

Falling in Love with Horses: The International Thoroughbred Auction

ABSTRACT

Based on fieldwork in Newmarket, England, and Kentucky, this paper examines the acts of looking that take place at international thoroughbred horse auctions. Racehorse caretakers (owners) employ bloodstock agents to select the yearling thoroughbred who will make the best racehorse as a 2-year-old and, hopefully, successful stallion or broodmare after retiring from the track as a 4- or 5-year old. The paper assesses the criteria used to assess yearlings: pedigree, conformation, and “that something extra.” The paper concludes that the ambiguous status of the bloodstock agent derives from the liminal task the agent performs, communicating with a young, nonhuman animal to discover the animal’s essential properties. Selecting yearlings depends upon a process of divination that mitigates against the characterization of western thought as “rational” and opposed to decision-making processes conventionally thought of as “non-normal” or irrational.

A man wearing a flat cap, tweed jacket, jeans and brogues looks at a horse, a stallion. The horse chews on his bit, swishes his tail, but stands completely still, four shining hooves planted firmly on the gravel. The man is carrying a book in which he scribbles brief notes before looking again, clutching the closed book to his chest. As the man looks, the horse begins to fidget, lifting a foot, tossing his head in the air,

biting the arm of the young woman who stands holding him. "Let's see him walk" says the man.

The attendant gathers the long, leather shank attached to the bit in the colt's mouth and, taking care to avoid the teeth, moves to the colt's left hand side. The pair walks in a straight line away from the man who moves to position himself directly behind them. He sets himself and looks, eyes narrowed, chin tucked into his chest, arms crossed, feet square. He is absolutely quiet and still, but at the same time active, his attention focused on the horse's hind legs, tail, and feet. The pair makes a turn, back toward the man.

The horse is now bored with walking and tosses his head into the air, breaks into a jog, and lets out a terrific whinny, an inquiry to his friends that elicits a series of answering calls. The man harrumphs. "Try him again", he says. The attendant pulls sharply on her shank, the bit clanks in the horse's mouth, he throws his head up, but returns to a walk. The man remains in front of the horse until the horse stops in front of him, his eyes fixed on the horse's front legs. Writing a final note in his book, he peels away from the horse and returns to his companions who stand, also looking, a few meters away. "Well?" asks the central figure of the group. "He's a no," says the man.

The racehorse auction is a wonderful place to look at people looking at animals. Racehorses are looked at all over the world in much the same way, their potential purchasers intent on discovering a champion, an equine work of art. The atmosphere is one of excitement, professionalism, and seriousness. At the center of the action is the auction ring, where fortunes are won and lost in a massive, animated roulette wheel, the horses spinning around until the bidding stops.

The auction is a "tournament of value" (Appadurai, 1986, p. 21); an example of "deep play" (Bentham, 1802); "action" (Goffman, 1969); and "conspicuous consumption" (Veblen, 1902), a dramatic event that creates moments of great excitement, tension, disappointment, and even despair. Considerable sums of money are at stake, activating links between human and equine actors—the former closely involved in the outcome of these performances; the latter, completely oblivious to them. The meaning and efficacy of the ring and the flow of events it frames draw both upon a distinctive form of exchange and on the thoroughbred as an object of desire. However, the outcome of the auction is determined to a great degree by acts of looking that take place

in the sales grounds before the auction begins. This paper concentrates on these acts.

Selecting Yearlings

Although some caretakers (owners) select their own yearlings, most employ an expert to perform this feat on their behalf. Bloodstock agents specialize in different areas of the market: Some look at stallions for mare owners, some look at foals, 2-year olds, or mares for potential buyers; but almost all take part in the yearling sales, the bellwether of the industry. When the market for racehorses first emerged in an organized form in the twentieth century, many of the bloodstock agents were ex-military men who were comfortable advising wealthy clients about horses. At a time when the market for racehorses was fairly small and specialized, these men and their clients were known to each other, and a degree of fairness or “sporting behavior” was adjudged to have held sway. As the market for bloodstock grew—particularly during the boom of the 1970s and 1980s—the number of people describing themselves as bloodstock agents and the number of people for whom they were buying increased exponentially. The cozy intimacy of the bloodstock world was lost. Unsustainable investments were encouraged, unnatural profits were made, and a number of people were ruined. As the market has restricted again since the 1990s, normal service has been resumed. The majority of people at the sale are known to each other, either directly, through mutual acquaintances, or by reputation.

