand-in for the author himself: the enthusiastic but bumbling writer Pollock, who "had but two horses to his stud, and was never known to give much money for them; – and he weighed without his boots, fifteen stones! No one ever knew how Pollock did it; – more especially as all the world declared that he was as ignorant of hunting as any tailor. He could ride, or when he couldn't ride he could tumble, – men said that of him, – and he would ride as long as the beast under him could go. But few knew the sad misfortunes which poor Pollock sometimes encountered; – the muddy ditches in which he was left; the despair with which he would stand by his unfortunate horse when the poor brute could no longer move across some deep-ploughed field; the miles that he would walk at night beside a tired animal, as he made his way back slowly to the Roebury!" (205-6).

equestrian manliness appears to come down to the horse-rider bond: as A. Henry Higginson writes in a letter of advice to his grandson, "the most important thing to cultivate in learning to ride is confidence, which I might perhaps better express as *understanding* between you and your horse."[9] Confidence here, as in Greenwood's words above, implies not simply the rider's sense of his own ability, but the mutual trust between horse and rider.

By representing horsemanly knowledge as a knowledge of relationship, these Victorian texts suggest a twofold implication for the production of identity: first, that a man's social role is dependent upon his capacity for intimacy; second, that both class and gender are developed relationally. Although the rider's knowledge may be a "feeling knowledge," it does not feminise the rider; rather, it stands as a particular kind of masculinity – and, too, a particular kind of social legitimacy – both of which are impervious to doubt, cemented as they are in "nature" and "instinct." As Francis Dwyer argues in *On Seats and Saddles*, "[Pleasure] is precisely that which brings into the saddle a great number of people who do not belong to the class of born riders," those who pay others to teach them – but, "this luxury is, however, not always attainable even to a long purse, [as] many a man can testify" (18-19).

In questioning the legitimacy of his participation if not his pleasure, Trollope thus calls into question his very masculinity; he is by his own description a type of man in marked contrast to Dwyer's horseman of "peculiar build [. . .] which combines strength and vigor with lightness and dexterity." As one sporting text notes, echoing Trollope, whereas the man who has learned to love the hunt "labours under many disadvantages" because "[a]ll he knows of sport he has gathered from hearsay" (Dixon xix) the *real* sportsman "is replete with [. . .] manliness" (Dixon xviii). The association of horsemanship and manhood goes back as least as far as the seventeenth century, when the Duke of Newcastle, riding master to Charles II, declared that equestrianism "Makyth for Manhoode" (qtd. in Dixson xi); by the nineteenth century it is foxhunting that is most frequently associated with a certain kind of virility. "No sport to the *chase* can compare,/So manly the pleasure it yields" affirms one popular hunting song; a "manly and wholesome exercise [. . .] by nature designed to be the amusement of the Briton" another text attests, portraying hunting as providing a kind of natural pleasure, an expression of inborn tendencies productive of national and gender identity.[10]

But if a man becomes a man in part through the outward practice of innate knowledge, that knowledge has the potential to occur in men who are not necessarily of a particular class: feeling, after all, is not solely the domain of the upper classes.

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[9] A. Henry Higginson, *Letters from an Old Sportsman to a Young One*, 26. Higginson goes on to advise that "the most important part of horsemanship [is] the development of that bond of understanding and sympathy between horse and rider which is so essential to success" (49).

[10] The hunting song is quoted in Nimrod's *The Life of a Sportsman*, 230. Surtees uses eighteenth-century huntsman Peter Beckford's encomium as the epigraph to his novel *Handley Cross* (1854).

Just as horsemanship seems to be a way to ensure that only those with inherited abilities are entitled to ride and to hunt – inherited, presumably, from their aristocratic and horsey forebears – so does it present problems of instability precisely *because* of the argument for innate knowledge. The question of "hands" that runs obsessively throughout Victorian literature on horsemanship is illustrative of this conundrum: the "good hands" of equestrian parlance refers to the rider's quite literal connection with the horse through the reins and the bit (in what is called "contact," or often the French, "*appui*"). *Fair Diana*, an 1884 novel by sporting author "Wanderer" (a.k.a. Elim d'Avigdor), sums up one side of the argument: the novel's model horseman (and, not coincidentally, model aristocrat) Henry Branscombe muses that "'this question of hands is a very curious one. Some people ride all their lives, ride all sorts of horses under all sorts of circumstances, and never acquire the touch which others of half the experience seem to possess almost instinctively. No lessons will teach a man to have good hands' " (48-9). But other texts argue against this kind of claim; although much of Greenwood's *Hints on Horsemanship* is dedicated to the importance of "good hands," the Colonel contends that "[good riding] is soon and easily acquired, and, when acquired, it becomes habitual, and is as easy, nay much more easy, and infinitely more safe, than bad riding" (65). J. Rimmell Dunbar's 1861 *Park Riding* likewise advises thorough instruction of both horse and rider, since "[t]his knowledge is not inherent in man or horse; they must each be taught, and without proper teaching, perfection cannot be attained" (52).

Equestrian knowledge thus comes to inhabit a liminal space between the inherited and the acquired, the instinctive and the learned. As an "*ex re natâ* property in the human composition, and thus sought for in vain by those to whom nature has denied it," the understanding implied by good hands is absolute: one has it or one doesn't, and, unfortunately for the have-nots, in the having lies stability of social position, national identity, and manhood ([Apperley] "Nimrod" *Horse and the Hound* 236). As property closer to commodity than natural tendency, however, skill on horseback and in the field is the ultimate possession, an "acquired instinct" that, once procured, brings with it permanent ownership, as William Dixon's words attest: "One benefit from hunting is that whatever a man really knows about it he has had to learn for himself. Of course, he must have had some guidance, or he would never have mastered the rudiments of the noble sport. But what he *knows* is his own" (xii). Of course, this is the same Dixon who differentiated between the sportsman and the sporting man, dismissing the latter as an impostor who "labours under many disadvantages," having gained his knowledge "from hearsay." And so if equestrian knowledge is property, it is unstable property at best, expressive of Victorian contradictions and conflicts centred on masculine social identity and the means to legitimacy.

