

*BLACK BEAUTY: STRAIGHT FROM THE HORSE'S MOUTH*

BY

KAREN CROSSLEY

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

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## Abstract

At the climax of Anna Sewell's *Black Beauty*, the horse who has known so many masters is recognized by one of his old grooms by the "white star in the forehead, one white foot on the off side, this little knot just in that place [. . .]" and "that little patch of white hair that John used to call 'Beauty's threepenny bit'" (236). This recognition marks the beginning of what seems to be the end of Black Beauty's tale; as Beauty himself says, "here my story ends. My troubles are all over, and I am at home" (238).<sup>1</sup>

It's a bittersweet ending, to be sure, and the sense of closure it provides is based entirely on that incredible moment of recognition that signals Beauty's return to his true self. But who or what is the true *Black Beauty*? This most unstable of texts has gone through countless revisions, adaptations, abridgements and retellings since it left the hands of its author over 125 years ago. What relation, if any, does the *Black Beauty* of today bear to the *Black Beauty* of 1877?

My thesis considers the ever-changing textual condition of *Black Beauty*, from its initial British and (pirated) American editions, to its retellings for young readers, and its incarnations for film and television, to demonstrate how every variant text creates its own "real" Beauty, each as relevant as the one that came before. Would Anna Sewell be able to walk by a bookstall today and recognize *her Black Beauty* by a star, a foot, a knot and a "threepenny bit"? Probably not, for her horse's story is not yet done.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, quotations from *Black Beauty* are from the J.M. Dent and Sons edition published in 1921 and reprinted in 1951. Dent editions of *Black Beauty* are considered to be faithful to the original and were used as the base texts for *The Annotated Black Beauty* (1989) and the Oxford University Press *Black Beauty* (1992), both now sadly out of print.

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## Introduction

Besides being the story of a character who was meant to exemplify all that was true, good, and beautiful in animal nature, *Black Beauty* is a text which has itself passed through all three states of being. In its “true” form, the original *Black Beauty* is a complex text, on the surface the simple story of a horse’s life told in a clear, compelling voice, but containing many subversive voices contesting for the alert reader’s attention. In its “good” form, *Black Beauty* is transformed by its first American publisher into an animal rights tract of the first order, equating the abuse of horses with the institution of slavery and vehemently opposing both. In its “beautiful” form, *Black Beauty* is a text subject to constant grooming, as time and time again publishers, editors, interpreters and writers take it upon themselves to scrub it, sanitize it, and stamp it suitable for children.

Do any of these various textual incarnations embody the “real” *Black Beauty*? Should Anna Sewell’s original text be treated as the Platonic ideal of *Beauty*, and all others just shadows of its substance? Given the circumstances of its writing and initial publication, I would like to suggest that even the authenticity of Sewell’s original version can be called into question. *Black Beauty* has never been a stable text, and never will be. It is a text in constant motion, harnessed to “a ceaseless process of textual development and mutation,” to use the words of Jerome McGann (9). My thesis follows McGann’s lead in considering *Black Beauty* as a series of texts produced over time. In examining the textual and cultural history of *Black Beauty* from its first publication to the present day, my aim is to bring a number of critical approaches to bear in an effort to capture the essence of each text. Audrey Jaffe writes that Charles Dickens constructed *A Christmas Carol* as “an exemplary text for understanding the commodity culture Guy Debord terms

‘a society of the spectacle’” (28). Jaffe notes that “Paul Davis has used the term ‘culture-text’ to describe the way the *Carol* has been rewritten to reflect particular cultural and historical circumstances” and goes on to state that “the story deserves this name, however, because it identifies itself with culture: it projects images of, has come to stand for, and constitutes an exemplary narrative of enculturation into the dominant values of its time” (29). By this definition, *Black Beauty*, too, can be seen as a culture-text.

Though *Black Beauty* is Sewell’s only novel and *A Christmas Carol* is one of Dickens’ many, they have this trait in common. Writing of *Black Beauty*, Coral Lansbury notes that “just as a Dickensian quality can be seen affecting the way people celebrated Christmas, the fictional depiction of animals altered the contemporary perception of the natural world. Anna Sewell believed she had faithfully recreated the mind of a horse, and her achievement was generally praised on her own terms” (183).

My thesis begins with an attempt to examine Sewell’s culture-text on its own terms. Chapters one and two focus on the impact of the book at the time of its initial publications, first in England in 1877, and then in America in 1890. *Black Beauty* was originally conceived and received as a variation of the social problem novel, addressing Sewell’s concern for the humane treatment of horses. In America, the book was pirated and promoted by George T. Angell as a humane work, tellingly re-subtitled “The *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* of the Horse.” In examining the text at this early stage in its existence, I will be using the theories of Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar (*The Madwoman in the Attic*), Susan Chitty (*The Woman Who Wrote Black Beauty*), Melissa Holbrook Pierson (*Dark Horses and Black Beauties*), and Coral Lansbury (*The Old Brown Dog*) about women and literature to consider *Beauty* as a substitute for the Victorian woman, and

Ginger as Beauty's "mad double," and drawing on the work of such writers as Robert Dingley ("A Horse of a Different Color: *Black Beauty* and the Pressures of Indebtedness") and Peter Stoneley ("Sentimental Emasculations: *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Black Beauty*") in considering *Black Beauty* as a vehicle of explicit and implicit moral instruction. Additionally, these chapters will investigate how *Black Beauty* both shares and shapes the voices of such roughly contemporary works as Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), Leo Tolstoy's "Strider: The Story of a Horse" (1861-86), Marshall Saunders' *Beautiful Joe* (1894), and Mark Twain's "A Dog's Tale" (1903) and "A Horse's Tale" (1906); and such analogous modern works as Robert Lawson's *Mr. Revere and I* (1953), Richard Adams' *Traveller* (1988), and John Hawkes' *Sweet William* (1993).

Chapter three presents a survey of the textual transformations *Black Beauty* has undergone since its first publication. Sewell's original 49-chapter novel has reappeared before the public in the guise of a nursery tale, a teaching text, a children's classic, an adventure story, and a novelty to be merchandised as comic book, colouring book, and pop-up book. It has been retold and recorded on cassette and LP, in movies and on television, in live action and animation. Sometimes the narrative point of view changes from Sewell's first equine singular to an ordinary third person omniscient. The cast of characters, equine and human, is in constant flux. Even Black Beauty occasionally disappears as some of his incarnations—the foal named Darkie, the lady's mount Black Auster, the cab horse christened Jack, or the cart horse called Blackie—are renamed or replaced within the text. Illustrations usually show readers a black horse, but no other detail remains constant—neither Black Beauty's breed type, his age, his sex, his white



star, white foot on the off side, nor distinctive white patch called a “threepenny bit” can ever be relied on as certain signs of identity.

In considering the impact of these textual variations, I will be incorporating the work of Margaret Blount (*Animal Land*) and Peter Hunt (*Criticism, Theory and Children's Literature*) in discussing the history of the text as both fable and fantasy for the child reader and turning to Peter Hollindale (“Plain Speaking: *Black Beauty* as a Quaker Text”), Harriet Fowler (“Enduring Beauty”), and Ellen B. Wells and Anne Grimshaw (*The Annotated Black Beauty*) to demonstrate the ways in which the text both responds to and interrogates an ever-changing culture. By examining the many “modern” versions of *Black Beauty* that exist, I hope to demonstrate how, as *Black Beauty*'s scripted adventures change, so too does our recognition, or reading, of the horse.

## Chapter One

### Horse Sense: The Truth About *Black Beauty*

Like its eponymous hero, Anna Sewell's original 1877 edition of *Black Beauty* can be recognized by a few distinguishing features. One is its title, which runs, in full: *Black Beauty: His Grooms and Companions. The Autobiography of a Horse. Translated from the Original Equine by Anna Sewell*. Another is its voice. As hinted at in the title, the work is a first person, or rather a first *equine* narrative. Then there is the format of the book itself: a modest volume bearing a small gilt horse-head on its cover and only one illustration within the text—a rather grim picture of a beaten black horse staring morosely at a huddled human corpse. Barely any of the many textual incarnations of *Black Beauty* bear these marks today. Most modern editions of the text are titled *Black Beauty*, nothing more. Several adaptations of the story alter the voice of the horse. Not all of them go the full length of changing the voice to the third person omniscient, though some do. But most alter the writing either through abridgement or through retellings, which tend to transform Sewell's measured Victorian cadences into more modern rhythms. And many reincarnations of *Black Beauty* are lavishly illustrated; though the picture of Beauty with the body of Reuben Smith remains a favourite subject, it is now often just one illustration among a mass of others.

This sort of reworking has been happening to Sewell's story from the moment it made the transition from thought to text. Even as it was being born, *Black Beauty* passed out of the hands of its author into the hands of a kind of literary midwife, for it was Mary Sewell, Anna's mother, who wrote the fair copy of the story that the sickly Anna dictated quite literally from her deathbed. We know that Anna read the proofs of her work before

publication and approved of them, but we also know that she died mere months after her book was published. After that, her text was on its own and, like its hero, it became the servant of many masters.

Sewell herself meant her horse story to be read seriously as an educational tract. She was not so much interested in educating the young as in educating the ignorant—it is no accident that one of the angriest chapters in *Black Beauty* is chapter 19, “Only Ignorance,” in which kind coachman John Manly declares that ignorance is “the worst thing in the world, next to wickedness” (86). When Sewell was close to completing her manuscript, she wrote in her journal that “I have for six years been confined to the house and my sofa, and have from time to time, as I was able, been writing what I think will turn out a little book, its special aim being to induce kindness, sympathy, and an understanding treatment of horses” (qtd. in Chitty 178). This suggests that Sewell meant her book to be read not necessarily by children, who have little control over the lives and actions of others, but by adults whose livelihood depended in some way on the horse—stable hands, grooms, coachmen, and particularly cab drivers and carters.

Probably the primary factor that led to *Black Beauty*'s transformation from the educational tract Sewell envisioned to a form of childhood entertainment was the circumstance of its initial publication. Sewell left much of this business in the hands of her mother, who was herself a modestly successful author of poems and books for children. Mary Sewell, not unnaturally, had the book placed with her own publisher, Jarrold and Sons, who at the time specialized in the publication of religious tracts and school stories—these latter logically aimed at children. Evidence from the publisher's lists found in the back pages of early editions of the book suggests that Jarrold's

promoted *Black Beauty* both as an improving book and as a school prize book, ideal for passing on to promising young people in all fields of endeavour.

Whatever Sewell intended for the readership and marketing of her little book, its design and distribution were effectively out of her hands. In fact, Sewell was forced by circumstances to place her book in other hands early on its production. Sewell took up the pen to write *Black Beauty* at a time when she began to find herself hopelessly housebound by an ailment which had afflicted her since early childhood. Ever since slipping on the road running home on a rainy day when she was around 14 years old, Sewell had been having trouble with her legs. The exact ailment is unspecified in all the writing that exists around Sewell. Sewell herself refers to weakness and pains in her feet and legs. Susan Chitty suggests the injury may have been to the joints of the ankles—perhaps a dislocation that was never properly reset, or an injury that was subsequently aggravated by the effects of malnutrition (110). Adrienne Gavin, taking up where Chitty left off, speculates that Sewell may have been suffering from the self-induced malnutrition of anorexia (*Studia* 36). Sewell sought spa treatment for her ailment several times as a young woman and for one brief period around 1856 it seems she was able to walk easily and without pain, but the pain and weakness came back and by 1871, around the time she began work on *Black Beauty*, Sewell was finding it more and more difficult to get around.

Is *Black Beauty* Sewell's attempt to write herself out of her own life? Although Gavin notes that *Black Beauty* is riddled with references to injuries of the legs and feet, suggesting the disabled author's subconscious identification with her text (*Leeds* 57-58), the full title of the book distances the author from the subject, claiming that *Black Beauty*

is the autobiography of a horse and that Sewell's role in the story is limited to that of translator, as if she were as schooled in the Houyhnhnm tongue as Gulliver himself.<sup>2</sup> *Black Beauty* is certainly not the literal life story of a horse. However, this alone does not necessarily mean that it is the life story of Anna Sewell, tempting as it may be to read the text in this light. Moira Ferguson writes, "In this 'autobiography of a horse,' Sewell projects her anxieties about a lonely, still and painful life. *Black Beauty* is Sewell's mirror image, a refraction of her emotional experiences and her refusal to be a Victorian female invalid, severely limited discursively as well as physically" (48). Coral Lansbury, too, theorizes that Sewell's "autobiography of a horse" was in many ways an autobiography of the author and that "because the persona chosen was not human, Anna Sewell felt free to speak her mind and feelings in ways that would have been consciously censored had she written as a woman" (98). Yet, if the only way to truly understand the "other" is to understand through the other's senses—to see what the other sees and hear as the other hears—then *Black Beauty* might be read as the author's earnest endeavour to understand the most familiar other of her day, the horse. When Sewell completed *Black Beauty* in 1877, the horse was still very much a part of everyday life, as ubiquitous as the

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<sup>2</sup> Sewell was not the first writer to attempt the "mission impossible" (Colombat 43) of the animal autobiography, but she certainly took the genre and made it her own. Chitty argues that Sewell may well have been influenced by a chapter in George MacDonald's *At The Back of the North Wind* (1871), in which two cab horses talk to each other about the miseries of their lives (242). Margaret Blount points out many similarities between the storyline of *Black Beauty* and that of Arabella Argus' 1815 tale *The Adventures of a Donkey*. Blount seems to prefer Argus' tale because Argus attempts less in it; she finds that "the omniscience of the horses in *Black Beauty* is rather unnerving" (52) whereas *The Adventures of a Donkey* is the author's "objective attempt to imagine herself inside a four-footed beast and describe what it is like" (51). Both stories speak from the first person, but Blount likes Argus' tactic of making her asinine hero Jemmy admit to "the presumption and danger of attempting further analysis of the *human* character" (52). Perhaps she misses the many moments when Sewell does much the same thing.

automobile is today and about as little regarded. What Sewell attempted to do in her novel was give feelings—eyes, ears, and a voice—to this common beast of burden and transportation. By writing a novel through the senses of the other, Sewell created a classic of children's literature, a novel of significant emotional and social impact, and a work that shows every sign of having extraordinary literary legs. When Sewell wrote *Black Beauty*, she unharnessed a power that she probably didn't even know she had.

*Black Beauty's* narrative works through empathy, a way of seeing the world that has often been recognized as an essentially female strategy. It is also, Chitty argues, a strategy that embraces the perspective of children who, as powerless outsiders in an adult-controlled world, identify readily with the experience of the horse (244). Certainly if we read a repressed feminism in Sewell, it becomes easier to understand how *Black Beauty* came to be classic of children's literature, for, as Lissa Paul points out, there are significant parallels between the situations of women and children in society and "Both women's literature and children's literature are devalued and regarded as marginal or peripheral by the literary and educational communities" (qtd. in Hunt 191). Women, children, and horses are all marginalized in a male-centred discourse. They are neither the "I" nor the "eye" that Martin Jay identifies as the centre of the Cartesian perspectival regime which governs such a discourse, but rather they represent the "other," on the periphery, on the outside looking in (54-57). When Sewell chose to write her novel through the body of the horse, selecting for her point of view the first equine singular, she was literally embodying an "other" experience, while at the same time writing of an experience akin to her own.

The novel is constructed, as its subtitle informs us, as *The Autobiography of a Horse*. Translated from the Original Equine by Anna Sewell. This removal of the author from the work, this pretence of autobiography, is a not uncommon strategy employed by female Victorian writers. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar note that “in publicly presenting acceptable facades for private and dangerous visions women writers have long used a wide range of tactics to obscure but not obliterate their most subversive impulses” (74). Among the strategies used, Gilbert and Gubar point particularly to Victorian women’s tendencies to publish anonymously or pseudonymously, or to channel their efforts into “lesser” subjects (such as novels, as opposed to works of history or philosophy), both of which Sewell seems to be doing when she writes her “Autobiography of a Horse.” Though Sewell attached her name to her work, she did it coyly, through the pretence of being a translator, and though she meant her novel to be read by adults rather than children she was still writing “only” an autobiography, not a serious volume of social criticism. The result is an awkward, indirect mode of discourse, marked, as Gilbert and Gubar note, “by an obsessive imagery of confinement that reveals the ways in which female artists feel trapped and sickened both by suffocating alternatives and by the culture that created them” (64). In *Black Beauty*, the “obsessive imagery of confinement” breaks through in such passages as:

What more could I want? Why, liberty! For three years and a half of my life I had had all the liberty I could wish for: but now, week after week, month after month, and no doubt year after year, I must stand up in a stable night and day except when I am wanted, and then I must be just as

steady and quiet as any old horse who has worked twenty years. Straps here and straps there, a bit in my mouth, and blinkers over my eyes. (24)

Although Gilbert and Gubar do not directly address *Black Beauty* in their study, it seems clear that it, too, can be read as one of those “palimpsestic [. . .] works whose surface designs conceal or obscure deeper, less accessible (and less socially acceptable) levels of meaning” (73). Certainly, *Black Beauty*’s anxiety when confined, even in the best of stables, suggests one of those images of enclosure that “reflects the woman writer’s own discomfort, her sense of powerlessness, her fear that she inhabits alien and incomprehensible places” (Gilbert and Gubar 84). If *Black Beauty* is not strictly a re-imagining of Sewell’s life experience, it may well be read as a reconstruction of the middle-class Victorian woman’s experience. But beyond this, it functions, as it was meant to, as a discourse of difference—an expression of a way of being such as “only horses know” (134).

How does *Black Beauty* work to open its readers’ eyes to this other point of view? The narrative voice is only part of the answer. To a great extent, it is Sewell’s use of the specific qualities of equine perception—including lateral vision, directional hearing, and sensitivity of the skin and lips—that shapes her story and her argument against what she saw as needless cruelty to, and unnatural restriction of, the horse. In Jay’s terms, Sewell’s novel seems to fall neatly into the Impressionist/Naturalist way of seeing, privileging “the raw description of surface appearances over the more penetrating gaze” (173) leading to “a fetishistic preoccupation with the sensibility of the describer rather than with the object described” (174). However, because Sewell slips into the skin of her narrator, becoming the object described, *Black Beauty*’s point of view is a little more complicated than Jay’s



categorization seems to allow, for the horses in *Black Beauty* are severely restricted, and their unique perceptions cannot be easily separated from their experiences at the hands of those who have control over them.

Black Beauty learns to submit his will to that of man when he feels the power of control man has over his body. This first comes to him through sensations of touch, particularly pressure that is brought to bear on his sensitive skin and mouth. In his *History and Treatment of the Diseases of the Horse with A Treatise on Draught* (1851), William Youatt advises horse owners that “The horse is guided and governed principally by the mouth, and therefore the lips are endowed with extraordinary sensibility, so that the animal feels the slightest motion of the hand of the rider or driver, and, as it were, anticipates his very thoughts” (132). Youatt writes as though the horse’s mouth were especially designed to be controlled by man. Sewell, on the other hand, writes:

Those who have never had a bit in their mouths cannot think how bad it feels; a great piece of cold hard steel as thick as a man’s finger to be pushed into one’s mouth, between one’s teeth and over one’s tongue, with the ends coming out at the corner of your mouth, and held fast there by straps over your head, under your throat, round your nose, and under your chin; so that no way in the world can you get rid of the nasty hard thing; it is very bad! yes, very bad! at least I thought so. (10-12)

Both authors make the same point about the sensitivity of the mouth, but where Youatt sees a benefit for humanity, Sewell sees a detriment to horses.

After being introduced to the bit and bridle, Black Beauty finds that his masters want to control not only his mouth, but also his vision, when he is made to wear blinkers

while under harness. The problem with blinkers is that they cut the horse off from its accustomed lateral way of seeing. By forcing the horse to focus only on the road in front of it, blinkers restrict the horse's vision to a very narrow range. As Desmond Morris explains, although the horse does possess a narrow band full-frontal vision, it can see nothing clearly nearer than six feet directly in front of it. "This is a sobering thought for any jump-jockey," Morris comments, "because it means that every time he urges his steed into another huge leap over a fence, the animal is jumping blind" (32). What blinkers do, then, is to enforce a kind of blindness on the horse—not total, but vastly different from the kind of vision a horse naturally enjoys. When a blinkered horse is in harness it is almost totally dependent on directions from its driver, for, like the horse taking a jump, it is moving forward on blind faith. In *Memoirs of the Blind*, Jacques Derrida notes how blind humans take very little on faith, replacing visual information with tactile so that "Standing on his own two feet, a blind man explores by feeling out an area that he must recognize without yet cognizing it" (4). Lacking hands, the horse who is blinded by blinkers has no option open to it for reaching out, for the hands that guide it are not its own and they are placed behind it, not in front. Standing on its own four feet, the horse reaches out with other senses, not always understood by man.

