Animals with Voices

*Anthropomorphic Animals in Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* and *Black Beauty*

B.A. Essay

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Abstract

This essay explores anthropomorphic animals in two Victorian children’s books: *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll and *Black Beauty* by Anna Sewell. It examines what influenced these authors and how they influenced future works. Furthermore, it attempts to explain why these particular books have remained popular with readers and how they helped to support new theories in natural history, especially Darwin’s Theory of Evolution, as Darwin’s theory greatly influenced the two writers and the Victorian society as a whole.

In addition, it looks at the difference between the two types of anthropomorphism used in these two books and the different approaches Sewell and Carroll took. One of the authors followed the conventional formula of past children’s literature by using didacticism to put her ideas forth while the other paved the way for what we now call nonsense literature. Sewell managed to create a character that would become pivotal in the fight against animal cruelty. In a world where engines were starting to replace horses she saw the need to give the horses a voice. She gave them a voice by creating an “animal biography”, where a horse tells his life story to the reader. Carroll created a book that he thought would appeal to children, one abundant with conversations and illustrations. He portrayed the animals as their own subjects rather than the objects of humans.

Moreover, this paper talks about the history of children’s literature, John Locke’s influence on the children’s book genre, and children’s lives as a whole, more specifically, how children’s literature has moved from didactic tales to ones filled with pictures and play. Overall, the essay discusses the differences between humans and animals, questioning whether we really are that different.
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Introduction

According to John Muir, a Scottish-American Victorian-Era naturalist, “[t]he clearest way into the Universe is through a forest wilderness.” This quote is relevant to the ideas discussed in this essay because people can learn a lot about themselves by learning about and being around nature and animals. The animals discussed in this essay have taught readers kindness, self-awareness, and humbleness to name a few things. These animals force us to go back to our roots and to see ourselves as part of the nature. In the previous quote, Muir suggests that nature is the gateway into the soul because nature not only teaches us about the nature of other things but of our own selves. Thus, the saying that nature is the best teacher is quite relevant.

This essay mainly focuses on anthropomorphic animals and their relations with humans in the books Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland by Lewis Carroll and Black Beauty by Anna Sewell. These two books question what it means to be human and our place in nature. They are mainly focused on human interactions with animals, but what makes the animals special in these works is that they are anthropomorphic animals. Many people will know what personification is, especially in relation to poetry, but it is not the same thing as anthropomorphism. Personification is when an animal or an inanimate object appears to be doing something human, but is not actually doing so. An example of a personification would be: the wind howled and the trees danced. Anthropomorphism, on the other hand, is when an object or an animal is actually doing something only humans would do. Thus, anthropomorphism gives objects and animals human characteristics and/or behaviours. This can mean that animals may have human emotions and speech, stand on two legs, wear clothes, go to school, dance, speak, sing, cook, and live in houses. It is no surprise that this technique appeals to children who have vivid imaginations and might find it amusing and humorous when they see animals wearing clothes and cooking, characteristics that are very human.

In 1862, a man by the name of Charles Lutwidge Dodgson utilized that technique when he took a ten-year-old girl, Alice Liddell, and her two sisters on a boat ride. There he started telling them a made-up story about Alice following
a white rabbit down a hole (Hopley 34). Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, known to most people as Lewis Carroll, was telling the girls the beginning of the story people now know as Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland. Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland was first published in 1865, three years after that whimsical boat ride, and its sequel, Through the Looking-Glass was published in 1871, six years after the first. Carroll was a mathematician born in 1832 and was the oldest of eleven siblings, which may explain why he got along so well with children. Carroll was also an animal lover and cared deeply for their welfare. He encouraged children to share that love, and in many of his writings, including Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland, he expresses strong feelings on the topic of animal treatment (Eick 26). Though Carroll was a mathematician, which is a very logical subject, he wrote what is called nonsense literature. Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland is now considered to be one of the classics of both children’s literature and nonsense literature and his Alice books have stayed with readers and continue to be adapted into films and TV shows and to inspire countless works of art.

The book starts with the protagonist of the book, Alice, discovering a talking rabbit wearing clothes on a hot summer’s day in England and following it down a rabbit hole where she enters a fantasy world called Wonderland. It is a land full of peculiar characters. Among them is a plethora of anthropomorphic animals. She eats and drinks food that make her change sizes, takes part in a “Caucus-race,” goes to a tea party with a March Hare, the Dormouse, and the Mad Hatter and plays croquet with the Queen of Hearts using flamingoes as mallets and hedgehogs as balls. The Queen of Hearts is a harsh leader who orders execution for everyone in her way. When she orders for Alice to be beheaded, Alice grows until she towers over everyone and then wakes up, finding herself on the same bench that she sat on with her sister before her journey started.