Compounding the problem of the rider's psychological "properties" is the horse itself, a creature whose own status as property is described as shifting and

unpredictable. F.C. Burnand's 1875 *About Buying a Horse* lists prices ranging from £20 to 200 guineas, depending on the type of horse and the seller, and the problem of what a horse is worth – or, rather, how to *know* what a horse is worth – runs throughout Victorian equestrian manuals, many of which contain a chapter on horse-dealing.[11] Surtees' first book (prior to his forays into fiction) was *The Horseman's Manual*, a study of the laws pertaining to the sale of horses, and written "for the protection of inexperienced men, who daily fall into the snares of the artful and designing" (119). But even a modicum of savviness as to the tricks of horse-dealers is of little help since, as Surtees laments, "[t]he glorious uncertainty of the Law has long been proverbial; but to no one of its multitudinous branches is this saying more applicable than to the uncertainty of the law of warranty on the purchase and sale of horses" (v). The horse's actual condition appears almost impossible to accurately detect or to guarantee beyond the time of original inspection, since, despite paragraphs of legal code on what constitutes "soundness" (physical health), it is the horse's psychology that proves the most troublesome. Even a veterinary-level knowledge of conformation and illness cannot replace an ability to understand the horse's temperament, to know intimately, in essence, *who the horse is*.

As depicted in nineteenth-century equestrian texts, horses are not only commodities but also feeling individuals, each with a unique set of predilections and sensitivities. Like Jorrocks' hunter, any particular horse "may be all mild and hamiable" one moment and unpredictable the next – this, dependent upon the status of the relationship between him and his rider, for, according to *The Horseman's Manual*, "some horses, when they change their masters, frequently undergo a great alteration; and a horse that has been perfectly docile in the hands of one man may become completely unmanageable in the possession of another" (13). Of course, it is this capacity for attachment between horse and rider that founds the rider's knowledge-through-feeling – but it is also precisely what can disrupt that intimacy. A nineteenth-century sporting song describes the breach of intimacy, and the breakdown of such knowledge: in "Bought and Sold," a man buys what seems to be a perfect hunter at auction, only to find that the horse balks at every fence he's put to in the hunting field. The buyer's narrative ends as a cautionary tale:

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[11] "Copeing," or unlawful and unethical horse-dealing, is the theme in much of this literature. Works like Henry William Herbert's *The Tricks and Traps of Horse-Dealers* (1858) and William Procter's *The Management and Treatment of the Horse in the Stable, Field, and on the Road* (1883), for example, caution buyers against prevalent scams like "bishoping" and "beaning." In the former practice, the horse's teeth are burned with a hot iron to eradicate marks indicating his age. (Herbert inserts an aside offering the etymology of the term: apparently an infamous body-snatcher by the name of Bishop was known for selling the teeth of exhumed corpses to dentists [41-2].) "Beaning" sometimes refers to a second step in "bishoping," in which the horse is given beans to chew that produce foam, thus further obscuring the teeth; in other manuals "beaning" means rebalancing a lame horse by placing a bean between the shoe and hoof of the sound leg, thereby evening out the horse's limp.

Then the secret unsuspected,
The truth till then unknown,
Came out, – the splendid creature
Had Temper of his own.

. . . .

MORAL.
Youth, bear in mind that beauty
Lies no deeper than the skin,
That which maketh or which marreth
Is the temper hid within.

Whether horse it be or helpmate,
To your lot whate'er may fall;
Still that which can and will not,
Is the saddest lot of all.
(qtd. in Egerton-Warburton 15-16)

Just as the innate knowledge of "good hands" comes from an interior well of instinct rather than an outward show of imitative behaviour, the knowledge of the horse is founded on an understanding of its interiority rather than an ability to make an appraisal of its conformation. Equestrian knowledge thus poses problems on two levels: first, it presents the potential for a social identity created through feeling rather than buying, thus allowing men of any class to achieve a legitimacy and masculinity previously reserved for the aristocracy; second, because this knowledge takes place through affect, it makes it possible for those in the lower classes to move upward undetectably (and even, in "acquiring instinct," to metamorphose into aristocrats). But this knowledge itself proves unstable, linked to a notion of property that has the promise of permanence in its innateness, but also contains the mutability of the horse's own temper and worth. Like Jorrocks' once-amiable "gal" during courtship, or a "helpmate" who turns out to have her own ideas, the horse is a figure with whom intimacy is not necessarily assured. It is through the literary representation of equestrian failures – and the accordant failures to understand of self and other – that new intimacies are produced, often based in heterosexual romances defined in direct relation to the horsemanly skill. Although equestrian knowledge may prove too volatile a foundation for middle-class manhood, it is through the depiction of its breakdown and revision that the authors I discuss below develop their relational redefinitions of class and gender identity.

David Parker has argued that Dickens' *The Pickwick Papers* "records the acquiring of knowledge and skills needed by many of the lower middle classes in the early nineteenth century, rising through the English class system, thanks to the expansion of industry, commerce and administration," and that "Mr. Pickwick's

acquiring of horsey knowledge and coaching skills represents this process by metonymy" (96-7). But the rather linear trajectory Parker notices turns out to be markedly more fraught when seen in the larger context of Victorian equestrianism. Indeed, for some authors, finding a means of defining a stable and legitimate middle-class manhood came to demand a move away from both the inherent instabilities of equestrian knowledge and its associations with aristocratic entitlement. In the second section of this essay, I look in greater detail at some conventional tropes of the sporting novel, and at works by Eliot and Trollope that, through the effective inversion of those tropes, redefine bourgeois masculinity in a way that functions as a rejection of upper-class ideals, and replace an unstable intimacy with the horse with a stable knowledge of the (heterosexual) self.

