

literatur für leser

16

3

39. Jahrgang

Inhaltsverzeichnis

Joela Jacobs · Über LiteraTier

Julia Eva Wannemacher · Vom Symbol zum Individuum: Tiere im Werk Jeremias Gotthelfs

Joela Jacobs · Separation Anxiety: Canine Narrators and Modernist Isolation in Woolf, Twain, and Panizza

Sabine Wilke · Von Bären, Katzen, Hunden und anderen nicht-menschlichen Wesen: Tierliches in Leopold von Sacher-Masochs Novelle *Venus im Pelz*

Belinda Kleinhaus · (Un)Thinking Otherness: The Entanglement of *Bios* and *Zoë* in Rahel Hutmacher's Animal Stories

Vanessa Hester · „Die Schranken zwischen Tier und Mensch fallen sehr leicht“: Die Wandlung der weiblichen Protagonistin in Marlen Haushofers *Die Wand*

Shreya Gaikwad · Historische Perspektivverschiebung auf Tiere in Marcel Beyers *Kaltenburg*



PETER LANG

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Joela Jacobs

Inhaltsverzeichnis

Joela Jacobs

Über LiteraTier _____ 137

Julia Eva Wannemacher

Vom Symbol zum Individuum: Tiere im Werk Jeremias Gotthelfs _____ 141

Joela Jacobs

Separation Anxiety: Canine Narrators and Modernist Isolation in Woolf, Twain, and Panizza _____ 153

Sabine Wilke

Von Bären, Katzen, Hunden und anderen nicht-menschlichen Wesen: Tierliches in Leopold von Sacher-Masochs Novelle *Venus im Pelz* _____ 169

Belinda Kleinhans

(Un)Thinking Otherness: The Entanglement of *Bios* and *Zoë* in Rahel Hutmacher's Animal Stories _____ 181

Vanessa Hester

„Die Schranken zwischen Tier und Mensch fallen sehr leicht“: Die Wandlung der weiblichen Protagonistin in Marlen Haushofers *Die Wand* _____ 197

Shreya Gaikwad

Historische Perspektivverschiebung auf Tiere in Marcel Beyers *Kaltenburg* ____ 211

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Separation Anxiety: Canine Narrators and Modernist Isolation in Woolf, Twain, and Panizza

In the decades around 1900, the Western literary canon boasts a dense accumulation of stories that specifically make dogs their protagonists, or even their narrators. Authors amongst the most important voices of modernism in their respective traditions, such as Virginia Woolf, Mark Twain, Franz Kafka, O. Henry, Miguel de Unamuno, Vladimir Bulgakov, and Italo Svevo, all turned to canine perspectives to discuss the human condition in the rapidly changing modern world.¹ Modernism entailed, among other characteristics, fundamental skepticism of the human self-conception, including the epistemological insecurity of how one might fully know oneself or others and doubt about the ability of language to communicate meaning.² I argue that the turn to animals in the literary production of this time parses out three interconnected anxieties of modernism: 1) the growing isolation of the individual subject (which a companion animal can and cannot solve); 2) the *Sprachkrise*, a crisis of language and meaning (in which the limitations of language are addressed via depictions of canine thoughts or words); and 3) concerns about physiognomy and race theory (encoded by dog breeds), which lead to the violent subdual of Others – be they animal, female, or non-white – thus prompting questions about the “humanity” of humankind. The turn to dogs as one of, if not, *the* animal species sharing human everyday life in the literary engagement with these questions both illustrates and suggests ways of overcoming this isolation and its violence. On the following pages, I first briefly outline the three anxieties regarding isolation, language, and breedist violence in modernism and then draw on three canine narratives, Virginia Woolf’s *Flush: A Biography* (1933), Mark Twain’s *A Dog’s Tale* (1903), and Oskar Panizza’s *Aus dem Tagebuch eines Hundes* (*From the Diary of a Dog*, 1892), in order to unfold these three entangled points.

1 Much could be said about each example, but for these purposes a list of quite heterogeneous texts must suffice: Marie More Marsh’s *Vic: The Autobiography of a Fox Terrier* (1892), Oskar Panizza’s *Aus dem Tagebuch eines Hundes* (1892), Marshall Saunders’ *Beautiful Joe: An Autobiography* (1893), Gordon Stables’ *Sable and White: The Autobiography of a Show Dog* (1894), Anatole France’s *Riquet and Pensées de Riquet* (1900), Mark Twain’s *A Dog’s Tale* (1903), O. Henry’s *Memoirs of a Yellow Dog* (1903), Jack London’s *The Call of the Wild* (1903) and *Wild Fang* (1906), Reginald Pelham Bolton’s *The Autobiography of an Irish Terrier* (1904), Olive Evelyn Hurd Bragdon’s *Pup: The Autobiography of a Greyhound* (1905), Esther M. Baxendale’s *Yours with All My Heart: Her Own Story, as Told by the Beautiful Italian Gazelle-Hound Fairy* (1904) and *Fairy: The Autobiography of a Real Dog* (1907), Jacinto Benavente y Martínez’s *Nuevo coloquio de los perros* (1908), Miguel de Unamuno’s *Berganza y Zapirón* (1909), Carrie Gates Niles Whitcomb’s *The Autobiography of Jeremy L.: The Actor Dog* (1910), Barbara Blair’s *The Journal of a Neglected Bulldog* (1911), Thomas Mann’s *Herr und Hund* (1918), Albert Payson Terhune’s *Lad: A Dog* (1919), Franz Kafka’s *Forschungen eines Hundes* (1922), Mikhail Bulgakov’s *Собачье сердце* (1925), Sewell Collins’s *The Rubáiyát of a Scotch Terrier* (1926), Rudyard Kipling, *Thy Servant a Dog and Other Dog Stories* (1930), Virginia Woolf’s *Flush* (1933), Italo Svevo’s *Argo e il suo padrone* (1934).

2 See, for instance, Helmut Kiesel: *Geschichte der literarischen Moderne. Sprache, Ästhetik, Dichtung im zwanzigsten Jahrhundert*. Munich: Beck 2004. Joachim Pfeiffer: *Tod und Erzählen. Wege der literarischen Moderne um 1900*. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer 1997.

The texts are selected as representative both because they bring out these modernist anxieties very clearly, while nonetheless approaching the representation of dogs in three different ways, and because they span a wide historical and national range through their British, American, and German origins across four decades, while still being distinctly anchored in the Euro-Western constellation that gave rise to these modernist anxieties. Each text places a slightly different emphasis on the three aspects of the argument, and therefore my reading of them is divided into two parts: the first explicates the interplay of modernist isolation and the language crisis with the help of Woolf's and Panizza's works, while the second turns to the issue of breed with Woolf and Twain, whose texts highlights the violent consequences and ethical implications of these ideas.

