

Writing Against Animal Cruelty: Disability and Anna Sewell's *Black Beauty*

Anna Sewell's equine autobiography, *Black Beauty: his grooms and companions: The autobiography of a horse. Translated from the original equine* (1877), inspired sympathy for work horses through its unique narrative voice, straight from a horse's mouth, and its affective depiction of animal cruelty. Sewell's intention in writing *Black Beauty* "was to induce kindness, sympathy, and an understanding treatment of horses" (qtd. in Chitty 178). The narrative follows a young colt's life on an idyllic farm to back breaking work for a series of London cab drivers, some kind and some cruel. The book's influence on more humane horse conditions such as the abolishment of the check rein and the novel's immense popularity among humane societies attests to its success as protest literature.

Anna Sewell had difficulty walking for most of her life, depending on horse drawn transportation for her mobility. Her relationship to these horses is similar to the interspecies bonds experienced by service animals and their caretakers. I will investigate how her personal experience of disability informs her depictions of animal cruelty and disability. The titular character's livelihood depends on his fitness and ability to perform feats of strength and endurance, though he suffers much pain at the ignorant and careless hands of humans. I will use theories on the intersection of critical disability studies and animal studies, such as Sunaura Taylor's inquiry into disability liberation and animal studies, to analyze disability caused by animal cruelty in the novel as well as depictions of interspecies sympathy.

Keywords:

Disability studies, animal studies, *Black Beauty*, sympathy, humane

Works Cited

Chitty, Susan, "Anna Sewell" in *Writers for Children*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1988.