## Equestrian Misfortunes and New Knowledges

"[T]here is no secret so close as that between a rider and his horse" writes R.S. Surtees in 1860 (*Plain or Ringlets?* 79). But what that secret is, how it is effected and utilised, and, moreover, what its social value comes to signify in the latter half of the nineteenth century are not so immediately clear as the kind of intimacy the quotation, taken out of context, would seem to suggest. Like the "secret" of the horse's true nature in "Bought and Sold," the "secret" in *Plain or Ringlets?*, the sporting novel in which the above line appears, is in fact the basis for comedy predicated on failures of intimacy that stem from unstable equestrian knowledge. The horse's knowledge of what kind of rider sits astride him functions in comic contrast to the rider's self-presentation as a competent horseman; the rider's knowledge of what kind of horse he sits astride – often, in Surtees, ill-tempered, rebellious, or just plain wilful – allows him to show the horse off to best advantage so as to profit by selling him at a price above what he is worth. Through the depiction of this horse-rider relation in the context of middle-class fantasies of mobility, Surtees' works exemplify two prevalent features of sporting novels in general: first, an aristocratic anxiety over social advancement (attempted through riding), and second, a corollary insistence that such advancement is impossible, due to the inevitable disclosure of the "secret." Just like a vicious horse who can be made to appear tame but is never actually reformed, Surtees' man of middling means, no matter how much equestrian knowledge he possesses, has his identity cemented through his horsemanly mishaps, failures that preclude assimilation and provide narrative and social resolution.[12]

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[12] The comedy of the sporting novel – of which genre Surtees' works were by far the most widely-read – has its roots in an earlier, late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century tradition of sporting prints and illustrations that depicted falls off horses as part of a satiric commentary on bourgeois ambition. Prolific illustrator Henry Alken's 1826 set of plates, *A Few Ideas; Being Hints to All Would-Be Meltonians*, for example, opens with the epigraph "All is not Gold that glitters; NEITHER DOES Keeping Horses at Melton, and mounting the Scarlet, MAKE the real Meltonian." The plates

As I have noted above, the comedy of Surtees' Jorrocks novels is the comedy of failed understanding: for a grocer and tea-merchant, the love of sport cannot compensate for an intimate knowledge of self and of horse, and although he may know *about* horses, Jorrocks does not truly *know* them, just as he does not understand his own social place. His riding is characterised by fall after fall, mistake after mistake, and his hunting journal in *Handley Cross* confirms his inability, recording more than once, "Paid for catching my 'oss, 6d" (269). Jorrocks' failures in the foxhunting field thus produce a consistently middle-class identity for him, one that confirms his unsuitability for the aristocratic world of the landed gentry to which Surtees himself belonged. But what of the rare man of middling means who can understand his horse? Two such fellows appear centrally in Surtees' later novels, *Mr. Sponge's Sporting Tour* (1849-51) and the posthumously published *Mr. Facey Romford's Hounds* (1865).[13] The would-be heroes of these texts – Soapey Sponge and Facey Romford, respectively – are Jorrocks' kinsmen in foxhunting zeal, but his antithesis in equestrian proficiency and savvy, men who use their excellence in the saddle to perpetrate deception and scams. Where Jorrocks is verbose but inept, Romford is laconic and expert; where Jorrocks innocently imagines his acquired knowledge will translate into prestige, Sponge is shrewd, using an innate feel for horses to con his way into a living. The comedy in *Sponge* and *Romford* is thus likewise the comedy of mistaken identity, but one in which the mistake is intentional, and only serves to benefit the eponymous equestrian.

If Soapey and Facey share Jorrocks' enthusiasm, they also share (perhaps more profoundly) a need to make money, and their horsemanly "delicacy of feeling" is used for mercenary means: both *Mr. Sponge's Sporting Tour* and *Mr. Facey Romford's Hounds* centre on the main characters' attempts to profit by insinuating themselves into the homes of the wealthy and selling vice-ridden horses to unsuspecting buyers at exorbitant prices. Soapey, whom Surtees describes as a

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that follow portray the ridiculous exploits of men ignorant of social protocols in the field – men who, eager to ride with the famous Melton Mowbray hounds, disrupt the hunt, tumble off their horses, and otherwise make fools of themselves through their flagrant failures of knowledge. Alken's *Illustrations to Popular Songs* (1823) further exemplifies the seemingly inherent ironies in unknowledgeable men's riding: to the line "No hedges can turn them, no walls can them set/For the choicest of sportsmen in England were met," Alken portrays three riders taking a wall, each one in a different attitude of ineptitude. The first is thrown into the wall, his horse having refused; the second pulls his horse up just as the animal is about to jump; the third's horse breaks his knees on the fence and has thrown his rider over his head. Creating comedy through the inversion of the national and gender identity that supposedly comes with good horsemanship, Alken's foolish bumblers, out of sync with their horses, show themselves to be less than sportsmen, less than Englishmen, and, ultimately, less than men.

[13] Facey Romford first appears as a character – and fellow ne'er-do-well alongside Soapey Sponge – at the end of *Mr. Sponge's Sporting Tour*, a novel that was serialized for over two years (January 1849 – April 1951). It subsequently went through a number of revisions and was published as one volume, with illustrations by John Leech, in 1853.

superior horseman, combines his foxhunting with "the diversion of fortune-hunting" (2); his appearance, "commanding" from a distance, reveals at close range "a jerky, twitchy, uneasy sort of air, that too plainly showed he was not the natural, or what the lower orders call the *real* gentleman" (2). Indeed, notes Surtees, "[g]entlemen of his calibre are generally extremely affluent in everything but cash" (67). Soapey may not be a "natural" gentleman, but he is a natural at horse-coping: at work trying to pawn off a no-good mount, Soapey understands that "the true way to make a man take a fancy to a horse is to make believe you don't want to sell him [. . .] Mr. Sponge had played this game so very often, that it came quite natural to him. He knew exactly how far to go" (52). And his horses themselves parallel Soapey's pleasant-from-a-distance appearance: "Hercules" and "Multum in Parvo" are both defective steeds who come across at first as handsome (or at least innocuous) but who are, upon closer inspection, seriously flawed.