The other novel, Black Beauty, is told from an anthropomorphic horse’s perspective. Black Beauty is an English novel by Anna Sewell published in 1877. Sewell herself was born in 1820 to a family of devout Quakers. The injuries after an accident she endured as a child never healed properly, so she was mostly confined to her house (Hollindale 97). However, she was able to get
around using carriage horses. Like Carroll, she was a lover of animals and her book preaches kindness to animals. She spent her last years writing *Black Beauty*, which has become a classic, and she died a few months after its publication.

*Black Beauty* has sometimes been called *Black Beauty: an Autobiography of a Horse* as the story is told from a carriage horse’s perspective who is given the name Black Beauty and tells his life story. Throughout his life, Black Beauty gets a taste of both human cruelty and human kindness and love. From birth, he lives with his mother and his owner, who cares appropriately for his horses. When Black Beauty comes of age, he is sent to another farm where he meets other horses and remains happy and cared for. His life is not eventless, however, and he recounts how he survived a fire in the stables and saved his owner’s ill wife. His owner falls sick as well, however, and has to sell Black Beauty. This is where Black Beauty’s happy and carefree days come to a close and where he starts to endure mistreatment and negligence. Eventually, he is sold to become a cab horse, thus losing his rank as a carriage horse. He switches owners again after that and falls into the hands of even more ignorance and cruelty. By this time, Black Beauty is permanently injured, and his health will never be the same again. He meets Ginger, an old horse friend, again and hears her tragic life story. She has been so badly mistreated that she is not the same horse as she was before, and in the end, she dies. Although Black Beauty himself is also closer to death than life, he finally gets a touch of kindness again. He is sold to a kind family who recognize him as Black Beauty from his happy youth, and thus he gets his happy ending.

These two novels deal with the relationship between humans and animals in different ways. This essay explores the hierarchy and power struggle between humans and animals in the two aforementioned children’s books and the difference between their portrayal of animals. It also talks about what may have influenced these books and their message, directly or indirectly, and about children’s literature as a genre.
The Victorian Era: Progress in the Natural Sciences

Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland and Black Beauty are from the Victorian Era and both deal with the problems of that time although their message can also be considered timeless and universal. The Victorian Era in the United Kingdom, which gets its name from Queen Victoria’s reign, was a period lasting from the 1830s until the death of Queen Victoria in 1901. Today, we associate the era with politeness, work ethic, family values, sexual restraint, moderation, and “exaggerated Puritan morality” (Balinisteanu 71). It is also known for its use of young children as laborers during the Industrial Revolution. However, it was a period of change, where brutality was receding and slowly giving way to a gentler society (Nath and Kumar 79).

The Victorian Era especially saw a great change in children’s lives, and people’s perception of children and their nature changed; there were also major breakthroughs in the natural sciences. Consequently, it is necessary to mention natural history in the context of the Victorian Era since so much new knowledge was gained during that period in this field. To start with, in the entertainment sphere, there was a new form of entertainment rising. Zoos and menageries, which were relatively new at the time, were becoming more and more popular in England. The London Zoo was first opened in 1828, helping zoos come into the mainstream in the Victorian Era. Thus, the people of England were introduced to a wider variety of animals than they had ever seen before (Daston and Mitman 59). Perhaps, seeing and even interacting with different animals was one of the ways that helped turn people’s attitude towards animals into a more empathetic one. Furthermore, the upper class was familiar with keeping pets at home, but pets increased in number when the middle class followed suit regarding pet ownership. By the end of the nineteenth century, the dog had moved from the outside where it was treated as a worker and seen as a savage to inside the home, where it was loved by family members and considered to be a part of the family (Smith and Do Rozario 40).

It was Charles Darwin who helped us understand our own nature better and that of the animals around us, making him one of the most influential persons of the Era. In the latter half of the nineteenth-century, Charles Darwin’s
Theory of Evolution revolutionized our perspective of ourselves as humans and our view of the animals that inhabit the planet with us. Charles Darwin’s theory is a big part of why and how humans see themselves as a part of the animal kingdom. People started viewing themselves as part of nature and started accepting natural history and their connection to it. Because of his theory, it is hard to argue today that humans are not part of the animal kingdom. It was mainly his book *On the Origin of Species*, which was published in 1859, that understandably caused a lot of debate at the time, but gradually people got used to the idea. As a result, animals were humanized, and humans were animalized in people’s minds. The line between animal and human became blurred. Charles Darwin also published *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* in 1872, a couple of years before Anna Sewell wrote *Black Beauty*. Both of Darwin’s books and *Black Beauty* along with the general rise of the animal book genre in the late Victorian Era served to further promote the idea that animals experienced pain and to embolden activists who fought for animal rights.