The Modernist Crisis of the Human Self

In his introductory lectures on psychoanalysis in 1915, Sigmund Freud described three crises in the history of humankind, which fundamentally changed the existing view of the world and the human self. The most recent crisis, he held, was that of his own time:

Humanity, in the course of time, has had to endure from the hands of science two great outrages against its naive self-love. The first was when humanity discovered that our earth was not the center of the universe, but only a tiny speck in a world-system hardly conceivable in its magnitude. This is associated in our minds with the name "Copernicus," although Alexandrian science had taught much the same thing. The second occurred when biological research robbed man of his apparent superiority under special creation, and rebuked him with his descent from the animal kingdom, and his ineradicable animal nature. This re-valuation, under the influence of Charles Darwin, Wallace and their predecessors, was not accomplished without the most violent opposition of their contemporaries. But the third and most irritating insult is flung at the human mania of greatness by present-day psychological research, which wants to prove to the "I" that it is not even master in its own home, but is dependent upon the most scanty information concerning all that goes on unconsciously in its psychic life.³

These three attacks on human superiority – decentering the earth with Copernicus, dethroning man with Darwin, and deposing rational subjectivity with Freud – left modern humans with pressing questions about who they are and where they belong. This anxiety was amplified by the concurrent realization that language appeared unfit to express one's thoughts and describe the world accurately, anticipated by Friedrich Nietzsche's claims for the fundamentally metaphorical nature of all language and fully expressed in Hugo von Hofmannsthal's famous *Chandos Letter* (1902). Hofmannsthal's narrator distills the *Sprachkrise* into a single "case":

Mein Fall ist, in Kürze, dieser: Es ist mir völlig die Fähigkeit abhanden gekommen, über irgend etwas zusammenhängend zu denken oder zu sprechen. [...] Es zerfiel mir alles in Teile, die Teile wieder in Teile und nichts mehr ließ sich mit einem Begriff umspannen. Die einzelnen Worte schwammen um mich; sie gerannen zu Augen die mich anstarrten und in die ich wieder hineinstarren muß: Wirbel sind sie, in die hinabzusehen mich schwindelt, die sich unaufhaltsam drehen und durch die hindurch man ins Leere kommt.⁴

³ Sigmund Freud: *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis*. New York: Boni and Liveright 1920, p. 246f.

⁴ Hugo von Hofmannsthal: *Ein Brief*. In: Hugo von Hofmannsthal: *Gesammelte Werke in zehn Einzelbänden. Erzählungen, erfundene Gespräche und Briefe, Reisen*. Ed. by Bernd Schoeller. Frankfurt: Fischer 1979, pp. 460–471, here p. 464f. "In brief, this is my case: I have completely lost the ability to think or speak coherently about anything at all. [...] Everything came to pieces, the pieces broke into more pieces, and nothing

Unable to put anything into meaningful words (except, ironically, the contents of his eloquent letter, which exemplifies the artistic inspiration that the *Sprachkrise* also provided), the writer is no longer in control of language, as “everything comes to pieces” and he is “led into the void”. Embroiled in such fundamental skepticism regarding both reason and language, the two characteristics supposedly differentiating humans from animals, the modernist individual lost hold of the notions that had constituted its sense of self and belonging.

The inability to define oneself or others entailed a profound experience of alienation and isolation that is symptomatic of the modernist crisis, and its entangled insecurities prompted a turn to the animal in an effort to rediscover the human.⁵ One of the most famous solitary modernist figures is perhaps the protagonist of Rainer Maria Rilke’s *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge* (1910). Avoiding human companionship and language, the protagonist turns to dogs early on in his notes: „Ich sprach fast mit niemandem, denn es war meine Freude, einsam zu sein; nur mit den Hunden hatte ich kurze Gespräche dann und wann: mit ihnen verstand ich mich ausgezeichnet.“⁶ The excellent or “perfect understanding” of these conversations seems to make Malte’s otherwise mute isolation not only bearable but enjoyable and invokes the image of “man’s best friend” as one who can undo isolation. Canine companionship even seems to circumvent the problems of the *Sprachkrise*: dogs will listen and their response does not rely on abstract linguistic expressions, thus creating the sense of “perfect understanding”. Yet on the level of language, this conversation is a soliloquy, which makes it a lonely affair after all, and therefore, a companion animal both can and cannot soothe isolation or circumvent language. After Darwin, Freud, and Hofmannsthal, the presence of the mute animal signals species similarity to the human, for better or for worse. No longer underpinning the traditional human superiority, the animal is a reminder of humankind’s limitations, which can either lead to a sense of shared companionship that eases isolation or result in the animal’s violent subdual in order to re-establish the status quo. As Woolf’s, Panizza’s, and Twain’s narratives will each show in their own way, these two options are often entangled with one another.

could be encompassed by one idea. Isolated words swam about me; they turned into eyes that stared at me and into which I had to stare back, dizzying whirlpools which spun around and around and led into the void.” Hugo von Hofmannsthal: *A Letter*. In: Hugo von Hofmannsthal: *The Lord Chandos Letter and Other Writings*. Transl. by Joel Rotenberg. New York: New York Review of Books 2005, pp. 117-128, here p. 121f. Such a language-philosophical crisis of language and meaning is poised to be a particularly devastating diagnosis for writers, though many moderns turned it into a productive phase of creating *l’art pour l’art*, which trades in linguistic signs and symbols whose meaning cannot be fixed.

- 5 Whether it is portrayed as the lonely experience of an individual in the big city or traced to the theoretical foundations of Marxist alienation, Nietzsche’s nihilism, or Sartre’s existentialism, the sentiment of isolation pervades the works of American and European modernists. See, for instance, Kiesel: *Geschichte der literarischen Moderne* and Pfeiffer: *Tod und Erzählen*.
- 6 Rainer Maria Rilke: *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*. In: Rainer Maria Rilke: *Sämtliche Werke. Band 6*. Ed. by Ernst Zinn. Frankfurt: Insel 1966, pp. 708-945, here p. 733. “I hardly talked to anyone, for I found my greatest joy in being alone; only with the dogs did I now and then have short conversations: we understood one another perfectly.” Rainer Maria Rilke: *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*. Transl. by Stephen Mitchell. New York: Vintage International, 1990, p. 30.

Isolating Language

Virginia Woolf's *Flush* poses as the biography of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's cocker spaniel (about whom the latter penned two poems herself). Written in the third person, it details Flush's experience of moving from the country to the city, and his new life with an ailing female writer who is confined to her tyrannical father's house. Everything changes when Barrett meets her future husband, to whom jealous Flush is eventually reconciled and who brings on the writer's convalescence, which is completed when the newly married couple moves to Italy. Flush is part of all of these adventures, and he experiences some of his own when he is briefly dognapped and then released for a ransom payment. Through the eyes of Flush, the story weaves together a biography of Barrett and her experiences as a female writer in a patriarchal society as well as a portrayal of Victorian-era London, including its stark class differences.⁷ The story is saturated with the theme of isolation, particularly since it partakes in the common modernist convention of depicting a lonely and alienated individual living in a metropolis. Flush is given to Barrett by an impoverished friend precisely in order to ease her isolation, which is intensified by an illness that effectively quarantines her in her room:

may [he] be offered [...] to a friend who lies secluded all through the summer months in a back bedroom [...]? Such were the thoughts that came more and more frequently to Miss Mitford as she watched Flush rolling and scampering in the sunshine; as she sat by the couch of Miss Barrett in her dark, ivy-shaded London bedroom. Yes; Flush was worthy of Miss Barrett; Miss Barrett was worthy of Flush. The sacrifice was a great one; but the sacrifice must be made.⁸

