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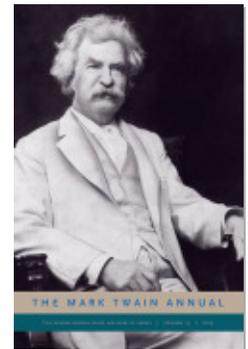
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Dog's Best Friend?

Vivisecting the "Animal" in Mark Twain's "A Dog's Tale"

Matthew Guzman

Abstract

"A Dog's Tale" encapsulates the duality that the domesticated dog as both loyal "friend" and dependable scientific "instrument" denotes. Twain paints a dark portrait of man's association with "beast." Additionally, the story presents much more than a simple anthropomorphic tale. Although the nonhuman narrator has humanlike characteristics, one is always aware that Aileen Mavourneen is a dog. Nowhere is this divide more apparent than in the narrator's failed attempts to "understand" the language and behavior of the human characters. The tale epitomizes the dogma of man's rule over "lower" creatures, but it does not fully reaffirm these accepted beliefs. Rather, the story problematizes our position relative to these "lower creatures," most notably through the inconsistencies between language, interpretation, and physical response; the story also forces readers to confront the inconsistent treatment of "man's best friend" as well as humanity's privileged locus as reasoning animals.

Keywords: Twain; dogs; nonhuman animals; critical animal studies; "A Dog's Tale"

The catchphrase "man's best friend" is a well-known reference to the domesticated dog. This common phrase originated from the 1870 closing argument made by George Graham Vest in a Missouri courthouse over the killing of his client's foxhound, "Old Drum," by a local sheep farmer (Kobbé 10). Vest won his case, and the expression entered the general lexicon. But can we, with a clear conscious, label the *Canis lupus familiaris* with such an encumbered title?¹

Mark Twain, especially in the last two decades of his life, vehemently speaks out against vivisection ("Letter to the London Anti-vivisection Society") and satirizes anthropocentrism into a farce ("Was the World Made for Man?").

In his essay “The Lowest Animal,” Twain renounces the Darwinian concept of the “Ascent of Man” from the lower animals. He states that “since it now seems plain to me that that theory ought to be vacated in favor of a new and truer one” (176). Twain goes on to explain that this “new and truer” theory should be named “the Descent of Man from the Higher Animals” (176). These works, two essays and one letter, reveal a great deal. Many of his earlier perceptions and/or prejudices began to change, and as Anthony Brandt notes, in the introduction to *Following the Equator*, Twain’s criticism was redirected to the white race’s “claims to moral superiority,” “greed,” and “arrogance” (xxiii). An important addition to Brandt’s observations lies in Twain’s identification of the despotic relationship between human and nonhuman animals, an association which can be directly observed in “A Dog’s Tale.” Further, this story encapsulates the duality that the domesticated dog as both loyal “friend” and dependable scientific “instrument” denotes. Twain paints a dark portrait of man’s association with “beast.” Additionally, the story presents much more than a simple anthropomorphic tale. Although the nonhuman narrator has humanlike characteristics, one is always aware that Aileen Mavourneen is a dog. Nowhere is this divide more apparent than in the narrator’s failed attempts to “understand” the language and behavior of the human characters. The tale epitomizes the dogma of man’s rule over “lower” creatures, but it does not fully reaffirm these accepted beliefs. Rather, the story problematizes our position to these “lower creatures,” most notably through the inconsistencies between language, interpretation, and physical response; the story also forces readers to confront the inconsistent treatment of “man’s best friend” as well as humanity’s privileged locus as reasoning animals.

In 1911, Killis Campbell attempted to trace the story’s inspirations by drawing parallels between “A Dog’s Tale” and numerous tales of folklore; Campbell is quick to point out, though, that this is “his child’s story” (43). Likewise, John H. Davis, in *The Mark Twain Encyclopedia*, mentions that the story might have been for Twain’s daughter Jean, who, according to Davis, was staunchly against vivisection (223). While the initial motivation or spark of inspiration might have come from Twain’s daughter, in a historical context Twain is working among a growing number of individuals who give significant consideration to the cruelty toward nonhuman animals. The creation of the London Anti-vivisection Society in 1875 provides clear evidence of this increasing demographic, as does Twain’s own “Letter to the London Anti-vivisection Society.”

“A Dog’s Tale” begins with the first-person narrator introducing herself. She states, “My father was a St. Bernard, my mother was a collie, but I am

a Presbyterian” (165). The story consists of three parts, and this opening section is full of wonderfully comedic scenes, many of which center on the narrator, Aileen Mavourneen, recalling her mother’s (mis)understanding of human language. The second section focuses on Aileen’s separation from her mother. Then, the third and final section contains both Aileen’s dramatic rescue of her owner’s baby from a house fire and the vivisection of her own child by the hand of her “master,” Mr. Gray. Words and the comprehension of language appear impish in the opening section. Later, the irony of these early playful scenes transform into the narrator’s own plight to understand the actions of her human “companions.” This first section evidences a foundational trust from dog to human being, a trust which appears confounded by the discrepancies between word and action.

Human language intrigues Aileen’s mother. She listens to her owner’s conversations in order to memorize choice words and phrases; then she uses these chestnuts to impress all of her canine acquaintances. When her friends question the meaning of these words, she gives a different definition each time. The acquisition of language becomes mostly sounds without meaning, a mimetic function, and as Aileen expresses, “[Her mother] wasn’t interested in what [the phrases or words] meant, and knew those dogs hadn’t wit enough to catch her, anyway” (166). To the other dogs in this tale, with the exception of Aileen, her mother possesses an elevated knowledge of human expression and, in effect, human knowledge. So in this regard, the mimicry of words becomes a status symbol which raises Aileen’s mother above the other “simple” hounds. Her “knowledge” is illusory, but others unknowingly laud her under this false pretense.

