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The Horse in Landscape: Animals, Grooming, Labour and the City in the Seventeenth-Century Netherlands

In 1652, Paulus Potter (1625-1654) produced a series of five small etchings, each depicting a landscape with either one or two horses in the foreground. The series is currently in the collection of the *Rijksmuseum* in Amsterdam and the entire suite is known under the title *Horses*, or in Dutch, *Paardenserie* (figs. 1-5). All five images are carefully detailed and realistic, with the horse serving as primary subject matter. These visual characteristics are significant as they represent a major change in the representation of the horse and in the genre of animal painting in general. Tamsin Pickeral notes that it was in the seventeenth century in the Netherlands that a dramatic change began to occur in the compositional strategy of the representation of the horse in art: "Paintings began to depict an understanding relationship between human and horse, and there was a shift in the balance of power, from 'dominant/subservient' to 'partnership.'"¹ Pickeral cites Potter as a key agent in this shift, one who ultimately demonstrated what was an emerging and broader change in human and animal relations. Given this significant change, it is curious that there is very little scholarship surrounding Potter's horse imagery or even the work of Potter more generally. Despite this, however, I will argue that the pictorial isolation of the animal from the human seen in Potter's *Horses* should be viewed as highly significant given its emergence as a new kind of subject matter. Moreover, I will analyze the series alongside a study of how the representation of landscape functioned for the Dutch seventeenth-century viewer. Ultimately, I will argue that although the series is representative of a change where the removal of the human is significant, Potter's horses, and the landscapes that frame them, function to mediate human anxieties.

The sheer ubiquity of horse imagery that has accompanied many of the civilizations of the world is, no doubt, indicative of the highly entangled relationship between horses and humans. However, what is perhaps most intriguing given the historical record of horses in visual imagery is the lack of critical engagement with their representation. For example, at the beginning of her book, *The Horse: 30,000 Years of the Horse in Art*, Pickeral writes, “The relationship between horse and human is one of the longest love affairs to traverse history, and it is an affair that has been catalogued by the hand of the artist.”² Pickeral’s term “love affair” to denote the relationship between horse and human is typical of the often celebratory approach surrounding equine representation in the literature. Yet this celebration of the relation between horse and human is highly problematic given the abusive entanglements between horses and humans that the term “love affair” seems to negate. As Juliet Clutton-Brock observes, writing about the horse, donkey, and mule: “Until the machine age, their services were required for almost every endeavour, and in many of these, the horse has been an unwitting accomplice in the destruction of the natural world and the needless slaughter of untold numbers of wild animals.”³ Horse power, she adds, enabled the decimation of human populations through increased speed of travel in the European invasion of the New World.⁴ The point here is to note the complicated and turbulent history horses have had while in contact with humans. While generally there is a deep respect for horses and the immense power they lend to humans, I believe it is important to note the turbulent history that a statement like Pickeral’s seems to overlook.

The social and economic role of the horse in the early modern period is underscored by Pia F. Cuneo. Central to her argument is an understanding of the horse as a key mechanism in the activities of “agriculture, industry, trade, warfare, social differentiation, and recreation.”⁵ Exploring the role of the horse in the early modern period, she explains, “offers an opportunity to access crucial aspects of early modern life and culture from a perspective as historiographically unique as it is historically pivotal.”⁶ At stake in the initial analysis of Potter’s *Horses*, therefore, is the understanding of the immensely important and unique role the horse played within

the seventeenth-century in the Netherlands and early modern Europe more generally.

Potter's *Horses* represent a major change in equine representation and therefore must first be situated within the long trajectory of the horse in art prior to their making. Scholars have considered one of the central iconographic traditions of equine representation to be the use of the horse as a symbol of authority for elevating an individual's status.⁷ Cuneo explains that the "wielding of power" central to military culture and warfare enabled the horse to provide a visual sign for an individual's dominance and supremacy throughout the ancient, medieval and early modern periods. She explains, "Effortless mastering of the impressive power of an exquisitely bred stallion became an important visual formula for communicating the bravery and power of the rider, not only over other men (his soldiers and his enemies), but even over nature itself."⁸ The lineage of this representational mode, Cuneo further notes, can be traced back to ancient Rome. During the Renaissance, as Laura Camins observes, ancient sculptures such as the *Marcus Aurelius* in Rome and the San Marco horses in Venice exemplified the ideal for equestrian imagery.⁹ The visual influence of the *Marcus Aurelius*, for example, can be seen in Donatello's dominating bronze equestrian statue of the *Gattamelata* in Padua erected in 1453 and the tomb designs of Leonardo da Vinci for the equestrian statue of Gian Giacomo Trivulzio (1506-1511).¹⁰