For Surtees, the pretense to gentlemanliness that Soapey's equestrian skill allows is just as flimsy as the knowledge acquired by Jorrocks – and it is the failure of equestrian intimacy to yield transformation that reinscribes Soapey's and, later, Facey Romford's, middle-class identity. Indeed, the value of understanding horses itself comes to signify only the short-lived profit that can be made through savvy masquerade, rather than an intimate bond of trust that would reveal the rider to be of a higher class stratum. In *Mr. Facey Romford's Hounds* even more pointedly than in *Mr. Sponge's Tour*, horses are represented as being as crafty as their dealers, wily and stubborn creatures who wish to have their own way. Only a real horseman such as Romford, or his colleague Goodhearted Green (whose assumed moniker, like those of the renamed horses in the novel, emphasises the novel's emphasis on and anxiety over the power of superficial traits), has the expertise to take a bad horse like the Cur (rechristened Honest Robin) and "turn him to account":

> In the middle of a run, when the rider thought he was going gallantly, expecting to cut everybody down, the Cur would suddenly collapse, and refuse to proceed a step farther, leaving the laughing field to pass him like a milestone. No, neither bullying nor coaxing had any effect on the Cur. He would kick, and strike, and plunge, and wheel round and round, but as to going any farther, that he resolutely declined – it was quite out of the question. "A fair day's work for a fair day's food," was the horse's motto; and of course the animal himself was the best judge of what was fair [. . .] And a horse that will neither ride nor drive not being of much use to anybody, he at length came into Goodhearted Green's hands, who, knowing how the world is governed by appearances, thought to turn him to account. (62)

Although the Cur is given an interior monologue, it is not the "motto" of the horse that Romford and Green have an interest in altering, merely the exterior behaviour. The horse need only behave during the brief period of trial, or better yet only in the field, when ridden by the rider seeking to sell; when skilfully managed, underfed and overexercised, most of Romford and Green's mounts settle down to obedience fairly quickly and make a good temporary showing. To be turned to account means quite literally that: that the horse turn a profit in the account-book of his seller. Put another way, the "secret" between horse and rider (or, here, horse and dealer) is a means to mobility but not to actual change: the horse changes hands, the dealer social rank, but both are temporary states of transition. There might be a way to move into the aristocratic world through equestrian knowledge, but there is simply no way, in Surtees' novels, to *become* an aristocrat.

For Soapey and for Facey, novelistic resolution comes with the exile of the horse-dealing, would-be gentleman from the hunting county he has temporarily infiltrated: Soapey's tale ends with him falling for a penniless former actress, Lucy Glitters, and returning to London to set up shop as a money-lender and bookmaker; Facey's scheme to inhabit a country estate under false pretenses unravels, appropriately enough, through an obstinate horse resold for nearly thirty times his worth, who turns out to be unrideable and whose exposure as vicious sets in motion a series of revelations about his seller. Although Facey's and Soapey's knowledge of horsemanship may come "naturally," Surtees suggests, the simple fact of equestrian skill cannot confer social legitimacy. The class anxieties evident in Surtees' novels are thus stabilised through the production – or reproduction through revelation – of middle-class masculine identity, and neither the acquisition of equestrian know-how "by hearsay" nor the inheritance of a horseman's "delicacy of feeling" are compatible with the inheritance of land, money, or title. Middle-class mobility, the possibility for which is so enticingly ambiguous in the equestrian manuals of the period, is foreclosed in an economy where social power inheres not so much in what one knows but who one is (an identity that will inevitably be discovered). Finding a means of defining the middle-class man so as to introduce his social value and legitimacy, then, would require a move away from the conventions of Surtees, away from the inherent instabilities of masculine identity that arise when a middle-class man mounts into the saddle. And, too, it would necessitate a re-evaluation of the aristocratic entitlement to inheritance and knowledge.

Although Anthony Trollope was an avid foxhunter and the great majority of his forty-seven novels afforded him the "legitimate joy" of describing equestrian sport, his attitude toward horsey knowledge as a negative characteristic of the aristocracy betrays his interest in revising the distinctions between the upper and middle classes. A close look at some of Trollope's extended hunting scenes, in fact, reveals an investment in redefining middle-class masculinity so that social legitimacy is achieved through the production of interiority, a relationship to the middle-class self rather than to horses and (tangible) property. As his character Miss

Dunstable advises the young horseman Frank Gresham in *Dr. Thorne* (1858), his material estate, Greshamsbury, "should not be half so precious, as the pulses of your own heart. That is your own estate, your own, your very own – your own and another's; whatever may go to the money-lenders, don't send that there. Don't mortgage that, Mr. Gresham" (386). Defining the intimacy between a man and himself (and then a man and his beloved) as central to attaining secure and legitimate identity, Trollope privileges interiority as the primary achievement of virtuous manhood. Whereas Jorrocks' horsemanship echoes the prevailing wisdom of Victorian equestrian texts – to ride well one must know oneself and know one's horse – in Trollope knowledge of self is depicted not only in contrast to equestrian understanding, but in fact as a product of its failure.

The equestrian successes in Trollope's 1865 novel *Can You Forgive Her?* are emblematic of the author's attitude toward what in his work is often the intertwined role of dangerous aristocratic men and the perils of sport. Both gentlemanliness and the pursuit of heterosexual love are at cross purposes with equestrian avidity in the novel, and a practiced knowledge of horses is impossible to reconcile with identity-stabilising romantic resolution for Trollope's young aristocrats. The heir Burgo Fitzgerald, who "was related to half the dukes in the kingdom, and had three countesses for aunts," meets a troubled fate that accords with his habit of hard riding (205). His affections for Glencora Palliser are thwarted, and his failures of romantic intimacy run parallel to his difficulties in the field; Burgo is a rider "whom no man had ever known to crane at a fence, or to hug a road, or to spare his own neck or his horse's. And yet poor Burgo seldom finished well, – coming to repeated grief in this matter of hunting, as he did so constantly in other matters of his life" (205). Another of the novel's hunting men, George Vavasor, is likewise skilful in the saddle, and regarded by his groom as "a man wholly devoted to his horses" (189). But if Vavasor's predilection for equestrian understanding allows him to buy and sell horses with success (if not always honesty) and to maintain a stellar reputation in the field, his interest in riding and horse-dealing ends up making him an unsuitable lover. Vavasor's horsemanship, that is, is linked to a romantic opportunism and temperamental volatility that ultimately mark the demise of his engagement to his cousin, Alice Vavasor – and that make his social position less rather than more secure.