While the context of these sentences puts "the sacrifice" in terms of the money that the financially struggling Miss Mitford could have asked for the purebred dog, the story also suggests that Flush is made to sacrifice his happy country life when moving from the summer sunshine to the confines of the "dark, ivy-shaded back bedroom" in the city. While his previous life entailed regular walks with his mistress, filled with rich scents and encounters with other animals of various kinds (both to mate with and to hunt), his new environment is not only so distinctly dark and stuffy that its smell is likened to that of a mausoleum⁹, but it also introduces him to isolation, as if modern city life were tied to this experience:

He felt himself alone—deserted. He rushed to the door. It was shut. He pawed, he listened. He heard footsteps descending. He knew them for the familiar footsteps of his mistress. They stopped. But no—on

7 A host of research about *Flush* has sprung up in recent decades. In the context of my argument, I want to highlight the following contributions in particular: Karalyn Kendall-Morwick: "Mongrel Fiction. Canine *Bildung* and the Feminist Critique of Anthropocentrism in Woolf's *Flush*". In: *Modern Fiction Studies*, 60.3 (2014), pp. 506-526. Layla Colon Vale: "Virginia Woolf's Feminist *Flush*". In: *Atenea* 34.1-2 (2014), pp. 89-106. Anna Feuerstein: "What Does Power Smell Like? Canine Epistemology and the Politics of the Pet in Virginia Woolf's *Flush*". In: *Virginia Woolf Miscellany* 84 (2013), pp. 32-34.

8 Virginia Woolf: *Flush*. Ed. by Kate Flint. Oxford: Oxford University Press 1998, p. 13. Subsequently abbreviated as *W* and cited in the text.

9 "Only a scholar who has descended step by step into a mausoleum and there finds himself in a crypt, crusted with fungus, slimy with mould, exuding sour smells of decay and antiquity, while half-obliterated marble busts gleam in mid-air and all is dimly seen by the light of the small swinging lamp which he holds, and dips and turns, glancing now here, now there—only the sensations of such an explorer into the buried vaults of a ruined city can compare with the riot of emotions that flooded *Flush*'s nerves as he stood for the first time in an invalid's bedroom" (*W*, p. 16).

they went, down they went. Miss Mitford was slowly, was heavily, was reluctantly descending the stairs. And as she went, as he heard her footsteps fade, panic seized upon him. Door after door shut in his face as Miss Mitford went downstairs; they shut on freedom; on fields; on hares; on grass; on his adored, his venerated mistress—on the dear old woman who had washed him and beaten him and fed him from her own plate when she had none too much to eat herself—on all he had known of happiness and love and human goodness! There! The front door slammed. He was alone. She had deserted him. / Then such a wave of despair and anguish overwhelmed him, the irrevocableness and implacability of fate so smote him, that he lifted up his head and howled aloud. (W, p. 17f.)

This moment of desertion brings forth a howl, which evokes a child's cry for its mother, since Miss Mitford "had washed him and beaten him and fed him from her own plate". In this analogy, the howl echoes the first cry of a baby, a language-less but utterly meaningful staple of the imagination that signifies the beginning of life as much as the horror of entering the world (in this case, one that seems to be cut off from "freedom" and "happiness"). The howl maintains its association with a life-altering moment of change that prompts longing for the familiar and the familial (i.e. the opposite of isolation), when children and adults cry for their mothers in moments of crisis throughout their lives. Such a howl seems appropriate for marking the moment of realizing a fundamental change, a Copernican turn in the howler's existence, to use Freud's words, which could not be adequately addressed with language, just as Hofmannsthal describes it. Transposed onto a dog – a wordlessly howling figure whose universe is suddenly robbed of all its known order – the overwhelming experience of the modernist condition is rendered ever more powerful.¹⁰

Flush's howl is soon interrupted by his first encounter with his new mistress, Elizabeth Barrett, and his brief experience of isolation like hers immediately connects them. In fact, they seem to have much in common:

Heavy curls hung down on either side of Miss Barrett's face; large bright eyes shone out; a large mouth smiled. Heavy ears hung down on either side of Flush's face; his eyes, too, were large and bright: his mouth was wide. There was a likeness between them. As they gazed at each other each felt: Here am I—and then each felt: But how different! Hers was the pale worn face of an invalid, cut off from air, light, freedom. His was the warm ruddy face of a young animal; instinct with health and energy. Broken asunder, yet made in the same mould, could it be that each completed what was dormant in the other? She might have been—all that; and he— (W, p. 18f.)

Emphasizing their considerable kinship, the text seems to suggest a way out of Miss Barrett's isolation, provided by the lively animal. Flush was specifically picked as her companion because "Spaniels are by nature sympathetic; Flush, as his story proves, had an even excessive appreciation of human emotions" (W, p. 11). Yet despite these individual and supposedly breed-related qualifications, his companionship will not be the medicine that ultimately heals the ailing poet. He offers some relief, but the text will make clear that *human* companionship, specifically the love of her future husband which frees her from her father's tyranny, is responsible for Elizabeth Barrett's recovery (a point worthy of Woolf's patriarchal critique, no doubt). A dog cannot heal the poetess because her being and her wellbeing, both as a human and a writer, are

¹⁰ The cry of a wordless voice that cannot reach a recipient is perhaps most famously captured in Edvard Munch expressionist painting *The Scream* (1893), which pictures the outcry of a figure that seems to be experiencing a fundamental moment of crisis. Though two other people are approaching the screaming person from the distance, their blank expressions suggest that the moment's horror is not shared. The screamer's isolation encapsulates the sense of alienation of the individual in the modernist crisis.

intricately bound up with language – and Flush remains wordless.¹¹ Therefore, the description of their first encounter goes on to say:

But no. Between them lay the widest gulf that can separate one being from another. She spoke. He was dumb. She was woman; he was dog. Thus closely united, thus immensely divided, they gazed at each other. Then with one bound Flush sprang on to the sofa and laid himself where he was to lie for ever after—on the rug at Miss Barrett's feet. (W, p. 18f.)

The passage invokes the traditional *differentia specifica* of language in order to affirm the dog's Otherness along the pre-Darwinian fault lines that established human superiority. The previously described similarities between the dog and Miss Barrett pertain only to the physical realm, which is "made in the same mould" and thus holds the potential "to complete what was dormant in the other". It is readily admitted that humans could provide this cure-all of fulfilling companionship for dogs, but when it comes to the dog's ability to do the same for humans, the difference between human and animal is called "the widest gulf that can separate one being from another". This is a rejection of the potential of an animal to "complete what is dormant" in Miss Barrett and ease the isolation that stifles the writer. Flush is subdued by language, and as a consequence of this verdict rife with modernist anxieties about the human self, Flush lies as a "dumb dog" at Miss Barrett's feet, embodying the traditional human-animal hierarchy in an image that seems to suggest proximity, but spells separation.