The tradition of equestrian iconography featuring a noble rider controlling his mount was indeed a subject taken up by artists in the Netherlands. However, unlike other distinguished courts and their respective riding academies in Europe at the time, The Hague required little of this pictorial tradition.¹¹ Gerard ter Borch's portrait of Duke Henri de Longueville completed in 1647, for example, displays the power of the foreign Duke through his control of the animal, maintaining the horse in the difficult, yet elegant, position of the *levade*: a rise on the haunches requiring extreme precision in riding aids.¹² Interestingly, Potter was commissioned by Dr. Nicolaes Tulp of Amsterdam in 1653 to paint an impressive equestrian portrait of his son Dirk Tulp in command of a dapple grey horse in the *levade* position; the work was to be one of Potter's last as he died in 1654 at the age of twenty-eight.¹³

Religious imagery also frequently demonstrates the use of the horse for its iconographic significance. For example, Cuneo cites the depiction of the horse in images of Saul's conversion; the equine body serving as a compositional device signalling spiritual transformation within the narrative.¹⁴ The sheer ubiquity of religious imagery commissioned during the early modern period meant that horses became commonplace in visual imagery.¹⁵ While these two main roles for the horse—images of authority and religious narratives—are central in literature on the representation of the horse, it is not, I will argue, these iconographic traditions that help to understand how Potter's subject matter and composition informed his viewers. I will argue instead that in order to understand the powerful visual impact that Potter's horses had on their viewers it is imperative first to situate his work within a much larger framework of equine imagery. Following Cuneo, this study considers the visual culture of the horse that paralleled the significant role the animal played within early modern society.¹⁶

According to Cuneo, scholars have neglected a large number of works containing equine imagery in the period. She cites the abundance of illustrations of horses used in treatises relating to equine health throughout Europe.¹⁷ Through detailed visual analysis of illustrations accompanying Hippological texts, she argues that the body of the horse was an extremely active site for understanding the overlapping of art and science.¹⁸ Ultimately Cuneo argues for an understanding of printed illustrations featuring the horse as “cultural cargo” given the primary role horses maintained within daily life in early modern culture.¹⁹

In her visual analysis of illustrations accompanying the very popular scientific text *Master Albrecht's Little Book of Horse Remedies*, originally written in 1250 by German farrier Master Albrecht, Cuneo explains that the images featuring static and rigid representations of the horse do not wholly correlate to the scientific text they accompany. “As fundamentally artistic images,” she explains, “these illustrations are not mutely obedient to the text, but are instead multivalent signs richly resonating with notions of art, power, and social prestige, no matter what their aesthetic quality.”²⁰ Many images in horse-care texts such as Albrecht's maintain the precise

pose of the horse in profile with one foreleg lifted above the ground.²¹ Cuneo's analysis of these images argues that a kind of resonating "dialogue" was enabled between the delineation of a horse in profile and the scientific text that accompanied it.²² This exchange between image and text is also characteristic of Carlo Ruini's *Dell' anatomia et dell' infirmita del cavallo* originally published in 1598. With reference to Ruini's work, to cite Cuneo again: "the very nature of these poses is as much socially and aesthetically defined as it is anatomically; the way in which these stances are read and understood depends as much on the scientific texts as it does on the viewer's cultural and visual vocabulary."²³ It is precisely because the horse was an essential part of early modern culture that printed illustrations featuring the horse were able to operate in powerful ways, establishing a visual and textual dialogue between art and science for their viewers.

Potter's horses, I will argue, solicit a similar interpretive experience from their viewers, but one in which the dialogue is instead situated in the etching itself, for as I propose, the image operates as a kind of sign system in which the viewer negotiates between the body of the horse and the landscape which frames it. Potter's horses are multivalent signs, moreover, because of his capacity to render his horses and the landscapes they occupy with a visual vocabulary invested in realism. Amy Walsh argues that the Italianate artist Pieter van Laer influenced Potter's compositional structure. "Van Laer's paintings," she writes, "and especially his 1636 print series of farm animals, had an enormous impact on Potter and his contemporaries, introducing new subjects and compositional devices in the endeavour to suggest space."²⁴ The use of pictorial methods to imply space is seen throughout Potter's work, creating convincing forms set within realistic vistas of the Dutch landscape.²⁵ The influence of van Laer could also be more explicit; his composition of two dead horses was translated by Potter for his own print, *An Old Horse and a Dead Horse*.²⁶ Van Laer's series also expresses an interest in the distinguishing features of animals, and Potter's work similarly shows an increased attention to the proper anatomy of animals.²⁷