When Black Beauty refuses to cross a flooded bridge in chapter 12, "A Stormy Day," Sewell writes, "We were going along at a good pace, but the moment my feet touched the first part of the bridge, I felt sure there was something wrong. I dare not go forward, and I made a dead stop. [. . .] Of course I could not tell him, but I knew very well that the bridge was not safe" (55-56). Here Sewell is writing of a sense that she herself does not possess, at least not consciously. Morris theorizes that a horse's sixth sense may

actually be just a manifestation of an acute sense of hearing and that “in all such ‘mysterious’ reactions the horses are in reality responding to tiny sounds that are still too far away for the human ear” (10). However the horse is able to come by this extrasensory perception, it is clear—in the pages of *Black Beauty* at least—that this perception is not highly valued by man. Even the master whose life Beauty saves by his refusal to cross the bridge gives the credit not to the horse, but to a higher power: “Master said, God had given men reason, by which they could find out things for themselves, but He had given animals knowledge which did not depend on reason, and which was much more prompt and perfect in its way, and by which they had often saved the lives of men” (57).

The ear of the horse is an organ of perception that nobody pays much attention to, not even experienced horsemen. As Morris notes, “One special benefit of the horse’s sensitivity to sound is that an intelligent rider can readily train a horse to respond to softly spoken, simple words of command” (11). Even Youatt, who believes that horses have to be controlled by force rather than by persuasion, notes that “The ear of the horse is one of the most beautiful parts about him, and by few things is the temper more surely indicated than by its motion” (77). Morris calls this the “simple ‘language’ of the equine ears” (9), and notes that in a horse “the ears have a double role—they receive sound signals and they transmit visual signals” (6). The ears of the horse are not passive receptors, but ever-active perceptrs, communicating with the world on a sensory level unavailable to human beings with their flat, stationary ears and limited range of hearing. In *Black Beauty*, Sewell shows herself to be keenly aware of the importance of equine hearing. Black Beauty, like Ginger, tends to judge people by their voices. “Master rode me home slowly, and I could tell by his voice how the thing had grieved him,” Beauty reports after

witnessing the abuse of a pony (52). Beauty gets nervous when the drunk Reuben Smith is about to ride him home from a tavern: “He spoke in a very loud off-hand way, and I thought it very unlike him” (116). And when he is reunited with his old stable boy Joe Green, Beauty at first fails to recognize him because “now he was a fine grown young fellow, with black whiskers and a man’s voice” (236). More than this, though, Sewell shows how horses tend to trust hearing over sight. When caught in a stable fire, Black Beauty will not leave the burning building until his groom James Howard comes to get him:

The next thing I heard was James’ voice, quiet and cheery, as it always was.

“Come, my beauties, it is time for us to be off, so wake up and come along.” I stood nearest the door, so he came to me first, patting me as he came in.

“Come, Beauty, on with your bridle, my boy, we’ll soon be out of this smother.” It was on in no time; then he took the scarf off his neck, and tied it lightly over my eyes, and patting and coaxing he led me out of the stable. Safe in the yard, he slipped the scarf off my eyes [. . .]. I set up a shrill whinny as I saw him go. Ginger told me afterwards, that whinny was the best thing I could have done for her, for had she not heard me outside, she would never have had the courage to come out. (71-72)

It’s significant here that Beauty has to be blindfolded before he can be drawn out of the fire. In *Black Beauty*, the horses are subject to several kinds of blindness. Besides being blinded by blinkers in harness, and by smoke and a scarf wrapped around his eyes in the

stable fire, Beauty also spends some time in a poorly lighted stable, which, he says, has a depressing effect on his spirits:

I believe, had I stayed there very long, I should have become purblind, and that would have been a great misfortune for I have heard men say, that a stone-blind horse was safer to drive than one with imperfect sight, as it generally makes them very timid. (223)

Sewell takes this observation no further, but Youatt notes that “A horse blind in both eyes will usually have his ears in constant and rapid motion, directing them in quick succession to every quarter; he will likewise hang back in his halter in a peculiar way; and will lift his feet high, as if he were stepping over some obstacle, when there is actually nothing to obstruct his passage” (93-94). In other words, the blind horse makes up for his lack of vision by relying on sound and touch, the same two senses that seem more trustworthy than vision to Black Beauty and his companions. Blindness is, in fact, shown to be more detrimental to humans than to horses in *Black Beauty*, but because the horses are under the control of the humans, human blindness hurts them too. Black Beauty is ruined running on a bad road for a man who is “too madly drunk to notice anything” (116) and his foot is cut by a stone left wedged in his hoof by a driver who “was partly blind, or only very careless, I can’t say” (128).

Towards the end of the novel, Black Beauty, reduced to a state of complete powerlessness, is driven to reject visual perception completely, saying “I have heard men say, that seeing is believing; but I should say that *feeling* is believing; for much as I had seen before, I never knew till now the utter misery of a cab horse’s life” (224). Derrida says that “if the eyes of all animals are destined for sight, and perhaps by means of this

for the scopic knowledge of the *animal rationale*, only man knows how to go beyond seeing and knowing [savoir], because only he knows how to weep” (*Memoirs* 126).

Youatt might disagree with this, for he reports having seen horses secrete tears “under acute pain or brutal usage” (86). *Black Beauty*, however, suffers, but he does not weep—though he has certainly been the cause of many tears through the ages, particularly female tears. As Lansbury writes:

In many ways, *Black Beauty* has always been a woman’s book, and I would venture to say, without recourse to statistics or computerized studies, that its effect upon adolescent girls has always been one of unbearable anguish. Generally read at the perilously emotional time when a child crosses the threshold to adult life, *Black Beauty* is a work of inconsolable grief. It is read obsessively, as though it contained lessons which must be learned, no matter how painful. I can speak only from my own experience and those who have read the book with the same feelings of anger and loss. (97)

When you think about it, it takes no great leap of the imagination to link women and horses. As Melissa Holbrook Pierson, who has thought about it, says, “Women are already more like horses than they know. Their inner ears, for one, are able to detect very soft sounds better than men’s. They are alert to peril, and especially to the sounds of whimpering in the depths of night” (161). And this very link that Pierson sees, a link of sense and sensitivity, is at the heart of Sewell’s story, for *Black Beauty* is all about the senses. In telling her story from the horse’s point of view, Sewell is doing everything in

her power to explain the world from the sensual perspective of the outsider, the unknown, the other.

Sewell's animal rights philosophy, as expressed in *Black Beauty*, had its origin in Horace Bushnell's *Essay on Animals*, a work brought to Sewell's attention by a Mrs. Bayly, a family friend. Paraphrasing Bayly, who was in turn paraphrasing Bushnell, Chitty notes that the following principles from Bushnell's work found expression in *Black Beauty*:

Man is made for God, and just as his happiness depends upon the degree in which, in his life, he lives to do the will of God, so with animals—they instinctively know that their vocation is to do the will of man; and were we as wise and kind to animals as we might be, and ought to be, their lives in doing our will would be supremely happy. (140)

Inspired by Bushnell, Sewell adopted a view of man's relationship with animals which develops in direct contrast to Thomas Aquinas's, even though Aquinas's writings, which argue against cruelty to animals, are often taken as a starting point for later treatises on animal rights. However, as Andrew Linzey notes, "because, strictly speaking, animals could, for Aquinas, have no friendship with humans, and therefore be subject to charitable constraints, animals could not actually be wronged" (16). For Sewell, animal and human friendship was more than possible, it was desirable, and with or without it animals could most definitely be wronged.

If the one wrong that Sewell wished most particularly to right was the use of the bearing-rein on horses, then *Black Beauty* can be considered a smashing success. The publication of *Black Beauty* has often been linked with the disappearance of the bearing-

rein from the harnesses of working horses (Ferguson 35). Both Black Beauty and Ginger protest the use of bearing-rein, a device that holds the horses' heads in an unnaturally erect position, restricting their vision and movement and damaging their breathing. Youatt, whose 1851 work is generally sympathetic to equine suffering, writes of the effect of the bearing-rein on horses:

This rein not only gives the horse a grander appearance in harness, and places the head in that position in which the bit most powerfully presses upon the jaw, but there is no possibility of driving without it, unless the arm of the driver were as strong as that of Hercules; and most certainly there is no safety if it be not used. There are few horses who will not bear, or *bore* upon something, and it is better to let them bore upon themselves than upon the arm of the driver. Without this control, many of them would hang their heads low and be disposed every moment to stumble, and would defy all pulling, if they tried to run away. (132)

Sewell, however, writing in 1877 from the horse's point of view, argues that:

What I suffered with the rein for four long months in my lady's carriage, it would be hard to describe; but I am quite sure that, had it lasted much longer, either my health or my temper would have given way. Before that, I never knew what it was to foam at the mouth, but now the action of the sharp bit on my tongue and jaw, and the constrained position of my head and throat caused me to froth at the mouth more or less. Some people think it is very fine to see this, and say, "What fine, spirited creatures!"



But it is just as unnatural for horses as for men to foam at the mouth: it is a sure sign of some discomfort, and should be attended to. (105-06)

Throughout the text, Black Beauty bears with the bearing-rein, but his stable mate Ginger kicks up a fuss, doing so much damage to her owner's property that she is never asked to wear the bearing-rein again. In a sense, Ginger is Beauty's "mad double"—the ferocious alter-ego that Gilbert and Gubar say nineteenth-century women writers created to express the violent rebellion they would not allow their heroines to enact (85). Every time Ginger is cruelly abused she stages a rebellion, and just as it is an affront to her senses that sets her off, so she can only be calmed by an appeal to her senses. Early in her training she is beaten by a man whom she describes as "only hardness, a hard voice, a hard eye, a hard hand, and I felt from the first that what he wanted was to wear all the spirit out of me, and just make into a quiet, humble, obedient piece of horse-flesh" (29). After her fight with the man, Ginger escapes into an open field. Here she is approached by another man: "He was a very fine old gentleman with quite white hair, but his voice was what I should know him by amongst a thousand. It was not high, nor yet low, but full, and clear, and kind, and when he gave orders it was so steady and decided that everyone knew, both horses and men, that he expected to be obeyed" (30-31). It is this man's simple speech that brings Ginger back to her senses.

A number of theories have been advanced as to how and why *Black Beauty* has come to hold its place as the sixth best-selling book in the English language. Many theorize that the simplicity of the story is the key to its success. Sewell's language has a no-nonsense quality to it, a style that Chitty identifies as "pared to the bone" (224). It is not great poetry, but it can be powerful prose, displaying as it does a kind of rugged

determination not at all out of line with the concept of “muscular Christianity” being championed by such figures as Charles Kingsley at the time of Sewell was composing *Black Beauty*. In fact, as Bruce Haley notes, Kingsley’s ideal of the “muscular Christian” was closely allied to Herbert Spencer’s idea of the “good animal”—a particularly fitting image for the character of *Black Beauty*. When Spencer was exhorting his fellow Englishmen to become “a nation of good animals” Haley believes that Spencer had in mind a particular “embodiment of moral and physical toughness, [. . .] an ideal in himself and a symbol of national prosperity” (72). Though Haley looks to the writings of Matthew Arnold, George Eliot, and George Meredith for the ideal of the “healthy man,” Sewell too was writing of this character—with the difference that her healthy ideal was as healthy as a horse. *Black Beauty*, with his glossy coat, fine manners, cool head, and heroic strength and endurance, epitomizes the model Victorian male. As the ultimate good animal, *Black Beauty* represents, in a sense, the perfect Englishman of Sewell’s day. And yet he is more than a symbol of the ideal Victorian male, for he also embodies the real experience of the idealized Victorian female.

Sewell was raised in the Quaker faith, and so she may well have believed that Englishwomen could embody a moral ideal as easily as Englishmen, for as Elizabeth Isichei points out, within the Quaker circle “the powers open to women were so large compared with their restricted role in other religious—or, for that matter, secular—organizations in Victorian England, that they deserve to be regarded as one of the most striking elements in Quaker organization” (107). In fact, Sewell herself in many ways represents what Isichei calls “the single, the childless, and the widowed figure prominently in Quaker philanthropy” (217), who performs charitable works for emotional

fulfillment. Sewell was not a widow, but she was single, childless, and an invalid—she fits the profile. Writing at a time when women's bodies were being disciplined by some of the most restrictive fashions in the history of dress, Sewell, as a Quaker woman, must have known the inconvenience of the Quaker bonnet as well as the confinement of the corset and hoop, for as Chitty points out, the Quaker bonnet was *de rigueur* wear for the faithful on Sundays, and the bonnet itself functioned for the wearer as a kind of blinder, for “the brim was stiff and formed a funnel round the wearer's face which thus became invisible in profile” (63). The wearer must have felt very much like a blinkered horse, just as the bound victim of the corset might feel very much like a horse wearing an extra-snug girth, or tightened breeching. These are very personal discomforts, which call for a personal response. And certainly Sewell's interest in animal rights aligns perfectly with Quaker interest in social causes, among which the R.S.P.C.A. and the anti-vivisection movement feature prominently (Isichei 219).

Quakers were also active in anti-slavery movements. It only makes sense then, that when Sewell gives Black Beauty the power of speech she creates a text that speaks as strongly against the abuse of humanity as it does against the abuse of animals. It is no accident that when the book was first published in America its subtitle was changed from *The Autobiography of a Horse* to *The Uncle Tom's Cabin of the Horse*. Black Beauty's story has often been read as a kind of slave narrative. It's a natural enough comparison, for as Morris suggests “the secret of equine appeal is that it [the horse] slaves for us while still looking noble. It is our humble servant even though it has the demeanour of an animal aristocrat. The mixture is magical. If such a dignified beast is subordinate to our will, then we must indeed be masters of the world” (2). Slaves, like women and children,

also have an “other” voice and an “other” view not taken into account by Cartesian perspectivalism. All these groups are held at a distance from the privileged site of the “I” or “eye,” and have been held so deliberately. As Ferguson sees it “*Black Beauty*, then, systematically generates a counter-sentiment about its supposed economic and cultural reality—how ‘things are’—by positing a number of cultural sites from which people and animals speak. By inflecting the text with tropes from the discourse on slavery, Sewell injects it with a dual vision. The oppressed possess both voice and agency” (47).

I will consider *Black Beauty* as an anti-slavery text more thoroughly in the following chapter; for the moment, it may be worthwhile to pause and note that the multi-layered significance of Black Beauty’s name. Although the horse is given many names over the course of his story, beginning with Darkie (which certainly has racist connotations) and ending with Old Crony (suggesting a kind of equality), the name he eventually returns to, and the name which is given to his story, is Black Beauty. Black, as Peter Stoneley points out, is more than just a signifier of race; it is also a favourite colour with the Quakers, representing dignity without pride and grace without showiness (65-66). The term Beauty suggests something quite different. Firstly, it feminizes the horse. Although it is common in equestrian circles to call a male horse a beauty or to praise the beauty of his movement, among humans beauty is usually reserved for females— attractive males are called handsome. The name Beauty calls into question Beauty’s status as a sexual animal, particularly when you reflect, as most readers have, that the horse is probably a gelding since he is of mixed, and therefore not particularly valuable, bloodlines and is required to work in double harness with female horses. Secondly, by naming her horse Beauty, Sewell draws attention to the moral character of the horse.

“Handsome is—that handsome does,” quotes Farmer Thoroughgood as he tries to sell a rehabilitated but still sadly broken-down old Beauty to a trio of maiden ladies (235). The familiar phrase reminds one that, as Audrey Jaffe notes, many Victorian writers were concerned with the question of whether or not beauty is definable only in moral terms (164). While on the surface Sewall seems to accept this counter-aesthetic proposition, it is worth noting that *Black Beauty* is, in its way, an identity drama in which the “real” character of the hero under a variety of disguises is continually being revealed. Jaffe suggests that Victorian identity dramas reveal the extent to which identity remained, in the minds of both writers and readers, an aesthetic category (165). Beauty is beautiful, therefore he must be good. As Beauty’s good looks deteriorate through age and abuse, marking his body a site on which, to use Jaffe’s words, “experience accumulates like capital” with “each mark rendering experience visible, denoting a site at which something happened” (174), Beauty himself loses his financial, if not his moral, worth. Experience is ugly, and so Farmer Thoroughgood feels compelled to explain it away, asserting that the animal retains an inner value at odds with his outward appearance. As every good horse trader knows, damaged goods are hard to sell.

When Black Beauty and his friends protest that their masters view them as mere horseflesh, their indignation resonates with other literature of the era decrying the devaluation of humanity, particularly of the working man. As Jerome Meckier points out, both Elizabeth Gaskell in *North and South* and Charles Dickens in *Hard Times* question the thought processes that reduce factory labourers to “hands” (50). Black Beauty has no hands, but he has feet and flesh, and to many of his masters that is where his value lies. Meckier also latches on to the passage in *North and South* in which Margaret, in defense

of her brother, declares that “Loyalty and obedience to wisdom and justice are fine; but it is still finer to defy arbitrary power unjustly and cruelly used” (Gaskell 107), pointing out that here Gaskell “spells out the rules for rebellion” (75). Sewell, too, believes there are times when rebellion is justified. Merrylegs, for instance, is smugly self-righteous when he rebels against his juvenile masters, calling, in effect, an equine work stoppage.

Although *Black Beauty* initially disapproves of what he sees as Ginger’s bad temper, her rebellion in the face of the intolerable oppression of the bearing-rein is titled, tellingly, “*A Strike for Liberty*” [emphasis added], and when at the last Beauty remarks to Ginger that “You used to stand up for yourself if you were ill-used,” (192) it is with the sense of a fine quality lost. Meckier maintains that “Read in light of one another, *Hard Times* and *North and South* stand for the competition between utopian and dystopian elements that subsequently characterizes much so-called realistic Victorian fiction. The novels are a dispute between two conscientious social analysts, one of whom hopes for the best while the other anticipates the worst” (85). Read in the light of both *Hard Times* and *North and South*, *Black Beauty* seems to have a hoof in both worlds. Beauty, through most of his journey, travels hopefully, but towards the end of his story he has given up looking for horse heaven and is happy to settle for “a quiet genteel place [. . .] where he will be valued” (233). Ginger, who begins her journey expecting the worst from everybody, gradually loses “the watchful, defiant look that she used to turn on any strange person” (36) only to end with “a hopeless look in the dull eye” (191). The world of the Victorian horse, as portrayed by Sewell, is neither utopia nor dystopia, but a little bit of both. England might be hell for horses, according to Robert Burton, but Sewell sees it as a sort

of purgatory—a state from which things could get better just as easily as they could get worse.

Clearly, Sewell was interested in reforming the treatment of working horses. What is not so clear is whether or not she wrote *Black Beauty* with the idea of reforming society in general. Chitty believes that Sewell had no particular interest in the lot of the working man, while Lansbury argues that Sewell was not content to accept injustice in the world and, through *Black Beauty*, “Sewell contrived to make a number of subversive and radical statements about work as a condition of life” (70). Lansbury sees the fact that “Black Beauty finds it far more enjoyable in the meadow with his mother, and his training, the breaking-in to a life of work, is a painful ordeal” as evidence that “Sewell did not regard work as the natural avocation of man” (70). Comparing *Black Beauty* to a later work, Robert Tressell’s *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* (1914), Lansbury draws parallels between the two, noting that the animals in the one novel and the workers in the other share the same powerlessness under the abuse of uncaring masters (82). The similarities run even deeper than this. Tressell’s characters often liken themselves to beasts, and one of them carries around a newspaper clipping which he feels encapsulates his situation. The clipping contains a parable which opens with the line: “‘I wish I could open your eyes to the true misery of our condition: injustice, tyranny and oppression!’ said a discontented hack to a weary-looking cob as they stood side by side in unhired cabs” (263). The parable which follows is anti-socialist propaganda miles away from Sewell’s message, but the dialogue itself might have been cut from *Black Beauty*’s pages. Furthermore, Lansbury notes that when Sewell pairs the pathetic death of Ginger with that of the driver Seedy Sam, she demonstrates a Tressell-like sympathy for Sam: “Rather

than denounce Sam for cruelty, Sewell condemned society for its callous disregard of any interest save its own" (73). It is this sensitivity to the concept of justice, Lansbury says, that helped make *Black Beauty* "as popular with working-class readers as it was with the rich, for the responsibility for brutality towards animals is not made the result of the innate callousness of the poor, but that of the insensitive and intemperate of all classes" (74).

There can be no doubt that *Black Beauty* is a class-conscious creature. Even among equines, there are aristocrats and the lower orders, as Beauty's mother informs him when she notes that "The colts who live here are very good colts, but they are cart-horse colts, and, of course, they have not learned manners" (2). Culture, in *Black Beauty*, is expressed in form as well as in action. Even when he has fallen on hard times, Black Beauty still appears to the informed observer as one with "a deal of breeding" who "might have been anything when he was young" (230). While in *Black Beauty* the animal world, like the human, is divided into social strata, there is no sense that one class is necessarily inferior to the other. Beauty mixes happily with horses of all classes—his friends include a children's pony, a retired hunter, a cob used for light hauling, a country-bred mare, and a decommissioned military mount. In this way, Sewell's sense of class is markedly different from the kind Jennifer Brody identifies when she notes that one way that upper class Victorians distanced themselves from lower class Victorians was to label the lower orders as animalistic. "The analogies made between the poor and pigs, between enslaved black bodies and unruly beasts, between apes and the Irish—did a disservice to all at the same time that it served to protect certain (mostly white male) individuals from contamination," Brody insists (138). Sewell was apparently not concerned about class



contamination. Black Beauty himself was, after all, not a purebred animal; though we hear nothing specific of his lower class connections, we are left to conclude that the grandmother who “had the sweetest temper of any horse I ever knew” was probably not the same sort of animal as the grandfather who “won the cup two years at the Newmarket races” (2) and the fact that Beauty and Ginger were “just as good for riding as we were for driving” may have had as much to do with the blood which remains unnamed as with the “racing blood in us” (43). Sewell clearly knows something about horse breeding and although she is shy about discussing the sexual nature of horses (she remains notoriously silent, for example, on the subject of Black Beauty’s probable gelding)<sup>3</sup>, her writing reveals a wide-ranging and thorough knowledge of practical horse care. As Chitty notes, “We may be sure that Anna’s interest in her pony did not stop at the stable door, for any lover of horses knows that their performance is directly related to their condition” (109). Furthermore, Chitty says, “Sweat and manure were not considered suitable subjects for ladies to discuss and even if a lady interested herself in horses she was certainly not expected to associate with grooms. Stablemen were considered the lowest of the low” (217). Therefore, Sewell’s decision to write a book specifically for the use of these men demonstrates both the strength of her commitment to charitable works in the name of animal welfare and her willingness to ignore the public restraints placed upon her class and gender in order to do so.