The role of bloodstock agent is based on trust. However, it also is a highly ambiguous role. It is associated with a degree of skullduggery and chicanery. It is not quite criminal (although in some cases it has been), but it takes place at the margins of acceptable behavior. In anthropology, the figure most similar to that of the bloodstock agent is the trickster (Pelton, 1980), the individual within society who makes revelations—epitomized by Hermes, the messenger of the gods—both radical and marginalized. Hermes’ gifts included stealthiness and an ability to negotiate what seemed fixed responsibilities, seen most clearly in his denial of the theft of Apollo’s cattle. The cunning exploits of particular bloodstock agents are described in hushed voices and with humor, culminating in the best loved phrase of all—delivered with a knowing grin—“Trust me, I’m a bloodstock agent.” There are both irony and

self awareness in this statement. The bloodstock agent shares with the tricksters described in many other societies a role that entails the combination of opposites—in this case nature, the animal with culture, the thoroughbred racing complex—of which, more later.

At its simplest, the role of the bloodstock agent at the thoroughbred auction is to select the yearling who will be the best racehorse of the generation on offer and the best stallion after his racing career is over. As I was told in Kentucky, “My job is to find the racingest, best bred, best looking son of a gun here.” The obvious snag is that year-old horses are immature and cannot be ridden. They will not race until they are 2-year-olds. Most reach a physical peak in their 3rd or 4th years².

Selecting yearlings therefore involves making judgments. On one level, these judgments will vary according to the individual for whom the animal is intended. Are you buying the horse to race or to sell? Are you buying for yourself or an owner? If you are buying for an owner, what kind of racing are they interested in? Dirt, turf, long distances, sprinting? What kinds of horses have they been lucky with in the past? How much can they afford to spend? How much is too much, how much is too little? More significant for the purposes of this paper and regardless of the buyer, yearling selection involves making judgments in the present that relate to possible futures. They are predictions. The nature of racehorse physiognomy dictates that these predictions lack precision. Buying yearlings is a gamble, and there is no way of telling with any degree of certainty which young horse will make the best or worst racehorse. There are, however, three considerations that all assessments of yearlings share: pedigree, conformation (the muscular and skeletal composition of the horse) and that extra something.

Pedigree

The selection process begins when the catalog is sent out by the sales company. The catalog records the breeding of each horse offered, according to a set of conventions that I have discussed elsewhere (Cassidy, 2002). The men and women involved in selecting yearlings read through the catalog and see who is on offer.

All thoroughbreds are selectively bred. To qualify as such, they must be registered in a recognized national stud book. National stud books are monitored by an international committee, and they share not only rules for inclusion but also many common entries and ancestors. The best illustration of this fact is that every thoroughbred in the world today can trace his origins to one of three stallions imported to England during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.³ In theory, the breed is closed and has been so since 1791 when the General Stud Book was first produced. There can be no additions to the breed, only rearrangements of the existing resources. These recombinations have taken place under the auspices of several different theories, most of which are based loosely on the guiding maxim of the thoroughbred breeder—"like will, in some sense, beget like."

The most striking and gratifying fact of the thoroughbred breeding scene is that although there have been more and less successful breeders at different times, no breeder has been able to repeat consistently the successes or avoid the disappointments that the quest for champions inevitably entails. However, the reality that ability cannot be predicted with any certainty has not stopped the development of a large community of pedigree experts and an enormous literature on breeding—first paper based; more recently, interactive and web based. This literature embraces diametrically opposed opinions of even the most basic facts. However, reading breeding manuals did little to prepare me for the confusing morass of ideas that I was to encounter in person during fieldwork in Newmarket and Kentucky, the two most important centers of thoroughbred breeding.⁴

During my fieldwork, the starting point of selecting yearlings was the sire (male parent of the yearling). In both Europe and the United States, stallions are available to service mares for a fee called the nomination fee. This fee tends to reflect the popularity of the stallion among breeders (mare owners), which is determined, in turn, by the price of the offspring as yearlings and by their performance on the track and at stud.