**Ancestors and Descendants in Children’s Literature**

It is surprisingly tricky to define children’s literature. One of the main categories is, of course, books written specifically to appeal to children and ones that have children as main characters. *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* is typically classified as a children’s book but is also adored by many adults and has themes that are appealing to them also. Thus, the line between adult and children’s literature is not always as sharply drawn as people think. However, one of the main giveaways of children’s books today are the animal characters. What would animals say if they could speak to us? That is a question that most people have probably asked themselves at some point when they have come into contact with animals. Walking into a bookstore or a library today people find a plethora of children’s books with talking animals in them. Children’s literature is the genre that perhaps uses animals most in stories, and children’s literature today is especially filled with stories of animals that have lives of their own. Humans are either replaced with animals or the animals live among humans. Either way, humans and animals are involved in each other’s worlds and share
similar characteristics that are not common in adult literature. The line between what is human and what is animal is much more blurred in children’s literature compared to adult literature. Children are perhaps more gullible, and their imagination is more vivid than that of adults. Thus, it is easier for them to imagine animals and humans as being somewhat interchangeable. They are much more likely to believe that animals can be like human children and identify with them in some way.

The animal story has a long history and tradition, reaching back to folk tales in general and *Aesop’s Fables* in particular. *Aesop’s Fables*, which date back to ancient Greece, are still being read to children today, and most people recognize at least a few of the fables (Vogl 69). They are a good example of didactic stories that include anthropomorphic animals. It was not until recently, during the nineteenth century, that talking animals in children’s literature became a staple though (Elick 1). Furthermore, children’s literature as a whole is a young genre. Children of the past were not considered what we consider children today but rather as small adults. The Victorian Era, as mentioned before, saw important transformations in the status and concept of the nature of children overtime. They were seen as a work force in the early Victorian Era; indeed, child labour was not an uncommon thing. However, it was in the late Victorian Era that laws concerning child labor were legislated.

The English philosopher John Locke was a key figure because he presented children as being their own entity and not work force or objects for adults to control (Brown 420). It was in the late 17th century that Locke first influenced the public’s notion of childhood when he wrote about childhood and suggested that books be written that would specifically appeal to children in his 1693 treatise *Some Thoughts Concerning the Education of Children* (Tunnell et al. 80). Ever since then, publishers of children’s books have taken John Locke’s argument into account that children’s books should contain pictures. Locke said that if people wanted to teach children to read and value reading, then books should be somewhat of a play or a game to them because that is what all children are familiar with and love. It should especially not be made into a task or a burden for them. In *Some Thoughts Concerning the Education of Children*, Locke wrote that when babies are born, they love liberty and have an aversion to many other
things that might seem to threaten that. He encouraged teachers and educators
to respect children’s attachment to liberty and the pleasures associated with it (Brown 351-352).

Locke also suggested that toys and education be combined to make it
easier for children to learn. For instance, he recommended putting letters on
cubes to stack so young children can learn the alphabet. Children’s fundamen-
tal desire for play can thus be used as a tool to make learning easier instead of
simply dismissing it (Brown 352). In this way, children could be taught without
them associating it with anything but entertainment. Locke’s idea about coaxing
children into reading has influenced modern child education, largely through the
eighteenth century children’s books that were getting more popular due to the
emerging mass printing industry (Brown 352). Before the Victorian Era, litera-
ture for children was mostly focused on didacticism and getting a message
across rather than on literary quality or enjoyable stories that children would en-
joy reading and that would appeal to their vivid imagination (“History of Chil-
dren’s Literature” 8). Carroll defied conventional expectations with Alice’s Ad-
ventures in Wonderland by writing a story devoid of didacticism; indeed, it is the
book that is considered the first work that broke the shackles of didacticism
(“History of Children's Literature" 13). Furthermore, Alice’s Adventures in Won-
derland was the first children’s fantasy book that initiated the rethinking of the
relations between humans and animals and asked questions about the power
struggle between the two (Elick 23).
The animals in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* behave mostly like humans in animals’ bodies, at least on the surface. They talk English; they throw tea parties; and they worry about tardiness. *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* rethinks the animal/human power struggle by making the animals subjects and not objects. The animals have lives of their own, without a human master, so the hierarchy becomes blurred (Elick 20). They do not need humans to survive, and they are fully independent. This plays with people’s notions of the hierarchy between (hu)man and beast. The animals are empowered to speak for themselves, so the power has been reversed more in the favour of the animals (Elick 23). The animals differ from those in fairytales and folktales as they are not portrayed as the helpers, enemies, or victims of Alice (Elick 25). They are actually rather rude to her and talk back to her, which raises the question of whether animals are equal to humans or superior to them in the story since the animals in Wonderland seem to see themselves that way. They are not the same helpless animals that Alice is used to seeing, and they are not helpless or dependent on humans.