*Orley Farm* (1860) provides an answer to the problems raised by equestrian knowledge, presenting as it does a model of middle-class legitimacy as stemming from the vulnerabilities of equestrian failure. While the question of Lady Mason's perjury over her late husband's will takes centre stage, the subplots of the novel pit young man against young man, heir against middle-class professional, in romantic contests that take place largely in the context of equestrian sport; here, knowledge of and interest in things horsey prove to be an impediment to the stabilising forces of romance and interior "estate." The novel contrasts Peregrine Orme, good-natured but comical aristocrat (and thus rather more-than-avid horseman) with Felix

Graham, a middle-class lawyer whose independent opinions have complicated his professional success; Felix, unlike Perry, has no guaranteed income, rank, or inheritance. And it is precisely Felix's equestrian ignorance, leading as it does to a critical fall (critical both in terms of its physical effects, and on the course of the plot), that ultimately wins him Madeline Staveley, the well-bred and wealthy object of both young men's affections. Here, the failure of intimacy with the horse leads to a vulnerability productive of identity and even inheritance.

Perry Orme inhabits a world in which to be fond of and masterful over horses are not only an expected part of behaving according to rank, but are also a way of gaining honour and recognition. Perry's horsiness at first leads him to the disreputable, lowly sport of rat-catching, and his proposal to his grandfather, Sir Peregrine Orme, that he take up the profession of Master of Foxhounds for the local hunt is quickly rejected. But Perry does distinguish himself as a horseman, and to do so is to win back his grandfather's good opinion after the rat-catching incidents, and thus to regain his position as the appropriate heir to the Orme property:

> Perry had been doing great things with the [Hamworth Hunt]; winning golden opinions from all sorts of sportsmen, and earning a great reputation for a certain young mare which had been bred by Sir Peregrine himself. Foxes are vermin as well as rats [. . .] but a young man who can break an old one's heart by a predilection for rat-catching may win it as absolutely and irretrievably by prowess after a fox [. . .] It may be doubted whether he would have been a prouder man or said more about it if his grandson had taken honours[.] (I: 136-7)

But while Perry may show himself to be a good aristocrat by riding well, his love of horse and hound comes to function as a demonstration of his inferior character, in that his emotional shallowness, his inability to think or feel deeply, is evidenced by his attachment to sport. Perry may care for Madeline, but throughout his courtship and heartache he never forgets his duties in the field: "though he was in love up to his very chin, seriously in love, acknowledging this matter to himself openly, pulling his hair out in the retirement of his bedroom [. . . ] – Peregrine Orme, I say, though he was in this condition, did not in these days neglect his hunting" (I: 275-6). Perry's intimacy with his horse competes with his pursuit of Madeline, and his ability to hunt on despite heartbreak is indicative of a masculinity ultimately deemed inferior to that of his rival, Felix.

It is in the hunting field, appropriately enough, that Madeline's choice is cemented and the distinction between Felix and Perry is clarified. The contrast between them is stark, especially in the eyes of Madeline's mother, Lady Staveley, who laments to herself that, while Perry is "fair and handsome, one of the curled darlings of the nation [. . .] a young man to be loved by all the world, and –

incidentally – the heir to a baronetcy and a good estate," Felix Graham is "by no means a curled darling. And then he was masterful in mind, and not so soft and pleasant as was young Orme. He was heir to nothing, and as to people of his own he had none in particular" (II: 118). And, quite unlike Perry Orme, Felix has almost no equestrian knowledge or skill; he agrees to go out foxhunting only under duress, for he "was not a hunting man, as he possessed neither time nor money for such a pursuit; but to-day he was mounted on his friend Staveley's second horse, having expressed his determination to ride him as long as they two, the man and the horse, could remain together" (I: 279). His precarious social position mirrored by his precarious seat in the saddle, Felix seems to be an altogether inappropriate match for Madeline – and yet it is his fall off his horse, a failure of intimacy with the animal, that results in her affection for him. Here, Felix's vulnerability (and the accordant self-searching that this catalyses) is what legitimises him, in contrast to Perry's more conventional, upper-class social standing and equestrian understanding. Indeed, Felix's fall produces alternative kinds of knowledge – and this, in turn, results in his ability to move upward in rank through heterosexual intimacy.

Not knowing how to manoeuvre a treacherous double ditch during the hunt, Felix follows Perry through, but pulls the horse up because of his ignorance – as Trollope remarks, "It was at such a moment as this that [the horse] should have been left to do his work without injudicious impediment from his rider" (I: 287). Felix, not knowing better, does interfere, and takes a hard fall, cracking his ribs and breaking an arm, and Madeline, upon seeing him in such a position (weak, helpless, unable to move), falls in love:

> Felix Graham was by no means a handsome man; I should hardly sin against truth if I were to say that he was ugly. But Madeline, as she looked at him now, lying utterly without colour but always with that smile on his countenance, thought that no other face to her liking had ever been more gracious. (I: 294)

The accident results in an extended sojourn at the Staveley house, since Felix's injuries are too severe to admit of him being sent home to London right away. During the time of his recovery, a romance is slowly and subtly kindled between Madeline and Felix – the simple proximity leading to mutual regard and affection, and the development of a romantic love dependent upon the production of interiority in both. For Madeline and Felix, this communion takes place in the turn away from things equestrian, and the turn inward to gain knowledge of the self – a process of self-management that makes Trollope's young man fit for social advancement.

Laid up in the Staveley household, Felix is provided not only with proximity to Madeline, but moreover with the leisure to begin self-study – in the terms of *Doctor Thorne*'s Miss Dunstable, to survey the grounds and take ownership of his own interior "estate." His internal questionings – "did he love [Mary Snow, the girl

to whom he is engaged at the novel's outset]? And if not her, did he love any other?" – culminate in his knowledge of himself as his own property, a process of possessive individualism that catalyses the legitimisation of his social place (I: 332). Put another way, the development of his knowledge of his own heart affords him stability of identity; as Madeline's brother Augustus opines, to "[find] out your own feelings [. . .]matters above all things; – above all things, because as to them you may come to something like certainty" (I: 394). Meanwhile, Madeline herself goes through a dawning process of self-knowledge, beginning with a state of inchoate understanding – "she hardly knew as yet how to frame the question which she desired to ask herself" – and ending with an internal confession: "Not in the first asking nor on the second did the answer come; not perhaps on the twentieth. But the answer did come at last, and she told herself that her heart was no longer her own. She knew and acknowledged to herself that Felix Graham was its master and owner" (I: 403 and II: 104, respectively). In becoming master and owner of Madeline's heart – *her* personal "estate" – and by proving himself capable of self-mastery by coming into possession of his own heart's secrets, Felix becomes an heir to an exterior fortune as well, for he marries into wealth and thus follows in the footsteps of Lord Staveley, who attained his own position through a similar course of events. Read this way, *Orley Farm* makes the case for a model of middle-class manhood whose rise to power comes through an interior knowledge rather than an understanding of the social codes and skills embedded in the world of foxhunting – a definition of masculinity that does not seek assimilation but rather revision of class boundaries. Inheritance, that is, thus becomes potentially available to the middle class man without the disruptive leapfrogging attempted by, say, a John Jorrocks.