Compared to the children’s books being produced by her contemporaries, Sewell’s *Black Beauty* is both less didactic and less sensational than the standard fare.

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<sup>3</sup> See John Sutherland’s essay “Is Black Beauty gelded?” for a thorough discussion of this puzzle.

Haley identifies two distinct traditions in Victorian children's fiction, the "openly utilitarian story [. . .] which tried to encourage moral reflection by appealing not to fear but to reason" and "the darkly pious stories of unhappy lives and happy deaths [. . .] where the only joy is religious joy" (158-59). *Black Beauty* partakes of both of these traditions. Sewell's primary strategy is to reason her readers into agreement with her moral stance, but she is also willing to resort to pathos to drive home a point; thus all her reasonable advice on the humane treatment of horses reaches its climax with the death of Ginger through cruelty and neglect. Haley observes that in the religious children's tales "the life of a child is so troubled that when it is over for him [. . .] the reader feels a warm relief" (159). The reader experiences a similar emotion at the death of Ginger, though that relief may also be mixed with astonishment and rage, as it is for Beauty when he exclaims, "Oh! if men were more merciful, they would shoot us before we came to such misery" (193). In this sense, Anna Sewell's work differed significantly from her mother's more traditional books of moral conduct. As Lansbury notes, "If Mary Sewell preached resignation and contentment, there are a number of voices in *Black Beauty* which contend with each other for the reader's attention, and often rage against the existing social order" (96-97). Yet the very qualities that made *Black Beauty* different from its contemporaries are also the qualities that have allowed the story to outlast them. Chitty points out, quite correctly, that *Black Beauty*'s companions in Jarrold's catalogue of improving books are today as "dead and forgotten as the works of Mary Sewell herself" (241). Chitty goes on to observe that, of the many humanitarian books produced during the nineteenth century, only Kingsley's *The Water Babies* and Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* are still read today and "of these two one suspects that the former survived not because of its

good intentions but because it belongs to that timeless category, the fairy tale” (241).

*Black Beauty*, by contrast, was never meant to be read as a fairy tale, though to eyes familiar with today’s publishing practices, the first edition of *Black Beauty* has the look of a children’s book. Of course, this assessment must be largely based on the much-maligned practice of judging a book by its cover. The cover of the original edition of *Black Beauty* features the head of a pleasant, friendly-looking horse (clearly domesticated as he is shown wearing a bridle), surrounded by stylized flowers and vines. It’s a pretty thing. The evidence suggests, however, that Victorian readers in general were not averse to pretty things. Victorian periodicals—the staple of every literate home—were extensively illustrated. So were copies of sheet music, playbills, and newspapers. *Black Beauty*’s illustrations, minimal as they are, should not alone have been sufficient to mark the text as a children’s book.

It seems strange now, considering the hundreds of illustrated editions of *Black Beauty* that exist, to realize that the original *Black Beauty* contained only two illustrations—the pleasant cover and the unpleasant frontispiece picturing a wounded and exhausted Beauty standing with his head down overlooking the corpse of his rider, Reuben Smith. Stranger still is the fact that variations of this peculiar drawing turn up time and time again in illustrated editions of the text. The fact that Jarrold’s artist chose or was commissioned to depict this particular scene out of all of Beauty’s adventures seems to me typical of the peculiar Victorian fascination with the macabre and suggests that the image represents a defining moment in the text. *Black Beauty*’s cover design, by comparison, seems elementary and naïve. The sophisticated adult reader of today might also find Sewell’s prose style elementary and naïve. It must be remembered, however,

that Sewell's intended audience was the busy, and probably under-educated, working man. The fact that the short, simple narrative structure Sewell used to reach this audience is also a style well-suited to children may be just coincidence, or it may also reflect a reality of the working world in the late nineteenth-century—the fact that many of the people who were in charge of taking care of horses were children. Again, I wish to stress the fact that Sewell did not write *Black Beauty* specifically as a children's book. It just so happens that many of the readers she had in mind for her book may well have been working children—at least, children with the literacy level of Beauty's groom James Howard, who went to a school for “farmers' sons and labourers' sons” (60).

Black Beauty and his friends have many encounters with working children, both good and bad. As examples of good children Sewell gives readers the adolescent groom James Howard, who learns to treat the abused Ginger with kindness rather than returning blow for blow; the stable boy Joe Green who injures Beauty through ignorance but afterwards learns to be “attentive and careful” at his work (88); Harry and Polly, who help cab-driver Jerry Barker take care of his horses; the anonymous coster-boy, a “king of drivers” (197) whom Jerry admires for his cheerfulness at work; Grace, a traveller's daughter who urges her father not to overload the cab that Beauty is hauling; and finally Farmer Thoroughgood's grandson Willie, a more responsible version of Joe Green who seems to combine the best of all the good children's qualities in effecting Beauty's rescue and rehabilitation. For bad children, we have the ploughboy Dick, who throws stones at the colts and loses his job as a result of his misbehaviour; Vicar Blomefield's children who have to be tossed off Merrylegs before they realize he is not a steam engine to go on indefinitely; the boy Bill, with “the Devil's own trade mark” on him (61), who is also

tossed off a pony he is abusing; the child Filcher, who helps his father steal Black Beauty's oats; a "strong rough boy" (194) who mercilessly beats a pony pulling an overloaded cart; and a speed demon of a butcher's boy who pushes his horse to the point of exhaustion. The forces of good are in this way balanced by the forces of evil, and young horsepersons reading the book are encouraged to identify with the good forces and shun the bad.

Children are still encouraged to read *Black Beauty* for its moral lessons, but Black Beauty's voice has a power to persuade that goes beyond mere morality. After viewing a recent video version of *Black Beauty*, one in which the first person narration is maintained, Pierson writes, "Anna Sewell's story could not have the effect it does—on me, on all my millions of childish compatriots—but for one literary device: the first person. And it is hearing the voiceless suddenly speak that makes me sweat and tremble, panic rising, until to save myself (because I can do nothing to save them) I must switch it off" (246). The true secret to *Black Beauty*'s success in this regard is, I think, the directness of the horse's voice. Sewell's talking horse stands apart from his successors by the way in which he unapologetically launches into his narrative. So many other writers writing in the first equine singular seem to feel compelled to justify their technique by constructing an artificial context in which their tales can be told. This is one of the many things that makes Marshall Saunders' *Beautiful Joe: An Autobiography*—published in 1894 as the result of a contest sponsored by *Black Beauty*'s first American publisher, George T. Angell, to find a successor to *Black Beauty*—a much lesser work than *Black Beauty*. *Beautiful Joe* is a dog story, not a horse story, but the species of the protagonist is not the problem here—the problem is his voice. Beautiful Joe's voice is unbelievably

pretentious and all-knowing. He has the power to understand human speech, reasoning, and emotions, for he begins his story by commenting that

I am an old dog now, and am writing, or rather getting a friend to write, the story of my life. I have seen my mistress laughing and crying over a little book that she says is a story of a horse's life, and sometimes she puts the book down close to my nose to let me see the pictures.

I love my dear mistress; I can say no more than that; I love her better than anyone else in the world; and I think it will please her if I write the story of a dog's life. (14)

The story continues on in this vein right to the bitter end, when Beautiful Joe dismisses his readers with the lines "Now I really must close my story. Good-bye to the boys and girls who may read it; and if it is not wrong for a dog to say it, I should like to add, 'God bless you all'" (304). The style is cloying but, as Chitty notes, "It is understandable [. . .] that Joe won a prize from Mr. Angell for he devoted his 266 pages to barking out advice on the care of animals from cows to canaries, much of it culled from Mr. Angell's own writings" (243). Peter B. Kyne's *They Also Serve* (1927), the tale of a survivor of the First World War, similarly begins with Kyne's horse hero justifying his tale two ways: first, he notes that "Were I a man instead of a horse I would write it and call it my autobiography, because in my story I am going to include everything of any importance that has ever happened to me" (1); and secondly, he reports that he is going to tell his tale because his stable mates have asked him to, and "I'm to start in at the beginning and just ramble along in my own way, and if I get boresome or appear to brag or gild the feathers of fact with the fur of fancy, they can stop me" (5). Kyne's narrator, a horse named

Professor, is frequently interrupted by his auditors as he tells his tale, so that readers are never allowed to forget that they are listening to a horse talking to other horses, a device that serves only to maintain the readers' distance from the text. *Black Beauty's* voice speaks directly to the reader without interruptions and without excuses. There is no pretence of a horse recording his memoirs or delivering a lecture to his friends and fellow creatures. *Black Beauty* simply starts speaking after the manner of an interior monologue, and a reader coming to the story without any previous knowledge of it would have to read through to the second paragraph, to the point where Beauty begins to talk about learning to eat grass, to realize that the "I" of the story does not belong to a human being. Robert Lawson's *Mr. Revere and I* (1953), the story of a British military mount who becomes a reluctant recruit in the American revolutionary struggle, follows Sewell's elegant example by maintaining, for the most part, the direct, unmediated voice of the horse. Lawson's equine protagonist, Sherry, has no actual or implied audience, and appears to be telling her tale to no one in particular. But Lawson, nevertheless, feels compelled to open the narrative by excusing the story, having Sherry exclaim, "Would that some understanding historian could relate my story fittingly, but there being none available I must make shift to tell in my own way the trail of events resulting in my vastly changed estate" (4). The exclamation fits the character, since Sherry starts out as a snobbish aristocrat and only slowly learns to appreciate the common American colonials she was sent to help control; however, it undermines the truth of her tale.

Even texts that attempt to pick up *Black Beauty's* story where Sewell left off are prone to this sort of artifice. Phyllis Briggs' *Son of Black Beauty* (1954), described by the publisher as a book in which "the art of the storyteller has been enlisted to produce what

Black Beauty the horse could not—a son” (6), opens with Beauty’s son, Stardust, explaining

Many of my worries and hard times came upon me because I was wild and headstrong. I imagined that I could please myself all the time, which is good for nobody, men or horses. It is for this reason that I want to tell all young colts starting out in life all about myself, so that they can keep out of some of the troubles I found. (9)

Similarly, the 1978 story collection *Black Beauty’s Family*, by Josephine, Diana and Christine Pullein-Thompson, begins with a forward by Pot Black, “Black Beauty’s great-great-great-great [sic] nephew,” who claims that

The three stories discovered by my late sire, Black Abbot, and published under the title *Black Beauty’s Clan* brought a great spate of letters from horses believing themselves related to Black Beauty and a deluge of hoof-written manuscripts.

Checking the authenticity of these relationships and life stories has been a heavy task, but I am now in a position to set a further three bona fide autobiographies, written by members of my extraordinarily talented family, before the public. (7)

Now this may be charming, but its net effect is to position the text as something not to be taken seriously. Sewell, with her *Translated from the Original Equine*, also revealed that as an author she had a playful side, but once into the body of her text she expected to be taken seriously, for she had serious issues to discuss. There is a great difference between a talking horse, like Pot Black, and a horse with a voice, like Black Beauty. One is an



unnatural, imaginary animal, and the other is an animal whose nature has been imagined.

The difference is in the subtlety of the writer's style.

In his introduction to the 1992 Oxford University Press edition of *Black Beauty*, Peter Hollindale heaps great praise upon Richard Adams' 1988 novel *Traveller*, a story of the American Civil War as seen through the eyes of General Lee's horse. Hollindale claims that "*Traveller* has a subtlety in such narrative techniques that was beyond Anna Sewell's compass" (xxviii), and indeed, in *Traveller*, there is much to praise. As Hollindale notes, Adams is a master at using the horse's "naïve observational perspective" for ironic effect (xxvii). Particularly haunting is *Traveller*'s perspective on war. Hearing that he is going to war, *Traveller*, quite naturally, imagines that war is a destination, rather than a hostile operation:

I'd come to have quite an idea in my own head what this here War place was gonna be like. First off, it must be a mighty fine place, a whole lot finer'n where we was living now. That stood to reason—why else would the men be so all-fired hankering to go there? (28)

*Traveller* goes on from here to describe his vision of war as a kind of rural paradise, full of grass and trees, food and shelter, equine companions and human friends. He closes his reverie by saying, "What I couldn't really make a guess at was whether it would be far to the War—a short road or a long'un. I still don't know the answer to that, Tom, 'cause o' course, as I'm gonna tell you, we never got there. We never did" (29). This is a powerful piece of writing, more poignant, in its way, than Sewell's approach to the same subject, when she has the old warhorse Captain comment that "the enemy must have been awfully wicked people, if it was right to go all that way over the sea on purpose to kill them"

(163). And yet Adams keeps his readers at arm's length from Traveller's narrative by giving Traveller an audience that, like the Professor's audience in *They Also Serve*, keeps interrupting the story. In Traveller's case, even the implied audience is remote from the story, for the Tom that Traveller is speaking to is a cat, and so readers are constantly kept aware not only that they are listening to a horse talking, but that he's talking to another species.

It's interesting to note how often writers other than Sewell resort to the horse's voice to tell war stories—*They Also Serve*, *Mr. Revere and I*, and *Traveller* all employ the equine viewpoint primarily for this ironic perspective on one of the most human of endeavours. John Hawkes' *Sweet William: A Memoir of an Old Horse* (1993), on the other hand, purports to be a modern day *Black Beauty*, and on the surface the story follows the pattern of *Black Beauty* as it traces Sweet William's story from colthood to old age through many changes of ownership and occupation. Sweet William suffers, but unlike *Black Beauty* he revels in his misery and methodically plots his revenge, all the while conscious of his own misanthropy. In this sense, Sweet William's story is much more like another horse story composed around the same time as *Black Beauty*—Leo Tolstoy's short story "Strider: The Story of a Horse" (1861-86)—than it is like *Black Beauty*. Strider is also the story of a horse who wallows in self-pity and learns to loathe people: "Suffering for the pleasure of others is nothing new to me. I have even begun to find a certain equine pleasure in it," he says (587). Rather than being written entirely in the first person, Strider's story is framed by observations spoken in the voice of a dispassionate third person narrator. Ironically, this technique increases the emotional impact of the story, for it allows Strider to die while the third person voice stands back

and concludes his story with the line “The whole burden of his life was eased” (623). Mark Twain uses a similar technique in his 1906 short story “A Horse’s Tale.” “A Horse’s Tale” highlights the contrasts in human attitudes towards animals, telling the story of a prized cavalry horse who falls into the wrong hands and is fated to die a painful death for the amusement of spectators in a bullring. Twain’s story opens with the horse’s voice, but the narrative is told through many voices and from many points of view, and the horse’s death is related second-hand, in a letter from one observer to another. As a humane parable, it is in the end less effective than its companion piece, “A Dog’s Tale” (1903), a tale of human ingratitude written, like *Black Beauty*, entirely from the animal’s naïve point of view. Hawkes’ Sweet William, like Tolstoy’s Strider, is anything but naïve. He is aware that he is addressing a set of readers. Sweet William’s story begins with a “Gentle Warning” to readers which appears to promise to keep them out of the tale:

If convention and reassurance are what you must have, then stop and spare yourself unsettling surprise. But if you are not easily aroused to indignation, and if you are prepared to set aside familiar expectations, then persist, walk on, ride to the end, and in the adversities of this horse’s life find yours. (9)

But when Sweet William concludes his story, it is clear that he has been aware of his audience all along, for he asks, “Well, my dears, have I succeeded in demonstrating that dignity does not always come to a harsh end? I hope I have” (269). Sweet William means his tale to be instructive and, read in the light of the ending, the opening can be seen as the horse referring to himself in the third person, addressing his readers directly as

a preface to his story. Such distancing devices are hardly necessary, however—the fact that Hawkes writes his story with an equine voice but a human viewpoint is already sufficient to create a sceptical space between the “I” and ear.

*Black Beauty* offers its readers a different perspective in every sense of the word. The viewpoint character of the novel, the “I,” is not a human, but a horse. Thematically, the story encourages a broadening of perspective by arguing for the prevention of cruelty through the workings of empathy. As a work of children’s literature, it is remarkable for the clear-eyed and often surprisingly unsentimental approach Sewell takes in her presentation of the social problems of her age. Sewell made her mark in literature by identifying so closely with the horse that she was able to convincingly create a voice for it, to perceive the world through its senses and to express its perceptions as if they were her own. Her clearly incredible fiction thus has a ring of truth to it, a paradox made possible through the extraordinary—almost equine—sensitivity of a highly original author.

## Chapter Two

### American *Beauty*: A Good Horse is Never a Bad Colour

*Black Beauty* arrived in America in 1890 without passport or pedigree. Anna Sewell's old black gelding had been kicking around England for 13 years before he made the transatlantic crossing, but his arrival seems to have come as something of a surprise to the American reading public. A copy of the book found its way into hands of Massachusetts Humane Society founder and president George T. Angell who immediately recognized in the story a vehicle for his work. As Susan Chitty explains:

Angell had been anxious for some years to find a book that would do for horses what *Uncle Tom's Cabin* had done for slaves. "Many times," he wrote in his introduction to *Black Beauty*, "have I called the attention of American writers to this matter and asked them to undertake it. At last the book has come to me: not from America but England." (224)

According to Chitty, within 12 days of receiving the book Angell had the text electrotyped, and a pirated edition of 10,000 copies hit the streets of Boston. Angell's subsequent marketing of the book resulted in sales of over one million copies during the first two years of its publication (Chitty 223). The Americanization of *Black Beauty* involved few major changes to the text, but the changes that were made were culturally significant ones. All in all, Angell's alterations produced an American *Beauty* that was materially, textually, thematically, psychologically, and philosophically distinct from its British progenitor—truly, a horse of a different colour.

The first edition of *Black Beauty*, published by Jarrold and Sons of London in 1877, became a bestseller in England soon after its publication and by the time Angell's

edition came out in America it had already sold over 100,000 copies. Perhaps the most noticeable difference between the first British edition and the first American one occurs in the material packaging of the story itself. You can't judge a book by its cover, perhaps, but it is not impossible to read something of the publisher's intentions in what lies outside the pages. Angell's editions of *Black Beauty* were cheap-looking affairs. He made them so deliberately. For Angell, *Black Beauty* was not so much a novel as a tract, and his purpose was not to launch it as a literary sensation, but rather to get it into as many homes and hands as humanly possible. Thus, he used cheap paper stock, cheap binding, and cheap printing processes. The book was apparently distributed widely free of charge, but payment for copies was also encouraged. Readers of the American *Black Beauty* could hardly fail to miss Angell's somewhat evangelistic appeals for funding. Angell's *Black Beauty* carried a heavy load of advertisements for many things that Angell had to sell, from subscriptions to the Humane Society newsletter *Our Dumb Animals* to memberships in the Band of Mercy (a Humane Society club for children), but *Black Beauty*, too, was on the market, as Angell made clear in his introductory chapter:

I would be glad to have each reader of this paper, *who has ever loved or cared for a horse*, send me as large a check as he or she can afford, to be used in the distribution of this book. (Angell 6)

The italics are Angell's. He used italics liberally throughout his version of the *Black Beauty* text, in this way putting a distinctive stamp on American editions of the book for many years to come. A survey of books held in the *Black Beauty* Collection, Archives and Special Collections at the Thomas J. Dodd Research Center, University of

Connecticut Libraries reveals that American editions of *Black Beauty* continued to replicate Angell's italics until well into the 1920s.

Angell appears to have used italics for three purposes: to emphasize an emotional outburst, to make an ironic comment on the text in the italics, and to draw attention to those points he considered most important in the text. Angell italicized 129 passages in his edition of *Black Beauty*. That total of 129 includes only 16 passages also italicized in the original British edition published by Jarrold. All the rest of the italics in Angell's *Black Beauty* are Angell's own innovations. Of these, I believe that 35 passages are italicized for emotional emphasis, 10 make an ironic comment, and 68 draw attention to important points. All of the italics that originated in Jarrold's first edition of *Black Beauty* fall into the first category—italics for emotional emphasis. Jarrold's use of italics is spare and discreet; usually only a word or two in a sentence is stressed, as in "*Only* ignorance! *only ignorance!* how can you talk about *only* ignorance?" (86). Angell retained this italicization, but also placed in italics the following line, "*Don't you know that it is the worst thing in the world next to wickedness?*" (Angell 92), where Jarrold's copy goes back to plain text. Here, I think, Angell begins to use italics to draw attention to something that he considers to be an important point.