The story starts in the real world, Victorian society, where rules of conduct are strict and unwavering. The first animal to appear in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* is the anthropomorphised White Rabbit who leads Alice into Wonderland, where everything seems a little warped and backwards. However, her first step into the fantasy world is not stepping into the rabbit hole but rather when she sees the White Rabbit, who is the only animal from Wonderland that she encounters in the “real” world. The rabbit walks on its hind legs, wears a waistcoat, and has a watch in its pockets that it checks while mumbling to itself that it is late. The White Rabbit is capitalised in the book like that is its name, similar to a human's or perhaps to give it an air of importance. It is not just some rabbit that hops in the garden when one is taking a walk. It is not just a "White Rabbit with pink eyes" (Carroll 1) as Alice first describes it. The White Rabbit is the connection or bridge to the fantasy world; it is human and familiar enough to us but also too fantastical for our world because the human and animal characteristics have been put together in one. In the illustrations, its posture is human-
like, and it has a worried look on its face. Overall, it looks like a small, furry human. When Alice first sees the White Rabbit in the garden, she thinks that “There was nothing so very remarkable in that; nor did Alice think it so very much out of the way…” (Carroll 2), meaning she acknowledges that it is not very abnormal for a rabbit to wear clothes in her mind, and she does not seem to care too much. Alice is, after all, a child, and she probably has dreamt, read about, or imagined talking animals before, so they do not seem as absurd to her as they perhaps should. Alice is probably used to seeing men in waistcoats with pockets, and to a child like her, the boundary between humans and animal is not as clear as has been mentioned before. Later, when Alice gets to Wonderland, she meets a Mouse (also capitalized). At that point, Alice has gotten so small that she is the same size as the Mouse. Alice starts talking about her cat from back home, Dinah, without realizing that the Mouse is terrified of cats like any other mouse would be. It is in that moment that she is able to experience for herself how it is being afraid of common house pets like cats that mice and birds would flee from, but it does not seem to fully sink into her mind. She may not realize fully that she would be prey for her cat, much like the Mouse, in the state that she is in. A cat would probably just as well attack Alice being the small size that she is. Thus, the roles of Alice and her pet cat get reversed even though Dinah does not come with her to Wonderland. Alice herself does not comment on the concern of predator and prey; rather, she is mostly just worried that she might have offended and “hurt the poor animal’s feelings” (Carroll 14) when telling the Mouse about Dinah. She experiences the animals as having feelings and almost sees them on par with humans—but not completely.

In one of the later chapters, Alice eats a mushroom. It makes her neck grow so long that she can bend it “about easily in any direction, like a serpent” (Carroll 39). When she dives her head into the trees below her, she is attacked by an angry Pigeon mother who thinks she is a serpent trying to steal the eggs from her nest. John Tenniel, the illustrator, did not attempt to depict that moment in his illustrations and perhaps because of that the Pigeon has never captured the imagination of the readers as much as the Cheshire Cat or the Caterpillar (Lovell-Smith 27). It is, however, an interesting scene because the Pigeon misidentifies Alice’s species and sees her only as a threat, another
fellow creature in nature that it has to protect itself against. Now, Alice is not merely a human observer of nature but is also a part of it; now, she is also being observed and brought under nature’s eyes by the many animals of Wonderland. This scene also shows the Pigeon as an animal in a natural setting rather than a setting of fairy-tales or fables where animals resemble humans and have the latter’s concerns and behaviours (Lovell-Smith 28). This role reversal may insinuate that humans are not superior to other creatures in nature but that they are merely a part of the animal kingdom. The Pigeon’s protective nature can be read as the struggle for survival. However, the Pigeon sounds more annoyed than defensive in this scene: “I've tried every way, and nothing seems to suit them! . . . those serpents! There's no pleasing them!” (Carroll 40). The Pigeon fears the serpent/Alice because she is the predator, but yet it wishes to please it/her. This scene shows real nature, where the smaller animals have to fight for their space and their lives.