And what then of Trollope's aristocratic horseman and suitor? During the period in which Felix is recovering, Perry tenders his own affections to Madeline, and proposes to her in a characteristically blunt but earnest manner; her refusal leads him to imagine the truth – that she is enamoured of Felix – and thus Perry returns to the scene of the fall, where he himself had been the one to stay behind and care for Felix until more substantial help could arrive. Perry gazes at the jumps, reliving the scene in his head, and lamenting his own equestrian *ability*:

> There was the spot on which he had knelt so long, while Felix Graham lay back against him, feeble and almost speechless. And there, on the other side, had sat Madeline on her horse, pale with anxiety but yet eager with hope, as she asked question after question as to him who had been hurt[. . .] Peregrine rode up to the ditch, and made his horse stand while he looked at it. It was there, then, on that spot, that he had felt the first pang of jealousy. The idea had occurred to him that he for whom he had been doing a friend's offices with such zealous kindness was his worst enemy. Had he, – he, Peregrine Orme – broken his arms and legs, or even

> broken his neck, would she have ridden up, all thoughtless of herself, and thrown her very life into her voice as she had done when she knew that Felix Graham had fallen from his horse? (II: 97).

In his jealous despair, Perry puts his horse at the jump from nearly a standstill, trying in vain to imitate Felix's fall – but to no avail. Perry is, for better or worse, an able horseman, and just as it is impossible for Felix to understand his horse in the course of one hunt meet ("a man cannot learn to ride any particular horse by two or three words of precept," Felix realises after his accident), Perry cannot divest himself of the knowledge and knack he possesses (I: 297). Too much a rider, too much an aristocrat, Perry is ultimately too shallow to be a proper match for Madeline. Although Trollope's narrative voice is compassionate, it is also gently mocking of "the curled darling," using his sporting single-mindedness as a foil to point up what Trollope privileges as Felix's production of an identity from the inside out, a kind of acquiring of instinct that stands in contrast to Perry's unshakeably innate and class-bound horsey self. And thus does Trollope imagine a middle-class masculinity produced through its very failure to assimilate – an identity ultimately, if somewhat ironically, reconcilable with inheritance.

Like Felix Graham, George Eliot's Fred Vincy is an "heir to nothing in particular" (*Middlemarch* 146). But the world of *Middlemarch* (1872-3) is one in which self-knowledge is not so much a way to transcend class as it is a way to solidify a definition of middle-class manhood predicated upon vocation and concern for others – and thus irreconcilable with what Eliot sees as upper-class solipsism and self-indulgence. Both Fred and his graspingly materialistic sister, Rosamond, have ambitions to social mobility that Eliot depicts as not only impossible but counterproductive to society; that both Fred and Rosy come to bad ends through accidents with horses only underscores their unfitness for life in the upper class.[14] In *Middlemarch*, Fred's Jorrocks-like failures of equestrian knowledge (i.e., he thinks he knows but he doesn't) produce a model of manhood that is emphatically *not* mobile: Eliot revises what was by the 1870s a common cultural knowledge of sporting tropes to insist that falling off one's horse is not simply comical but in fact desirable.

Fred's social aspirations revolve around his inappropriate wish to attain horsey knowledge – and Fred imagines he is a better judge of horseflesh than he actually is, and winds up in debt and disgrace. It is Fred's devotion to Mary Garth, his first love,

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[14] In another of the novel's principal storylines, the Dorothea plot, this association of horses with undesirable aristocratic indulgence is reinforced. Dorothea complains to her uncle, Mr. Brooke that he should " 'make the most of [his] land [rather] than keeping dogs and horses to gallop over it''; she asserts her rejection of Sir James Chettam's courtship at one point by asserting " 'I have made up my mind that I ought not to be a perfect horsewoman, and so I should never correspond to your pattern of a lady'" (*Middlemarch*, 39 and 44, respectively).

that redeems him from a life of equestrian peril and leads him to an appropriate and legitimate social position. Although Fred must accept his given class role, here even more than in *Orley Farm* are the world of horses and the world of romantic love incompatible. Fred fails in his attempts both to "acquire instinct" that would afford him an imagined social legitimacy, and to portray himself as one with the innate knowledge of the aristocrat/horseman. It is in and through those failures, however, that he discovers what Eliot portrays as an innate knowledge of another kind: a knowledge of vocation strongly linked to romantic desire.

The primary question Eliot asks through the Fred Vincy plotline is articulated by Mary: exasperated with his aimlessness and inability to reconcile himself to his class status, Mary exclaims, "'How can you bear to be fit for nothing in the world that is useful? And with so much good in your disposition, Fred, – you might be worth a great deal'" (288). The social value of an individual life at the core of her novel, Eliot contrasts Fred with Mary's father, Caleb Garth, who has found a way of making himself useful and of worth – by managing estates – without needing to step beyond the bounds of his class sphere. As Mary describes him to Fred, her father "'never got into trouble by thinking of his own idle pleasures, but because he was always thinking of the work he was doing for other people'" (287). But Fred, who is ostensible heir to his uncle Featherstone's fortune – who, although son of a manufacturer, has been raised to possess "a good appetite for the best of everything" – thinks of his value in monetary rather than moral terms, and thus wanders desultorily (and covetously) through much of the novel (147). His lament to his bedridden uncle over his woefully impecunious state couples his sense of himself as made for better things with his equestrianism – horses most often representing the problematic self-indulgence of the upper classes in Eliot's fiction:

> "I was not born to very splendid chances. Few men have been more cramped than I have been[. . .] It really seems a little too bad to have to ride a broken-winded hunter, and see men, who are not half such good judges as yourself, able to throw away any amount of money on buying bad bargains." (164)

Fred's hubristic delusions about his own knowledge here lead him into exactly what he derides: a bad bargain. Thinking to rid himself of debt through horse-dealing, Fred "felt sure that by dint of 'swapping' he should gradually metamorphose a horse worth forty pounds into a horse that would fetch a hundred at any moment" (262).