Despite this divide, woman and dog soon settle into a state of comfortable companionship. As their familiarity with one another in this relationship grows, both the dog and the writer are prompted to reassess their difference and ponder the unequal distribution of linguistic skills between them, which leads to a reassessment of the status and effect of language:

The fact was that they could not communicate with words, and it was a fact that led undoubtedly to much misunderstanding. Yet did it not lead also to a peculiar intimacy? "Writing,"—Miss Barrett once exclaimed after a morning's toil, "writing, writing ..." After all, she may have thought, do words say everything? Can words say anything? Do not words destroy the symbol that lies beyond the reach of words? [...] But suppose Flush had been able to speak—would he not have said something sensible about the potato disease in Ireland? / So, too, Flush felt strange stirrings at work within him. [...] When he heard her low voice syllabbling innumerable sounds, he longed for the day when his own rough roar would issue like hers in the little simple sounds that had such mysterious meaning. And when he watched the same fingers for ever crossing a white page with a straight stick, he longed for the time when he too should blacken paper as she did. / And yet, had he been able to write as she did? —The question is superfluous happily, for truth compels us to say that in the year 1842-43 [...] Flush was not a poet but a red cocker spaniel. (W, p. 27f.)

In this scene, words are accused both of being unable to "say anything" and of robbing symbols of their polysemous mystery. This skepticism of language resonates with the criticisms brought forth in the *Sprachkrise* and attempts to close the divide between woman and dog through the intimacy of "wordless understanding". Just like in the case of Rilke's *Malte*, this seemingly "perfect understanding" could ease isolation, but language, no matter how flawed, is still central to Miss Barrett's life and it therefore has a "mysterious meaning" to Flush too, which is why he yearns to be able to speak and write. Yet the narrator's hypothesis about what he might have said is entirely prosaic (a commentary about the nascent Irish potato famine), and speculation

11 Unlike many of the dogs in other modernist narratives, he does not speak in the first person to either the reader or his mistress.

about his poetic prowess (“had he been able to write as she did”) is immediately cut short and countered with the “truth” that dogs are not engaged in poetic production, though this conflicts with the narrative’s presupposition of a canine lens. Nonetheless, the seed of doubt has been planted, raising epistemological questions about what we (can) know about the limits of language, wordless understanding, and poetic animals. The linguistic human-animal difference does, in fact, cut both ways. Flush might not have language, but he lives an existence unfettered by language. Instead of a rich vocabulary, Flush has an inventory of scents at his disposal that make the power of words pale in comparison:

Where two or three thousand words are insufficient for what we see—and Mrs. Browning had to admit herself beaten by the Apennines: “Of these things I cannot give you any idea,” she admitted—there are no more than two words and perhaps one-half for what we smell. The human nose is practically non-existent. The greatest poets in the world have smelt nothing but roses on the one hand, and dung on the other. The infinite gradations that lie between are unrecorded. Yet it was in the world of smell that Flush mostly lived. Love was chiefly smell; form and colour were smell; music and architecture, law, politics and science were smell. To him religion itself was smell. To describe his simplest experience with the daily chop or biscuit is beyond our power. [...] to Flush Italy, in these the fullest, the freest, the happiest years of his life, meant mainly a succession of smells. Love, it must be supposed, was gradually losing its appeal. Smell remained. [...] He nosed his way from smell to smell; the rough, the smooth, the dark, the golden. [...] In short, he knew Florence as no human being has ever known it; as Ruskin never knew it or George Eliot either. He knew it as only the dumb know. Not a single one of his myriad sensations ever submitted itself to the deformity of words. (W, p. 86f.)

Excluded from this immediate way of interacting with and being in the world through smell, humankind is both epistemologically and expressively challenged: knowledge of the world turns out to be incomplete, and even the most eloquent poets are unable to describe the experiences available to their limited senses (be it a biscuit or the land of the muses). Language is exposed as humankind’s central limitation rather than bolstering its exceptionalism. While Flush’s wordlessness in the face of the world recalls the special intimacy that he shared with his mistress, humankind’s struggle for words suggests a status of being poor-in-world – but for the human instead of the animal, contrary to what Heidegger envisioned.¹² The contrast between the poverty of language and the richness of scent inverts the human-animal hierarchy that the narrative established when it said that “she spoke” and “he was dumb”, and the dog’s self-assured way of being in the world reinforces the modernist condition of insecure human selfhood and language.

A similar sentiment of language-induced human helplessness also pervades Panizza’s *Aus dem Tagebuch eines Hundes*, whose canine narrator is a dachshund who, like Flush, comes to the city from the country to live as a pet, but remains unnamed in the text. The relationship to his male owner lacks the affection that Flush affords his female owner (a gendered pattern that will hold true for Twain’s text as well),¹³ yet

12 See Stuart Eldon: “Heidegger’s Animals”. In: *Continental Philosophy Review* 39 (2006), pp. 273-291.

13 The relationship consists of a trade of services, which entail both violence and infantilizing language. This pet-directed speech evokes the notion of language as meaningless sound, which it shares with the *Sprachkrise* and some of its expressions, such as Dada: “Aus dem letzten Monat finde ich beim Zusammenzählen: 12 Stockkiebe; 25 Fußtritte, 6 mal Prügel und Püffe mit der Faust oder Hand; 3 mal furchtbaren Durst leiden müssen; 1 mal steinharte, abgenagte Knochen; 35 mal ‘Ei di di di di di das schöne Hunderl!’; ca. 40 mal ‘A dä dä dä dä dä dä

this dog is nonetheless fascinated by humans, and he studies them and their world while roaming the city and adjacent countryside. The entire diary of this speaking and writing dog consists of observations in the style of a scientific exploration of humankind, and he feels that “[i]ch muß diese ganze Bagage registrieren, einteilen, schablonieren. Einteilung der Menschenbagage!”¹⁴ (P, p. 147) Turning the tables on traditional taxonomy, this canine narrator comes to the conclusion that humankind inhabits an “un glaublich niedere Stellung in der Tierreihe”¹⁵ (P, p. 180). His freedom to stray and deliberate lack of attachment give this dog an unusual degree of independence, which renders him a purposeful loner whose moments of isolation seems to stem from existential philosophical quandaries rather than the absence of meaningful relationships, as is the case with Flush.¹⁶ Much like Flush, however, Panizza’s narrator is invested in scenting out his environment, and since he takes smell to be the canine language, human language does not make much sense to him. As a result, he often misinterprets events, or rather describes them in defamiliarized language that interferes with human recognition, thus rendering language visible as an obstacle to comprehension on the level of the text. He observes:

Ich weiß noch immer nicht, wie die Leute sich verständigen. Zwar nähern sie sich oft gegenseitig die Köpfe und entblößen die obere Zahnreihe, aber die Nasen scheinen mir zu kurz, um nach unserer Weise sich sofort zu orientieren. Dagegen unterstützen ihren Mündern ein ganzes Geknarr von Geräuschen, förmliche Mundsalven, denen fleißige Gesticulatonen hinterdrein folgen. Aber zu einem Verständnis scheinen sie nicht zu gelangen, da das Gequatsch stundenlang dauert, heftiger wird, von Stampfen, Rücken, Stoßen und Zunge-Herausrecken begleitet wird, bis Beide gehetzt mit dampfenden Mündern von einander scheiden. Armes Geschlecht, das du die Luft zerhackst und dein Gesicht verschneidest, um auszudrücken, was du willst.¹⁷ (P, p. 148)