In many ways, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* can also be read as a satire of Victorian society. It parodies the education, ethics, and properness of the era. It is easy to see the parallels between Wonderland and Victorian society. The easiest one to spot is perhaps the Queen of Hearts who is supposed to be Queen Victoria’s counterpart of sorts. Queen Victoria was a really important figure in Victorian society, and she bears resemblance to the Queen of Hearts in Wonderland who rules with tyrannical power. In Wonderland, the justice system, or lack thereof, is as follows: “Sentence first — verdict afterwards” (Carroll 102). There is an apparent lack of logic here as the normal order has been switched. It is, however, not so far-fetched seeing as justice systems all around the world sometimes judge people before a verdict has been reached. The citizens of Wonderland seem to be puppets in the Queen’s hands: in the case of the flamingoes, they are mallets in her hands, and the hedgehogs are the balls in her game of croquet. These depictions might apply to the citizens of the real world in some shape or form, in that people do not really have power over their lives but are really someone else’s instrument or pet.
Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland: Identity Crisis

Alice’s personal struggle throughout the book are the constant bodily changes she goes through. “...I know who I was when I got up this morning, but I think I must have been changed several times since then.” (Carroll 34) is a quote that describes Alice’s personal journey through Wonderland well as she and others constantly question her identity. Her bodily form is something that changes throughout the book and is not stable, and therefore her identity is not clear anymore. This can be read as being a reference to natural history, to the Theory of Evolution, and to the notion of survival of the fittest. All creatures evolve over time in order to survive, so it is easy to see the connection between the Pigeon scene and Darwin’s theory. Wonderland perhaps disputes the assumption that Alice is superior to other creatures, when she is first misclassified, mistaken for a servant, and then later grouped with other “nameless” animals. This can easily be seen as the post-Darwinian thought that argues that humans are just clever animals. Thus, Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland can be read as a parody of the human observer and writer of nature who names and explains to readers the strange creatures that live in the dangerous world out there (Lovell-Smith 39). Instead, in Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland, the Caterpillar asks Alice, “Who are you?” (Carroll 34). Clearly, the roles are reversed: Alice has become the curious entity that catches the attention of the Caterpillar. Furthermore, the White Rabbit mistakes Alice for a servant, and the Pigeon accuses her of being a serpent about to steal her eggs. This all threatens Alice’s vision of herself and her fellow humans.

When Alice falls into Wonderland, a land of talking animals, she shifts from being a subject to an object and from being an observer to being the one observed. The animals are the ones who identify Alice instead of she herself. When Alice tells the Pigeon she is a little girl but that she also eats eggs, the Pigeon says that it does not believe it, “but if they [little girls] do, then they’re a kind of serpent: that’s all I can say” (Carroll 41). The Pigeon’s comment on the similarity between little girls and serpents silences Alice. The Pigeon forces Alice to face her own animal nature: “No, no! You’re a serpent; and there’s no use denying it. I suppose you’ll be telling me next that you never tasted an
“eggs!” (Caroll 40). Her sense of her own human superiority is thrown into question when she is rightfully compared to a serpent, a predator, and she instantly tries to protect her superiority by saying “if I was [looking for eggs], I shouldn't want yours: I don't like them raw” (Carroll 41). The Pigeon lives in fear everyday that a predator will take her eggs away, something that Alice has never had to face. It is that emotion of anxiety that is very prominent in Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland. It is the anxiety of being eaten by other creatures which actually makes Wonderland a world of violence and fear. Humans have built a society where they do not have to worry all the time about predators stealing their cubs or being eaten for food. All that vanishes, however, when Alice can no longer identify with the belief in human superiority, especially owing to her changing body. She ponders the reversible question “Do cats eat bats?” (Carroll 4) because she is being thrown into “nature” where the principle eat or be eaten can be applied. Predators are a source of constant anxiety for the smaller animals in the Pool of Tears and Caucus-Race chapters, and Alice does not help the situation when she starts mentioning her cat, Dinah. Alice is also almost cooked alive in the White Rabbit’s house and therefore has become prey herself. Alice’s superiority, which is supposed to stem from her humanness, is constantly being undermined. As mentioned before, the Victorian Era is known to have been very prim and proper, but Carroll broke the shackles of didacticism and properness by inverting what was expected of children’s literature and by parodying Victorian society’s general perception of itself and encouraging readers to not take themselves so seriously.

**Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland: A Story Told in Pictures and Conversations**

Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland is adorned with illustrations that really add a new perspective and enhance the story by helping readers imagine the fantasy of the story but also enabling them to connect more to it. Alice herself says it best about the unappealing book in her sister’s hand just before leaving her behind and following the White Rabbit into Wonderland: “…what is the use of a book … without pictures or conversations?” (Carroll 1). Alice’s Adventures in
*Wonderland* is the opposite of her sister’s book in the beginning because it contains what was lacking in there. *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* is therefore exactly the type of book that Alice would have liked to be reading in the garden at the beginning of the story. Even when Alice is alone, she manages to add conversations by chatting to herself. Carroll presents us with a text that is noticeably abundant in punctuations marks: quotations, periods, commas, dashes, parentheses, italics, and question marks. The lack of punctuation is what made her sister’s book look so dull (Brown 355). As mentioned before, the book contains 42 illustrations by John Tenniel, making it more interactive and therefore more interesting to children. From the start of children’s books coming into print, publishers have placed importance on imaginative practices in the form of illustrations and have recognized the relation between the compatibility of words with images, just as Locke did (Brown 355). Alice’s preference for books containing pictures and conversations therefore comes as no surprise as children’s books have a certain liveliness and sensory engagement built into them that is connected to play. Locke encouraged and placed great importance on having pictures to translate ideas into visible objects. It helps children not only to have words to connect to ideas but also images and figures (Brown 353). This is the formula that publishers follow today, as picture books are usually the first books that a person reads in their lives.
The early nineteenth century saw the dawn of the first animal activism groups (Elick 7) in a world where horses were the main mode of transportation. Black Beauty was a pivotal work for animal activism at the time, advocating for the better treatment of working horses in England. One of those activists was Anna Sewell, who was homebound most of her life due to her disabilities. However, horses enabled her to travel around, and her fondness for them grew into intense love. Unlike the animals in Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland, which are not so familiar to humans, the horses in Black Beauty are recognizable because they have been pets to humans for a long time, and humans have had to learn how to take care of them and how to train them. Horses and humans have a bond, and horses are often loved by family members. They are more connected to the human world than any of the animals in Wonderland and that is probably a part of why people are able to connect to the story of Black Beauty as much as they do.

At the time of the Industrial Revolution, however, Sewell saw that the horses needed a voice to speak up for them as she needed the horses in order to live a better, more mobile life. Like animals, women at the time were also voiceless in society, so it is not surprising that many of the authors that wrote the genre that is called “animal biographies” were women (DeMello 3). In an animal autobiography, a nonhuman narrator provides an account of their lives, much like Black Beauty does. Black Beauty’s publication and popularity sparked a revival in animal stories, which continued to evolve into the big phenomenon that it is today (Markowsky 460).

Furthermore, Sewell has actually been credited for being a pioneer in creating a new literary genre with Black Beauty. That genre is frequently called the realistic animal story, it-narrative or the animal-centric story (DeMello 180). Black Beauty is different from other animal stories in the sense that an animal is both the narrator and protagonist, and the story is focused on the horses’ lives and their habitat and not a human’s (DeMello 180). Sewell used a powerful tool when she decided to make Black Beauty the narrator because it would not have had the same effect on the reader if it was told from a human’s point of view.
It may seem controversial to say that *Black Beauty* is narrated in such a way that the readers regard the horse Black Beauty as they would a human. However, he is not supposed to represent humans as the animals in *Aesop’s Fables* did before. The animal biography and the animal “author”, in this case Black Beauty, is more of a narrator than an author. It is obvious that Black Beauty did not write the story but that his story is all in the head of a human author. The bond between the author, Anna Sewell, and the narrator, Black Beauty, can never be severed, and thus the story becomes more humanised even if that is not the desired effect. The purpose of many animal stories is not to give an in-depth account of the animals themselves but rather to portray human experiences, like *Aesop’s Fables*. In later texts such as *Black Beauty*, Sewell, however, resisted using the animal narrator as means for depicting human social life. Instead these horse characters have depth and a lot of things to say to their human reader (Flegel 122).