According to Peter Sutton, van Laer's horse imagery needs to be analyzed alongside two distinct traditions of equine iconography developed in the sixteenth

century and influencing Netherlandish artists working in the seventeenth century: the portrait of the individual horse as well as the representation of different breeds and types of horses.²⁸ These two pictorial categories were visual modes that represented the horse in a manner not immediately focused on the human: rider, groomer or owner. However, they could signal the human given their composition and technique. The individual horse portrait, for example Jacques de Gheyn II's *Spanish Warhorse* of 1603, could depict a particular horse, further recognizable given a viewer's cultural vocabulary. In this case, the stunning dapple grey being led by his groom is the Spanish charger taken during the Battle of Nieuwpoort by the Dutch and offered to Prince Maurits.²⁹ The depiction of breeds and types of horses could function as a reference to the human owner as is the case with the print series commissioned by Don Juan of Austria, *Equile Ioannis Austriaci Caroli V. Imp. F.* The series, according to Sutton, was a compilation of forty engravings completed during 1576-1579 by various artists, and depicts Don Juan's favourite horses from his stables; each print identifying the kind of horse as well as their geographic origin.³⁰ This sort of work functioned to categorize visually different breeds and types of horses through the medium of print and can, perhaps, be understood as a classification of the animal. Moreover, Sutton observes that the translation of this pictorial tradition in the seventeenth century developed alongside an increased attention to naturalism. Writing of van Laer's series of eight prints of draft horses, Sutton explains: "of no special breed or distinction, these animals are simply depicted in all their natural aspects and activities—standing, drinking, grazing, running, pissing, even dying."³¹ Dirck Stoop's 1651 etching series of twelve horses similarly depicts horses involved in everyday activities; his depiction of plough-horses was translated by Potter for his own.³²

During the seventeenth century in the Netherlands, animal painting, and especially the representation of domestic animals, was considered "a discrete painting type and discipline...one at the service of the painting of the human figure, traditionally the artist's noblest calling."³³ Karel van Mander's *Den grondt der edel vry schilder-const* in his influential art treatise of 1604, *Het schilder-boeck*, emphasizes

the need for the artistic study of *tamme beesten* (domestic animals), dedicating an entire chapter to this endeavour with a stress on the study of the horse and cow.³⁴ Sutton analyzes ter Borch's *The Horse Stall*, completed in 1654, alongside van Mander's text and argues that this work can be understood as a genre scene in line with ter Borch's larger body of work, which often focuses on the representation of the human figure.³⁵ *The Horse Stall* features a dapple grey horse standing in profile, his head gently resting inside his feed trough as his groom stands behind him, brushing his coat. A woman stands within the doorway of the stall and functions to enclose the scene at the left of the picture plane; the two human figures seem engaged with one another as the horse quietly consumes his feed. Indeed, there is an everyday quality to the scene given the uncomplicated and relaxed gestures of all three figures; the descriptive quality of the work is underscored visually by the glowing flicks of paint used to render the coat of the horse. The representation of horse stalls and stables was a theme taken up by other Dutch artists, and the interpretation of these works is the subject of Sutton's article.³⁶ Sutton suggests that the interior stall space of ter Borch's work could be that of a renovated farmhouse, popular structures that served as rural homes for burghers at the time, and he cites one seen in the background of Potter's painting, *The Grey Horse*, completed in 1653, as an example.³⁷ What is striking in Sutton's analysis is that he highlights the landscape in Potter's painting as an important compositional element, explaining the significance of representing the "moderately well-to-do household" in relation to the seventeenth-century viewer.³⁸ Thus, much like the details of ter Borch's stall scene, the descriptive quality of Potter's work is undeniably significant, and needs to be analyzed critically.

There has been surprisingly little scholarship on Potter, with the exception of Walsh's dissertation, *Paulus Potter: His Works and Their Meaning*. She writes, he "was the first and in many ways the most significant artist of the mid-seventeenth century in Holland to make pure animal painting his primary subject."³⁹ She notes that although animals had been given visual emphasis in the work of Claes Moeyaert and Abraham Bloemaert, Potter was the first to render them as the central

focus of his compositions.⁴⁰ Grounding her dissertation in Potter's biography, Walsh traces his stylistic development in order to analyze his artistic production. Potter came from an educated family, and the influence of his father, the artist Pieter Symonsz Potter, can be seen in his earlier work.⁴¹ By 1644, however, Potter's work began clearly to establish conventions that were to become integral elements of his own style.⁴² As seen in his late work, Potter's animals can be characterized by their stunning naturalism, and they are often framed against a landscape with a concern for capturing the detail of the Dutch sky and terrain.⁴³ The work of Potter, then, is significant for its specialization in both subject matter and visual style.

Walsh's dissertation focuses on Potter's bucolic imagery, which coincides, she proposes, with the increased interest in the study of the natural world as reflected in literary sources of the mid-seventeenth century.⁴⁴ In particular, Walsh takes up Potter's imagery of the milk cow set within distinctly Dutch rural vistas, arguing that the animal stood as an expression of national well-being. "As an economic symbol of Holland," she writes, "the milkcow offered to the seventeenth-century Dutchman the perfect emblem of the country at peace."⁴⁵ The image of the cow, then, is understood by Walsh as an image standing in for both an interest in nature as well as economic prosperity. While Walsh's dissertation is concerned primarily with Potter's images of the milk cow in relation to national productivity and stability in mid-seventeenth century Holland, her work is also highly significant for understanding the larger relationship between humans and animals during this period. Further, as Potter depicts diverse species of animals, Walsh asserts that his paintings should be considered together, and his works understood in "a whole rather than a piecemeal fashion."⁴⁶ In order to analyse Potter's *Horses*, it is therefore necessary to consider them in the context of his entire oeuvre.