Reading Angell's italics carefully, it is easy to see how much of the text seems to have struck him as relevant animal rights rhetoric. The important points that Angell italicized tend to be either those that offer advice for practical, humane horse-keeping, or those that stress some kind of religious or moral teaching. A typical italicization is this from chapter 10, "A Talk in the Orchard": "John said he thought *it would a good thing if all colts were broken in without blinkers, as was the case in some foreign countries*"

(Angell 54). Here Angell is clearly stressing the point that carriage horses do not wear blinkers in all countries, and emphasizing Sewell's suggestion that young horses be trained without them, without any particular emotional content or ironic comment implicit in the statement. Similarly, Angell italicizes the line "*if it [religion] does not teach them to be good and kind to man and beast, it is all a sham*" (Angell 67) in chapter 8, "The Devil's Trade Mark," to make a moral point that supports his humane work.

Angell's use of italics for extra emotional emphasis might be seen in the following passage from chapter 5, "A Fair Start": "*I had never heard that before, and so poor Rob Roy who was killed at that hunt was my brother!* I did not wonder that my mother was so troubled" (Angell 27). Here the italicized phrase has nothing to do with horse-keeping or moral instruction, and is not particularly ironic; instead Angell seems to have chosen italics to emphasize the shock that this news of a kinship with the dead horse might have had for Black Beauty. Compare this to the more ironic tone of the italicized passage from the description of "The Hunt" in chapter 2: "*One of the huntsmen rode up and whipped off the dogs, who would soon have torn her [the hare] to pieces. He held her up by the leg torn and bleeding, and all the gentlemen seemed well pleased*" (Angell 13). While this passage does relate peripherally to the concept of the humane treatment of animals with which Angell was engaged, the words themselves do not offer any particular practical or moral advice. Instead, they seem to have been emphasized because of the irony implicit in them in light of the horror of the situation.

Another addition Angell made to the text of *Black Beauty* can be found in "An Alphabetical Index of *Black Beauty*" prepared by James A. Blaisdell of Beloit, Wisconsin, and placed in the forefront of Sewell's story. At first glance it may appear



that Blaisdell's index refers to the sections of the text italicized by Angell, but in fact the two only occasionally align. Blaisdell's index refers the reader primarily to instances of veterinary and horse-keeping advice contained within the text of *Black Beauty*, including "Exercise, necessity of," "Stones in hoof," "Thrush," "Watering," and "Whipping" (Angell 2). Included in this list is an entry on "Horse-balls, Birtwick,"—a curious entry since the "Birtwick balls" are not medicine at all, but a recipe made up of "*patience and gentleness, firmness and petting, one pound of each to be mixed up with half-a-pint of common-sense*" (Angell 43). Blaisdell's index also rather intriguingly points the reader to one of Sewell's few overtly political statements: "Cab licenses, exorbitant."

The index in Angell's *Black Beauty* is followed by Angell's introductory chapter, written especially to introduce American readers to the book. The chapter itself is a skittish kind of thing, jumping from subject to subject as if the author could not contain his enthusiasm for either this work or his cause. Indeed, the sense of enthusiasm for the work is infectious, and yet there is a somewhat disturbing tone of intense evangelism in the words, particularly as Angell states that he "wishes to put a copy [of the book] *in every home in America*" (Angell 6). And Angell is not above telling his readers how to read the book. His two-sentence summary of the plot of *Black Beauty* will no doubt dog the book for the rest of its days, as variations of it appear again and again on book jackets and in library catalogue listings: "It is the autobiography of an English horse, telling of kind masters and cruel, of happiness and of suffering. *I am glad to say that happiness predominates and finally triumphs*" (Angell 5). Compare this to the summary of the book in the on-line catalogue of the *Black Beauty* collection at the University of Connecticut archives: "A horse of nineteenth century England tells his life story from his early home

through many masters and experiences, both good and bad.” It is not just Angell’s perception of the plot, with its focus on Black Beauty’s changing masters, which has remained influential—it is also his interpretation of the book as a story with a happy ending. Partly because the book is now firmly fixed in the minds of many as a children’s classic, its ending is assumed to be happy. But an attentive reader like Coral Lansbury will note a melancholy wistfulness in Sewell’s carefully crafted ending—an ending that puts question marks rather than periods into the mind of the reader:

*Black Beauty* ends on a note of perilous uncertainty; always working longer hours for less feed, the horse finds himself at last in the care of Miss Ellen and her sisters. He is recognized by Joe Green, his old name restored to him, and he is cared for and groomed. All seems well except that we know how uncertain life can be for a horse, particularly one with broken knees and the weight of years upon him. So the concluding line carries with it an anxiety for the future which comes from knowing Black Beauty’s past: “I have now lived in this happy place a whole year.”

(Lansbury 72)

Of all the italics that Angell added to the text, perhaps the most curious is the final passage he chose to italicize, which occurs shortly after the line Lansbury quotes in chapter 49, “My Last Home”: “*My ladies have promised that I shall never be sold*, and so I have nothing to fear; and here my story ends” (Angell 245). The passage Angell has chosen to italicize here does not fit neatly into any of the categories I have already identified—it does not offer advice, is not wrought with strong emotion, and is not explicitly ironic. However, I have added it to the total of italics signifying irony, because

it seems to me that *Black Beauty*'s history to this point in the novel has shown time and time again that human promises cannot be trusted, and no horse is ever free from the threat of being sold. So, whether Angell realized it or not, the passage he italicized at the end of his book is one that contributes to the destabilization of the novel's "happy ending."

In the Jarrold edition of *Black Beauty*, the supposed happy ending might well be seen to be compromised by a rather unhappy beginning. The only illustration that accompanies Jarrold's text is a frontispiece—a heavily shaded woodcut showing an exhausted Beauty standing, with his head hanging down, over the corpse of the man who ruined him. The scene is taken from chapter 25, "Reuben Smith," an episode located roughly in the middle of Sewell's 49-chapter novel. Angell's *Black Beauty* has considerably more illustrations than Jarrold's first edition, but none of them are direct illustrations of any scenes from the text. Those on page iii may come as a bit of a shock to a modern reader, particularly one who thinks of *Black Beauty* as a children's tale, for Angell's page iii is an illustrated text on the art of "Killing Animals Humanely." Line drawings of the head of a horse and a long-eared dog show the ideal spots for placing bullets in the brains of these animals, and an unillustrated section below these drawings offers advice on the most efficacious way to kill unwanted cats. Further on in the text, two illustrations in chapter 8, "Ginger's Story Continued," show head studies of horses in harness. One is entitled "Happy Horse—No Blinder or Check-Rein" and illustrates a rather plain but happy horse (Angell 39). The second, entitled "Cruelty," compares a diagram of a horse wearing a bearing- or check-rein to a diagram of a swan-necked bird with its head held back by a similar device—apparently an attempt to illustrate the

concept that aristocratic beauty cannot be forced (Angell 40). To balance these rather horrific images, Angell's text also contains a picture of a small dark horse wearing a side-saddle on the title page (Angell 1), and, just after the end of the story on page 246, an illustration entitled "One of Black Beauty's Friends," which shows a little girl approaching a large horse in a stall (whether the girl or the horse is the friend in question is not clear). Angell's illustrations are, in this way, either sweeter than Jarrold's (the side-saddle horse and "Black Beauty's Friend" are both calm, pleasant-looking animals), or much more severe (as in the drawing which represents a horse's head as a target, or the diagram of the horse as a creature enduring cruel torture). The somewhat Gothic gloominess of the Jarrold's frontispiece is entirely missing in this text—what is illustrated in Angell is either black or white with no hint of shadow.

One of the most notable changes Angell made to the text of *Black Beauty* was to give it a new subtitle. In place of Sewell's rather cumbersome *His Grooms and Companions. The Autobiography of a Horse. Translated from the Original Equine by Anna Sewell*, Angell offers *His Grooms and Companions. By A. Sewell. The 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' of the Horse*. In his introductory chapter, Angell expands on this theme, declaring that he has seen in Sewell's text "a book which shall be as widely read as 'Uncle Tom's Cabin,' and shall have as widespread and powerful influence in abolishing cruelty to horses, as 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' had in the abolition of human slavery" (Angell 5). It's interesting to note, however, that by replacing the subtitle "*The Autobiography of a Horse*" with "*The 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' of the Horse*," Angell is, in effect, altering the voice of the novel. It is still written from the point of view of a horse, of course, but the emphasis is now on the tale as a slave narrative, rather than on the tale as an

autobiography. And autobiography, as Jacques Derrida notes, is a powerful form of writing. In “The Animal That Therefore I am (More to Follow)” Derrida writes, “Autobiography becomes confession when the discourse on the self does not dissociate truth from an avowal, thus from a fault, an evil, an ill. And first and foremost from a truth that would be due, a debt in truth that needs to be paid off” (390). The fact that *Black Beauty* was designed as an autobiography, albeit a fictional one, suggests that the novel might also be read as a confession, for we have only Beauty’s own word for the “truth” of his narrative. As confession, though, the text becomes problematic. Margaret Blount, for instance, has some problems with the effectiveness of the first-person voice in *Black Beauty*. She finds that it weakens, rather than strengthens, the power of the novel:

The inwardness of dog, cat, or horse, the desire to describe what its life is really made of from the inside, seems to have occurred to no one. The best that could be imagined was to put a human self into the animal with results that were moral, stiff, sometimes unhappy. The method has a brilliant success in a novel like *Black Beauty* but brings with it a special pleading that is morally suspect. (245)

How much simpler and more acceptable, then, is Angell’s scheme of making a slave narrative out of the book. Reading the novel as such, one need not be concerned with truth of the story; one only needs to be captivated by it.

In truth, Angell actually alters the text of *Black Beauty* very little, most of his changes being such as are imposed on many books which make a transatlantic crossing, that is, the replacement of idiosyncratic British terms with equivalent American ones. Thus the “bearing-rein” becomes the “check-rein” throughout Angell’s text. The most

telling change, however, and one that has for many years set the American text apart from the British, occurs in the very first paragraph of the very first chapter. Describing his early home, Sewell's *Black Beauty* notes that "at the top of the meadow was a plantation of fir trees, and at the bottom a running brook overhung by a steep bank" (1). These features of the landscape are important ones, for they play a role in the drama of "The Hunt" in the second chapter, during which "a hare wild with fright rushed by, and made for the plantation" (5) while a horse and rider come to grief at the brook and bank. In Angell's text, however, and in most American versions of the tale which followed Angell, *Black Beauty* begins life on an estate where "at the top of the meadow was a grove of fir trees" (Angell 9) and "a hare wild with fright rushed by, and made for the woods" (Angell 13). It seems that even though Angell saw *Black Beauty* as the *Uncle Tom's Cabin* of the horse, he was not prepared to let his little black horse begin life on a "plantation."

Perhaps Angell simply thought that this term, like "bearing-rein," would be unintelligible to his American audience. It seems more likely, however, that Angell anticipated the American reader linking the term "plantation" to the idea of a southern slave-holding estate. Since a "plantation" might also have connotations, particularly to the northern American readers who constituted Angell's initial market, of an evil or unsavoury place, and Sewell's text stresses a kind of nostalgia in her horse for the place where he "used to lie beside my mother in the green pleasant meadow" (117), perhaps Angell also felt compelled to replace "plantation" with "grove" and "woods" in order to preserve the sanctity of Sewell's conception. Whatever the reason, the change was a significant one, for American editors of the text seem to have followed it slavishly ever since.

Angell's branding of *Black Beauty* as the *Uncle Tom's Cabin* of the horse begs a thematic comparison of the two novels. Harriet Beecher Stowe's 1852 narrative on the abuses of the slave system had a firm place in the American public imagination by the time Angell began publishing *Black Beauty*. Ever since Angell, a comparison of the two novels has become almost standard practice in American criticism of *Black Beauty*, as opposed to the British practice of reading *Black Beauty* in relation to class issues. Few of Sewell's personal letters and diaries survive, so we cannot say for certain that Sewell either read or approved of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, but given the novel's fame it seems unlikely that Sewell, brought up like Stowe in the Quaker religion, would have been unaware of its message. Robert Dingley, for one, suggests that Sewell's and Stowe's books bear "a more than coincidental resemblance" (242) to one another, but he does not go so far as to suggest that Sewell was in any way mimicking Stowe. In fact, Dingley's argument is that *Black Beauty* is finally less successful as a social problem novel than *Uncle Tom's Cabin* due to differences between Sewell's style and Stowe's. He writes:

It is extremely doubtful whether Angell realized quite how fully the relationship between the two books might be pursued, but it is doubtful too whether he recognized quite how misleading it finally is. Stowe's novel, after all, is premised on the absolute moral imperatives for slavery's abolition; *Black Beauty*, conversely, derives from an inflexible assumption that the subjection and exploitation of horses must, indeed should, be perpetuated. *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, to misappropriate one of Blake's infernal proverbs, is a tyger of wrath; *Black Beauty* is only a horse of instruction. (250)

In terms of style, both *Black Beauty* and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* are often categorized as sentimental novels. Melissa Holbrook Pierson argues that the categorization of a novel as sentimental often indicates its dismissal as a work for women and children, both traditionally conceived as voiceless and powerless entities in nineteenth-century society. For Pierson, sentimentality is, ironically, the glue that holds society together

for without it we would leave our children hungry in the streets and our babies tied to tables to learn (for science is civilization minus compassion) how long it takes them to expire from neglect. As the British critic Brigid Brophy, who has the knack of seeing this clearly, has written: "Whenever people say, 'We mustn't be sentimental,' you can take it they are about to do something cruel. And if they add 'We must be realistic,' they mean they are going to make money out of it.'" (162-63)

However, where Pierson adopts the term sentimental, Carol Adams recognizes a useful distinction between sentiment and sentimentality:

To be sentimental is to identify, in a limited and limiting way, with the victim and with innocence lost. [. . .] It also enacts a controlling patriarchal response that believes in the necessity of avenging anyone under men's protection in a way that recalls white men "avenging" white womanhood by lynching black men.

Sentiment, genuine concern, enacts feminist ethics; it understands what brought about the victimization, and does not ignore our own complex roles within the structures of social oppression. Our goal cannot be to



paternalistically advocate for and avenge the “innocent,” but to think systematically about the politics of domination. (83)

Judged by Adams’ criteria, the sentimental status of both *Black Beauty* and *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* must be called into question. Both novels identify with the victim, but both are also more concerned with drawing attention to the social circumstances that bring about that victimization than with raising a rallying cry for vengeance. Winifried Fluck comments that “in talking about the sentimental in literature there is an apparently unavoidable tendency to be stuck with one of two choices: either to criticize sentimental fiction as a text that fails, or to explain and defend it by recovering its former cultural function” (320). Critics of *Black Beauty* tend to see it as text that fails—at least, as one that fails to capture adult attention—while *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* is regarded as having had a useful cultural function; it is popularly credited as the book that started the American Civil War. Curiously, Fluck credits the success of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* to Stowe’s technique of constantly repositioning her readers, letting them view the story alternately as one of the oppressors and one of the oppressed. “If *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* would have to rely on the narrator’s power of persuasion alone,” Fluck writes, “it would remain a form of mere preaching” (326). *Black Beauty*, by contrast, is written entirely in the voice of the oppressed. By Fluck’s logic, this should make it by far the more powerful novel, for its uncompromising narrative technique relegates its reader to what Fluck calls “the stance of a helpless onlooker who can only compensate for his or her own helplessness by an intensification of emotional involvement” (327). In fact, twentieth-century rejection of the sentimental novel may have its basis in a patriarchal unwillingness to accept the stance of the helpless onlooker of the nineteenth-century. Gregg Camfield writes:

It is [. . .] too facile to blame sentimentalism for its own unpopularity in twentieth-century intellectual circles, for sentimentalism came under concerted attack by many self-styled promoters of the best in American letters. Culturally, the neopuritans who worked in the shadow of social Darwinism had little compassion for compassion. They found sentimental emphases on community and self-sacrifice antithetical not only to the survival of the fittest but to the survival of high culture. How much of this was fed by and in turn fed misogyny is difficult to say, but by the time [George] Santayana began attacking American culture, sentimental womanhood frequently served as scapegoat [. . .]. (343)

*Black Beauty* is a fascinating cultural work precisely because the story of the horse can be read as the story of so many of society's "others." Though on the surface it is, as Sewell wrote it and Angell marketed it, an animal rights text, beneath the surface it speaks for several strata of oppressed people. Angell certainly seems to have seen the parallel with slavery, which can hardly be missed. Both *Black Beauty* and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* are first and foremost narratives of lives lived in bondage and servitude. As Peter Stoneley points out, "Horses, like slaves, were gagged, bound, and whipped. And like Africans, they were subject to a schizophrenic discourse in which they were either gentle and childlike or dangerously lacking in restraint" (67). Neither *Black Beauty* nor *Uncle Tom* represents the "dangerous" condition of blackness. The titular characters, horse and man, are both portrayed as gentle, uncomplaining, self-denying slaves—a fact which leads some readers to scorn them and some to pity them but perhaps just as many to empathize with them, as Sewell and Stowe no doubt intended. Beauty and Tom share a

similar perception of their place in the world. “Mas’r always found me on the spot,—he always will. I never have broke trust, nor used my pass no ways contrary to my word, and I never will,” says Uncle Tom, when he learns he is to be sold away from his family (59). Black Beauty’s philosophy, passed down to him from his mother, is that “a horse never knows who may buy him, or who may drive him; it is all chance for us, but still I say, do your best, wherever it is, and keep up your good name” (14). Even though there is something suggestive of slave trading as well as horse trading in the way Beauty is bought and sold, Beauty puts up with the indignity and does not cause a fuss. At the horse fair, Beauty notes:

The first thing was to pull my mouth open, then to look at my eyes, then feel all the way down my legs, and give me a hard feel of the skin and flesh, and then try my paces. It was wonderful what a difference there was in the way things were done. Some did it in a rough off-hand way, as if one was only a piece of wood; while others would take their hands gently over one’s body, with a pat now and then, as much as to say, “by your leave.” Of course I judged a good deal of the buyers by their manners to myself. (148)

Though both Stowe and Sewell clearly sympathize with attitudes such as these which accept oppression, these are not the only possible responses that the authors imagine or endorse.

In George Harris, Stowe created a slave who dares to stand up for his rights. Though he initially tries to work within the system, for George there is a line beyond which he will not be pushed. “What right has he to make a dray-horse of me?—to take

me from things I can do, and do better than he can, and put me to work that any horse can do?" asks George of his master when he rebels (24). Sewell's equivalent to George is the pony Merrylegs, a "rogue" (38) with a solid sense of self. "I have only been giving those young people a lesson, they did not know when they had had enough, nor when I had had enough, so I just pitched them off backwards, that was the only thing they could understand," explains Merrylegs when he is reprimanded for throwing his "masters" off his back (38-39).

Sewell's troubled mare Ginger has counterparts in several characters in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. In *Black Beauty*, Ginger is Beauty's mad double for, as Moira Ferguson notes, "If Black Beauty is a projection of the oppressor's preferred passive other, Ginger is a fiercer alter ego who invites contestation" (40). In that sense she may be most closely allied with the rebellious slave Cassy from *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, a parallel Stoneley observes when he notes that "in keeping with *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, in which Cassy is saved by Tom's encouragement, Ginger is given a new start by Beauty's example" (66). However, as a horse admired for her "beautiful arched and glossy neck [...] clean straight legs and delicate fetlocks" (191) and ruined by those who wish to possess that beauty, Ginger bears more than a passing resemblance to Stowe's beautiful quadroon slave Eliza. As Dingley explains:

The dispiriting truth that Ginger has derived from her experience—"men are strongest"—is a double-edged one. Her status as a horse means of course that "men" are to be understood primarily in a generic sense, as human beings, but her simultaneous career as female slave (whose

chestnut coloring even suggests the mixed ancestry prized by Southern investors) also lends the word more than a hint of gender-definition. (243)

And yet in the end, the character from *Uncle Tom's Cabin* whom Ginger comes to resemble the most is the old slave Prue, who longs for death in the midst of all St. Clare's luxury. Compare Prue's first words:

"O Lord! I wish't I's dead!"

"Why do you wish you were dead?" said Miss Ophelia.

"I'd be out o' my misery," said the woman, gruffly, without taking her eyes from the floor. (330)

with Ginger's last: "I wish the end was come, I wish I was dead. I have seen dead horses, and I am sure they do not suffer pain. I wish I may drop down dead at my work, and not be sent off to the knacker's'" (192-93). Needless to say, both Prue's and Ginger's wishes are granted.

But the equine and slave characters are not the only ones who fall into parallel structure in Sewell's and Stowe's novels. Horse masters and slave owners, too, can be matched voice for voice. John Manly, the kind coachman who recommends "patience and gentleness, firmness and petting" (37) as the cure for bad-tempered horses, finds his match in Augustine St. Clare, who claims he once broke in a recalcitrant slave by "quite a simple process. I took him to my own room, had a good bed made for him, dressed his wounds, and tended him myself, until he got fairly on his feet again'" (362-63). On the other hand, St. Clare's assertion that "I can't turn knight-errant, and undertake to redress every individual case of wrong in such a city as this. The most I can do is to try and keep out of the way of it'" (341), runs directly counter to the conclusion of *Black Beauty's* Mr.