Even though *Black Beauty* is a children’s book, parents might be shocked at the level of violence described and depicted in it. Tess Cosslett argues that animal stories are “allied with science, ethics and truth” (Flegel 122), seeing as they were often used for natural history education and anticruelty advocacy. Consequently, it comes as no surprise that many animal autobiographies include depictions of abuse, suffering, and trauma, all of which can considered an essential feature of the genre. A common topic is the torture of animals by the hands of children and the general cruelty of human practices. *Black Beauty’s* purpose is not to represent animal consciousness accurately but to evoke compassion in humans towards animals, ultimately leading humans to treat them better. The result is that *Black Beauty* tries to represent horses as having consciousness on a similar level as humans, meaning that they feel pain, happiness, and loss, and they have the self-awareness and the intelligence to realise what is happening to them.

Of course, Anna Sewell knew that she could not portray what goes on in the mind of a horse accurately, but she used the horse narrator and gave it human feelings to make us connect more to the pain the horses feel. Ultimately, we understand that the animal is only a character in a human’s mind. The author might not be able to write an authentic animal story, but only a more human
story with a character in an animal guise. The readers have probably all felt similar emotions to Black Beauty because these are human emotions. After all, humans do not fully know how animals feel and if they feel exactly like we do. Thus, the story tries to represent the “other world,” the world we do not fully understand, the world of animals, but it is not necessarily successful in that regard.

The animal narrator often speaks for humans or the writers themselves. It allows them to discuss concepts such as loneliness, alienation, or slavery, through an animal voice, therefore actually helping us understand what it means to be human (Herman 82). As a result, the story may be more about being part of “the other” or the oppressed and not so much about being animalistic, so the animal might be a stand-in for the child reader or an alienated group.

The animal biography genre manages to invite the reader to immerse him or herself in the animals’ lives and imagine their feelings. Sewell’s situation in life may very well have helped her to “switch lives” with the horses and identify with the cruelty they endured at the hands of humans. Sewell might have identified with the horses as she lived in a society where women were more oppressed; the latter were seen as being driven by feelings and nature, not reason and culture (DeMello 90). It is easy to connect that to how people look at animals as wild beasts, and it is therefore easy to connect the story of Black Beauty to that of Anna Sewell’s and many other women at the time. However, even if the genre gives people the possibility of identifying with the suffering animal, there are limitations. For it to be possible for the reader to be able to identify with the animal, the animal is humanized and the difference in human/animal consciousness is not explored. In Black Beauty, the horses are objects of human cruelty and not subjects with a free reign over their lives (Elick 7).

The didactic nature of Black Beauty, like other moral discourses, is narrated through sentimentality; the book plays with the reader’s emotions. Black Beauty makes the reader think twice about the behaviours of the master towards the servant, be it an animal or a human. It encourages self-reflection on one’s behaviour and offers room for self-improvement. Black Beauty tries to call for a change but also does not challenge the existing human/animal hierarchy in a way that is meant to break it. Black Beauty’s happy ending is not his freedom to do as he pleases, but his freedom from the cruel humans and into the hands
of caring owners. Thus, the story does not argue against the use of horses for transportation so that they can roam around free but that their bond to humans is their purpose. Human lives are made better with the use of horses as transportation, and the horses deserve a good life for their work. The book does not challenge social roles or the human-animal hierarchy, unlike Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland. Rather, it raises the questions of animal welfare and human cruelty and tries to fight for animal welfare through the use of didacticism.

**Black Beauty: A Horse or a Machine?**

One of the essential backdrops for Black Beauty is the rapid technological changes in the world at the time. Thus, the contrast between horse and machine becomes essential in the story. The horse’s status at the time was changing when machine-driven vehicles started replacing horse-driven carriages and that may have been a big reason for why the story came to be. One of the horses, Merrylegs, says that “Boys, you see, think a horse or pony is like a steam engine or a thrashing machine, and they can go on as long and fast as they please; they never think a pony can get tired, or have any feelings…” (Sewell 34). When Black Beauty has been used as a rental horse, he remarks that “ninety-nine out of a hundred would as soon think of patting the steam engine that drew the train” (Sewell 162). He also mirrors Merrylegs’s comment when he says that “They always seemed to think that a horse was something like a steam-engine, only smaller. At any rate, they think that if only they pay for it, a horse is bound to go just as far, and just as fast, and with just as heavy a load as they please” (Sewell 114). It is emphasised a lot that horses were treated inhumanely and it is very evident that some people saw little to no difference between a living horse and a machine, viewing horses as machines to help the humans travel around and not pets to love and take good care of. Considering that people get tired if overworked, it is quite strange that people could not see the similarities to another living creature in that regard.