Further insights into the conditions from which Potter's work emerged are found in a range of primary sources that address the relationship between humans and work animals. For example, the popular philosopher Pierre Charron explains:



Fig. 1.

Paulus Potter, *The Frisian Horse*.
Etching, 162 x 241 mm. Collection
Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

IMAGE SOURCE:

<http://www.rijksmuseum.nl/collectie/zoeken/asset.jsp?id=RP-P-OB-12.766&lang=enradicalism/fozowick.shtml>

there is a kind of commerce betwixt beasts & us, a certain relation & mutuall obligation, whereof there is no other reason, but that they belong to one & the same master, and are of the same family that we are. It is an unworthy thing to tyrannise over them, we owe justice unto men, and pitie and gentleness to such other creatures as are capable thereof.⁴⁷

The relationship between human and animal here is understood as mutual. This reciprocal relationship, or to use Pickeral's term "partnership," as I propose in what follows, is what was at stake for Potter and his *Horses* series.

The kind of partnership outlined by Charron can be most clearly seen in the one image of the series featuring a single horse, titled *The Frisian Horse* (fig.1).⁴⁸ Potter presents the viewer with a solitary figure of a horse whose gaze is directed at a town set in the distance and across a body of water and a small field. His gaze is an attentive one and this is evidenced by both his body stance and the position of his head. He stands at a square halt with all four hooves planted firmly on the ground. Although standing still, his strong stance indicates that he is not simply resting. His neck and head are held high with his ears pricked upright and turned to the front. Potter is clearly drawing on knowledge of equine behaviour in order to render the horse as one who is fully engaged in the act of attentive looking. Although the work does not feature a human figure, the careful attention to detail in the composition indicates that the human is included in the narrative. The horse is clearly well cared for as his coat is clean and well groomed; he wears proper shoes; his feathers are brushed and trimmed; and his hooves are neatly clipped. The three braids tied into a bow in his mane are evidence that he is not only well looked after but also, perhaps, that he is a deeply valued asset to his owner. The mutual obligation between human and animal present in the language of Charron is echoed in Potter's visual language. At this particular historical time, the horse was an essential means of both transportation and labour: a commercial, economic and agricultural asset. To a contemporary viewer, Potter's Frisian could be viewed as a symbol of his owner's capital.



Fig. 2.

Paulus Potter, *The Docked Horse*.
Etching, 162 x 241 mm. Collection
Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

IMAGE SOURCE:

<http://www.rijksmuseum.nl/collectie/zoeken/asset.jsp?id=RP-P-OB-12.769&lang=en>



Fig. 3.

Paulus Potter, *The Plough-Horses*.
Etching, 159 x 241 mm. Collection
Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

IMAGE SOURCE:

<http://www.rijksmuseum.nl/collectie/zoeken/asset.jsp?id=RP-P-OB-12.771&lang=en>



Fig. 4.

Paulus Potter, *An Old Horse and a Dead Horse*. Etching, 162 x 242 mm. Collection Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

IMAGE SOURCE:

<http://www.rijksmuseum.nl/collectie/zoeken/asset.jsp?id=RP-P-OB-4636&lang=en>

The Docked Horse (fig.2) and *The Plough-Horses* (fig.3) also invoke the role of the human in the lives of the horses depicted. *The Docked Horse* shows two animals with cropped or docked tails. This technique of cropping was used in agriculture to ensure the horse's tail would not get caught in the harness. Upon close inspection, then, these horses are employed by humans and for agricultural labour. *The Plough-Horses* show somewhat emaciated horses; however, they too show the traces of grooming and clipping. Further, there is a fence in the background that implies they are being kept.

The distant skyline of *The Frisian Horse* is an urban one with a prominent steeple and windmill. According to Ben Broos, the well-kept horse and the landscape featuring an urban settlement speaks of "Dutch prosperity," and he sees this connection as relevant upon inspection of Potter's earlier designs for the series.⁴⁹ This connection to the city, taken together with the visual emphasis on the well-groomed horse, enables the viewer to grasp Potter's composition and understand the image. The body of the Frisian initially captures the viewer's eye given its dramatic stance in the foreground. Second, the gaze of the horse is directed at the city rather than at the viewer. The body of the horse acts as a mediator in a sign system that signals the viewer to notice the urban skyline in the distance. Considered together, four out of the five prints in the series feature a distant city skyline in the background. Indeed, Walsh comments on the constructed nature of Potter's landscapes: "Typical of contemporary landscapes, his paintings are not representations of actual scenes in reality but pleasing composites of various elements from nature."⁵⁰ With reference to a design completed in or before 1652 for *The Whinnying Horse*, Broos explains that the "paradigm of Dutch prosperity" as expressed in the peaceful and idyllic landscape is echoed by "the splendid condition of the horses."⁵¹ The kind of positive partnership between horse and human as evidenced by a well groomed animal, moreover, would be highly dependent on the economic and political stability this landscape suggests.