The sire is thought to determine the maximum ability a horse might possibly achieve in the future. The horse may be prevented from reaching this potential because of his conformation. However, the perfectly formed offspring of a cheaper stallion will not be expected to run "above pedigree" (though the

offspring may do so) but rather to achieve the most that might be expected of a horse by that horse's particular sire. An imperfect offspring of an expensive sire will, therefore, be more expensive than a perfect offspring of a cheaper sire. Pedigree trumps conformation. At the present time, it is better to be well bred than good looking.

Although the sire currently is the most influential determinant of the price of a yearling, ideas about the relative influence of the mare and stallion are contested, as always has been the case. Wall (1946) reported that although Madden, "one of America's master breeders" (p. 175), believed that the sire was the greatest factor in mating, "stating somewhere that the stallion dominates 75%" (Wall, p. 176), Bradley, "America's most successful breeder today" "considers the mare 80% in importance, the stallion 20% in influence" (Wall, p. 176).

During my fieldwork, I spoke with breeders who favored the female side but who felt obliged to make their stallion choices "commercial," while other breeders considered their mares to be "mobile incubators." Regardless of whether a breeder favors the mare or stallion, scorn is heaped upon those who would hold the opposite view in the face of such overwhelming evidence to the contrary. A UK breeder stated that some people look only at stallions, adding that they may as well buy half a lottery ticket.

The relative importance of male and female thoroughbreds to their offspring always has been disputed and remains controversial in the selection of yearlings today. However, it merely is the starting point in any assessment of pedigree. Once the male and female parents of the yearling have been assessed according to any of the preceding ideas, the general structuring of the pedigree is considered. In particular, selectors are looking for repeats of crosses or "nicks" that have proved successful in the past. A mare thus may be unraced or untalented, but her value as a dam may lie in her re-enactment of a cross that produced a champion earlier in her family line. "Nicks" and a general idea of good and less promising combinations of male and female lines are major considerations in the United Kingdom. In the United States, this idea has been taken a little further in the idea of "dosage."⁵

It is no surprise that some breeders eschew the morass of contradictory theories in favor of more spiritual considerations. Lord Wavertree's determina-

tion to base his horse's matings on astrological compatibility is well known and bore fantastic results. In the breeding cabinet of the Keeneland library, there still is a huge assortment of literature advising the breeder of the most favorable time in the lunar calendar for him to arrange his covering.

Burket (1980) offers advice on "How to plant young'uns by the moon." One might expect that such thinking would fade in the light of the increased sophistication of veterinary knowledge. However, "The Sign," a series of astrological charts, is produced in each edition of *The Blood-Horse*, the trade magazine for the thoroughbred industry in the United States. It is glossed as follows, "The Sign is a zodiacal tracking, by which some horsemen traditionally have determined the best time for weaning and certain other husbandry decisions." Traditions such as "The Sign" suggest that astrological theories are by no means obsolete and that the indeterminacy of pedigree makes relevant all kinds of explanatory devices. This literature sits easily alongside Mendelian tracts, and many breeders and selectors of yearlings are happy to employ both in the same complicated stories that they tell about pedigrees.

Conformation

Selection takes place initially on the basis of pedigree, considered as a graphic representation of a yearling's likely potential. The indeterminacy of such a representation is multiplied by the act of looking at yearling conformation. Unlike breeding manuals, few books explain how to look at yearlings in the flesh. Selecting yearlings on this basis is not thought to be something that one might learn or teach. It is a gift. My own incomplete apprenticeship into this art was based on periods of time spent preparing yearlings for sale in the United Kingdom and the United States, showing yearlings at sales in the United States and the United Kingdom, and taking yearlings through the ring in the United Kingdom. In addition, I managed to shadow bloodstock agents and clients, vets, trainers, and breeders as they selected their yearlings.