Wright that “if we see cruelty or wrong that we have the power to stop, and do nothing, we make ourselves sharers in the guilt” (186). Sewell’s buyers of horses, who handle Beauty “as if one was only a piece of wood; while others would take their hands gently over one’s body, with a pat now and then, as much as to say, ‘by your leave’” (148), can be paired with Stowe’s buyers of slaves who “intending to purchase, or not intending, as the case might be, gathered around the group, handling, examining, and commenting on their various points and faces with the same freedom that a set of jockeys discuss the merits of a horse” (515). Stowe’s Simon Legree, who “don’t go for savin’ niggers. Use up, and buy more, ’s my way,—makes you less trouble, and I’m quite sure it comes cheaper in the end” (526) is paralleled by Sewell’s Nicholas Skinner, whose plan is “to work ’em as long as they’ll go, and then sell ’em for what they’ll fetch, at the knacker’s or elsewhere” (228). And Mas’r George, who arrives at Legree’s just too late to save Tom, crying, “Oh, dear Uncle Tom! do wake,—do speak once more! Look up! Here’s Mas’r George,—your own little Mas’r George. Don’t you know me?” (646) finds his echo in Joe Green, who, in finally recognizing Beauty, asks, “Why, Beauty! Beauty! do you know me? little Joe Green, that almost killed you?” (236).

Ferguson notes many other parallels between *Black Beauty* and *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, including depictions of the disruption of the family unit (38), the “seasoning” of slaves through systematic abuse (38), the significance of slave names (38-39), plantation gossip (39), and the cruelty of aristocratic women (47). For Ferguson, as for Angell, reading *Black Beauty* as a slave narrative seems natural, even something that Sewell might have intended on a thematic level. Such a reading, however, leads inevitably to a

comparison of the two texts on a psychological level—a situation the practical-minded Angell probably did not foresee.

Stoneley, for instance, theorizes that both Sewell and Stowe give voice in their novels to conflicting desires to both embrace and restrain what he calls the “primitive other,” symbolized by the black male animal (56). As he explains, “To write about blackness, then, was to write about desire. But to write about blackness was also to avoid desire altogether, for the black figure represents both sexual desire and childish innocence. There is the same contradiction between ‘dumb beasts’ and ‘the Beast,’ between the helpless and the wicked” (56). Stoneley notes how both authors focus on the black male body as a saleable commodity, pointing out that Stowe in particular “invites us as readers to desire and to consume the slave body, and her narrative gaze mimics the trade that it deplors” (59). Sewell does the same thing, however, always emphasizing the monetary value of Beauty’s body, which declines as his story unfolds. Both women write out of a commodity culture, in which the “goodness” of the servant is “defined in his availability for service” (Stoneley 60). As Stoneley argues, Stowe and Sewell “both show unruly ‘black desires’ being subjugated to white human discipline” (57). The authors seemingly have no problem accepting the necessity of discipline—it is cruelty, or the abuse of discipline, that they deplore. Dingley finds this more of a problem in *Black Beauty* than in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, for Sewell, he argues, can

seek only to emancipate the horse from a specific grievance within a generally acceptable system, and this necessitates an insistent foregrounding of the bearing-rein as an anomaly; once that anomaly has

been dealt with, the system of equine slavery by implication can revert to legitimacy.

In this respect, at least, *Black Beauty* might be viewed less as analogous to other examples of juvenile or tract literature than to those contemporary “problem” or “thesis” novels which center their narratives on the exposure of particular abuses in a society whose need can thus appear to be for limited, piecemeal reform rather than for radical transformation, and which confine themselves, in Charles Reade’s words, to “a few undeniable truths out of many.” (249)

Following Stoneley’s theory, in which black is tied to male, the more the black body is hybridized or “whitened,” the tamer, or more female, it becomes. This stretches analogic parallels between *Black Beauty* and *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, for in *Black Beauty*, not only does horse equal slave, but horse also equals woman. Again, Stoneley picks up on this analogy when he writes:

My argument has been to affirm that women’s writing contained emasculatory scenarios, but that this fact is more a sign of double-binds and lack of power than of women’s cultural domination. Following on from previous studies of the appropriation of blackness by whites, I used representations of blackness to show both white middle-class women’s position and their fear that desire is a chaotic and domineering force that corrupts Christian social authority. Because of this fear, these women saw desire more readily as male, and as racially other. (72)



Victorian women, Stoneley argues, identified strongly with animals, in a way that had much more to do with empathy than it did with sentiment. “Looking at late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century emancipation movements, especially in England, we often find that campaigners for women or for slaves were also involved in the cause of animal rights,” Stoneley points out (65). The conflation of abolition, animal rights, and female emancipation has its roots, Jennifer Brody argues, in the Darwinian discourse of the time, which changed the way that people looked both at animals and at each other. “In the nineteenth century, the classification of animals changed,” Brody writes. “During this period, animals, like women, were divided into two categories: domestic (owned) and wild” (136). Both Sewell and Stowe can be seen struggling with the concept of the wild woman. Independent female characters such as Ginger and Lady Anne in *Black Beauty*, and Eliza and Cassy in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, have their moments of rebellion and escape, but all are eventually punished for their rebellion, either “tamed” as Anne, Eliza, and Cassy are, or “beaten,” as Ginger finally is. Alexander Grinstein, in his psychological analysis of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, even theorizes that Stowe uses the character of Topsy, a “motherless, mischievous, provocative little Negro girl [who] asks to be beaten or whipped for her own good” as the mad double of her Little Eva. “It is quite likely,” Grinstein adds, “that the figure of Topsy represented the ‘negative’ or ‘bad’ aspects of the author’s own personality as she viewed them” (139).

This relentless disciplining of the wild woman also leads one to consider the texts in tandem as nineteenth-century manuals of child-rearing, for as much as Victorians valued and valorized the child, they were also intent on disciplining, taming, and civilizing children. This pushes the analogy one step further yet—the horse is to the

black slave as the black slave is to the white woman and the white woman is to the child. All occupy positions of powerlessness outside of the white male patriarchal culture. Though voiceless, they are perceived as threatening, and as such it is necessary to put them in their place. Horses do sometimes function as children in *Black Beauty*, as Sewell makes explicit when she has the old ostler remark, "Bless you! they are like children, train 'em up in the way they should go, as the good book says, and when they are old they will not depart from it, if they have a chance, that is" (68). Beauty's outlook on the world is childlike in its naïveté, but it is because of this childlike innocence, Sewell argues, that a horse ought not to be punished too harshly. Stowe says the same of slaves and children, with considerably more irony:

"Children always have to be whipped," said Miss Ophelia; "I never heard of bringing them up without."

"Oh, well, certainly," said St. Clare; "do as you think best. Only, I'll make one suggestion: I've seen this child whipped with a poker, knocked down with the shovel or tongs, whichever came handiest; and, seeing that she is used to that style of operation, I think your whippings will have to be pretty energetic to make much impression." (382)

Stowe also compares the breaking in of a child to the breaking in of a pony (414), deploring the violence used in both instances.

From theories about child-rearing, it's a relatively easy psychological leap to theories about child-breeding and indeed, both *Black Beauty* and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* reflect a certain cultural concern about breeding. Beauty is often reminded that he comes from a class above other horses: "You have been well bred and well born; your father has

a great name in these parts, and your grandfather won the cup two years at the Newmarket races,” Beauty’s mother, Duchess, tells him (2). Later, Beauty will say of himself, “Ginger and I were not of the regular tall carriage horse breed, we had more of the racing blood in us” (43). So, although Beauty is clearly not a Thoroughbred in the modern sense of the word, he is a horse of good breeding who allies himself with a thoroughbred line. Thus, as Stoneley notes, “Sewell, like Stowe, superimposes the social connotations of ‘breeding’ onto literal breeding or genetic inheritance” (67), and “that is why he [Black Beauty] is the hero and not one of the cart-horses or ponies” (70). To understand the significance of breeding in the nineteenth century, it is important to note, as Brody does, that

professional breeders, in response to patron’s demands and market pressures (some of which they helped to foster), were rewarded, while natural hybridization led to the production of mongrels—especially in animals. Indeed, scientific hybridizers or eugenicists thought that their man-supervised hybridizing could be beneficial to society; they frowned, however, on “brute” miscegenation as evil, as untamed nature mixed too promiscuously. Only white Englishmen were able to strike the proportionate balance between variation and stability. (137)

Here we can see the links between horse breeders and slave breeders, who, while claiming to value “purity” above all else, are willing to experiment with hybridity in response to market demands, whether for a fine-boned carriage horse (like Ginger) or for a fair-skinned slave (like Eliza).

All these readings of *Black Beauty* follow naturally from Angell's simple pairing of the text with *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. But Angell himself was not really concerned with finding the analogies between Sewell's work and Stowe's. His attention, as his italics indicate, was primarily focussed on the animal rights teachings in the text. Angell was interested in the work *Black Beauty* could do and to that end he saddled the text with his own unique philosophy. In several of the speeches he made to such bodies as the American Social Science Association, the International Congress of Educators, and the National Association of Superintendents of Public Schools, which he reprinted at the end of his edition of *Black Beauty*, he stresses the effect of humane education on the young. Of himself, he says, "Through over sixty years of my own life I can remember the songs and stories of my boyhood. *They have influenced my whole life*" (Angell 251). He points out that it is easy to interest children in animals and argues that the problem with American education is that children are not taught respect and kindness to animals (Angell 254). Calling himself an "advocate of the lower races" (Angell 257), Angell argues a position originated by Thomas Aquinas and still popular with humane societies today—that cruelty to animals leads to cruelty to humans, and as such is at the root of all crime (Angell 256). Aquinas himself, however, found "nothing morally objectionable in the animal's suffering as such" (Maehle and Tröhler 17). Arguing against the idea that it is a sin for man to kill animals, Aquinas merely advises that one ought not to be unnecessarily cruel to animals:

And if any passage of the Holy Scripture seem to forbid us to be cruel to brute animals, [. . .] this is either to remove man's thoughts from being cruel to other men, lest through being cruel to animals one become cruel to

human beings; or because injury to an animal leads to the temporal hurt of man, either of the doer of the deed or, of another; [. . .]. (10)

As if in response to Aquinas, one of the many humane subjects that *Black Beauty* tackles is the senseless cruelty of humanity's attempts to "improve" upon God's creations. In chapter 10, "A Talk in the Orchard," the horses discuss the human practices of docking the tails of horses and cropping the ears of dogs and ask, "What right have they to torment and disfigure God's creatures?" (46). Pierson observes similar practices going on at horse shows in the present day and formulates an answer to the question:

They [the show horses] are horses made to move in a way that imitates only the hyperbolic horse of legend—fiery, barely of this earth. If the tail doesn't assume the aspect of the wind-whipped stallion out on the steppes, why then break and reset it so it does. Right then and there I formulate my theories, and it is a good thing I have a notebook so as to record such magnitudinous revelations. "Underlying such transformations are two things: a (self)-loathing for the way things *are*, and the belief that human intervention is required by just about everything that doesn't have anything, really, to do with the human—the urge toward colonization." The sight appalls me, when it is supposed to entrance me with its grace. (184)

The mere fact that Pierson was able to write in the year 2000 about ongoing abuse of American show horses suggests that *Black Beauty* may not have had the large and lasting effect in America that Angell envisioned for it. *Black Beauty* is popularly credited with helping to speed the abolition of the bearing-rein on carriage horses in England. Its effect

on horsemanship in America is not so clear cut—a variation of the check-rein known as an overcheck is still used today in the sport of harness racing and by many Amish drivers. And the American Kennel Club still allows the cropping of dogs' ears, which has been banned by the Kennel Club in Britain since 1895.

Pierson argues convincingly that part of the problem people have had responding to *Black Beauty* is the enormity of its thesis. Once one becomes aware of the cruelty occurring all around one, it is possible to be paralysed by the sheer size of the problem:

While some may have found these particular animals worthy of pity, fewer felt it for the millions of equines in plain view carrying on with daily work, perhaps because if pity were to be felt for some, all would soon demand it, and life would clang to a halt. Every city, town, and village was clogged with horses pulling delivery wagons, refuse carts, carriages, traps and coaches, fire engines and streetcars and ambulances. The year 1916 saw fifty thousand of them dead in New York City's streets. (Pierson 31)

Pierson goes on to propose that part of the problem was that *Black Beauty* never reached its intended audience. Sewall wanted her book to be read as a manual of instruction for carriage drivers, but "*Black Beauty* soon became known as a children's book and children did not drive delivery wagons or fancy carriages. Moral concern for animals has long been considered the sole province of children, something to be grown out of eventually, and one probable reason is that we thus avoid having to sacrifice the expediencies that make daily life economical" (Pierson 32).

However it was that *Black Beauty* became a children's text, it does not seem to have been the fault of George T. Angell. True, Angell pirated *Black Beauty* and made

money off another person's work. True, when Angell Americanized *Black Beauty*, he altered certain material, textual, thematic, psychological, and philosophical aspects of the novel to suit his own purposes. However, the novel that Angell presented to the American public was still essentially a serious work, worthy of adult attention. The first known edition of *Black Beauty* adapted expressly for children was *Black Beauty Retold in Words of One Syllable* by Mrs. J.C. Gorham—but that's another story.

## Chapter Three

### Hobby-Horses: *Beauty* in the Eye of the Beholder

When considering the many variations of *Black Beauty* that have been crammed into bookstalls over the years, the temptation is strong to separate the original from the herd, brand it with the label of the “true” *Black Beauty*, and dismiss the rest as inferior stock. And yet, just as Anna Sewell gave Black Beauty a voice that spoke directly to the culture that created him, so all of the Beautys who have followed in his hoofprints have been given voices that communicate the concerns of their times and circumstances. The story that Sewell’s *Black Beauty* told of and to Victorian England is patently not the same story Angell’s *Black Beauty* told of and to a post-Civil War America. Similarly, the voice that Beauty used to speak to children at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is not the same as the voice he uses to speak to children at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup>. Even the vehicles Beauty has been harnessed to have changed, as Black Beauty has expressed himself in print, audio, and video media, as well as in interactive form in the guise of a game of chance.

*Black Beauty* retired to the nursery about the same time real horses began their retreat from city streets, their flesh and blood power being replaced by a new kind of horsepower in the automobile. Initially, the Industrial Revolution was envisioned as a god-send for horses, but as Peter Hollindale observes, Anna Sewell was imaginatively prophetic when she drew her readers’ attention to “the false equation between horses and engines, reminding us in the process that the historically recent arrival of mechanical engines had altered perceptions of horses for the worse” (*CLA* 109). Hollindale goes on to quote from *A Century of Work for Animals: The History of the R.S.P.C.A 1824-1924*, in which the authors note:



When railroads were first made it was suggested that horses would no longer be required. . . . When motor-cars were introduced the same cry was raised, but with each change the necessity for protecting horses has really increased, since they have, as it were, fallen from their high estate and are now looked upon by the majority as a cheaper, and therefore an inferior, form of traction. (Edward Fairholme and Wellesley Pain 239-40 qtd. in Hollindale 110)

In contrast to this unprecedented social change in the lives of living horses, the first dozen years in *Black Beauty's* literary life were relatively quiet ones. The text, in its original form, was a steady, dependable seller for its publisher, Jarrold and Sons, who brought out over 150 editions of the work in a wide range of prices and formats before their copyright expired. George T. Angell's American edition of 1890, which ignored Jarrold's copyright, was the first edition to really change the text, and, as I have already shown, Angell's most telling changes were additions to the text, rather than deletions from it.

American editions of the text that immediately followed Angell used Angell as their base text, preserving his italics and such Americanisms as "check-rein" for "bearing-rein" and "hostler" for "ostler." They also followed his lead in adapting the text to their own uses by adding to it, as opposed to subtracting from it. Notable American editions produced in these years include the 1891 J.F. Murphy edition, apparently produced for the reading pleasure of passengers on the Fall River steamer line between Boston and New York and chock-full of advertisements placed by Boston-based merchants of everything from lace (inside front cover) and liniment (1) to anti-Catholic essays (243) and cures for stammering (inside back cover); and the 1892 Frank Miller edition, which advertised

Frank Miller's Harness Dressing throughout the text and added to the book an article by Charles C. McBride entitled "Bad Country Roads," claiming that

In England, where "Black Beauty" was at home, the roads are always hard and smooth. There are no mud holes, no bogs, no loose rocks, no ruts, no broken places, no steep grades. [. . .] Had "Black Beauty" lived in the United States how eloquently might the noble beast have pleaded for better roads. (195-98)

This pattern of altering Sewell's text by adding to it was to change, however, when *Black Beauty* began to be adapted for children. In most cases, such adaptations are accomplished through a kind of textual gelding—a neutering of the more political aspects of Sewell's original story that Angell was a pains to emphasize. If, as Jerome McGann has theorized, "the entire history of a work is a fit subject for textual scholarship, and even posthumous changes by editors, publishers, friends and relations, are to be considered a perfectly valid part of the text read as a social construct," (Greetham 337) then it may be instructive to examine a selection of textual variations of *Black Beauty* in terms of both the stories they tell and the stories they are not telling, and to take a good look at just what gets cast aside each time *Black Beauty* encounters the editorial shears.

Just as the Americans were the first to adapt Sewell's text to their own culture and cultural agendas, so too were they the first to adapt the text for children. J.C. Gorham's *Black Beauty Retold in Words of One Syllable*, published in 1905, is the first adaptation that can be accurately dated, although Mary E. Blain's undated *Black Beauty: The Autobiography of a Horse. Rewritten for Young Readers* bears every appearance of having been produced at approximately the same time. Saalfield Publishing, too, released

a one-syllable edition of *Black Beauty* by Edgar Lee in 1905, but Lee's text is so different from Sewell's that practically the only things the two stories have in common are their names.

In order to adapt *Black Beauty* to the tastes of younger readers, Blain rewrites the story, as indeed the new title suggests, but, unlike Lee, she does not completely rework its theme. *Black Beauty Rewritten for Young Readers* is a 15-chapter story, with six illustrations from the text. Part of the rewriting Blain has done involves altering a few chapter titles, thus the main incidents from Sewell's chapters "Ginger," "Ginger's Story Continued," "Merrylegs," and "A Talk in the Orchard" are summarized in Blain's chapter 5, "My Companions." Sewell's chapter 12, "A Stormy Day," becomes Blain's much tamer chapter 6, "The Wooden Bridge," and Sewell's chapter 18, "Going for the Doctor," becomes part of Blain's chapter 8, "A Midnight Run," which also includes incidents from Sewell's "Only Ignorance" and "The Parting." This restructuring and renaming of chapters is a significant move, for, as Philip Stevick points out, "chapters in the nineteenth-century novel represent the segmentation of process [. . .] and the objectification of the anxieties of a culture full of stress" (183). Stevick notes that chapters in nineteenth-century novels were meant to represent "blows of circumstance" (182) and that chapter titles "set the symbolic limits of a chapter" (93). By compressing four chapters into one, Blain effectively elides many of Sewell's social concerns, and by changing a storm to a bridge she radically alters any symbolic significance that might be read into the chapter title.

The net effect of Blain's adaptation is to render Beauty into a rather simple-minded animal, concerned with telling his readers his life story, but without the wit to

offer an opinion on anything that has happened to him. Blain's closing line—"I have lived here a year and hope to spend the rest of my life in this happy place, where I am called by my old name 'Black Beauty'" (45)—differs strikingly in tone from Sewell's ending, and suggests rather oddly that Beauty is happiest at the end because he has regained his old name. It is perhaps worth pointing out here that most abridgements of *Black Beauty* end on a similarly upbeat note with Beauty remarking "My troubles are all over, and I am at home." In the original, this sentence continues "and often before I am quite awake, I fancy I am still in the orchard at Birtwick standing with my old friends under the apple trees" (238), introducing a wistful, almost mournful note totally missing in the abridged versions. By omitting this final clause, most adaptations are, in fact, subtly changing the tone of "perilous uncertainty" (Lansbury 72) on which the novel ends.

Gorham's text, *Black Beauty Retold in Words of One Syllable*, isn't exactly written entirely in words of one syllable—that would be impossible, considering that the hero's full name has three syllables. Gorham gets around such technicalities by hyphenating anything she can't reduce to a single syllable, thus Beauty is "Beau-ty" throughout, and his best friends are "Gin-ger" and "Mer-ry-legs, a po-ny" (10)<sup>4</sup>. Many of the ways in which Gorham works her way around multi-syllabic words are quite clever.

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<sup>4</sup> Gorham's adaptation of *Black Beauty* is advertised as one of 14 titles in "Burt's Series of One Syllable Books" (111), which include *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Gulliver's Travels*, both also adapted by Gorham. The one-syllable book was a popular educational tool in the early 1900s, and Burt was not the only publisher to adapt a string of classics in this manner. The theory behind all the hyphenation is that it would help and encourage children to sound out words, rather like phonics is supposed to work today. The alternative method of teaching children to read was by whole language system, which encouraged sight-memorization through repetition of a few simple words, resulting in texts that read rather like the Dick and Jane books of the 1950s. Gorham's text seems to draw from both schools of thought. Her simplified diction, though not particularly repetitious, does give a staccato rhythm to the work, while her few hyphenations are so simple that one suspects few children would have trouble making out the meanings of the words.