Further evidence of the well-kept horse as a symbol of Dutch prosperity is the one image in the series that does not contain an urban skyline in the distance. *An Old Horse and a Dead Horse* (fig.4) is an example of those left uncared for, and the

absence of the city in the background likely suggests the lack of equine-human partnership. The silhouetted body of the withered horse standing with his neck hanging low appears all the more fragile against the bleak and empty horizon; the bloated carcass of the horse lying on the ground foreshadowing his own inevitable fate. Attesting further to this interpretation is the intriguing deletion of a farmhouse initially sketched in the background of the etching; the erasure underscores the landscape appearing void of human settlement.⁵² The emaciated and famished bodies of the horses themselves perhaps indicate the inability of their owner to properly care for them.

The seventeenth century marked a period of extensive change in the economic sphere of the Netherlands. Extensive land reclamation projects completed in 1664, for example, increased the land area of North Holland by slightly more than half and those efforts were enabled by the large accumulation of capital due to the economic policies of an open market.⁵³ Occurring at the same time across Europe was a large increase in agricultural production due to better agricultural technologies.⁵⁴ The impact of these changes and the corresponding increase in industry meant an increase in the labour output of the horse. Apart from working the land for pulling heavy loads, Pita Kelekna explains that the horse played an even more critical role in transportation with the increase of trade of foreign goods and for distributing New World wealth throughout Europe for use in different kinds of industries.⁵⁵ Within the context of Holland, furthermore, horse-drawn barges were used to transport passengers from city to city with the construction of a large configuration of *trekvaarten* (towing canals) between 1632 and 1665.⁵⁶ Therefore, horsepower was used for both increased transportation along roads and waterways thereby contributing to seventeenth century economic growth.

Dutch identity was mediated through landscape painting in the seventeenth century, as Ann Jensen Adams has shown. She argues that landscape painting for the Dutch attempted to work out urban anxieties accompanying significant changes in political, economic and religious spheres of the time, and Dutch landscape can therefore be understood as an urban phenomenon. For example, Adams explains

that images featuring ferryboats on rivers, an older method of transport from the sixteenth century, were commonplace in the seventeenth century.⁵⁷ Moreover, the sheer amount of ferryboat imagery contrasts the vast improvements in transportation occurring with the construction of new canal systems at the time.⁵⁸ By citing particular subject matter (ferryboats, in this example), images functioned to “naturalize” their compositional elements through the landscape genre.⁵⁹ This kind of visual strategy would further displace contemporary urban concerns.⁶⁰ Following Adams, it is possible to view the rural landscapes in Potter’s *Horses* as examples of ways in which visual imagery provided ways of working out urban anxieties. It is through the body of the horse, however, as I argue, that the use of landscape in all five images can be interpreted using this kind of analysis.

First, none of the horses are shown at work and, with the exception of the docked horses, they show little evidence of having worn bridles, harnesses or other tack. Horses were used for both land projects and transportation in the context of early modern Europe as they increasingly became the main type of draft animal. Craig Pearson and Judith Nasby have noted that over time horses replaced oxen for transport and haulage due to their superior speed, increased agility, smaller size and relative cost.⁶¹ Potter’s horses and the landscapes that frame them avoid immediate associations with the kinds of labour projects and activities with which horses would have been involved during the seventeenth century.

Second, the bodies of the horses are framed within the landscape in a way that mediates between the viewer and the pristine urban settlements situated along the horizon. Thus, the body of the horse becomes a crucial site for reflecting on urban concerns. By representing horses as visual metaphors for Dutch prosperity and stability during the seventeenth century and at the same time removing immediate associations with the role horses had within the prosperous Dutch Republic itself, Potter visually disables a clear reading of his horses as ones involved in agricultural labour and land economics. It is possible to view Potter’s horses, then, as resolving visually or at least obscuring surrounding changes in the Dutch landscape and the animal labour that undoubtedly powered it.



Fig. 5.

Paulus Potter, *The Whinnying Horse*.
Etching, 160 x 241 mm. Collection
Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

IMAGE SOURCE:

<http://www.rijksmuseum.nl/collectie/zoeken/asset.jsp?id=RP-P-OB-12.768&lang=en>

As *Horses* was produced as a series, the images should be understood as a whole rather than individually. It is worth noting that in 1801 the images were given names by Adam von Bartsch based on the animals' distinctive physical attributes and these are the names still used today.⁶² In 1974, Jan Verbeek took creative license in the arrangement of the series to fit with his own theory that the prints function as symbols for the seasons of the year and, therefore, the cyclical nature of life itself.⁶³ He argues that *The Docked* and *Whinnying Horses* could be seen as early spring and spring respectively as referenced in the transition from young horses to older ones, and the two prints could be interpreted as the first and second of the series. *The Frisian* could be an allegory for late summer, understood by Verbeek to be the third print of the series, while the fourth and fifth, *The Plough-Horses* and *The Old Horse and a Dead Horse* can be taken as expressions of the autumn and winter seasons.⁶⁴ Broos views Verbeek's theory as slightly flawed given that Verbeek justifies it using the calamitous events of Potter's personal life such as the death of his infant son in 1651, the passing of his father and his own distressing health conditions beginning in 1652. As Broos notes, "Verbeek is on notoriously slippery ground, for it is only very exceptionally that a connection can be made between the life and work of seventeenth-century artists."⁶⁵ It would appear, then, that Verbeek's theory is somewhat problematic. Indeed, Potter himself did not number the prints and, as noted earlier, his series of horses was not unique to northern Europe, but rather a variation on a theme in which symbolic meanings are not the norm.⁶⁶