In this defamiliarized description of a communicative encounter between humans (or is it something else?), we recognize Hofmannsthal’s *Chandos Letter*, in which “everything comes to pieces” when he loses command of language. Yet while the evocation of the *Sprachkrise* in Woolf’s text focuses primarily on artistic expression (the poetess laments the limits of language when it comes to describing particularly sublime sights or her own writing practice), the everyday conversation between two people

das schwarze Dakkerl!. Auf meiner Seite, der Leistungen, stehen: 120 Beleckungen; 370 Beriechungen; 500 Schweifwedeleien, und an die 699 Speichelleckereien. — Ein jeder schlägt sich eben durch, wie er kann! [In the last month I counted: 12 blows with a stick; 25 kicks with the foot; 6 times beatings and blows with the fist or hand; 3 times having to endure terrible thirst; 1 time bones that were gnawed bare and hard as stone; 35 times “Coochie-coochie-coo, who is the nice doggie?”; circa 40 times “Goochie-goochie-goo, who is the black bow-wow?”. The services on my side are: 120 licks; 370 sniffs; 500 tail-wags, and close to 699 times brown-nosing. — Each one finds their way to get by!] Oskar Panizza: *Aus dem Tagebuch eines Hundes*. ... auch Hunde sind keine Menschen. Ed. by Martin Langbein. Munich: Matthes & Seitz 1977, pp. 145-244, here p. 178. All translations by Joela Jacobs. Subsequently abbreviated as P and cited in the text.

14 “I have to index them, categorize and fit them in a template. Classification of the human brigade!”

15 “unbelievably low position in the animal kingdom”

16 This dog is a representative of the philosopher dog tradition. See Theodore Ziolkowski: “Talking Dogs. The Caninization of Literature”. In: *Varieties of Literary Thematics*. Ed. by ibid. Princeton: Princeton University Press 1983: pp. 86-122. Yet belonging to a human generally grants dogs protection, while stray dogs can be killed in shelters and on streets, which makes his situation existential not only in a philosophical sense.

17 “I still don’t know how people communicate. Even though they often approach each other’s heads and expose the upper row of teeth, the noses seem too short to me to provide immediate orientation in our manner. Instead, an entire crackling of sounds is launched from their mouths, positively mouth-salvoes, followed by busy gesturing. Yet they don’t seem to arrive at an understanding, since the chatter takes hours, becomes more intense, is accompanied by stomping, jiggling, pushing and sticking out one’s tongue, until both separate, hounded, with steaming mouths. Poor species, you hack apart the air and adulterate your face to express what you want.”

in the scene above follows the progression of Hofmannsthal's *Letter* from difficulty with abstract or poetic terms to the loss of control over *all* words. The notion of language's inability to express one's perception of the world and articulate one's inner life therefore expands into a fundamental chasm between words and their meaning, which makes even the simplest act of communication impossible and moves language entirely outside of human control. And so the canine narrator goes on to say (quite eloquently) that

Der Frosch, der Spatz, das Eichhorn, die Krähe, der Storch und der Wolf zusammengenommen könnten nicht die Summe jener Laute aufbringen, die die Menschen nötig haben, um sich zu fragen: Wie geht's? Hast Du Hunger? — Ja, ich frage mich oft, ob alle diese Quatsch- und Fistel-Laute etwas zu bedeuten haben; ob diese Race trotz des kolossalen Aufwands schließlich weiß, was der Andere selbst denkt, und was er von ihm denkt! [...] Ob die was von einander wissen? — Von der Beschaffenheit ihrer Seele? — Arme Spezies!¹⁸ (P, p. 160f.)

Divorcing words from meaning, in consequence, renders the deceptively simple question "How are you?" complicated to ask and, it seems, impossible to answer. With the loss of language that organizes, according to Hofmannsthal, both thought and speech, humankind no longer knows what they think and how they feel. Knowledge about the self has no framework of expression, and knowledge of the other cannot be confirmed by communication. In this epistemological and linguistic crisis of modernism, the human species can neither define itself (their "soul") nor the other, be they of the same or another species, and the individual remains utterly isolated. Despite "colossal effort", man only produces "nonsensical and whimpering sounds", wordless howls whose meaning reaches nobody.

Yet just like Flush, Panizza's canine narrator is not bound up in this problem:

Sieht man zwei Hunden zu, die sich zufällig treffen und sich gegenseitig ausforschen, in wenigen Minuten ist Alles getan. Wir wissen, er klagt über Frost, er hungert, er ist geschlagen worden, er hat eine weiche Seele, er ist trotzig, er ist mißtrauisch; der Hauch sagt uns Alles; seine Seele liegt offen vor unserer Nase.¹⁹ (P, p. 159)

In the world of dog communication, "one whiff" tells you everything: existence, experience, emotion. The power of scent circumvents the problems of language and thereby establishes true wordless intimacy: "the soul lies open before the nose" in this encounter, which suggests that this species is epistemologically secure and knows who they are and what the self and the other thinks. Modern humankind has lost this immediate access to the self and the world, or rather, is kept from it through abstract language, thus languishing in isolation, most notably cut off from the animal Other.

18 "The frog, the sparrow, the squirrel, the crow, the stork and the wolf combined could not produce the sum of the sounds that humans need to ask each other: How are you? Are you hungry? — Indeed, I often ask myself whether all these nonsensical and whimpering sounds mean something; whether despite this colossal effort, this race finally knows what the other thinks to himself, and what he thinks of him! [...] Whether they know something about each other? — Of the composition of their soul? — Poor species!"

19 "When you watch two dogs who meet by chance and explore each other, everything is done in a few minutes. We know that he is complaining about the frost, he is going hungry, he has been beaten, he is defiant, he is suspicious; one whiff tells us everything; his soul lies open before our nose."