At the time that Anna Sewell was alive, animal activist groups were a product of the elite, but Sewell managed to create a figure, Black Beauty, that
spoke to a much larger audience, whether people were rich or poor, black or white, women or men. Indeed, *Black Beauty* influenced people’s concerns about animals. The book is reported to have inspired a large number of people to join animal activism groups and other humane societies to show their support against animal cruelty, which ultimately led to the outlawing of many harmful practices against horses (Malecki 2). It is because the book preaches kindness, that we should seek a way to be kind to others and also to bridge the gap and form a connection with other beings and not try to seek power over others.

In *Black Beauty*, humans are at the top of the hierarchy. They control the lives of the horses in almost all aspects, but the reader judges the humans for their bad treatment of the horses from an equine point of view (DeMello 184). Although the status and role of horses has changed drastically since the nineteenth century, *Black Beauty* remains just as popular now as ever and is considered a classic. The moral of the story transcends time and is not dependent on any one thing because it preaches kindness, which is relevant to every single being that is alive at any given time. Sewell criticizes people, who do not consider animals as having any emotions or the ability to feel pain and who end up abusing them with work to the point of sickness or death as well as those who hurt horses in the name of fashion. The story ends with humans and horses in harmony but not as being better off without each other. It is respect and love that is essential for creating a humane relationship between men and horses, where both sides benefits.
Conclusion

Although *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Black Beauty* are almost 150 years old and may focus on the problems of a bygone era, they are still relevant. What perhaps makes them timeless is that they are not one-dimensional but rather can be looked at from many standpoints, so the discussions about them continue to this day. Their uniqueness also makes them stand out; after all, these books were innovative at the time of publishing. What started as a little story to entertain Alice Liddell and her sisters turned into a cultural phenomenon, and a young woman's work on her deathbed has influenced many children’s lives throughout the decades and inspired people to join animal activism in some way.

These books use two different methods and approaches to get their message across to their readers. Anna Sewell used didacticism, a conventional way of telling children’s stories that we have seen through the centuries. Lewis Carroll, however, ignored that formula and tried to make his story fun and interactive for children while incorporating the new information that was surfacing in the natural sciences, the Theory of Evolution in particular, into his story to get people to question the natural order that we humans have become accustomed to. Carroll also utilized John Locke’s idea about children having their own identity with their own preferences, those preferences being play, pictures, and anything interactive. Carroll created a book that would appeal to children, a story full of conversations and illustrations. All of this helped change people’s opinions about children. Children went from being looked at as small adults and a work force to being considered their own persons with their own interests and needs.

After the Industrial Revolution horses and engines were treated much the same. Horses were overworked and treated like machines rather than living creatures. That is why Sewell saw the need to write the story of Black Beauty. *Black Beauty* is ultimately classified as an animal biography since a horse is narrating the story. However, these kinds of animal stories more often than not represent humans more than the animals. Black Beauty, however, is not supposed to represent a human, the horses in the story live in their own habitat and
have their own problems. Sewell manages to make the reader feel for the abused horses, but she also manages to speak for many other oppressed groups in society than just the horses. Since *Black Beauty* is not an authentic animal story the horses have human emotions which all readers can relate to. Sewell does not follow completely in the footsteps of the animal literature that came before and that used the animals to mostly comment on human social life; rather, she manages to make Black Beauty speak for all oppressed and alienated groups. She paints a picture where the humans and horses live in harmony together, and everyone is treated well. The human/animal hierarchy is not challenged in the end, as the humans still own the horses. The message is rather that the horses should be treated as living things and not as machines.

In *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* Alice goes on a journey where she no longer has any power over her identity or body and where the human/animal hierarchy that she is used to becomes blurred. Her body starts to change over the course of the story, which may be a nod to the Theory of Evolution where all creatures must change and adapt to new surroundings. Most of Carroll’s animals do not have typical human troubles. Rather, they live in the wilderness where they have to worry about predators. Moreover, the story parodies how humans look at animals and the stories that came before it. In *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* the animals are not Alice’s servants nor are they inferior to her. The animals end up being the ones who (mis)identify Alice much like the human observer of nature tends to identify other animals.

This essay started with a quote from the naturalist John Muir. Muir believed in harmony among all creatures. Ultimately, all humans and animals belong to and live off the same land; these books help remind people that nature is a force to be reckoned with, and it is best to treat it with care and respect.