Bloodstock agents operating at the top end of the market will arrange to see yearlings on the farm where they are being prepared before the sale. Yearling preparation has become increasingly professionalized during the last 10 years, and there is very little difference between viewing a yearling on the farm and

at the sale. The yearlings are presented immaculately. The show that takes place is identical to that undertaken at the sale and described at the beginning of this paper: a standing pose and a walk away from and back toward the bloodstock agent. Exegesis concerning conformation is minimal, and what follows is information that I have had to drag out of people. Agents vary in their explanations as to exactly which physical properties they are searching for so intently:

I look for an athlete. He has to stand up, but then most of them here do now with all that scraping and staples and shit. But he has to be able to move for God's sake. I'd rather he turned out but was an athlete. I hate to see a poor moving perfect son of a bitch.⁶

I look for a correct horse. Front legs take the strain and they're the first to go if they aren't 100%. So he has to be straight. I like to see him walk loose and big striding. Stretchy. Using his whole body. Watch his tail. Swing it from side to side, really using himself. But then he has to give me something. The extra 20. A look or a way of carrying himself that says 'I know how good I am and I can do anything'.

I want him to look like his Daddy. You know if he's a Storm Cat then By God I better know I'm looking at a Storm Cat.

Faults may be a matter of opinion. Even when they are agreed upon, they may be seen as detrimental to the horse's racing future: "Uh oh, crooked legs," or a positive endorsement of the horse's inheritance of the ability of its sire: "Aha! Crooked legs!"

In keeping with ideas about prepotency, particular stallions are regarded as transmitting certain strengths and weaknesses to their offspring. These faults are forgiven, or even admired, in offspring of a particular sire but will not be forgiven in the offspring of another. Conformation, therefore, is a relative notion rather than a single objective standard. Physical assessment of a yearling by an agent is an inter-articulation of pedigree and confirmation. Faults also may be seen as something that the horse will either be able to run through or outgrow. "He turns in a bit, but he's got a lot of growing to do. He'll be fine when he fills out".

Although I continually was told that conformation was far too complex to reduce to a series of measurements, several companies promising the objective assessment of conformation emerged during the bloodstock boom of the 1970s and 1980s.

Racehorses come in all shapes and sizes. Like automobile “models,” there are various thoroughbred “types.” One type of auto is best engineered for the symmetrical oval of the Indy 500, another type altogether is best for the Grand Prix de Monte Carlo. Similarly, a thoroughbred whose structural properties are suitable to win high-class races at nine furlongs around one sweeping turn at Belmont Park may be totally unsuited to winning at the same class level and same distance around two tight turns at Keeneland or on the Newmarket dip or Longchamps straight . . . Since 1984, EQUIX has helped hundreds of owners, breeders, trainer and investors achieve their goals by providing the tools and insight to recognize what is really “under the hood.” (Equix Biomechanics, 2003, p. 1)

The resulting data can be presented in various ways: The Equix Biomechanics (2001) website is covered in pie charts and graphs of various kinds in eye-catching colors. All these calculations attempt to predict the future and how a yearling or foal will develop. The data are presented as the physical limitation to pedigree fulfillment. Although these companies seem to be flourishing—and one of their senior managers assured me that they were the future of the horse market—they are treated with utter scorn by some of the more traditional horsemen and women whom I encountered during fieldwork in Kentucky. Two commercial breeders expressed the prevailing opinion:

You want to measure a horse? That’s fine. You measure it, and you go away and do whatever you want with it. What I don’t like is that you get to a point where we all have to measure now. We all have that guy with the tape and the machines come around the farm, or his little girl. We have to because it looks like you got something to hide from the one guy (at the sale) who’s gonna ask you if they’ve been measured. I want to say to him, “You got eyes! What more do you need?”