Breeding Violence

Humankind's inability to know itself results in an incapacity but also a refusal to recognize kinship with the Other in both its human and animal form. Fueled by the endeavor to restore human exceptionalism, this often results not just in a linguistic subdual but physical violence, which canine narratives describe in order to raise ethical questions about the "humanity" of humankind. The portrayal of violent treatment of non-human and human Others tends to function as a critique the brutalities of each author's environment. In Woolf's story, this becomes apparent when Flush is one day dognapped for ransom – a common practice in Victorian London (it happened three times to the historical Flush), which highlights the economic inequality of the industrial age and the extreme differences between social classes:

He found himself in complete darkness. He found himself in chillness and dampness. [...] He whined, and a heavy hand beat him over the head. He cowered down on the few inches of damp brick against the wall. Now he could see that the floor was crowded with animals of different kinds. Dogs tore and worried a festering bone that they had got between them. Their ribs stood out from their coats—they were half famished, dirty, diseased, uncombed, unbrushed; yet all of them, Flush could see, were dogs of the highest breeding, chained dogs, footmen's dogs, like himself." (W, p. 55)

From the dark back room of a rich house that he now considers home, he has come to "complete darkness", and although he is not alone, he feels utterly isolated once again and cries out for his new mother. Instead of words, his whining is met with violence. The people who make a meager living from their dognapping business are described as quite different from Flush's mistress: they seem to care neither for nor about the animals. If an owner does not pay up, they return the dog's cut-off head and paws. Flush is a profitable commodity rather than a living individual to them, yet they are themselves exposed to violence and exploited by a system that supports the rich dog owners. The text suggests that they cannot afford to care: their own living conditions are "worse than those of animals" and certainly much different from those to which the pampered dogs are accustomed. The filth of the dwelling, in which "[c]hildren crawled out from dark corners and pinched his ears" (W, p. 55) repels Flush, yet this is a situation from which the children cannot escape, while Flush is eventually rescued – for a price. The episode raises complicated questions about human and animal welfare that are not easy to disentangle without making ethically questionable judgements about the worth of one species over the other, and it transposes these value questions, via breed and class, from dogs to humans and vice versa.

The dognapping business model is not only thriving because these dogs are subjectively valuable to their owners, but – as Flush had immediately observed – because they are "of the highest breeding". The high value of Flush, which could have solved Miss Mitford's financial troubles, was the theme with which the text begins, and it is tied intimately to his breed. The first sentence of the story reads: "It is universally admitted that the family from which the subject of this memoir claims descent is one of the greatest antiquity." (W, p. 5)²⁰ This family is not Elizabeth Barrett's – it is Flush's

20 This opening sentence resembles that of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), which is famously ironic about the social order it introduces: "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife." By taking up this sentiment of "universally admitted" or acknowledged truths that are, in fact, merely expressions of socially sanctioned, questionable behavior (such as women pursuing

spaniel lineage. The first several paragraphs of the story are dedicated to a discussion of the dog's pedigree, from the origin of the name Spaniel "[m]any million years ago" (W, p. 5) to the rise of several prominent Spaniel families that accompanied kings, Flush's immediate heritage, and his appearance as purebred according to Kennel Club standards. The Kennel Club is, in fact, heralded as a beneficial institution that would be needed to classify humankind according to value, too:

But, if we now turn to human society, what chaos and confusion meet the eye! No Club has any such jurisdiction upon the breed of man. The Heralds' College^[21] is the nearest approach we have to the Spaniel Club. It at least makes some attempt to preserve the purity of the human family. But when we ask what constitutes noble birth—should our eyes be light or dark, our ears curled or straight, are topknots fatal, our judges merely refer us to our coats of arms. You have none perhaps. Then you are nobody. [...] Everywhere rank is claimed and its virtues are asserted. Yet when we come to survey the Royal Houses of Bourbon, Hapsburg and Hohenzollern, [...] and find them now in exile, deposed from authority, judged unworthy of respect, we can but shake our heads and admit that the Judges of the Spaniel Club judged better. (W, p. 7f.)

Instead of a system that assesses belonging to a noble(r) group of people according to their fulfillment of expected appearance and behavior, the human (here specifically British) classification confers status through a purely hereditary system that results in a rigid class society. While Woolf's overt criticism of the class system and its resulting poverty, which particularly pervades the details of the dognapping episode, certainly calls attention to social inequality, the Kennel Club comparison and its striving for "purity" of the human race evokes notions of physiognomic typecasting, racial prejudice, and eugenics that are particularly devastating with a view to the atrocities about to begin in 1933, the year the text was written, as well as the colonialism in which the British Empire engaged at the time. Woolf's comparison of the upper classes to fancy overbred dogs is surely full of satire, especially since it suggests that these dogs show better character than the members of royal houses, yet the Kennel Club's breedism (a kind of speciesism) has also led to violent consequences for dogs, from inbred deformities and puppy mills to illegal dog fights and an epidemic of pitbull-type dogs in kill shelters.²²

Flush's preference for purebred over "mongrel"²³ dogs is eventually amended, but only once he "studies abroad" in Italy (once more, relationships change the view on

men for their money, or people judging others by their heritage), Woolf plays with the conventions of how humans and animals are traditionally spoken about, thus humorously preempting judgement about presenting a famous writer's biography through the lens of her dog, while simultaneously calling the human class system in question. (Coincidentally, Elizabeth Barrett's name also resembles that of Austen's heroine Elizabeth Bennet.)

- 21** "The College of Arms is the official heraldic authority for England, Wales, Northern Ireland and much of the Commonwealth including Australia and New Zealand. / As well as being responsible for the granting of new coats of arms, the College maintains registers of arms, pedigrees, genealogies, Royal Licences, changes of name, and flags. The heralds, besides having ceremonial duties, advise on all matters relating to the peerage and baronetage, precedence, honours and ceremonial as well as national and community symbols including flags." College of Arms: "Home". URL: <http://www.college-of-arms.gov.uk/> [last accessed on 26 July 2017].
- 22** The complicated entanglement of the forces that enact violence on humans with those that enact violence on animals is discussed in Claire Jean Kim: *Dangerous Crossings. Race, Species, and Nature in a Multicultural Age*. New York: Cambridge University Press 2015. See also Harlan Weaver: "'Becoming in Kind'. Race, Class, Gender, and Nation in Cultures of Dog Rescue and Dogfighting". In: *American Quarterly* 65.3 (2013), pp. 689-709. Donna Haraway: *Companion Species Manifesto. Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2003. Donna Haraway: *When Species Meet*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 2007.
- 23** This term is used for mixed-breed dogs (W, p. 23, 74, 76, 103, 113), but once also applied to Miss Mitford's alcoholic father in a way that evokes eugenics: "But there can be no doubt that, had there been a Man Club

Other and self), where he roams without the restraints of class differences and the expected behaviors that rule the streets of London:

Flush had faced the curious and at first upsetting truth that the laws of the Kennel Club are not universal. He had brought himself to face the fact that light topknots are not necessarily fatal. He had revised his code accordingly. He had acted, at first with some hesitation, upon his new conception of canine society. He was becoming daily more and more democratic. Even in Pisa, Mrs. Browning noticed, "... he goes out every day and speaks Italian to the little dogs." Now in Florence the last threads of his old fetters fell from him. The moment of liberation came one day in the Cascine. As he raced over the grass "like emeralds" with "the pheasants all alive and flying," Flush suddenly bethought him of Regent's Park and its proclamation: Dogs must be led on chains. Where was "must" now? Where were chains now? Where were park-keepers and truncheons? Gone, with the dog-stealers and Kennel Clubs and Spaniel Clubs of a corrupt aristocracy! Gone with four-wheelers and hansom cabs! with Whitechapel and Shoreditch! He ran, he raced; his coat flashed; his eyes blazed. He was the friend of all the world now. All dogs were his brothers. He had no need of a chain in this new world; he had no need of protection. (W, p. 77)