Another difficulty in developing a strategy for understanding a precise order for the series arises when contemplating *The Whinnying Horse* (fig.5). As outlined earlier, I have suggested that certain images in Potter's series can be read as expressions of the partnership between human and horse as outlined in contemporary literature. This is evidenced by the fact that although human are not immediately present in any of the prints, they are inevitably there in subtle visual references such as the braid in the Frisian or the fence with the plough-horses. However, what has been interpreted as the second image of the series, *The Whinnying Horse*, seems to complicate this kind of viewing by representing two wild horses rather than domesticated

ones. This image could represent two free horses, perhaps once domesticated and now roaming the land. Support for this theory is the foremost horse whose shoe can be seen from his raised back leg. Further, Walsh observes in Potter's paintings of horses, that a horse in a field often served as a symbol of freedom as this was a common association in the seventeenth century.⁶⁷ The overall effect of *The Whinnying Horse* relies, more than do the other prints, on strong juxtapositions of light and dark, a characteristic of the etching technique, in order to emphasize the drama of the scene depicted. The colour of the horse's coat, mane and tail are dark and are further enhanced by being silhouetted against a whitewashed sky. Potter's precision in the horse's dapple grey markings on his hindquarters and barrel, also seen in the image of the Frisian horse, further echo the strong light and dark contrasts of the sky and the larger figure of the horse. The careful rendering of the dapple grey markings also works to intensify the dimensionality of the round and muscular features of the horse. The low point of view and the dark unruly mane and tail blowing in the wind further heighten the intensity and drama of the image and give visual precedence to the equine figure. The dark horse in the immediate foreground is shown with one hoof at an angle as if ready to break into a quick trot if necessary. His mouth is slightly open as if ready to whinny and his nostrils are slightly flared. Given the small size of the etching, the strong contrasts and powerful body language of the horse undoubtedly function to arrest the viewer's attention.

With its dramatic visual strategies and unique subject matter, *The Whinnying Horse* seems to negotiate the tensions surrounding landscape and urban life through an entirely different equine figure. When read as one image in part of the larger series, Potter's *Whinnying Horse* acts as a counterpoint to the carefully groomed Frisian or the emaciated plough-horses. Arguably though, the two horses featured in *The Whinnying Horse* also operate to mediate the sometimes fraught relation between human and animal. Further, the horses also prompt reflection on urban concerns. Glen A. Mazis' recent book *Humans, Animals, Machines: Blurring Boundaries* attempts to dismantle the boundaries between humans, animals and machines within the context of the twenty-first century in order to show that the three categories

mutually overlap. He writes, "The human, animal, and machine are lodged within the core of each other's being."⁶⁸ Mazis writes that the machine today can be understood as the "postmodern animal." Is it possible, perhaps, to understand the animal, prior to the advent of the machine age with the industrial revolution, as a kind of machine of the early modern period? Conceived in this way, *The Whinnying Horse* would be fully removed from the understanding of the animal as machine, thereby providing a counter example to the groomed or labouring horses. As a series, *Horses* complicates a straightforward accounting of the animal and the landscape. The inclusion of *The Whinnying Horse* seems to express visually the fiction of the idyllic and romantic wild horse removed from early modern land and capital development. In regard to this image, we might consider Broos' fascinating analogy between "Dutch prosperity" and the "splendid" coat of the horse.⁶⁹ Out of all five images, the two horses in *The Whinnying Horse* have the shiniest coats and most elegant flowing manes and tails. At the same time, however, they are the furthest removed from any visual references to the role humans have in their lives. Thus, the equine symbols of Dutch prosperity appear to be the ones furthest removed from their roles within it.

