

COLLINS
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ANNA SEWELL

Black Beauty

BLACK BEAUTY

Anna Sewell

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Anna Sewell asserts the moral right to be
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History of Collins

In 1819, Millworker William Collins from Glasgow, Scotland, set up a company for printing and publishing pamphlets, sermons, hymn books and prayer books. That company was Collins and was to mark the birth of HarperCollins Publishers as we know it today. The long tradition of Collins dictionary publishing can be traced back to the first dictionary William published in 1824, *Greek and English Lexicon*. Indeed, from 1840 onwards, he began to produce illustrated dictionaries and even obtained a licence to print and publish the Bible.

Soon after, William published the first Collins novel, *Ready Reckoner*, however it was the time of the Long Depression, where harvests were poor, prices were high, potato crops had failed and violence was erupting in Europe. As a result, many factories across the country were forced to close down and William chose to retire in 1846, partly due to the hardships he was facing.

Aged 30, William's son, William II took over the business. A keen humanitarian with a warm heart and a generous spirit, William II was truly 'Victorian' in his outlook. He introduced new, up-to-date steam presses and published affordable editions of Shakespeare's works and *Pilgrim's Progress*, making them available to the masses for the first time. A new demand for educational books meant that success came with the publication of travel books, scientific books, encyclopaedias and dictionaries. This demand to be educated led to the later publication of atlases and Collins also held the monopoly on scripture writing at the time.

In the 1860s Collins began to expand and diversify and the idea of 'books for the millions' was developed. Affordable editions of classical literature were published and in 1903 Collins introduced 10 titles in their Collins Handy Illustrated Pocket

Novels. These proved so popular that a few years later this had increased to an output of 50 volumes, selling nearly half a million in their year of publication. In the same year, The Everyman's Library was also instituted, with the idea of publishing an affordable library of the most important classical works, biographies, religious and philosophical treatments, plays, poems, travel and adventure. This series eclipsed all competition at the time and the introduction of paperback books in the 1950s helped to open that market and marked a high point in the industry.

HarperCollins is and has always been a champion of the classics and the current Collins Classics series follows in this tradition – publishing classical literature that is affordable and available to all. Beautifully packaged, highly collectible and intended to be reread and enjoyed at every opportunity.

Life & Times

About the Author

Born in Norfolk, England in 1820, writer Anna Sewell is the perfect example of the well-known adage that everybody has one novel in them. *Black Beauty* is her one and only published work and it went to press just a few months before her death at the age of 58.

Sewell's literary success has as much to do with exposure to the right influences as much as anything else. She was brought up as a Quaker and educated at home. Her mother became a successful children's writer, and Sewell was involved with the editing of her books. At age 12, Sewell was sent to school in London for two years, but this exciting part of her life was short-lived as it was at school that she slipped and injured both her ankles. As a result she remained lame for the rest of her life, moving to Brighton with her parents for a change of air. She frequently attended European health spas to try and improve her health and met many creative people during her stays, including philosophers, writers and artists. It seems that this combination of experiences helped to plant the seed for *Black Beauty*, which she began to write six years prior to its publication in 1877.

Sewell was a deeply religious woman and claimed that her sole motive for writing *Black Beauty* was to urge people to treat horses with more kindness. Due to her condition, Sewell could not walk very far and she habitually relied on horse drawn vehicles to get about, so she was frequently close to and engaged with horses. In writing *Black Beauty*, Sewell imagined the character of the horse itself and invented an entirely new genre, where the story is told in the first 'person' by the eponymous horse.

Animal Welfare

The story of *Black Beauty* narrates the life of Black Beauty himself, from foal to working horse to pasture. Along the way the horse has

ANNA SEWELL

a gamut of experiences where he and other horses are treated with kindness, indifference and cruelty by humans, enlightening the reader about the feelings and emotions of horses.

During the Victorian era people had little empathy for their beasts of burden, but that all changed when *Black Beauty* was published, especially because of the Christian message that people might be judged by their god if they failed to treat animals with consideration. There was a seesaw effect, so that the general population suddenly tilted in favour of animal welfare, and especially towards horses. Today a vestige of that effect is seen in the British reluctance to eat horse meat as if horses deserve reverence over other livestock.

Due to Sewell's intimate knowledge of horses her attention to detail lends the book a sense of realism, and the narration of the story through the mouth of a horse is the perfect vehicle for displaying that knowledge. In fact that is where the phrase to hear something 'straight from the horse's mouth' originates, in reference to *Black Beauty*.

In addition to encouraging people to desist from deliberate cruelty to horses, Sewell also brought into question certain established practices, including the use of blinkers, which prevent the horse from having a panoramic view, and the use of a check rein, which holds the horse's head in a supposedly elegant, but unnatural posture.

