

Paper Mache for 7-10-26 by David Read

After watching the Season 1 closing episode of “Dutton Ranch,” the “Yellowstone,” spin off, I got to wondering if any of the horses that feature so prominently in both shows have names. Turns out that Tate Dutton, Kevin Costner’s grandson’s horse, is named Lucky whose name is mentioned repeatedly and is probably the most recognizable named horse in the series. Some of the real-life champion horses that have appeared include Metallic Cat, Spookernickerin, and High-Class Trash. What about famous horses throughout history, art and literature? Remarkable horses have become characters in their own right and aren't merely transportation. They're loyal companions, trusted partners, and sometimes symbols of courage, freedom, or even impossible dreams. Their names have endured for centuries, often outliving those who first imagined or rode them.

Perhaps no literary horse is more beloved than Rocinante, the faithful steed of Don Quixote. Created by Miguel de Cervantes in the early 1600s, Rocinante wasn't a magnificent warhorse. He was old, skinny, and hardly impressive. Yet to the delusional but idealistic Don Quixote, he was the noblest horse in Spain. In many ways, Rocinante perfectly reflected his master, ordinary in appearance but capable of carrying extraordinary dreams. An interesting side note is that John Steinbeck named his camper Rocinante in which he explored the country as chronicled in his book, “Travels with Charley.”

American history offers equally memorable examples. Traveler, the trusted gray horse of Confederate General Robert E. Lee, became almost inseparable from his rider and remains one of the most recognizable horses of the Civil War. Cincinnati, the favorite horse of George Washington, accompanied the first president through the closing years of the Revolutionary War and into retirement, becoming a symbol of leadership and the peaceful transfer of power.

The American West gave us Trigger, whose intelligence and athleticism made him every bit as popular as his owner, Roy Rogers. Television audiences of a certain age still fondly remember the Lone Ranger's magnificent white stallion, introduced with the unforgettable cry, "Hi-Yo, Silver! Away!" Generations of children grew up with Black Beauty, the gentle narrator of “Black Beauty” by Anna Sewell, whose story inspired compassion toward animals and helped shape the animal welfare movement.

Pegasus, the winged horse of Greek mythology, has inspired artists, sculptors, poets, and filmmakers for more than two thousand years and represents the soaring power of imagination itself. Cinema has given us unforgettable equine stars as well. Shadowfax, the majestic white horse from “The Lord of the Rings,” carries the wizard Gandalf across Middle-earth with almost supernatural grace. Of course, horse lovers could add dozens more names to the list: Bucephalus, who carried Alexander the Great across much of the known world; Marengo, the faithful companion of Napoleon Bonaparte; Comanche, the sole surviving horse of the Battle of the Little Bighorn, and racing legends like Secretariat and Seabiscuit, whose achievements transcended sport and became part of American folklore.

Perhaps we remember these horses because they remind us that history and great stories have never been made by people alone. Until recently, civilization itself moved at the pace of a horse. Explorers crossed continents on horseback. Armies depended on cavalry. Farmers worked beside horses from dawn until dusk. Families traveled by wagon, carriage, and saddle. For thousands of years, horses were our partners in nearly every important human endeavor. Today, horses occupy a different place in our lives, but not in our imaginations. Artists still paint them. Sculptors still cast them in bronze. Writers continue to place heroes in the saddle, and children still dream of owning one someday. That's quite a legacy for creatures who never spoke a single line. Well, there was the talking TV horse, “Mister Ed.” Most of the time, all they had to do was silently help carry the story forward.