The Dutch landscapes Potter situates his horses within are ultimately to be understood as carefully framing the body of the horse in order to produce a kind of semiotic continuity between animal and topography. This visual strategy produces a kind of idyllic and pastoral representation of horses united with the land they occupy. With the exception of *The Whinnying Horse*, all the images present the viewer with equine figures who are alert yet calm and stable. These horses are invested with an alert stillness, which further parallels the landscapes they occupy. All the images, however, negate almost entirely the mechanical aspect of the horse that was no doubt at the heart of urban European land economics of the time. Mazis argues that the human understanding of how machines operate is dependent on their mechanical nature, on a machine's individual "parts". In contrast, he argues, animals and their physical movements are understood to be operating by some underlying "unity." He writes,

the sense we attribute to animals and often use to explain aspects of their behaviour is a seamless immersion with the surround that humans lack—it is the very quality that often is romanticized about animals and that humans, feeling alienated, yearn to imitate—their ‘oneness with nature.’⁷⁰

Of course the human concept of nature is neither fixed or time-bound but is instead a cultural construct in flux. As Cuneo reminds us, “What constitutes nature, and how it is made knowable, are profound categorical and epistemological issues that are articulated in each cultural instance according to historically specific structures of thought and assumption.”⁷¹ What appears natural in Potter’s images is constructed and at the same time exposes what was highly desirable for visual consumption by people of the Dutch Republic at the time.

Mariët Westermann has shown that artists in the early modern period often focused on particular genres of pictures according to demands of the open market.⁷² Much of Potter’s work completed after 1644 consists of animals and accordingly can be understood as a response to the open market of picture-making. Specializing in the genre of animal painting, Potter would have understood how particular animals were interpreted by their viewers. The milk cow, as suggested by Walsh, was a symbol of national well-being and pride. The horse, as I am suggesting, operated somewhat differently, and functioned as a vehicle to express the Dutch landscape, which was not static, but rather always changing. As a response to a demand created by the open market, Potter’s *Horses* can be understood as a commodity, one that operates according to supply and demand in the Dutch Republic. This idea is furthered by the medium, since a series of etchings would not have a single patron, and printed many times, they would have been appealing to many individuals from various classes.⁷³ Potter’s series, then, can be understood as a product for consumption because of its visual strategies, its serial format, and the process of its reproduction. These images can be viewed close at hand, not unlike pages of a book, in order to contemplate a variety of preoccupations and relations with animals: grooming, labour, the city and the surrounding Dutch landscape.

In conclusion, despite the lack of scholarship surrounding both the representation of the horse in art and also on Potter himself, his work should be seen as highly significant given its specialization. Drawing on primary and secondary sources in addition to visual evidence, I have argued that Potter's *Horses* is representative of a significant change through the artist's displacement of the human to a position outside the scene as groomer, owner or viewer. I have also proposed that these images are nevertheless fuelled by anxieties surrounding the place of the human in the Dutch landscapes they represent, a place for which the horse provides substitute. The use of the landscape in all five images is central to an analysis of the series that brings forward how those concerns—urban and rural, transformations of the land, commerce and labour—were mediated through the body of the horse. At the heart of Potter's *Horses*, then, is the attempt to work out human issues and concerns.

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ENDNOTES

1 Many thanks to Professor Bronwen Wilson for her valuable comments, suggestions and encouragements.

Tamsin Pickeral, *The Horse: 30, 000 Years of the Horse in Art* (London, England; New York: Merrell, 2006), 18.

2 Ibid., 6.

3 Juliet Clutton-Brock, *Horse Power: A History of the Horse and the Donkey in Human Societies* (London: National History Museum Publications, 1992), 181.

4 Ibid.

5 Pia F. Cuneo, “Beauty and the Beast: Art and Science in Early Modern European Equine Imagery,” *Journal of Early Modern History* 4, no. 3/4 (August 2000): 272.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid., 271.

8 Ibid., 291

9 Laura Camins, *Glorious Horsemen: Equestrian Art in Europe, 1500 to 1800* (Springfield, Mass: Springfield Library and Museums Association, 1981), 11.

10 Ibid., 22, 26.

- 11 Peter Sutton, "The Noblest of Livestock" *The J. Paul Getty Museum Journal* 15 (1987): 99.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Amy Walsh, "The life of Paulus Potter (1625-1654)," in *Paulus Potter: Paintings, drawings and etchings*, Amy Walsh, Ben Broos, and Edwin Buijsen (The Hague: Mauritshuis, Zwolle: Waanders, 1994), 17.
- 14 Cuneo, 271.
- 15 Ibid., 291.
- 16 Ibid., 272. Cuneo argues with the terms visual culture and microhistory with reference to the larger framework of equine imagery of the early modern period.
- 17 Cuneo's study focuses on both artists' manuals and veterinary texts containing equine imagery. Her article focuses on three case studies of German artists: Erhard Schoen (c.1491-1542), Sebald Beham (1500-1550), and Heinrich Lautensack (1522-1568). In regards to artists' manuals, Cuneo grounds her argument in visual evidence wherein the isolation of the horse in profile and the use of geometric systems such as circles and squares became central to the purposes of instructing how to best represent the horse.
- 18 Ibid., 300.
- 19 Ibid., 321.
- 20 Ibid., 302.
- 21 Ibid., 312.
- 22 Ibid., 302.
- 23 Ibid., 320.
- 24 Amy Walsh, "Stylistic Development in the Work of Paulus Potter," in *Paulus Potter: Paintings, drawings and etchings*, Amy Walsh, Ben Broos, and Edwin Buijsen (The Hague: Mauritshuis, Zwolle: Waanders, 1994), 25.
- 25 Amy L. Walsh, "Paulus Potter: His Works and Their Meaning" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1985), 143-144.
- 26 Ibid., 188.
- 27 Ibid., 148-49.