In 1893 a similar book, titled *Beautiful Joe*, was published by Margaret Marshall Saunders. This time it was about a dog, but it was directly inspired by *Black Beauty* and was also a success. Marshall Saunders even wrote the book as a life story from the animal's point of view, in homage to Sewell and she even alludes to Sewell's book in her own.

Sewell's real legacy was to connect emotionally with the reader via the animal's mind. It was a trick really, as it supposed that animals are as sentient as humans, none-the-less it worked. All of a sudden Victorian society was tuned in to animal rights as the new way of showing how righteous one could be. Sewell succeeded in her aim as well as writing one of the best-loved novels of all time. In fact it remains one of the top 10 best selling English language books.

**BLACK
BEAUTY**

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PART ONE

CHAPTER 1

My Early Home

The first place that I can well remember was a large pleasant meadow with a pond of clear water in it. Some shady trees leaned over it, and rushes and water-lilies grew at the deep end. Over the hedge on one side we looked into a ploughed field, and on the other we looked over a gate at our master's house, which stood by the roadside; at the top of the meadow was a plantation of fir trees, and at the bottom a running brook overhung by a steep bank.

Whilst I was young I lived upon my mother's milk, as I could not eat grass. In the day time I ran by her side, and at night I lay down close by her. When it was hot, we used to stand by the pond in the shade of the trees, and when it was cold, we had a nice warm shed near the plantation.

As soon as I was old enough to eat grass, my mother used to go out to work in the day time, and came back in the evening.

There were six young colts in the meadow besides me; they were older than I was; some were nearly as

large as grown-up horses. I used to run with them, and had great fun; we used to gallop all together round and round the field, as hard as we could go. Sometimes we had rather rough play, for they would frequently bite and kick as well as gallop.

One day, when there was a good deal of kicking, my mother whinnied to me to come to her, and then she said:

‘I wish you to pay attention to what I am going to say to you. The colts who live here are very good colts, but they are cart-horse colts, and, of course, they have not learned manners. 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; your grandmother had the sweetest temper of any horse I ever knew, and I think you have never seen me kick or bite. I hope you will grow up gentle and good, and never learn bad ways; do your work with a good will, lift your feet up well when you trot, and never bite or kick even in play.’

I have never forgotten my mother’s advice; I knew she was a wise old horse, and our master thought a great deal of her. Her name was Duchess, but he often called her Pet.

Our master was a good, kind man. He gave us good food, good lodging, and kind words; he spoke as kindly to us as he did to his little children. We were all fond of him, and my mother loved him very much. When she saw him at the gate, she would neigh with joy, and trot up to him. He would pat and stroke her and say, ‘Well, old Pet, and how is your little Darkie?’ I was a dull black, so he called me Darkie; then he would give me a piece of bread, which was very good, and sometimes he brought

a carrot for my mother. All the horses would come to him, but I think we were his favourites. My mother always took him to the town on a market day in a little gig.

There was a ploughboy, Dick, who sometimes came into our field to pluck blackberries from the hedge. When he had eaten all he wanted, he would have what he called fun with the colts, throwing stones and sticks at them to make them gallop. We did not much mind him, for we could gallop off; but sometimes a stone would hit and hurt us.

One day he was at this game, and did not know that the master was in the next field; but he was there, watching what was going on: over the hedge he jumped in a snap, and catching Dick by the arm, he gave him such a box on the ear as made him roar with the pain and surprise. As soon as we saw the master, we trotted up nearer to see what went on.

'Bad boy!' he said, 'bad boy! to chase the colts. This is not the first time, nor the second, but it shall be the last – there – take your money and go home, I shall not want you on my farm again.' So we never saw Dick any more. Old Daniel, the man who looked after the horses, was just as gentle as our master, so we were well off.

CHAPTER 2

The Hunt

Before I was two years old, a circumstance happened which I have never forgotten. It was early in the spring; there had been a little frost in the night, and a light mist still hung over the plantations and meadows. I and the other colts were feeding at the lower part of the field when we heard, quite in the distance, what sounded like the cry of dogs. The oldest of the colts raised his head, pricked his ears, and said, 'There are the hounds!' and immediately cantered off followed by the rest of us to the upper part of the field, where we could look over the hedge and see several fields beyond. My mother and an old riding horse of our master's were also standing near, and seemed to know all about it.

'They have found a hare,' said my mother, 'and if they come this way, we shall see the hunt.'

And soon the dogs were all tearing down the field of young wheat next to ours. I never heard such a noise as they made. They did not bark, nor howl, nor whine, but kept on a 'yo! yo, o, o! yo! yo, o, o!' at the top of their voices. After them came a number of men on