But just as Fred himself cannot "metamorphose" from the middle-class man that he is into a landed aristocrat without need of profession, neither can he transform a horse – particularly not the ill-tempered horse with which he chooses to try his luck. Fred's inappropriate horse-dealing is foretold in the choice of company he keeps on the way to the horse-fair, where he seeks to sell his own horse and to buy another which he can sell for profit. Fred rides out of town with Bambridge and

Horrock, a horse-dealer and a sham veterinarian (and the latter name perhaps not coincidentally referencing Surtees' Jorrocks); Eliot muses:

> Considering that Fred was not at all coarse [. . .] his attraction toward Bambridge and Horrock was an interesting fact which even the love of horse-flesh would not wholly account for without that mysterious influence of Naming which determinates so much of mortal choice. Under any other name than "pleasure" the society of Messieurs Bambridge and Horrock must certainly have been regarded as monotonous; and to arrive with them at Houndsley on a drizzling afternoon, to get down at the Red Lion in a street shaded with coal-dust, and dine in a room furnished with a dirt-enamelled map of the county, a bad portrait of an anonymous horse, His Majesty George the Fourth with legs and cravat, and various leaden spittoons, might have seemed a hard business, but for the sustaining power of nomenclature which determined that the pursuit of these things was "gay." (268-9)

Eliot's mockery of the "pleasures" about which conventional equestrian texts wax rhapsodic – her portrayal of the pleasure of things horsey as not only undesirable but downright false – is underscored by Fred's ignorance about the horse he rides to the fair. Although Bambridge and Horrock look askance at his mount, a "roarer" with questionable soundness of gait, Fred thinks to himself "that Bambridge's depreciation and Horrock's silence were both virtually encouraging, and indicated that they thought better than they chose to say" (271).[15]

Fred's inability to read canny horse-copers correctly on the way to the fair is only exacerbated by the dealings that follow, in which Fred's failure to understand horses or their sellers results in the purchase of Diamond, a horse who appears perfect but turns out to be vicious. Fred wants to seem knowledgeable but his naïveté wins out; as Eliot ironically notes, giving us Fred's point of view, "[w]ith regard to horses, distrust was your only clue. But scepticism, as we know, can never be thoroughly applied, else life would come to a standstill: something we must believe in and do, and whatever that something may be called, it is virtually our own judgment" (272). And since "Fred could not but reckon that his own judgment of a horse was worth something," he purchases a horse that, before resale is possible, "without the slightest warning exhibited in the stable a most vicious energy in kicking, had just missed killing the groom, and had ended in laming himself severely by catching his leg in a rope that overhung the stable-board" (273). Like the unwitting buyer in "Bought and Sold," Fred fails in his ability to know his horse,

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[15] "Roaring," or "broken-windedness," are signalled by a horse's heavy breathing or wheezing during exertion, and constituted a legal form of unsoundness.

and, moreover, he fails in his knowledge of himself: a knowledge of a lack of knowledge. Surtees' Jorrocks professed the importance of this tandem understanding of horse and self but could not apply either and thus became a comic emblem of middle-class aspirations; but Fred's failures of equestrian knowledge yield a detailed redefinition of middle-class masculinity centred on work ethics and domestic intimacies. Leading him both to a stabilising career and a stabilising marriage, Fred's "bad bargain" is that which produces his ultimate social and personal identity.

By losing the deal with Diamond, Fred all but bankrupts Mary's family (her father having signed his name to one of Fred's bills of debt). The immediate results of the "bad bargain" Fred makes are to put himself in disgrace and disrepute with the Garths, and to lay himself up with "some ailment" contracted "[f]rom those visits to unsanitary Houndsley streets in search of Diamond" (292).[16] This illness is the first step in the creation of Fred's vulnerability – but it is not immediately curative, and Fred recovers, still hoping that his uncle's estate will provide him with the means so "instead of needing to know what he should do, he should [. . .] know that he needed to do nothing: that he should hunt in pink, have a first-rate hunter, ride to cover on a fine hack, and be generally respected for doing so" (376). Although he swears to Caleb Garth that "'I wish I and the horses too had been at the devil, before I had brought this on you,'" Fred continues to hope for an easy and labour-free means of moving up in the world – into a place to which he already feels entitled (281). But Fred is no Soapey Sponge or Facey Romford, and comes by his ultimate gains precisely *because* he is unable to appraise or resell a horse: in *Middlemarch* it is the development of the middle-class self, rather than its discarding in the desire for upward mobility, that leads to financial and social reward. In Eliot's world, Fred must be rehabilitated out of both his illness and his hopes for easy inheritance, and into a position in which respect and value are earned – a task that, for a middle-class young man like Fred, necessitates the relinquishment of fantasies of equestrian knowledge.

The turning point of Fred's redemption, appropriately enough, comes when he *dis*mounts from the saddle, using his horse as a way of helping another. Aiding Caleb Garth in the break-up of an altercation between local labourers and railway-layers, Fred alights from horseback and lends his mount to an injured man; the result is that Fred is left with Garth and spends the rest of his day assisting Garth at his profession, and finally convincing Garth to take him on as an apprentice. The primary privations of this newfound vocation Fred finds to be rather severe, as they result in the following litany of equestrian restrictions: "[Fred] had not been out hunting once this season, had had no horse of his own to ride, and had gone from

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[16] Clearly the Vincys are neither constitutionally, financially, nor socially suited for riding, as Eliot underscores in a minor but telling incident: Fred's sister Rosy comes to no good due to a riding accident of her own. Despite her husband's warnings, a pregnant Rosy goes out for a ride that ends in a fall and a subsequent miscarriage.

place to place chiefly with Mr. Garth in his gig, or on the sober cob which Mr. Garth could lend him" (723). But it is just such a transition that Eliot insists Fred must make in order to fulfil his potential "value": a realignment away from a horsemanship that is an end in itself – horsemanship as sport and as marker of status – and toward the functional in every way, toward a world (and a class position) in which both horses and men are worthy only insofar as they are useful.