Sewell's chapter 3, "My Breaking In," would only require one hyphen to reduce it to single syllables, but rather than do that Gorham opts to title her chapter 3, "How I Was Taught to Work." Gorham's text has 33 chapters, as opposed to Sewell's 49, but though this may seem as if Gorham has retained a lot of text, in fact there are several significant moments missing. Chief among these are the missing episodes of the "Talk in the Orchard," introducing Justice, Sir Oliver, and the customs of docking and cropping, any mention of Captain and Hotspur, together with their stories of the horrors of war and the evils of drunk driving, the story of Seedy Sam, and Black Beauty's wrenching reunion with Ginger and his witnessing of her death. All these are incidents in the text that were meant to make the reader feel uncomfortable and to elicit empathy with the horse. Minor passages also missing include the identification of Rob Roy at the hunt, Mrs. Gordon's consideration of alternate names such as Ebony and Blackbird for Beauty and her groom's relief that she did not choose any foreign name like Abdullah or Marengo, James's theory of "the devil's trade mark," and Jerry Barker's responses to the election and his interactions with the gentlemanly Mr. Wright and the hard-driving butcher's boy. Like the major incidents expunged from the story, these minor incidents all represent uncomfortable moments in the text—places where Sewell may be perceived as getting a bit political, or preachy, or, in the case of Rob Roy, of attributing too human feelings to the horse. While John Manly's "only ignorance" rant is often considered political and preachy too, Gorham manages to tone it down by rendering it into single syllables, so that Joe becomes a "dull boy" (37) rather than a stupid boy, and John's reproof to Joe's father—"how can you talk about only ignorance? Don't you know that it is the worst thing in the world, next to wickedness?" (86)—is expressed as "How can you talk thus?

I tell you not to know what's right is one of the worst things in the world'" (39). As Ellen B. Wells and Anne Grimshaw note, "The abridgements of all decades tend to shorten or eliminate the 'controversial' chapters, those in which Black Beauty and his companions discuss their lives and their owners" (xxxviii); Gorham's adaptation is merely the first of many to take this approach.

Lee's 1905 adaptation for Saalfield, *Black Beauty in Words of One Syllable: An Adaptation for Little Folks of Anna Sewell's Autobiography of a Horse*, takes the hyphenation technique to an extreme, while at the same time altering the story of *Black Beauty* almost beyond recognition. The 40-chapter text begins with an explanatory note which is meant to elucidate the theory behind the adaptation. Signed "E.L.," this notice of authorial intention reads:

While some changes in characters and incidents have been made, this adaptation of "Black Beauty" retains, in their entirety, the lessons of humanity to our dumb friends, so successfully taught in Anna Sewell's "Autobiography of a Horse." It should prepare for greater enjoyment of the original when the Little Folks shall have become Grown-Ups [sic] (6)

In fact, any "Little Folks" familiar with this version of *Black Beauty* would be in for a shock if presented with the original, for the two texts share only surface similarities, and Lee's *Black Beauty* is in fact almost an entirely new story. In Lee's text, Beauty begins life on a Quaker family farm where he is called "Nig," and where he learns about two different styles of horse racing—harness racing, which is acceptable, and track racing, which is not. Beauty wins a harness race for the farmer who owns him before he is sold to Squire Gordon who "will not make a track horse of him. He is too good for such a

life" (19). At Squire Gordon's, Beauty becomes the favourite pet of the Squire's daughter, Miss Helen, who gives him his new name, causing Beauty to say that "it did not make me proud. I knew I was just the same horse as when Jack said 'Nig' or 'Dark-y' to me—they are yet his pet names, and I like them too" (19). Here Beauty meets Ginger, who has been abused, but Beauty interrupts her before she even gets started on her life story:

"I think I know how it was done," I said; "Let me tell you of my friend Dol-ly."

"Just the way they did to me," said Gin-ger, when I had told her my story. (26)

It is left to Sir Oliver to tell Beauty about the torture of the check-rein, as well as the pain and indignity of docking. Ginger and Beauty never become great friends in this story; instead, Beauty makes friends with a dog named Dandy. When Miss Helen falls ill and Beauty must be sold to a Mr. York in London, Dandy accompanies him on his journey, and it is Dandy's warning which saves Beauty from being trapped in a burning barn. In London, Beauty meets Captain, but that horse's stories are about slavery rather than war, for Captain has been to lands where slaves are kept.

After working for a while in Mr. York's livery stable, Beauty is put out to pasture to recover from a stumble, and here he is reunited with Ginger, who has been used as a plow-horse and has been foundered. When they recover, Beauty and Ginger are sold as a team to hack driver Jerry Barker, who calls Beauty "Speed" and Ginger "Swift" (67).

The two then have a tragic reunion with Sir Oliver, who runs his butcher's cart into Jerry's hack, killing Ginger/Swift and breaking two of his own legs, so that he has to be

shot. When Jerry falls ill after New Year's Eve, Beauty is sold to Andrew, who stands in for Sewell's Jakes in this story. The lady who rescues Beauty from Andrew's use of the check-rein just happens to be Miss Helen, whom Beauty recognizes, but who does not recognize Beauty.

The final episodes of Beauty's life stick closer to Sewell's pattern. Beauty is sold to Skinner, is overloaded, and falls down exhausted in the streets. Though Sewell's Beauty wishes he might "like Ginger, drop down dead at my work" (225), Lee's Beauty can make no such reference, for Lee's Ginger died by accident, not through abuse.

Instead, Lee's Beauty says,

I be-gan to wish I was dead and out of my mis-er-y. I, Black Beau-ty, who had al-ways been hope-ful and good na-tured, pa-tient and will-ing, now be-gan to know what de-spair could mean. You see I was fast break-ing down. Do you won-der at it? (85)

This passage demonstrates both Lee's one-syllable technique, which consists of simply hyphenating words as opposed searching for single-syllable equivalents, and Lee's tendency to directly address his readers as "you," a style of writing that Sewell always avoided. Like Sewell's Beauty, Lee's is rescued by a farmer and his grandson, rehabilitated, and sold to an old lady, who just happens to be Miss Helen, who also just happens to be Willie's aunt. The ending of Lee's *Black Beauty* has a wistful tone, but it is not quite the same note as Sewell's, for Lee's Beauty is a fighter for reform to the end of his days, and he closes his story by saying,

Some day, I hope, there will be no cru-el men in the world, but all will be gen-tle one to an-oth-er, and to the dumb brutes God had en-trust-ed to



their care. Perhaps this story of my life may help to bring that day. Then  
I shall be truly happy. (95-96)

It is worth noting that Lee's text, with its odd juxtaposition of Americanisms like harness racing and the casual racism of Beauty's first name against its insistence that Beauty lives near London and knows nothing about slavery, was used in many subsequent Saalfield editions produced over the next three decades, though often abridged and sans hyphenation. Around 1934, however, Saalfield adopted a new text, edited by Althea L. Clinton, which is much more faithful to Sewell's original.

Single-syllable books were a fad, but other adaptive techniques originating in the 1900s set the tone for many subsequent abridgements of *Black Beauty*. In the early 1900s, the M.A. Donohue publishing company of Chicago began publishing a series of *Black Beauty Young Folks' Editions*. So many of these slim, large format volumes were published, differing only in the cover illustration, that it is hard to imagine that any American nursery at the turn of the century would have been considered complete without one. The books all have attractive covers, but inside they are very dull affairs, printed on cheap paper and illustrated with a variety of muddy halftone prints seemingly chosen for inclusion because they feature horses, not necessarily because they illustrate any scenes from the text. Donohue's *Young Folks' Edition* uses Sewell's original text as copy, but excises great chunks of it, reducing the story from 49 chapters to 16. No effort is made to fill in the gaps in the story that result from this sort of editing. For instance, the episode involving the death of Reuben Smith is deleted, so how Beauty came to have the blemished knees that ruined his value and sent him on his downward social spiral is never

explained. It just happens. Young Folks were either expected not to notice, or not to care.<sup>5</sup>

Graham & Matlack of New York also published a child's edition of *Black Beauty* in the early 1900s. The Graham & Matlack books resemble the Donohue in size, shape, and variety of cover illustrations, but are distinguished inside by the fact that they are illustrated with pictures that are at least *inspired* by scenes from the book, in the sense that they purport to be pictures of Black Beauty, though, oddly, most of them illustrate Beauty engaged with a number of female riders and drivers, whereas in the text Beauty has relatively little to do with women. Harriet Fowler theorizes that many early editions of *Black Beauty* bore illustrations of fashionable women because they were marketed as much to women (and mothers in particular) as they were to children. Such illustrations, Fowler says, “hint at the then-contemporary cultural notions of women as ‘the tender sex’—the ones most sensitive to matters of charity and kindness, to whom this story of a horse’s treatment would be most meaningful” (35). Another oddity to note in Graham & Matlack illustrations is that Beauty is sometimes shown with a docked tail (which he did not have), no white foot, and a white blaze as opposed to a star. Sewell never clearly stated exactly which of Beauty’s feet was white—she just indicated that he had “one

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<sup>5</sup> Indeed, the hallmarks of *Black Beauty* adaptations of the early 1900s seem to be the deletion of large chunks of text with little concern for logic and continuity. The Reilly and Lee edition of 1908, illustrated by John R. Neill (best known for his illustrations of *The Wizard of Oz*), is typical in this regard. In order to compress *Black Beauty* into 33 pages, the story springs forward in tremendous leaps and bounds. Consider this passage, which directly follows a description of Beauty’s rescue from the stable fire:

Three years later Ginger and I were sold to Master’s old friend, Lord W—, where our lives were far from happy. Early in the spring I was turned out into the meadow, for I was gone in the knees. (28)

Where is the logic, or even the drama, in that?

white foot on the off [right] side” (236), which gives illustrators a choice of two, front or hind,—but considering that the white foot and the star are the marks by which the horse is eventually recognized, you might think illustrations would accentuate these features.

Alas, this has never been the case for *Black Beauty*. Illustrators throughout the ages have exercised considerable artistic license in their portraits of *Black Beauty*, changing not only his markings, but also his breed type, and even his gender, at will.

Between 1910 and 1920, the world went to war and children continued to be treated to curiously edited versions of *Black Beauty*. Perhaps the scene most frequently deleted in *Black Beauty* during these years is Captain’s Crimean War story, while *Beauty*’s rescue from fire by humans is included more often than his rescue of humans from the flooded bridge in the storm. Clearly, the heroism of human beings is being stressed in these retellings, while the wisdom of animals is suppressed. Horses as well as men went to war during these years, though they no longer represented a significant element of the army. Captain’s Crimea foretold the end of the warhorse as a fighting force. During the First World War horses and mules were primarily used as draft animals, but if their participation in the war lacked the romance of the cavalry charge, they died under fire all the same.

Oddly, an interesting change occurs in an edition of *Black Beauty* released prior to the First World War that gives it a more military flavour. In the New York Book Company edition of 1911, one of the “Our Young Folks Illustrated Books” series, Jerry Barker suggests naming *Black Beauty* “‘Jack,’ after the colonel—shall we, Polly?” to which Polly replies, as she has always done, “Do [. . .] for I like to keep a good name going” (103). The oddity here is that, always, up until this point, Jerry has suggested

naming Beauty “‘Jack,’ after the old one” (153) and the reader is left to assume that “the old one” is a former horse. Who exactly “the colonel” is is unclear, but he continues to make an occasional appearance in *Black Beauty* editions printed after 1911, apparently finding his source in this New York Book text.

Things begin to go much better for Beauty in the post-war years, when there appears to be a concerted effort among editors and adapters to sweeten and lighten Beauty’s story for children’s consumption. Publishers of the 1920s seem to have been less concerned with the story itself than the problem of how to package it properly. *Black Beauty*’s original publisher, Jarrold and Sons, clapped a new subtitle onto Beauty’s story with their 1922 edition, *Black Beauty: A Story of the Ups and Downs of a Horse’s Life*. This edition of *Black Beauty* is not an abridgement or an adaptation; it presents the original English text in full, but, like the earliest American adaptations, it is notable for the additions it makes to the text. Certainly the new subtitle alone is significant, suggesting as it does the “storybook” quality of the tale over Sewell’s choice of “autobiography.” This story is also prefaced with “An Appreciation and Life of the Author” signed by William Jarrold. This nine-page preface is almost laughably melodramatic, beginning as it does with “[. . .] the faint sun of a wind-swept March day was ushering into the world a girl-child whose pen was one day to be used to her own fame and to the generous service of promoting kindness to that noble animal, the horse” (9). Jarrold’s “Appreciation” closes with the assertion that “‘Black Beauty’ is read by the squire, his lady, their stablemen and boys; and it has taught them to love and care for horses more than any book every published” (17-18) and here again we have drama and

hyperbole emphasized over cold, hard facts. The story is granted an almost magical power, just as the author is given a near-mystical birth.

Another full text version of *Black Beauty* with interesting additions published around 1922 is the Grosset & Dunlap edition “illustrated with scenes from the photoplay,” meaning the Vitagraph Pictures film version of *Black Beauty* released in 1921. Although the text of this book is the standard American variation, with the only notable cut being at the end of the novel, where the text ends abruptly after “I have now lived in this happy place a whole year” (244), the story is counter-pointed by a synopsis of the movie story printed on the inside of the novel’s paper wrapper. This synopsis begins with the statement that “This story is the autobiography of Black Beauty, the most famous horse in fiction, who relates the chronicles of his daily life and the adventures that befall those around him.” The story that follows, though, bears even less relation to Sewell’s *Black Beauty* than Lee’s earlier adaptation for Saalfield. Here is the synopsis in full:

Lord Wynwaring and his family visit the Gordons, and His Lordship accepts a fund of \$4,000 [sic] for charity purposes, collected by Squire Gordon. During the night, Beckett, a rascally relative of the Wynwarings, enters His Lordship’s room and takes the money. He throws suspicion on the squire’s son, who has just been killed in a fox hunt, and obtains Jessie Gordon’s promise to marry him in return for his secrecy, although she loves the Vicar’s son. Her real lover discovers Beckett’s perfidy and has a wild race on Black Beauty to rescue the girl.

Jean Paige and James Morrison who play the leading roles in the Photoplay of this animal classic are both famous for their juvenile freshness and charm.

The plot is so bizarre that it gives one pause, but it is interesting to note that, if the character of Lord Wynwaring was in any way inspired by Sewell's Earl of W—, this photoplay represents the earliest known instance of another author coming up with a name to fill in Sewell's blank. Coming up with names to fill in the blanks is an adaptive trick which did not really become popular until child-friendly "read aloud" editions of *Black Beauty* began being published in the 1960s. In order to make the text friendlier to the child reader of the 1920s, editors typically concentrated on setting the story in a juvenile context. A McLoughlin Bros. edition of *Black Beauty* from the 1920s reduces the story to 17 chapters (no talk in the orchard, no storm, no fire, no war stories, no election, and no Sunday escape to the country) and packages the tale with a bundle of "Anecdotes of Animals" told in a believe-it-or-not style. A 1923 Saalfield edition, still using Lee's text but without crediting Lee, similarly links *Black Beauty* with a lot of little fairy tales, including "Rumpelstilzkin," "The Golden Goose," "Henny Penny," and "The Gingerbread Boy." Kids were supposed to eat this sort of thing up.

The trend of adaptations in the 1930s was towards greater authenticity and respect for Sewell's text, perhaps because the Dirty '30s, in sharp contrast to the Roaring '20s, ushered in a sombre and serious Depression in America and saw the rise of Hitler in Europe. I have already mentioned how Saalfield adopted a new *Black Beauty* text in 1934, one with much more resemblance to Sewell's original story than the Lee text, although it runs to only 14 chapters. Clinton manages to squeeze quite a bit into those

chapters, though, including such episodes as that from “Plain Speaking” in which Squire Gordon reprimands his soldier friend for using check-reins, Beauty’s job-horse experiences, and Jerry Barker’s response to “The Election”—all incidents more often omitted than included *Black Beauty* abridgements. The 1937 Harrap edition scores over competitors by including “Recollections of Anna Sewell” by Margaret Sewell, Anna’s niece. Unlike Jarrold’s earlier “Appreciation,” the “Recollections” have an air of authenticity, suggesting as Sewell’s niece does that “No one would have been more amazed or more incredulous than my aunt had she been told that her book would attain world-wide fame” (1). Margaret Sewell speaks of her aunt as “Mercilessly honest, she could not suffer the most innocent deception” (3) and says that “her faith was the very core of her being” (6). It is almost as if Margaret Sewell is searching for diplomatic ways to describe an aunt who was a tough as opposed to a tender person, and thus a believable human being rather than a saint.

The 1935 Appleton-Century edition of *Black Beauty* “edited to fit the interests and abilities of young readers” by Edward L. Thorndike alludes to Thorndike’s “substitutions and modifications” on the copyright page, making it clear that what is being presented is not the original story. Thorndike’s edition retains Sewell’s fourfold partitioning of the story and all 49 of her chapters, though four of the titles have been changed—chapters 13 and 24 are shortened to “The Devil’s Mark” and “The Lady Anne,” respectively, chapter 15 becomes “The Old Hostler” as in most American editions, and chapter 29 is changed from “Cockneys” to “City People.” Thorndike converts “hands” to “inches” in the chapter where Beauty mentions his height, and mentions that “a pound is about five dollars” when the Earl of W— complains about his “three hundred pounds flung away”

(145). The remainder of his changes seems to follow the same pattern, either omitting, changing, or explaining any terms that might seem distinctly English or peculiarly Victorian to Thorndike's American readers.

In the 1940s, after the world has gone to war once again, there is a marked shift towards emphasizing the educational qualities of *Black Beauty*. Unfortunately, the accuracy and fidelity that marked most of the '30s adaptations of the text do not carry through to the '40s retellings. An introduction to the text written by May Lamberton Becker that prefaces the World Publishing edition of 1946 is riddled with inaccuracies, including the statements that "The Sewells live in Yorkshire in the North of England" (they didn't), "There were a good many children" (there were two), and "She [Anna] began to write as easily as if she were talking" (the manuscript was completed slowly and painfully over a period of six years) (8-9). The 1940s also saw the first adaptation of *Black Beauty* to comic book form, in the first of two distinct texts that would be published by Gilberton in its Classics Illustrated series. The 1949 version, illustrated by August M. Froehlich, is prefaced by a statement that "Black Beauty was a good colt whose series of misfortunes began when he was four years old" (1). It is probably being overly picky to point out that this statement is not strictly true either. When Black Beauty was four he was sold to Squire Gordon, where he spent the happiest years of his life. His misfortunes began after his sale to Earlshall, when he was seven.

Froehlich's illustrations for *Black Beauty* show all of the humans in Beauty's life wearing 1940s garb, which makes the preponderance of horses in their lives look rather odd. Froehlich seems to have done this deliberately, meaning the story to be read as a contemporary tale, for when Beauty is sold to Jerry Barker we do not see illustrations of



London streets full of horse-drawn carriages, but rather a small, rather quaint-looking cottage with a sign on the gate reading "Cab for Hire," as if Beauty had been sold to work at a seaside resort (24). Perhaps because he is assumed to be living in a more enlightened age, the Classics Illustrated Beauty is called Blackie, rather than Darkie, as a foal. In a fit of post-war militarism, or perhaps because war comics had been such big sellers for rival publishers during the Second World War, Captain's Crimean experiences are highlighted in this text, although the idea that a horse who lived through the Crimean War would still be living in the late 1940s relegates the retelling to the realm of pure fantasy. The cover illustration for the comic book is of a cavalry charge, and Captain's story, told in flashback style, gets a double-page spread in the middle of the book. However, Captain's comments on the war are curiously edited. Where, in Sewell's text, he comments that warcraft is fine when it is just exercise and parade "but when thousands of good brave men and horses are killed, or crippled for life, it has a very different look" (163), in the comic book he says only "When it's real, it's very different" (28). One can only speculate whether the editors wished to avoid the reference to dead horses in order to maintain the illusion of the 1940s setting, or whether they just didn't know what to say about the war.

Another major change was made to *Black Beauty's* story in a 1949 retelling by Eleanor Graham Vance for Random House. The Random House edition puts itself forward as a serious scholarly endeavour "Prepared under the supervision of Josette Frank, children's book adviser of the Child Study Association of America" (2). The cover of the Vance version promises that "All the tenderness of Anna Sewell's beloved story of *Black Beauty* is preserved in this new picture-story adaptation (for ages 6 to 9)." Perhaps in order to "preserve" a "tenderness" that is difficult to discern in the original

text, Vance decided to rewrite *Black Beauty* in the third person—the first recorded instance I can find of this viewpoint shift. Vance's *Black Beauty* begins life with his full name, and never loses it. In fact, Vance draws attention to his name right at the start, writing “‘You are well-named, Black Beauty,’ the master said to him one day, ‘For you are as black as you are beautiful’” (9). The character of Ginger is considerably toned down in this book. Although she expresses her dislike of the check-rein, there is no strike for liberty at Earlshall, and after Beauty leaves Earlshall he never sees her again. In consequence, when the time comes when Beauty wishes for death, all Vance can write, rather unconvincingly, is “Poor Black Beauty! He was so tired that he wished he could drop down dead, and one day his wish almost came true” (58).