Flush attains his new sense of *liberté, égalité, fraternité* in a "democratic" setting, yet even though the text calls this perfect place Italy, it is, rather, a space without all the restraints imposed by humans, where he encounters other dogs freely. It is also a place not ruled by grammar: as the text speeds up to match Flush's pace, it begins to mark human descriptors (poetic ones "like emeralds" and "the pheasants all alive and flying" as well as the normative "must") with quotation marks that separate them from Flush's own thoughts, which have less decorum and fewer complete sentences. In this special place, Flush can think and speak in language (he "bethought him"); the latter when he is not isolated but has social interactions with beings who speak his language (which is called Italian here in the same way the place is called Italy). This immediate manner of living is a return to the first days of Flush's life, in which he did not know of any dangers or social differences, roamed freely, and encountered other animals and humans without fear. With flashing coat and blazing eyes, Flush has left behind the alienating city with its linguistic obstacles and found happiness in this paradisiacal place (where the poetess has overcome her writing crisis and isolation with the help of the "wordfull understanding" she shares with her writer husband). In this place of "perfect understanding", there seems to be no need for a taxonomy of differences; yet given the unresolved nature of the class system, poverty, and other forms of violence back in London and elsewhere both in the mid-nineteenth century Italy of the historical Brownings' stay and in 1933 when the text was written, this place seems like a utopian, or heavenly paradise of the imagination.²⁴ Whether *Flush* is able to restore the hope for a better world to the utterly skeptical modern or is understood as saying that the yearning for equality will be fulfilled "when dogs go to heaven" is up to the reader's disposition.

corresponding to the Spaniel Club in existence, [...] no claim to kinship with the Mitfords of Bertram Castle, would have availed to protect him [...] from being branded as a mongrel man unfitted to carry on his kind. But he was a human being. Nothing therefore prevented him from marrying a lady of birth and breeding, [...] and from begetting a daughter." (W, p. 9).

- 24 Within this paradisiacal metaphor, Flush has passed from his happy existence in the womb of the English countryside to the ups and downs of life in London and finally arrived in the afterlife of heavenly Italy. Both Italy and the English countryside feature as near-paradisiacal and pastoral spaces of inspiration in the imagination of many writers across centuries.

Woolf's readers have often opted for a less serious interpretation of the cynobiography's happy ending, even though in 1903, Mark Twain already restricted the tendency toward carefree interpretations of dog narratives by denying a dog access to heaven. Twain's *A Dog's Tale* begins with a breed designation that sets the tone for the play with humor typical of Twain: "My father was a St. Bernard, my mother was a collie, but I am a Presbyterian."²⁵ Yet the equally humorously named story, told by a dog in the first person, is not as lighthearted as this beginning lets on, since it details a canine life full of violent abuse and makes a clear case for the need of animal welfare. The disconnect between the tone and content throughout Twain's story suggests a purposeful turn to sentimentalism, often problematically associated with feminine sensitivity, which is meant to evoke an affective reader reaction and thus prompt change.²⁶ Marked already in the first sentence as a mixed-breed dog and later identified as female, this dog's story stands in for the violent experiences of non-human, female, and non-white Others, and it will not have a happy ending. The first moment of isolation in her life is in some ways similar to Flush's experience, and it is one that happens to almost every dog who lives with humans: she is separated from her canine mother.

When I was well grown, at last, I was sold and taken away, and I never saw her [my mother] again. She was broken-hearted, and so was I, and we cried; but she comforted me as well as she could, and said we were sent into this world for a wise and good purpose, and must do our duties without repining, take our life as we might find it, live it for the best good of others, and never mind about the results; they were not our affair. She said men who did like this would have a noble and beautiful reward by and by in another world, and although we animals would not go there, to do well and right without reward would give to our brief lives a worthiness and dignity which in itself would be a reward. She had gathered these things from time to time when she had gone to the Sunday-school with the children [...]. So we said our farewells, and looked our last upon each other through our tears" (T, p. 563)

The scene is characterized by trust: of the canine daughter in her mother and the mother in a divine plan and purpose for everyone's life, despite the acknowledgment that the ultimate prize of admission to heaven will not be granted to these creatures preaching selflessness. In fact, the phrasing only grants celestial privileges to men, seemingly a purposefully ambiguous note, given the female canine speaker, and the pointedly gendered nature of the text, in which men hold the power over their female "possessions", echoing the patriarchal critique of Woolf's story. Yet, without knowing that the speakers are dogs, the scene could just as well portray a farewell between a human mother and her child, and because it is a sale with an uncertain future, it strongly evokes the context of slavery and racial inequality, which Twain experienced from the privileged position of a white man growing up in the southern United States.²⁷ These violent undertones accompanying the mother's wholesome appeal for selfless behavior without reward create a horrifying anticipatory *mélange* and foreshadow the treatment that the young dog, and subsequently her own offspring, is to experience in the story. The trusting puppy of this scene will save her new family's baby from a fire,

²⁵ Mark Twain: *Collected Tales, Sketches, Speeches, and Essays 1891-1910*. New York: The Library of America 1992, pp. 561-571, here p. 561. Subsequently abbreviated as T and cited in the text.

²⁶ See Gregg Camfield: *Sentimental Twain. Samuel Clemens in the Maze of Moral Philosophy*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 1994.

²⁷ His sale is also the subject of Panizza's narrator's first sentence, though it is stripped of emotion: "Wurde heute an meinen neuen Herrn verkauft." [Was sold to my new master today.] (P, p. 145)

yet they initially mistake her dragging the baby from the nursery for a bite attack.²⁸ The burned dog is beaten to the point of retaining a lasting limp and hides in the dark attic for days, realizing that she cannot run away because she has had a puppy of her own that she cannot leave behind with the family.

I searched my way through the dark among the piles of things, and hid in the secretest place I could find. It was foolish to be afraid there, yet still I was; so afraid that I held in and hardly even whimpered, though it would have been such a comfort to whimper, because that eases the pain, you know. But I could lick my leg, and that did some good. (T, p. 566)

Much like the howling, a wordless whimpering characterizes this moment of crisis and isolation in her life. We learn that crying out will ease the pain of isolation, perhaps because it re-affirms the existence of the self and its feelings, even if nobody responds and confirms that there are others who care. In contrast, when the dog is finally found by a friendly (and female) face calling out her name, she emits “*such* a grateful little yelp” (T, p. 568), and an act of mutual recognition and belonging is established through the act of naming²⁹, which prompts a different kind of vocal response (a yelp) in this communicative encounter.

The found dog is celebrated for her heroism, and

some of them said it was wonderful in a dumb beast, the finest exhibition of instinct they could call to mind; but the master said, with vehemence, “It’s far above instinct; it’s *reason*, and many a man, privileged to be saved and go with you and me to a better world by right of its possession, has less of it than this poor silly quadruped that’s foreordained to perish” (T, p. 568f.).