The property that Fred ultimately comes into, then, is not had through inheritance but rather through vocational assiduity. Rather than attempting to turn some horse "to account," Fred turns *himself* to account, becoming the trusted assistant of Caleb Garth and, finally, the manager of Stone Court, a large estate and farm. As Eliot begins her final chapter, "Every limit is a beginning as well as an ending," and the limitations the novelist places on Fred that restrict him to his own social sphere, the middle class, result in his happiness, both professional and personal (890). The intimacy Fred has developed with Mary and her family is rather slyly contrasted with his lack of intimate knowledge where Diamond is concerned, for, as Eliot notes of the horse's vices, "There was no more redress for this than for the discovery of bad temper after marriage – which of course old companions were aware of before the ceremony" (273). The knowledge Fred has of Mary, fostered from childhood, replaces his desired knowledge of horses, and as such produces a much more solid identity through romantic love. Of course, although Fred becomes "rather distinguished in his side of the county as a theoretic and practical farmer," he "was always prone to believe that he could make money by the purchase of a horse which turned out badly" (890-891). This tendency, though, is checked by his duties as husband, father, and farmer – as is his predilection for the risky sport of hunting. Fred "kept his love of horsemanship, but he rarely allowed himself a day's hunting; and when he did so, it was remarkable that he submitted to be laughed at for cowardliness at the fences, seeming to see Mary and the boys sitting on the five-barred gate, or showing their curly heads between hedge and ditch" (891). Finally, then, it is familial and heterosexual intimacy that saves Fred from his aspirations to transcend his class. The conclusion of Fred and Mary's tale is summed up in Mary's exclamation over what might have become of Fred had she not married him: " 'I shudder to think what you would have been – a curate in debt for horse-hire and cambric pocket-handkerchiefs!'" (892).

Bruce K. Martin has critiqued Eliot's treatment of Fred Vincy and the naturalisation of a middle-class point of view through the character, claiming that Fred "represents the rising business class [. . .] yet at the same time is set apart from the historical processes upon which its rise depended" (19). Martin concludes by asserting that "Fred Vincy enjoys a happier outcome and with less change in outlook or behavior than any of the novel's other central agents" (21). It may be true that Eliot sidesteps labour unrest and other ills of capitalism; I would argue, however, that, in placing Fred's storyline squarely in the context of the debate over the value of equestrian knowledge and the relation between class identity and horsemanship,

Eliot, in a way separate from that of Martin's primary concerns, clearly embeds her novel in the midst of an historical shift. If Fred is a fixed entity, this appears to be because of Eliot's interest in locating a model of middle-class masculinity that contains the potential for social legitimacy while eradicating upward assimilation into the aristocracy. Fred's trajectory as a character is to come to a knowledge of a solidly class-bound identity that replaces the value of horsey understanding with the value of self-abnegating vocation, a class-based knowledge of self stabilised through romantic love rather than equestrian skill.

George Eliot and Anthony Trollope ultimately imagine different ends for their inept middle-class horsemen, Felix almost inadvertently moving up in the world through marriage, Fred returning to a class status he had wished to escape. But both young men come into themselves – into a kind of self-inheritance – through the failure of intimacy and knowledge associated with equestrian sport. Felix's broken bones and Fred's illness serve as indications of a breakdown of identity on a physical level, a very basic and concrete metaphor of manhood's collapse and renewal. And the financial and social vulnerabilities aligned with bodily weakness in these novels point to a larger unravelling of class and gender that seems to take place of necessity in order for new forms of intimacy and knowledge to be established. Where some sporting texts use men's falls off horses to comment on the instabilities of equestrian understanding when applied by the "wrong" sort, Eliot and Trollope capitalise on those very instabilities to suggest that middle-class masculinity must be grounded in a more stable foundation. The new knowledges produced by Fred's and Felix's horsey misfortunes both resemble equestrian understanding and revise it considerably: the issues of inheritance versus acquisition remain, but they are resituated in a discourse of human interiority and sexual intimacy that, in the terms that Eliot and Trollope set out, trump horsemanship's unstable model, a knowledge of self often based in delusion and a knowledge of horses impossibly uncertain.

If equestrian knowledge poses problems of identity and legitimacy in Victorian culture, equestrian failure provides a kind of solution to those problems, holding out the promise that social hierarchies might be re-secured, or renegotiating class and gender identity so as to limn clear distinctions between aristocratic and bourgeois ideals. But while equestrian failure functions as a means to resolution in the texts I discuss above, the answers it provides turn out to be as fractured as the problems themselves: taking place on not only a social but also a physical, psychological, and sexual level, nineteenth-century redefinitions of middle-class masculinity show themselves to be plastic and various, engaging with equestrianism's shifty discourses of intimacy and knowledge and producing multiple possibilities for class identity.

No matter how varied the uses of equestrian knowledge, the invocation of that knowledge in Victorian novels suggests that it is via the process of knowing the self and knowing another ("whether horse it be or helpmate") that class and gender

identity are produced, negotiated and potentially remapped. A study of horsemanship and its vicissitudes thus complicates current critical notions of the middle-class self that imagine bourgeois subjectivity as resulting either from the procuring of intellectual knowledge and education (as in Bourdieu), or from the naturalisation of affect that constitutes a particularly female middle-class subject.[17] Victorian narratives about the management of social roles through the acquisition, application, or failure of equestrian understanding bring together the fields of knowledge and affect, revealing masculine psychology to be deeply enmeshed with Victorian discourses about emotion, and suggesting that middle-class masculinity comes into being through relational means. Clearly this notion of relational identity, so intensely and consistently manifested through the representation of horsemanship, was troubling to a nineteenth-century culture engaged in a struggle over the boundaries of class divisions. And although the equestrian texts I discuss in this essay may try but fail to completely resolve the troubling personal and social instabilities that equestrianism re-enacted and reflected for the Victorians, it is those very failures that illuminate the shifting field of the nineteenth-century male self.

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[17] I refer here to Foucauldian theories like those of Ann Cvetkovich, who has argued that the Victorians constructed "affects or bodily sensations as natural," and thus produced a particular (and particularly female) form of power, "a power all the more effective because it appears as a feminized susceptibility to affect rather than as overt control" (*Mixed Feelings*, 24 and 8, respectively).

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