Yeah. It’s a racket. Some people swear by it. But I think it’s just a diversion. Because they can’t see for themselves. What are you measuring, that’s what

you have to ask. If there was just one way of being a good horse then this whole thing would be simple. Even if it was like they said and different horses suited particular conditions then that would be something. As far as I'm concerned it just doesn't work out like that. I don't let them on the place if I can help it.

Although objective standards and measuring procedures are resisted by many, all bloodstock agents engage, to some degree, with the notion of "correctness." Although conformation refers to the entire horse, selection concentrates, to a large degree, on legs. What follows is a transcript of my attempt to encourage two men involved in yearling selection to talk about correctness. I asked them what I should look for in a horse:

Bob: Number one. Straight in front.

Tim: That's right. I can't be doing with offset knees.

Bob: Well, not more than a little anyway, and better both than one, right?

Tim: Right.

Bob: Now if that horse is toeing out a little I can live with that.

Tim: Right. A horse may be crooked, but if his weight distribution is basically unaffected, if he has a degree of alignment in those front legs then you're good to go.

Bob: I'm not saying if he's crooked he won't do some winning or some racing, but I'm wondering if he'll stay sound. And that's not to say any of them stay sound, crooked or not, but you want to be able to say to your client that that horse has every chance of running.

Tim: A lot of people who don't really understand the racehorse just look at their front legs and if they aren't straight then they will cross it off and move on. In the long run, we've both seen a hell of a lot of fast crooked horses, and bought our share of straight horses that aren't worth a dime.

Bob: That's right. Me? I have to fall in love with a horse.

The first aspect of correctness that occurs to my informants is that a line can be drawn straight through the center of a horse's front leg joints when one is standing looking at them head on. This line is constructed in their mind's eye. In addition, horses should walk straight, their front legs traveling through a plane along that line⁷. From this starting point, Tim and Bob then go on to include a number of faults that, although strictly contradictory to their start-

ing point (that legs must be straight), have to be factored in according to “the long run,” including having offset knee(s), toeing out, and eventually being “crooked”. By the end of this short interaction, Tim is talking about “fast crooked horses” and “straight horses that aren’t worth a dime.” Of course, these men are experts in this field; their expertise is based on exposure to the subject (yearlings) and a growing catalog of instances of yearlings—whom they have bought or at least looked at—reaching maturity. However, Bob’s final contribution, that he has to “fall in love” with a horse, suggests there is more at stake than ever can be captured by a list of necessary and sufficient criteria.

Between Nature and Culture

“The first time I laid eyes on this horse,” Sekiguchi, smiling broadly, said through an interpreter, “I knew he was destined to be a Derby winner” . . . I went to look at him in the barn. I felt an enormous power”, he recalled, “and that’s when I made up my mind”. (Litke, 2000)

When Fusao Sekiguchi spent \$4 million on the top lot of the 1998 Keeneland Select Sale, he told the clamoring U.S. press that racing brings “romance to the man, dreams to the man.” His description of the first meeting with the horse he named Fusaichi Pegasus begins with vision and progresses to a suggestion of awe. Sekiguchi was able to sense the power of Pegasus: A connection was made. His descriptions of the colt de-emphasize his otherness. Pegasus was inquisitive and intelligent, but wild. He was from a mysterious and unknown world. Sekiguchi’s vision took him into that world, to be one with Pegasus and to realize that this horse was exceptional. The act of selecting Pegasus was more significant than the ability to defeat a powerful alliance of rival bidders in the auction ring.

“When I saw the colt,” says Sekiguchi, “he was acting himself—very inquisitive, rearing a little, a little wild. Those horses are the very intelligent ones.” That night his staff were called to his room. Sekiguchi was in his pyjamas. “I want that horse” he told them, “I don’t care how much it costs.” The next day Satish Sanan, John Magnier and Michael Tabor formed an alliance to buy the Mr Prospector colt. Sekiguchi was not bowed. “We were going

limitless", he says. "We were wearing red and ready for battle." (Ashforth, 2000, p. 13)

Sekiguchi's dream was to win the Kentucky Derby. Fusaichi Pegasus fulfilled that dream in 2000. Afterward, Sekiguchi was keen to tell the press that the extra significance of the win lay in his ability to communicate with his horse from the beginning:

I had acquired Fusaichi Concorde (winner of the Japan Derby) by recommendation from my agents. Whereas, Fusaichi Pegasus, it was like love at first sight. Pegasus was a colt that I personally picked out and personally bid for, so obviously, I had strong feelings and attachment to this particular horse. There was more meaning and a sense of accomplishment in winning the Kentucky Derby than the Japan Derby. . . . (Anonymous, 2000, p. 398)

Although the press, emphasizing his difference from the majority of Kentucky horse society, referred to his ponytail, unusual dress sense and tendency to take meetings in pajamas, Sekiguchi is not exceptional in his belief that the horse must speak to him; this was by far the most consistent belief expressed by my informants:

I look at hundreds of yearlings each year and maybe a dozen really have this thing that you can't define. A feel about them. The mechanical stuff is for the vet. He can go and look at the x-rays and the throat and all that. That's not my job. I have to find what I think are the best yearlings in the sale that we would have an interest in buying. The vet's job is to tell us if they're sound.

People talented at selecting yearlings are described as having a "great eye." This is the highest accolade possible in the business of selecting yearlings. It is not a quality that can be reduced to "seeing," at least not in any sense of "seeing" an objective set of properties in a yearling. It is a mystical property that refers to their sense of the yearling as a complete entity, and this depends not only on the physical properties of a horse but also on the horse's spirit, intelligence, or heart. Watching these men sort the wheat from the chaff

depends not on a set of measurements that can be repeated for each horse but on an act of communion with an individual yearling,

I really agree with everybody about a good hind end, a good gaskin, a good fluid walk. But the thing I like most to see when they come out of a stall, I like to see a horse with a beautiful head and a beautiful long neck. Then, does it fit into his shoulder and his withers. I kind of take it from there. Then I will go and look for things that might bug me. A lot of the things from there I might be able to live with. I don't like long pasterns. I don't like horses that are really upright. I'm looking at them when they come out of the stall to see if they are nice, alert, good-looking horses. Does he look like he has a nice mind? I've never seen the perfect horse, but if everything else kind of fits in then it can work. (Buzz Chase, quoted by Liebman, 2003, p. 3485)

This aspect of yearling selection takes precedence over both pedigree and conformation and accounts for the divinatory aspects of the practice. Selecting yearlings involves an altered state of consciousness because it requires communication with the horse. In other words, the duality between horse and human or nature and culture is brought together through the extraordinary vision of the selector.

Conclusion

Risk taking, cast as "action," "deep play," or conspicuous consumption reveals something of the values and the priorities of the society in which it takes place. In the field of horse racing, anthropological and sociological awareness of risk taking has focused on the betting ring. However, the auction ring offers even greater opportunities for participants to perform their status. Stakes are higher, odds are longer, and the ability to negotiate the auction as a cultural arena is far more highly valued than the knowledge of even the highest roller. This potency emanates from the nature of the auction as a form of exchange and from the thoroughbreds as creatures appropriated by their human keepers according to a template of wildness as authenticity. The domesticated racehorse who recreates this wildness is worth looking at as

an animal capable of returning our gaze. It is appropriate, therefore, that the skills involved in selecting a particular horse are those of divination.

In classical anthropology, explanations of practices described as divination were used to “prove” the rationality of the traditional objects of investigation. The most notable of these was put forth by Evans-Pritchard (1937) whose work on the Azande remains compulsory reading on the majority of first year undergraduate reading lists. This introductory text provides the basis for an argument that, paraphrased, goes something like,

Even though it seems that the things other people do are really weird, in fact they’re no different from you or I. Furthermore, if we look at these things carefully, then we can explain them in terms that make complete sense.

The liberal impulse of Evans-Pritchard’s (1937) argument may have been laudable and, indeed, politically necessary at the time. However, it seems that a recasting of this argument is essential if anthropologists are to discuss ways of making sense of the world without implicitly privileging their own. If a distinction is postulated between “logical-analytical” or “rational” and “intuitive-synthetical” or “non-normal” modes of thought (Peek, 1991, p. 3), every example of decision making must be reducible to one or the other. If it is recognized that there is, in fact, no such opposition, then Evans-Pritchard’s anxiety is assuaged without activating the same power over difference.