However weak Vance's third-person innovation may seem now, it became a popular technique used in retellings of *Black Beauty* for children in the 1950s. Considering that the 1950s are remembered as the era of the Baby Boom, when children and parents of children comprised the largest section of the Western consumer market, perhaps it is not surprising that so many simplified, sanitized versions of *Black Beauty* were being marketed to very young readers at this time. In 1952 Grosset & Dunlap issued a 20-page, third-person version of *Black Beauty* for their Wonder Books series, aimed at beginning readers. Not surprisingly, the condensation of a four-part, 49-chapter Victorian novel into a 20-page picture book necessitated some serious chopping of the tale. In fact, the Wonder Books version of *Black Beauty* bears so little resemblance to Anna Sewell's novel that the publishers haven't even put her name on the cover. She is, however, mentioned on the title page of the book which reads, “*Anna Sewell's Black Beauty:*

*Retold for Little Children* by Marcia Martin.” On the verso of this page is a small disclaimer of sorts reading:

This book is a brief and simplified retelling of the famous story BLACK BEAUTY, that captures the spirit and beauty of the original tale. It is especially designed for very little folk. When the little folk are a little older, they will want to read the whole wonderful story, many times longer than this, just as it was written by Anna Sewell. Grosset & Dunlap, New York, publish the complete and unabridged text, with beautiful pictures in color and black and white. (2)

The remaining 18 pages proceed with the story proper—or rather, improper—for despite the claim that the text “captures the spirit and beauty of the original tale” there is little in this story that Sewell would recognize as her own.

From all the crowded incidents of the original *Black Beauty*, Martin has chosen to focus her tale on the story of Beauty’s relationship with the stable boy Joe Green, possibly because Joe begins the novel as a child character (and so Martin hoped her readers would identify with him), or possibly because he is the one of the few characters from the early part of the novel who shows up again at the end. However, there are other story arcs in *Black Beauty* Martin might have chosen for similar reasons. Black Beauty’s experiences in London, for instance, are framed by his interactions with cab driver Jerry Barker’s children. And arguably the most significant character from the beginning of the book to reappear towards the end is Ginger, whose tragic story lies at the heart of the novel. None of these characters even appears in Martin’s retelling. Her choice of incidents reveals an editorial bias, in this case strongly in favour of the happy ending. This kind of editing is

distinctly different from that practiced in the early 1900s, when simply shortening the story was the goal. In the mid-'50s, as Gillian Avery notes, editors of many Victorian children's stories "winnowed the chaff from the grain—and threw away the grain" (8). According to Sewell, her aim in writing *Black Beauty* was "to induce kindness, sympathy, and an understanding treatment of horses" (Chitty 178). *Black Beauty: Retold for Little Children* glosses over the mistreatment of the horse to such an extent that Sewell's intentions get lost in the shuffle. The message of *Black Beauty: Retold for Little Children* is that sickness might bring misery, but happiness is just around the corner. Anna Sewell has often been accused of being sentimental, but even she didn't sell children such simple-minded pap.

Sewell's work was further emasculated in 1958 when Grosset & Dunlap's Treasure Books division reworked the text for a *Black Beauty Coloring Book*. Now, granted, a colouring book is not primarily a literary work, but since such a work may well comprise some readers' first or only exposure to the story, its textual alterations do bear some investigation. Unlike *Black Beauty: Retold for Little Children*, the *Black Beauty Coloring Book* contains no mention of the original author, no disclaimer, and no advice to seek out the original tale. Instead it leaps boldly into story on its second page with the line "When Black Beauty was very young he had great fun frolicking in a meadow with other young colts." Though this version of the story sets off closer to Sewell's starting point than Martin's version, it is also written in the third-person, denying Beauty his distinctive voice, although, as with Vance, he does get to go through the whole text bearing his signature name.

In selecting episodes from *Black Beauty* to include in a colouring book one might imagine Grosset & Dunlap's editors would look for episodes involving the most "colour," lest the book's young readers wear their black crayons down to nubs. Where Martin had only 20 pages to work with, the *Black Beauty Coloring Book* offers 64 pages, and though the text is confined to one or two lines per page, it still seems possible that, in 64 pages, the editors might have offered a least a glimpse of the diversity of incidents that characterize the novel. However, the *Black Beauty Coloring Book* concentrates, like the Wonder Book retelling, on the Joe Green story. Ginger and Merrylegs, a chestnut and dapple grey, respectively, are mentioned and illustrated on only one page of the book, and then are never seen again. There is no treacherous, storm-swept bridge for Beauty to refuse to cross, no raging stable fire for Beauty to be rescued from. There is no Earls Hall with its liveried stable hands and steeplechasing lords, no bright horse fair with its sights and sounds, no Jerry Barker navigating the streets of London, and very little London life. Clearly, however, the *Black Beauty Coloring Book* is neither about Sewell's story nor Sewell's message. It is about exploiting a famous name to sell pieces of paper. Though in its way more faithful to Sewell's original than Martin's retelling because it contains more of the incidents of the story, the colouring book also does the greater disservice to the original by squandering the many opportunities it has to be better than it is.

One more third-person variation of *Black Beauty* produced in the 1950s deserves mention for its bold declaration of its editing principles, which, similar to those that lurk behind Martin's retelling and the Grosset & Dunlap colouring book, are to make the book as palatable and pleasing as possible, given all the disturbing elements of the original text. Ozni Brown's 1955 retelling is packaged, amusingly, as one of the Happiness Story

Books published by Ottenheimer. The virtues of the Happiness Story Books are said to be as follows:

Each Happiness Story Book is handsomely illustrated. There is not a single page without a sparkling illustration in full color. Talented authors have combined their skills with the nation's foremost illustrators to produce a series of beautiful books that children everywhere will take to their hearts. (2)

Note that the emphasis is all on surface, not on content. Everything about Brown's *Black Beauty* is meant to be beautiful, including the story. And indeed, Brown's Black Beauty has a happy life. He starts out playing in "a green and pleasant meadow" (3) until he sold to Squire Gordon, who "taught the young horse how to hold a bit and wear a bridle" (4) without any resistance on the horse's part. At Earlshall, Beauty and Ginger "were treated well enough, but there was one careless groom" (13). It is carelessness that results in Beauty tripping over his own loose shoe—nobody drinks, and nobody dies. The most traumatic episode of Beauty's life occurs when he is sold to a baker who "overloaded his cart so much that the poor horse could scarcely pull it, and so he [Beauty] was sold again, this time to a cruel wagon owner who used Beauty even worse than the baker had" (29). Due to this unspecified cruelty, Beauty collapses and is sold on to his ultimate rescue, where "He had a happy home for the rest of his life" (26), which was doubtless no less than he deserved.

Editions of *Black Beauty* published in the 1960s, that era of peace marches and social protest, are notable for the attempts they make to be politically correct while at the same time disengaging readers from emotional involvement with the text. The emotion

that shines through Sewell's original story is not so much sentiment as indignation. As Coral Lansbury writes, "Quite clearly, what Anna Sewell saw around her was a world without justice, where merit went unrewarded and virtue was of no more account in the order of things than crime" (978). Sewell was quite serious in her attacks on what she saw as evil all around her. Adaptations of the text in the 1960s skirt around both the attacks and the evil, as if unwilling to be overtly political in an age when young people were becoming seriously interested in politics and civil rights. Grosset & Dunlap offered young readers a typical abridgement of the tale in 1962 with an oversize version of *Black Beauty*, adapted and abridged by Alice Thorne. Thorne's version of the tale is something between a picture book and a chapter book—an in-between book for in-between readers. It offers just over 50 pages of text, each page illustrated with mostly marginal drawings. At their largest, the illustrations take up only half of a page, so a good deal of space is devoted to what amounts to a rather dull story.

In order to encapsulate the story within this space, Thorne has condensed Sewell's 49 chapters into 14. Significantly, there is no mention of Beauty's yearning for liberty even in the comfortable surroundings of Birtwick Park, and the story of Ginger's brutal breaking-in, which occupies two chapters in the original, is lost between the lines "The man that had the care of us never gave me a kind word in my life" and "Everything he did was rough" (17). In the gap between these two lines Sewell wrote such things as: "one dragged me along by the halter, another flogging behind, and this was the first experience I had of men's kindness, it was all force" (28); "I felt from the first that what he wanted was to wear all the spirit out of me" (29); "the sun was very hot, the flies swarmed round me, and settled on my bleeding flanks where the spurs had dug in" (30); and "What right

had they to make me suffer like that?" (34). Thorne replaces all this with a period. Given the excision of so much pain and cruelty from the book, it is not too surprising that Ginger's death loses some of its impact in Thorne's version. When Beauty notices a chestnut corpse being carted past his cab-stand, Thorne cuts his comments short at "I believe it was Ginger. I hoped it was, for then her troubles would be over" (53). Sewell's subsequent line, "Oh! if men were more merciful, they would shoot us before we came to such misery" (193) is understandably left out by Thorne, for in Thorne's version men *are* more merciful. The result is another warping of Sewell's story. By leaving out what might be perceived as the more didactic elements of *Black Beauty*, Thorne's adaptation actually strikes at the moral centre of the tale. Her version tells the picaresque story of a horse who passes through the hands of several owners, but there's no real drama to the story because there's no real emotion behind it.

It's interesting to note that a 1966 English-Russian edition of *Black Beauty*, designed to teach English to Soviet students, takes the opposite approach to Thorne in abridging the text. A. Kerlin's deliberately text stresses the political elements in the tale. In an introductory note to the reader, Kerlin explains,

Though it is a book about animals, it is by no means a dull book. The author describes different people in it. You can clearly see that Anna Sewell likes those people who are good, honest and industrious. In her book, she also criticizes the state of things in capitalist England (see Chapter XXV "Seedy Sam," XXVI "The Election" and others). (4)

Kerlin's text has 31 chapters, some with amusing titles like chapter 6, "The Story of Sir Oliver's Tail," and chapter 24, "All is Well that Ends Well." In the chapter "Seedy Sam,"



after Sam dies Kerlin has the Governor remark, “I’ll tell you what, mates. We must help his family, that’s what we must do. And we *shall* do it” (69) where Sewell’s Governor says, “I tell you what, mates, this is a warning for us” (190), thereby stressing a value that Sewell might have admired, but did not specifically endorse. Kerlin, in fact, pays much more attention to Sam’s suffering and Sam’s death than Ginger’s, which is included in Sam’s chapter. Of Ginger, Kerlin writes,

Her only dream was to die.

I must tell you that very soon her dream came true. A short time after a cart with a dead horse in it passed our cab-stand. It was a chestnut horse with a long thin neck. It was Ginger. (70)

That’s all Kerlin writes, but its very starkness suggests a kind of horror that, again, Sewell may well have appreciated.

In 1966 the publishers of the Classics Illustrated comic book series issued a second version of *Black Beauty* with new text and illustrations distinct from the 1949 version illustrated by Froehlich. The name of the Classics Illustrated writer who re-adapted Sewell’s tale to comic book form is not revealed in the 48-page comic, but Sewell herself is given plenty of credit for her original work. Not only does her name appear on the cover, but she is invoked implicitly at the end of the tale in a message to the reader which states: “Now that you have read the Classics Illustrated edition, don’t miss the added enjoyment of reading the original, obtainable at your school or public library” (45). This statement suggests that the Classics Illustrated edition is a faithful adaptation of the story Sewell wrote, and that the original need be sought out only for “added enjoyment.” In an apparent effort to add even more respectability—even a tone of

scholarly seriousness—to the comic book, the reverse of the page with the message to the reader contains a full-page biography of Sewell, followed by another full page on the domestication of the cat, on the back of which is a text on the history of child labour. Neither of these two issues—the domestication of animals or the employment of children—plays any great role in *Black Beauty*, but the tenuous link with the story is there nonetheless.

In terms of the story itself, the Classics Illustrated abridgement again reveals its biases at work. Although the story proper begins with “The first place that I can well remember [. . .]” (2), this is preceded by a one-page introduction which reads, “When I was young my mother told me that I had been well-bred and well-born, and that she hoped I would grow up gentle and good, do my work with a good will, and never learn bad ways. I have tried to do as she said” (1). This scene-setting prose places the adaptation firmly in the *Bildungsroman* tradition, transforming *Black Beauty* into a text about growing up. The *Bildungsroman*, as Peter Hunt notes, is a novel dedicated to revealing the texture of life without offering solutions to all its problems for “the characters, while they may return home, do not satisfy all the elements of closure. They have changed; and the book is in some way ambivalent” (128). This uneasiness, which is built into *Black Beauty*’s life story, is echoed by the uneasiness of “establishment” adults in the 1960s. At a time when parents worried about reaching their children across the generation gap, and the dangers of the counter-culture seemed to lurk around every corner, publishers such as Gilberton were, perhaps ironically, offering up *Black Beauty* as a text that could teach children how to grow up as good citizens.

Other editions of *Black Beauty* issued in the '60s seem similarly determined to undermine *Black Beauty*'s engagement with the empathetic imagination. The large-type Elephant Edition issued by Pendulum Press in 1969 carries an introduction by Lewis Simon which explains, rather laboriously, that

Despite its subtitle, *Black Beauty* is a novel, not an autobiography. An autobiography is a real life story. A novel is a story that *resembles* real life. Obviously, it is Anna Sewell, the English author, and not Black Beauty, the English stallion, who speaks to us in these pages. (ii)

In the introduction to Airmont's 1963 edition, Frances H. Putnam comments that the plight of the horse might seem remote to modern readers, but reassures them that "this book is more than a story about a horse. Through Beauty's eyes we see a continually shifting panorama of life in nineteenth-century England" (3). Not every editor of the 1960s managed to maintain this critical distance from the text, however. In an afterword to Macmillan's 1962 full text edition of *Black Beauty*, Clifford Faidman confesses,

When it came time for me to re-read this book I somehow found that I kept putting it off. Finally the reason for my reluctance dawned on me. From my first reading, almost half a century ago, I still retained dim memories of some of the more painful episodes—and I guess I didn't want to go through those sad parts again. (247)

His reaction to the text concurs with that of Lansbury, who notes of Sewell's original text that

It had the same fervor and passionate conviction as Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, which was written not to entertain but to change the hearts and

minds of all who read it. From the start it found its audience among children and adolescents, who wept and anguished over the story of a black horse. *Black Beauty* is a strange work which most of us can recall but never quite remember. Generally, what comes to mind is the almost unendurable grief when we first read it. Yet, when we take it up again years later, we can recognize the driving homiletic force but not why it should once have stirred us to such tears and anger. Nonetheless, it remains in the mind like a buried landscape, and if we think about it all, it is to wonder why we should once have wept so bitterly over the fate of a horse. (64)

The children of the “Me Decade” of the 1970s—a time marked by battles between decadent desires and conservative means—often read *Black Beauty* not as a sad thing, but as a plaything. A pop-up version of *Black Beauty*, retold by Lornie Leete-Hodge, was produced by London’s Murray Sales in 1974, and the identical book, illustrated and presumably retold by J. Pavlin and G. Seda though the text is uncredited, appeared under the name of the Czechoslovakian firm Artia one year later in 1975. Where the Murray text is all fun and games, the Artia text gets serious, and taken together the two perfectly symbolize the see-sawing between self-absorption and social consciousness that typified the ’70s. The pop-up version of *Black Beauty* is only 12 pages long, though they are 12 action-packed pages. The authors or illustrators chose to feature Beauty’s idyllic colthood, his experience of the hunt, the stable fire, the horse sale, Beauty pulling a cab, and Beauty’s final homecoming for rendition in 3-D. However, the two texts interpret the pictures quite differently. The Murray text is written in the first-person; the Artia text is

written in the third-person. Although both texts focus quite clearly on Beauty, Murray's has more room for Ginger than the Artia. In the Murray version, Beauty introduces "his friend, Ginger" on the page illustrating the stable fire, and speaks about "what a fright we had" (6). Beauty's parting from Ginger is implied under the horse sale illustration when Murray's Beauty says "My master decided to sell all his horses and go and live in a new home" (8). In the Artia text, Ginger is mentioned only on the page featuring the hunt scene in the following text: "He made a special friend of a young horse called Ginger and he and Ginger used to pull the carriage and take the children for rides" (4). None of this is true if you take Sewell's original text as truth. Sewell made a point of stressing that Ginger was an older horse than Beauty—the first words she addresses to him are: "it is a very strange thing for a colt like you, to come and turn a lady out of her own home" (17). Also, neither Beauty nor Ginger takes children for rides—that is Merrylegs' job and furthermore Ginger cannot be trusted with children, as she bites.

The Murray text tells, overall, a happier story than the Artia one. In the Murray story, Beauty begins his story by commenting that "Life is very good" (2). When he watches the hunt he notes that "It was very exciting. I was glad they did not catch the hare" (4), which, like the Artia comment about Ginger, directly contradicts Sewell's text. Murray's Beauty says of the horse fair that "It was very strange and I did not like it very much" (8), but he is proud of his accomplishments as a cab horse, and happy with his nice new master. On the final pages, Beauty declares he has grown too old to work, but "I was very happy dreaming about my busy life" (12). In the Artia text, by contrast, the scenes are not quite so sunny, though the brightly-coloured pictures remain the same. In the short space allotted to them, Artia's adaptors have managed to include the death of a

horse and rider at the hunt, a mention of the dangers of both storm and fire, a thieving groom and a careless one, the death of Reuben Smith and the damage to Beauty's knees due to rough riding and a loose shoe, Jerry Barker's illness, Skinner's cruelty and Beauty's collapse, all of which are glossed over in the Murray text.

Empathy and education are trotted out again in a mid-1970s edition of *Black Beauty* published by the Xerox Corporation. The book's introduction by Sandra Donaldson emphasizes the empathetic nature of Sewell's connection to her text. Among the parallels between the life of the author and the life of the horse, Donaldson notes that during Sewell's years of illness "Anna was further weakened by an old medical practice called bleeding, which also weakens Black Beauty" (13). One page later, Donaldson likens Sewell's intentions to those of Velma Johnston, who fought for passage of the 1959 Mustang Bill to protect and manage herds of wild mustangs and burros throughout the United States. "This is the kind of affectionate protection Sewell hoped to inspire," says Donaldson (14), and then, throwing out a challenge to the reader, she writes, "The events of Black Beauty's life may move us to sympathy, but will we recognize Sewell's intent and act on it?" (15). Such rhetoric, ringing out in the midst of the Me Decade, suggests that publishers were finding a social conscience in Sewell's text, and turning to it to work reformatory magic once again. The Xerox text is also interesting for the numerous definitions it offers on what the editors apparently felt would be foreign words to its readers—essentially English and equestrian words such as "ostler," "draught," and "knackers." A Pendulum Press edition of *Black Beauty* published in 1972 similarly expresses only faint confidence in the abilities of its readership. The book is a black and white reprinting of the 1966 Gilberton Classics Illustrated comic, and it offers its readers

two excuses for its format, one on the back cover which states that “The unique format of these books is designed to stimulate interest in reading,” and one in the preface “To the teacher” which states that “The final assumption is that reading as an end in itself is self-defeating. Children are motivated to read material that satisfies their quest for knowledge and understanding of their world” (3). Like the Xerox Corporation, the Pendulum Press expects its readers to be unable to define a list of words it presents as a learning exercise at the back of the book—words such as “colt,” “farrier,” “impudent,” “liniment,” and “bearing reign [sic]” (62). No one could blame children for having trouble with that last one.

In 1978, Playmore Publishing offered to entertain rather than educate children with a second colouring book version of *Black Beauty* edited by Helen Rudin. Unlike the 1958 Treasure Books adaptation, Playmore’s *Black Beauty Coloring Book* presents Beauty’s story in the first person, beginning with “The first place that I can remember was a large, pleasant meadow in England” (2). The text emphasizes Beauty’s gentleness and good manners as the pictures show him being broken in, making friends with Merrylegs and Ginger, participating in Gordon family outings (in which Sir Oliver is shown sporting a full tail), saving the Squire at the flooded bridge, keeping his head in the burning stable, and racing for the doctor. However, there are also unpleasant moments in this Beauty’s life. He does fall ill when Joe neglects him, is made to wear the bearing-rein at Earlshall, and is injured by “The groom in a drunken rage” (28), although the groom survives the incident. Beauty also gets to hear Captain’s war stories when he goes to work for Jerry Barker. He does not, however, meet Ginger again, though he hears “my friend Ginger was now being used for hunting” (39). Beauty himself is sold to unnamed cruel owners

before being rescued by a farmer, but he suffers no collapse under cruel treatment and therefore needs no rehabilitation before he can say “My troubles are over and I am finally at home” (48). By and large, Rudin seems to have cut Beauty’s story the way that you would expect a colouring book editor to cut it—she has included scenes that are entertaining and exciting, and eliminated the didactic and the dull. Though her story doesn’t tug at any heartstrings, it offers its readers a much more serious text than Treasure Books’ slight 1958 rendition, which is no small accomplishment for a colouring book.