28 Sutton, 100.

29 Ibid., 101.

30 Ibid., 100. Sutton lists the following artists: Adriaen Collaert, Hendrick Goltzius, Philips Galle, and Hieronymous Wiericx, noting the influence of Flemish artist Jan van der Straet (Johannes Stradanus; 1523-1605).

31 Sutton, 99.

32 Ben Broos, "Etchings," in *Paulus Potter: Paintings, drawings and etchings*, Amy Walsh, Ben Broos, and Edwin Buijsen (The Hague: Mauritshuis, Zwolle: Waanders, 1994), 196.

33 Sutton, 110.

34 Ibid. The ninth chapter of Karel van Mander's *Den grondt der edel vry schilderconst* (The foundation of the noble free art of painting) is titled "Van beesten/dieren/en voghels" (Of beasts/animals/and birds).

35 Ibid.

36 Sutton discusses the images of horse stalls by artists such as Philips Wouwermans and Lambert Doomer.

37 Ibid., 104.

38 Ibid.

39 Walsh, "Paulus Potter: His Works and Their Meaning" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1985), 1.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid., 103.

42 Ibid., 149.

43 Ibid., 149-50.

44 Ibid., 295, 315. Walsh grounds her analysis in sources corresponding with the rise of Stoic philosophy and the *hofdicht*, a popular type of poem describing the experiences of living in a rustic house.

45 Ibid., 368.

46 Ibid., 422.

47 Pierre Charron, *Of Wisdome* (facsimile reprint: The English Experience, Its

record in *Early Printed Books Printed in Facsimile*, no. 315. New York, 1971), 112, quoted in Amy L. Walsh, "Paulus Potter: His Works and Their Meaning" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1985), 339-40.

48 Today, the Frisian breed is visibly distinctive given its black coat, mane and tail. However, in the early modern period, breed definitions were not as heavily regulated. Sutton explains that the Frisian breed may have displayed lighter coat colours during this time. Moreover, although the Frisian is of Dutch origin (its name derived from the Friesland province), the historical study of the breed remains limited. See Sutton, 102.

49 Ben Broos, "Drawings," in *Paulus Potter: Paintings, drawings and etchings*, Amy Walsh, Ben Broos, and Edwin Buijsen (The Hague: Mauritshuis, Zwolle: Waanders, 1994), 176.

50 Amy L. Walsh, "Paulus Potter: His Works and Their Meaning," 254-55.

51 Ben Broos, "Drawings," in *Paulus Potter: Paintings, drawings and etchings*, 176.

52 The preliminary study for *An Old Horse and a Dead Horse* can be seen in *Paulus Potter: Paintings, drawings, etchings*, 177.

53 Ann Jansen Adams, "Competing Communities in the 'Great Bog of Europe': Identity and Seventeenth-Century Dutch Landscape Painting," in *Landscape and Power*, edited by W.J.T. Mitchell (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 39-40.

54 Pita Kelekna, *The Horse in Human History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 369. Kelekna further explains that the development of shire horses in England and Holland at this time reflected the increase in industry and the need for larger horses.

55 Ibid.

56 Adams, 52.

57 Ibid. Adams discusses Salomon van Ruysdael's 1649 painting *River Landscape with Ferry* as an example.

58 Ibid., 55.

59 Ibid., 66.

60 Ibid.

61 Craig Pearson and Judith Nasby, *The Cultivated Landscape: An Exploration of Art and Agriculture* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008), 11.

62 Ben Broos, "Etchings," in *Paulus Potter: Paintings, drawings and etchings*, 194.

63 Ibid.

64 Ibid..

65 Ibid., 194-6.

66 Ibid. Broos cites Antonio Tempesta's *Horses from various countries* of 1590 and Dirck Stoop's 1651 series of twelve horse etchings as examples.

67 Amy L. Walsh, "Paulus Potter: His Works and Their Meaning," 410-11. Walsh explains that because horses were used extensively in warfare, an image of a horse in a field operated as a symbol of liberty because it could signify peace. In Potter's painting *The Stadhouder's Horses* of 1653 Walsh further explains that freedom as expressed in the equine figures could be read as freedom from human service.

68 Glen A. Mazis, *Humans, Animals, Machines: Blurring Boundaries* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2008), 21.

69 Ben Broos, "Etchings," in *Paulus Potter: Paintings, drawings and etchings*, 194.

70 Mazis, 23.

71 Cuneo, 273.

72 Mariët Westermann, "Making and Marketing Pictures in the Dutch Republic," in *A Worldly Art: The Dutch Republic 1585-1718* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 39.

73 Adams, 66. Adams notes that Dutch society was extremely fragmented and that the landscape genre was particularly appealing given its ability to cut across political, religious and economic differences.