This praise of animal reason seems to break with the Cartesian animal machine – the dualist idea that animals are mindless bodies – as well as biblical doctrine that holds a soul as the requirement for celestial admission, but it pointedly still denies animals access to heaven, thus immediately diminishing this equalizing gesture and returning the dog to a place below the human in the hierarchy of beings. In the world of the “master”, a dog remains property (and again, the context of slavery returns), and in his work as a scientist, the father of the dog’s family actively reinforces this hierarchy by experimenting on animals. And so he perversely inverts the dog’s act of saving his own child by brutally blinding the dog’s puppy, which will ultimately kill it. This experiment happens in front of his colleagues and the mother dog, thus critiquing the contemporary practice of vivisection for its disregard for animal pain and life as well as its justification in the name of scientific progress and religiously bolstered human exceptionalism.³⁰ The only humans to speak out about the wrong, albeit quietly, are the servants of the house, who are also under the rule of the white, “Christian” man.³¹

The story ends with the dog’s confusion about the fact that her buried baby, or as she puts it, her “planted” puppy does not “grow and come up a fine handsome dog” (T, p. 570). As she refuses all food while waiting patiently by the gravesite for her

28 There are so many accounts of dogs who risk their lives to save children that this has become a trope for canine loyalty.

29 Naming is a powerful gesture (see Genesis), which individualizes the member of a species and suggests the rights and protections of personhood, though it can also signal possession. See also Vicky Hearne: *Adam’s Task. Calling Animals by Name*. New York: Skyhorse 2007.

30 This scene resounds with Twain’s anti-vivisection activism. See Shelley Fisher Fishkin: *Mark Twain’s Book of Animals*. Berkeley: University of California Press 2010.

31 See Kim: *Dangerous Crossings*.

puppy to return, it becomes clear to the reader that she is herself about to die. The heartbreaking effect of Twain's story is in the canine narrator's unwaveringly hopeful and trusting nature throughout her ordeals. She continues to trust her master because she fails to understand his language, which comes in the guise of experimental science and Sunday-school religion, whose intermingled influences are passed from humans to canines in a form of failed transmission that is blamed on language as such. This series of misunderstandings begins with the dog's mother, who has a love for words that is unequalled among her peers. She is the one who told her offspring that she was "Presbyterian" and so the second sentence of the story continues:

I do not know these nice distinctions myself. To me they are only fine large words meaning nothing. My mother had a fondness for such; she liked to say them, and see other dogs look surprised and envious, as wondering how she got so much education. But, indeed, it was not real education; it was only show: she got the words by listening in the dining-room and drawing-room when there was company, and by going with the children to Sunday-school and listening there; and whenever she heard a large word she said it over to herself many times, and so was able to keep it until there was a dogmatic gathering in the neighborhood, then she would get it off, and surprise and distress them all, from pocket-pup to mastiff, which rewarded her for all her trouble. [...] When she told the meaning of a big word they were all so taken up with admiration that it never occurred to any dog to doubt if it was the right one; and that was natural, because, for one thing, she answered up so promptly that it seemed like a dictionary speaking, and for another thing, where could they find out whether it was right or not? for she was the only cultivated dog there was. [...] And it was the same with phrases. She would drag home a whole phrase, if it had a grand sound, and play it six nights and two matinees, and explain it a new way every time—which she had to, for all she cared for was the phrase; she wasn't interested in what it meant, and knew those dogs hadn't wit enough to catch her, anyway. (T, p. 561f.)

This play with words, in which both the mother dog and the author of this "dogmatic" tale engage, showcases the power of language and education (a right denied to many women, slaves, and non-whites). As the only dog who has a semblance of this power, the narrator's mother wields her knowledge over the other dogs as if imitating, in a less violent manner, the way the church decrees who gets to go to heaven, the scientist father determines who gets to live, and the white upper classes of the American South and Victorian London define the lives of the enslaved, the poor, non-whites, women, and animals in these stories. Yet the mother dog is stripping words of their meanings and giving them ever-changing new ones without regard for the "right" one. Despite this semantic "meaninglessness" which showcases language's mutability and ambiguity, words seem to retain their powerful effect over those who do not understand them. This makes the dog's language play subversive in multiple ways: here is an animal attempting to take the power of words, a female animal at that, and one who undoes the pre-determined rules of language and meaning, thus potentially turning the modernist *Sprachkrise* into a tool of liberation. If successful, this would be an act of overthrowing the rule of man in all of its understandings – a Copernican turn that once again has the potential to decenter earth, dethrone man, and depose language. (How is the dog decentering earth, you ask? Why, by getting into heaven, which seems to be humankind's biggest fear because it would grant animals a soul – to whose existence Panizza's narrator testified –, thus making them equals to be respected.) However, man has the last word: the master is the one who knows and determines the "right" meaning of words – a position of normative power that does not take kindly to usurpation attempts. This leaves the mother dog and her daughter vulnerable, particularly since they have so fully imbibed the doctrine of linguistic supremacy. No wonder, then, that these dogs experience such violent

retribution, which is meant to reestablish man's superiority. Burned, beaten, and blinded, the animal Other is subdued with brute force alongside all those who have been denied a soul and equal stake in this world. And accordingly, the last sentence declares that Twain's dying canine narrator is not going to heaven, but "where go the beasts that perish" (T, p. 571).

Conclusion

Woolf's, Panizza's, and Twain's narratives turn to animals in order to address a human problem, which emerges from the subjective isolation, scientific self-objectification, and language skepticism of the modernist crisis. Through the lens of dogs, the texts chart many aspects of this human crisis of self, yet they simultaneously also give a voice to the animal Other. Since the definition of the human against the animal and vice versa has been a traditional way of reinforcing human superiority, recovering the human goes along with discovering the animal. In the narratives, the mute animal suddenly speaks, just as "words turned into eyes that stared at me and into which I had to stare back" in Hoffmannsthal's *Chandos Letter*. In speaking back, the dogs tell tales of repeated subjugation, both through words and violence, which also shine a light on the oppression of human Others. When they stand in the way of man's exceptionalism, both human and non-human Other are subdued by similar, forceful processes.

Yet the dogs in these narratives also illustrate the potential of the companion animal to soothe isolation, and they model a more immediate relationship to the world through the senses instead of language. These solutions to the modernist problems of alienation from both words and world pave the way for a reconsideration of the foundations of the human sense of self – one grounded in a similarity with rather than difference from the animal. By exposing the fact that the definition of the human has been resting on a premise of exceptionalism that diminishes all Others, the texts (some more strongly than others) call for a redefinition of the human that does justice to the notion of "humanity". And indeed, accepting that humans are not in full control of their psyche and embracing the ambiguity of language (as the artists of the *Sprachkrise* did) might be a liberation instead of a threat, and living kinship with animals would undo humankind's isolated position at the top of the traditional hierarchy of beings.

Lastly, the texts are beset by the great irony of showcasing the power of language and its eloquence in the midst of a crisis of linguistic production. Speaking and writing about the *Sprachkrise* comes with the issue of having to do so in language – the object of skepticism. What better way to get around this conundrum than by endowing dogs with speech? Non-humans can point out human limitations, and because they are not bound up in the same problems, they are able to defamiliarize the conception of the human and excel in linguistic eloquence in the midst of a crisis of language and subjectivity. Rather than defining the human against the animal, these texts let the animal define the human for a change.