Compared to the 1970s, the 1980s were carefree years, when the children of Baby Boom generation were pampered as “yuppie puppies.” Relative financial and political stability in the West is reflected in the complacent tone of some of the *Black Beauty* texts offered to children in these years—No worries? Be happy. Typical of the ’80s texts is the 1986 Ladybird Children’s Classics version of *Black Beauty*, a petite 52-page product. The story is adapted by Betty Evans and Audrey Daly, who retain Sewell’s first-person narrative, but preface their tale with the statement that:

Many stories have been written about horses, but none has been held in such wide affection as *Black Beauty*. Written over a hundred years ago, it has been loved by generation after generation of children. From the first faltering steps of the young foal through all his misadventures to the final happy ending, every moment is gripping. (2)

The rhetoric here is telling. Though *Black Beauty* begins his tale with his memories of his colthood home, he does not remember his “first faltering steps.” It also seems a bit coy to call the hardships the horse is subjected to “misadventures,” particularly when Sewell is at pains throughout her story to show how her long-suffering hero is in no way



at fault for the bad things that happen to him. Sewell's sombre, wistful closing is here unequivocally called a "final happy ending," and even Sewell's biggest fans would have some problem swallowing the idea that "every moment is gripping" in the original work. What Evans and Daly clearly wish to tell here is a fuzzy animal story—heart-warming and plot-driven. It's not an easy thing to shape *Black Beauty* into such a mould.

To do so, Evans and Daly omit and gloss over much, using Sewell's novel primarily as a plot outline. The first three chapters of the Ladybird *Black Beauty* focus only on the good things in Black Beauty's life: the fun he had in the fields as a foal, his grown-up beauty and good manners, the friends he makes at Birtwick Park. The small chapter on Ginger introduces the first note of discord, but rather than stressing the ill-treatment Ginger received this chapter stresses the mare's rebellion, and by the end of it Beauty is pleased to report that "Her bad temper slowly died and she became quite gentle and happy at Birtwick Park" (11). When Beauty is sold to be a job horse his succession of bad drivers are mentioned only in passing, but the perfidy of the grooms Filcher and Smirk is gone over in surprising detail, spanning four pages of this very short story. Evans and Daly give very little consideration to man's inhumanity to horses, but man's inhumanity to man rivets their attention. Jerry Barker's determination to remember the Sabbath and keep it holy is spelled out in some detail, but his small acts of kindness to horses and humans on the busy city streets are not mentioned. In fact, eight chapters from the original outlining Beauty's experiences in London are all gone, including his reunion with and the death of Ginger. By carefully cutting Sewell's story in this way, Evans and Daly do, for the most part, accomplish their implied objective of turning *Black Beauty* into an upbeat, exciting story. Their Beauty passes curiously unscathed through his

succession of experiences, neither growing nor suffering much, but merely observing and looking forward to the next surprise around the corner.

In the 1990s, with literacy a growing concern and children perceived to be slacking off, physically and mentally, from the standards their parents wished them to achieve, children's literature looked to educate children once again. The 1997 Fenn Deluxe Classics edition of *Black Beauty* is one of the most recent contemporary abridgements of the tale. Like the 1986 Ladybird it reveals its biases in its introduction where it states:

It is easier to understand Black Beauty's times, when horses were treated like machines, if we can see the real carts and cabs, the buses and trams that they pulled—not just in an artist's impression, but in photographs of the real things.

It is also interesting to think about the characters in this book as real animals—they are born, grow and develop exactly as horses do today. Again, it is easier to do this when we see photographs of real horses growing, being groomed, and revealing their highly developed senses. (6)

The Fenn edition, then, is interested in *Black Beauty* as a teaching text, but not in the way Sewell meant it to teach. Sewell meant for her book to inspire kind treatment of horses. The Fenn edition wants to teach a history lesson about "Black Beauty's times" and a science lesson about how horses "are born, grow and develop."

The Fenn *Black Beauty* is abridged by Caryn Jenner, who squishes Sewell's 49 chapters into 10 chapters in 64 pages, with plenty of room left over for photographs, illustrations, and didactic excursions like the two pages devoted to "The Country Horse"

(an examination of the layout of a stately home and stable) and two pages on “Black Beauty’s London” (illustrating horse breeds and vehicles and explaining some Victorian social problems). The extraneous matter, which occupies not only these privileged positions, but also a good deal of space around the margins of the story, continually pulls the eye away from what remains of Sewell’s text and proves in the end more interesting than Jenner’s version of the story.

Sewell’s novel is mercilessly clipped to squeeze between the snippets of information scattered throughout the pages. The story begins in the traditional manner, and the hunt that disrupts Beauty’s early life is included, but mixed into this hunt scene is information Sewell withheld until chapter 4 of her novel—that the horse who is killed in Beauty’s field is in fact his own brother—thus making the hunt seem even more important in this version than in the original. In fact, Beauty’s sense of the injustice in his life is emphasized in this abridgement. The unpleasantness of the breaking-in is acknowledged, as is the fact that all is not sweetness and light at Birtwick Park—a sentiment contained in Sewell’s oft-omitted chapter 6, “Liberty.” Jenner distils the gist of “Jakes and the Lady,” “Hard Times,” “Farmer Thoroughgood and His Grandson Willie,” and “My Last Home” into two chapters—“Hard Times” and “My Last Home”—but little of the emphasis in the original text is disturbed. Beauty still struggles with the bearing-rein uphill, is overloaded, falls senseless in the street, is rescued from the horse sale and reunited with Joe and the vicar’s daughters. He also gets to end his story on a wistful dream, though the Fenn text offers something beyond Sewell’s ending. The last two pages of the Fenn edition offer a cornucopia of information under the heading “Anna Sewell’s Horses.” This catch-all category includes a brief biography of the author, a

discussion of her aims in writing the novel, information about humane societies, a recap of some of the specific evils Sewell wished to correct, the printing history of *Black Beauty* and some mention of its modern adaptations. The result is a very disjointed text, jam-packed with ideas which spring off in all directions, but without much in the way of a cohesive narrative. The interpolated matter, covering everything from Victorian fashions to veterinary medicine, is fascinating and, in its way, adds an extra dimension to the text, but it takes up a great deal of space at the expense of much of the story's narrative power.

In 2001, *Black Beauty* was still being touted as an educational text. A full text version of *Black Beauty* published by Aladdin in 2001 offers a "Reading Group Guide" at the back of the book, complete with suggestions for discussion questions, activities, and research. Among the questions readers are encouraged to consider are "Are today's animals still being harmed by foolhardy fashions?" (208), "Why is it so difficult to keep a horse for its entire life?" (209), and "Is human intervention always harmful to animals?" (209)—all questions that prompt the reader to consider the human and equine interactions of the present day. Suggested research activities include contacting a speaker from a local animal protection society, debating the concept of animal rights, investigating the role of horses in today's society, and writing the autobiography of a family pet—all activities that again link concepts from the book to the current cultural situation.

When *Black Beauty* the literary text is translated into other media, the results can be both entertaining and informative. A telling retelling of *Black Beauty* might be read into the story scripted by the playing instructions for *The Game of Black Beauty* marketed by the Transogram Company in 1958. Players of the board game are encouraged to re-enact Beauty's life story by retracing his journey from "My First Home" to "My Last

Home” around the playing board. Moving along the Bridle Path, a player must collect four Lucky Horseshoe cards and reach home before the other players to win the game. Lucky Horseshoes can only be drawn when players land on Adventure Spaces, which take their names from incidents in Black Beauty’s story such as “The Fire.” What is interesting here is the perception of all of the incidents of Beauty’s life, good or bad, as “adventures,” the importance of a good set of shoes for success in the game, and the ultimate goal (common to many board games, but of particular significance in Black Beauty’s story) of reaching a “Last Home.” Simple as it is, *The Game of Black Beauty* is interesting for its implicit judgement of what constitute the most important elements of Beauty’s life. Rebellion and protest are of no use to anyone in this story; you have to follow the rules and keep moving forward if you want to win the game.

Sound recordings of *Black Beauty* also typically simplify Beauty’s story into a clear, forward-moving narrative—a story that can be followed upon first hearing. A 1970 45 rpm book and record rendition of *Black Beauty*, adapted by Carol Joan Drexler, simplifies Beauty’s story to a succession of sales; indeed, even Ginger and Merrylegs find themselves at the horse fair when the time comes to leave Birtwick Park. Beauty visits the fair a second time after Jerry Barker falls ill, and a third time after he at last becomes too weak to work. In the short space of time that it takes for a 45 to play, Beauty has gone through so many hands that it’s no wonder that Drexler closes the horse’s story with the comment that “Black Beauty had found another good home and another fine master. Though he still missed Squire Gordon, and John Manly, and Jerry Barker—Black Beauty was happy once again” (24). The reader/listener needs the recap just to sort out who’s who in Beauty’s life.

The listener to story of *Black Beauty* abridged by Barbara Holdridge and read by Claire Bloom for the 1970 Caedmon long-playing record may well want to read the liner notes provided by Holdridge on the back of the album cover to follow the thinking behind this adaptation. In her notes, Holdridge outlines her thesis that “Children [. . .] seldom recognize instinctively that other flesh suffers as does their own” and that “If children must be taught this, then *Black Beauty* is the teaching instrument to do it.” Holding out revolutionary ambitions for her text, Holdridge suggests

Observing our own times, we can spark thoughtful discussions among the children who hear this story. [. . .] We can ask the children whether they have ever seen animals abused or “teased.” We can stimulate discussions and research into pet-shop practices, the confinement of animals in zoos and circuses, the use of animals in medical experiments, and the training and use of police dogs. We can lead them to make parallels with the treatment of people in earlier times and our own: in various work situations, prisons, prisoner-of-war detention camps, and slums.

And some day, in a hopefully bright future, it may be possible to say that *Black Beauty* is “dated.” But not now, gentle reader, not now . . . .

The political agenda behind this recording strikes quite a different note from that sounded by the commercial agenda shaping *Walt Disney Presents The Story of Black Beauty*, read by Robie Lester for the 1966 Disneyland long-playing record. The Disneyland story opens with a dreadful mood-setting theme song that has little or nothing to do with the story which follows, but which suggests (surely not coincidentally) the hit theme song from the 1966 movie *Born Free*:

Black Beauty, Black Beauty  
In the wind and the rain  
Black Beauty, Black Beauty  
Knew the meaning of pain  
When it came to his duty  
He knew what it should be  
Black Beauty, Black Beauty  
Had a right to be free.

The story, as such, opens with Beauty's breaking-in, introduces Beauty to Ginger and Merrylegs, and then introduces Joe. Joe's good qualities are gone over in detail, but he is shown to be fallible when he neglects to care properly for Beauty after Beauty's run for the doctor. Beauty recovers only to part from his "family" and fall into the hands of Reuben Smith. Brought to his knees by Reuben's hard riding, Beauty moves on to a happier life when he joins Jerry Barker's family and learns two new songs—"The Pearle's Song" included to represent London life (and highly reminiscent of songs from Disney's 1964 hit musical *Mary Poppins*), and Jerry Barker's own "Turn To" ditty (with lyrics by Sewell) included to teach listeners the Golden Rule. In this story, Jerry falls ill at Christmas rather than New Year's Eve, and Beauty is sold again, to a cruel driver who works him until he drops. In the end, he is rescued by Squire Gordon's daughters, and returned to the good care of Joe. The story is simple and follows a familiar Disney formula—an idyllic childhood is interrupted by a tragic incident, which is followed by a gradual recovery and return to happiness, despite a last-minute peril that threatens to destroy the hero. The same formula was used for Disney's *Bambi*, and is still used in

such offerings as *The Lion King*. Though Disney has never animated *Black Beauty*—possibly because, as the creators of the 2002 DreamWorks animated movie *Spirit: Stallion of the Cimarron* have noted, horses are notoriously difficult to animate (JAH 5)—Disney’s sound recording of *Black Beauty* gives the listener some idea of what a Disney *Black Beauty* movie might have looked like.

*Black Beauty* has been adapted to film at least eight times, including one animated version, and the book has been the subject of or inspiration for at least four television series. On the face of it, *Black Beauty* does not seem like a text well-adapted to either medium. Its fragmented structure lacks the continuity that television craves, while its interior monologic observations are hardly the stuff that Hollywood dreams are made of. However, *Black Beauty* is a recognizable brand name, and so in the name of progress and/or profit, the hoof of this equine Cinderella can be shaped for the most ill-fitting of shoes. At least, that’s how the movie studios have seemed to have approached the problem of filming *Black Beauty*. In 1946, Max Nosseck directed a 20th Century Fox version of *Black Beauty* which, like the 1921 Vitagraph photoplay, had little if anything, to do with Sewell’s text. The film’s producers even go so far as to admit this in a paragraph of text that appears at the beginning of the film superimposed over the picture of a horse. The text reads:

This presentation of Anna Sewall’s [sic] immortal classic has been freely adapted for the screen—carefully preserving the beautiful spirit of this most beloved of all horse stories.

The author’s name appears twice in text on the screen, and is misspelled as “Sewall” each time. In this picture, Beauty is raised from colthood by a young girl, played by Mona



Freeman, who is shown to mature along with her colt. In fact, the whole picture is focused on the girl's transformation from awkward adolescence to acquiescent womanhood. The girl, Anne, initially rebels at the thought of letting anyone else ride her favourite horse. When the lady friend of a man she has a crush on is given Black Beauty to ride, Anne tears off in a tantrum on Ginger, endangering both herself and the other riders. When Anne falls, Beauty must race for the doctor, and during this ride he both fractures his knee and, due to stable boy Joe's inept treatment, comes down with pneumonia. Unable to ride while Beauty is ill, Anne dutifully goes off to boarding school, where she must learn to behave like a lady. While she's away, the injured Beauty is sold. When Anne returns, she is not yet enough of a lady to accept disappointment without a fight—she initiates a search for her lost Beauty and rescues him from a stable fire. Then, having demonstrated that one can have a “beautiful spirit” and be a lady too, Anne is rewarded with marriage to the object of her adolescent affections.

In the 1971 Paramount Pictures version, directed by James Hill, the cast has changed, but bits of the story remain the same. Like Nosseck's Beauty, and unlike Sewell's, Hill's Black Beauty is essentially a one-person horse, this time having been raised from colthood by Little Joe Evans, played by Mark Lester. Little Joe cannot keep his horse, however, for his father has debts and Beauty must be sold to pay for them. Beauty then goes on to have adventures of his own, performing in turn the exciting cinematic occupations of gypsy racehorse, circus horse, and war horse—all jobs Sewell's Black Beauty never undertook. When he returns from the war, Beauty spends a brief time hauling stumps and pulling a coal cart before he is rescued by Anna Sewell herself, driven by a grown-up Joe. Joe is not certain that he has found his old horse, but names him

Black Beauty nonetheless—"A bit grand for such a sad old horse," remarks Anna at the end of the film. In fact, the whole film is rather sad, presenting *Black Beauty* as a picaresque tale apparently without a moral or motive.

In 1978, Hanna-Barbera adapted *Black Beauty* to cartoon form under the direction of Chris Cuddington. In the cartoon version of the story, all the horses communicate with closed mouths, though Beauty opens his lower jaw occasionally to indicate that he is speaking. Although Black Beauty begins life on the farm with his mother, he is guided through life by his unnamed father's advice, related to him by Duchess in the words of Sewell's Jerry Barker, "Do your best / And leave the rest, / 'Twill all come right, / Some day or night" (174). Right from the start Beauty is reluctant to leave his mother and his home—even at the idyllic home of the Gordons where he makes friends with Ginger and Merrylegs he can be seen to be daydreaming about his old life on the farm. Illness forces him to move on to Earlshall, where Ginger stages her strike for liberty and Beauty is handed over to the wicked Reuben Smith. Smith survives his fall from Beauty to become Beauty's arch-nemesis, vowing an ultimate revenge. Before that can be accomplished, however, Beauty must work as job horse and suffer the indignities of being treated by a groom who is both a thief and a humbug. Sold to Jerry Baker, Beauty begins to enjoy life again when he meets up with Ginger and Seedy Sam, who expire together from overwork. Beauty gets to work through the election and the bitter New Year before Jerry, too, dies, and Beauty falls into the hands of Reuben Smith. Worked to exhaustion under Smith, Beauty is rescued by a grown-up Joe, and is pleased to be returned to the meadow of his birth. Except for the oddity of Smith as nemesis, Cuddington's *Black Beauty* is

remarkably faithful to the spirit of Sewell's text and, given the limitations of its very simple animation, it remains one of the most effective adaptations of the story to screen.

The most recent big budget *Black Beauty* to be made was Warner Brothers' 1994 version, directed by Caroline Thompson. This one is told in voice-over, with Alan Cumming providing the voice of Black Beauty, and focuses lovingly on the equine actors—for the most part. For, as Tim Morris has pointed out in his examination of children's films, the first line of Thompson's text is telling (18-19). "The story of my life is the story of the people in it," Thompson's Beauty says. And, true to this text, Thompson's film is primarily a film about relationships, between people and horses and between horses and horses, for in this film Ginger is not only Beauty's friend; she is the love of his life.<sup>6</sup> The plotline of Thompson's film runs much like a typical "retold for children" version of Sewell's story, deleting the most didactic and political sections of the text, but retaining and enhancing the action and adventure. The love story between Black Beauty and Ginger is peculiar, though, and it considerably alters the tone of Ginger's death scene. Of all the horses, only Beauty is given a voice in Thompson's film, and instead of using that voice to protest, "Oh! if men were more merciful, they would shoot us before we came to such misery," as in Sewell's text, Thompson's Beauty observes the body of his friend go by and says only, "Good-bye, my sweet one," while the camera closes in on the horse's soulful eyes. Anger, apparently, has no place in children's movies in the 1990s.

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<sup>6</sup> Interestingly, although Thompson does not address the issue of Black Beauty's neutering, Ginger's initially combative responses to Beauty's romantic overtures suggest the impatience of a mare with the grandiose dreams of an amorous gelding.

It did have a place, however, on television in the 1970s. Television has long been acknowledged as a medium that thrives on patterns of repetition, and indeed, London Weekend's televised *Adventures of Black Beauty* which aired from 1972 to 1974 are boringly the same. In the *Adventures of Black Beauty*, Black Beauty functions as a kind substitute parent to the children of the widowed Dr. Gordon, fulfilling the roles of playmate and protector as well as that of precious object that must not be lost. Of these roles, he plays the protector most often, appearing in episode after episode to rear up and threaten some villain who has been making life difficult for the Gordons. This avenging Beauty is a far cry from Sewell's obedient servant who learned as a foal to "never bite or kick even in play" (2) or the Beauty who would not rebel against cruelty because "it was no use; men are the strongest" (225).

Be that as it may, *Black Beauty*, apparently a most unstable text, has shown a remarkable and enduring strength throughout its over 125-year existence. Although each of its textual variations is undoubtedly a horse of a different colour, *Black Beauty* is, in essence, a textbook demonstration of McGann's "immutable law" of textual condition—the law of change. "Every text," McGann says,

enters the world under determinate sociohistorical conditions, and while these conditions may and should be variously defined and imagined, they establish the horizon within which the life histories of different texts play themselves out. The law of change declares that these histories will exhibit a ceaseless process of textual development and mutation—a process which can only be arrested if all the textual transformations of a particular work fall into nonexistence. (9)

There seems to be no danger of *Black Beauty* falling into nonexistence. Anna Sewell's old black gelding has rather surprisingly sired a bewildering string of healthy progeny. Though they do not necessarily bear the distinguishing marks of their sire, they all bear his name and therefore their fortunes reflect, for better or worse, on his fame.

## Conclusion

Although there may be no “true” *Black Beauty*, there can be little doubt that, through the voices of its many variations, *Black Beauty* has done the “good” work it set out to do. Over the years, its voice has instructed its readers, and driven them to tears. It has alerted readers to injustice and inequity, opened their eyes to the viewpoint of the other, and invited them to make comparisons between their attitudes towards animals and their attitudes towards other voiceless, powerless beings. On the other hand, *Black Beauty* has also misinformed, misled, and promoted racist and sexist attitudes when that is what it has been asked to do. *Black Beauty* is nothing if not a willing worker, but the nature of the work that the text does depends on that hands that guide it.

Confronted with a herd of Beautys contesting for a readership, how is one to choose one more “beautiful” than the rest? Every *Beauty* has its charms, and many are disfigured by ugly scars. Is any one text really better than the rest? To answer this, I go back to Jerome McGann, who points out that “a ‘text’ is not a ‘material thing’ but a material event or set of events, a point in time (or a moment in space) where certain communicative interchanges are being practiced” (21). *Black Beauty* then, despite the pretty packaging, is not so much a book of ink and paper as it is an expression of ideas—a voice, or, in the case of this particular dumb animal, a multiplicity of voices. Perhaps Coral Lansbury puts it best when she observes that, just as *Black Beauty*’s story comes to life when Sewell gives him the power of speech, so Sewell’s voice may be heard dying as she completes *Black Beauty*’s story:

In a sense, the story was her last will and testament, composed when she was preparing with daily prayer and self-examination to meet her God.

Perhaps it was the occasion of its creation which gave the work such urgent authority and allowed so many imperious voices to cry out from the text, voices which grieved for more than the plight of horses. Within the formal structure of a simple narrative, Anna Sewell raged against cruelty and injustice, against the nature of work, and the condition of women.

(64-65)

Many more voices have joined the chorus since, voices of protest and voices of acceptance. What is the point, then, in trying to single out the text's one true voice? *Black Beauty* has a lot to say, many voices with which to speak, and every voice has a valid story to tell. That is the truth of this text as I understand it—straight from the horse's mouth.

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