This paper described a particular way of looking at thoroughbred racehorses to re-emphasize the idea that interactions of all kinds are not representative of any existing objective social reality but constitutive of their own reality. This analysis encourages the idea that decision making, whether at an international thoroughbred auction among the Azande as described by Evans-Pritchard (1937) or at the supermarket, is not based simply on the reconstitution of existing rules and norms. It also is constitutive and influenced by all kinds of impulses and events, some of which relate more to the desire to interact sensibly with a group of interlocutors than to “rational” considerations of price, quality, and means-to-ends calculations (Garfinkel, 1984).

In the case of the thoroughbred auction, the bloodstock agent exhibits a particular skill. His role is to communicate with the horse. When he looks at the horse, he sees things that are not visible to everyone. His spectacular vision

enables him to appreciate the horse's essential properties—properties that reside in nature—and to communicate these properties to his clients. The ambiguity of his role is a result of these boundary-crossing activities.

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Notes

- ¹ Correspondence should be sent to Rebecca Cassidy, Anthropology Department, Goldsmith's College, University of London, New Cross, London SE14 6NW, UK. E-mail: ans01rc@gold.ac.uk. An explanation of a recurring term: "Owner" as used in this paper means what it says. Racehorses are commodities, however unpleasant that may seem. A current debate of usage, however, recommends alternative wording to denote relationships between humans and companion or other non-human animals: caretaker, guardian, caregiver. Such designations fail to describe accurately the relationship between the humans who, in racing parlance, "own" their racehorses and take pride in the prowess of these remarkable beings.
- ² Historically, the aim of racing was to breed a champion. Horses were owned by wealthy, often aristocratic, men. However, changes in the demographic and class structure of England, where the thoroughbred was created and the export of thoroughbreds to countries with alternative social structures (the United States in particular) ensured that a specialist market for thoroughbreds emerged during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This market was for yearlings.
- ³ These three are the Darley Arabian, the Byerley Turk, and the Godolphin Arabian. For more information on the founding fathers of the breed, see Cassidy (2003.)
- ⁴ Kentucky and Newmarket are traditionally the two most important producers of thoroughbreds, although Ocala, Florida, The Curragh in Ireland, and Chantilly in France produce an increasing proportion of the world's thoroughbreds.
- ⁵ Dosage is a mathematical calculation that claims to predict a horse's ability. It is based on the work of Colonel Vuillier who, in 1920, examined the pedigrees of the most successful horses of a generation and found that several stallions and one mare were consistently over represented. He nominated these individuals as "chef de race" and calculated their ideal relative contributions to offspring. His theory was a popular breeding theory between the 1950s and 1980s and continues to be popular as a betting aid in the United States (Roman's www.chef-de-race.com). All current chef de race are male, and this theory attempts to predict the ability of a horse based entirely upon the consideration of superior male ancestors.
- ⁶ Angular limb deformities can now be straightened by a combination of surgery and corrective trimming or shoeing of the young horse's feet. Toeing out is corrected

by “stripping,” pulling back the edges of the periosteum, the tissue that protects the bone, to stimulate the side of the growth plate that has fallen behind and caused the asymmetry. Knock knees are corrected by the insertion of screws, wires or staples that retard growth on the side of the plate that has raced ahead. Many of my informants assured me that although the majority of the horses I saw at the sale would have experienced some degree of corrective surgery, the effects were far from predictable and could even create other, much more serious problems later in their racing careers. As noted surgeon Dr Wayne McIlwraith has said, “manipulating the carpus for cosmetic reasons is not helpful and can contribute to unsoundness” (quoted by Pagones 2002).

- ⁷ The relationship between straight legs and performance is unproven. It is the opinion of surgeon Dr Wayne McIlwraith that “a perfectly straight leg is not ideal for soundness” (Pagones, 2002).

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