Steve Baker’s *Picturing the Beast: Animals, Identity, and Representation* traces the use of “talking-animal” narratives. He observes that there is a common perception that these types of narratives are not about nonhuman animals at all. Baker notes that this type of notion “is quite consistent with the far wider cultural trivialization and marginalization of the animal” (138). At first glance, it may appear that Twain’s story falls into this same general pattern of anthropomorphic representation. Twain’s depiction of these linguistically floundering nonhuman characters can be viewed as paradoxical; whereas, on the one hand, Aileen’s mother functions as a faux analogue to her human “superiors,” a subtle critique of a human propensity to value words over comprehension. On the other hand, Twain expresses, slyly, the “absurd” idea that dogs can understand human language by having them misunderstand it. And yes, we can laugh at these “simple” characters in this opening section. The dogs are noble in their

actions, but these hounds lack a proper understanding of language and higher reasoning skills, two characteristics which are used as common justifications for humanity's rule over lower creatures. It is a paradox in which these nonhuman characters reflect a negative characteristic of their human cohorts, while also highlighting that these dogs are *not* human. He provides an example of common preconceptions that dogs are "simplistic" creatures that, at best, can only mimic without comprehension.

Soon, the story challenges this divide in intellectual capacity between man and dog. This happens not by proving that the nonhuman animal characters are somehow intellectually "superior" or equal to the human characters. Rather, Twain shifts the focus from a dog's intellectual capacity to a moral one. Aileen understands the vanity of her mother's trickery and goes on to elucidate how her mother's virtuous traits far outweigh this one small vice. Her mother instills Aileen with admirable qualities such as gentleness, kindness, and bravery in the face of danger. Aileen is quick to add that her mother taught "not by words only, but by example, and that is the best way and the surest and the most lasting" (167). The time eventually comes when Aileen is sold to another family, and her mother reiterates the importance of doing "right *without* reward" (167). Since Twain already establishes that words are problematic, it is important that Aileen learns her moral behavior by example. In the narrator's later selfless actions, one can clearly see this early maternal influence predicated on the alignment and/or direct relation between physical action and words.

In the third section, Aileen arrives at her new home, and she describes her new family as sweet and loving. "And I was the same as a member of the family" she says, "and they loved me and petted me" (168). This kind treatment of Aileen continues for many months. Then winter comes and a fire begins in the room of the family's young infant. Aileen, noticing the immediate danger, first attempts to flee. The memory of her mother's *words* holds her back, and she drags the baby out of the fire. Twain seems intentionally to make Aileen first act on what one could call an "instinctive" flight reaction to danger, only then to overcome this "instinct" by a moment of self-reflective thought. Interestingly, she recalls her mother's *words*, not her *actions*. This may be because at this point, for Aileen, word and action each represent the same idea. These two terms are not yet confused by human inconsistencies. Mr. Gray, upon seeing Aileen carrying his child, does not stop for one moment to think. Rather he yells, "Begone, you cursed beast!" and delivers a harsh blow to Aileen with his cane (170). By juxtaposing the actions of a nonhuman animal and human in distress, Twain not only brings into question the moral "superiority" of human

beings, but he also provides an example of man acting in a purely instinctive manner, thus further countering the common assumption that humans are somehow intrinsically superior to nonhuman animals. Aileen recalls *words*; therefore Twain also gives her something exclusively human while stripping a layer of this same characteristic from his “human” character. Gray misconstrues the situation, but one might assume that a man of science, and scientific method, would first ask, “Why is my dog dragging the baby down the hall?” No, the natural reflex to correct a dog’s “bad” behavior is physical abuse.

This scene resembles Twain’s account of a German tourist in Bombay who strikes a “native” for some unknown “dissatisfaction” (*Following the Equator* 217–18). Like Aileen, the servant takes this blow “saying nothing.” In this extract from *Following the Equator*, Twain is quickly reminded of an early memory of the violence perpetrated against a slave. The thread that weaves these excerpts clearly resides in the hierarchies of “personhood” and the inability to “talk” back. Further, one can identify a brief, albeit violent, consistency between language and action in Mr. Gray, but he bases this quick reactionary behavior on a clear lack of understanding. Gray misinterprets Aileen’s actions, and she cannot verbally speak in her own defense. Moreover, Aileen’s position as a “loving pet” remains dependent on the whims of her owner. It is not until moments later when the maid alerts the family to the fire that he understands his error.

Instead of assuming a strictly anthropocentric premise, Twain expresses the inequities of such relationships, the abuse inflicted on those without a voice. He imagines how the world would look through the eyes of a dog. And, of course, unless there is a breakthrough in modern technology, humans will never truly be able to “know” definitively what a dog is thinking. Humans, however, can become cognizant of the unequal status of these nonhuman animals. The issue requires one to go beyond the obvious, such as the maltreatment of these creatures. As Peter Singer, in *Animal Liberation*, explains, “The extension of the basic principle of equality from one group to another does not imply that we must treat both groups in exactly the same way, or grant exactly the same rights to both groups. Whether we should do so will depend on the nature of the members of the two groups. The basic principle of equality does not require equal or identical *treatment*; it requires equal *consideration*” (2–3). A great deal of the story’s effectiveness derives from Twain’s identification of the inconsistent “treatment” toward these “lower” creatures. This might appear contradictory to Singer’s passage, which promotes not equal treatment but equal consideration. Twain seems to be working indirectly toward this consideration

by, first, showing the harsh and inconsistent *treatment* which dogs endure from the human species, and then pairing this with the inability to communicate.

Mr. Gray's reaction might appear reasonable given this particular circumstance, which is predicated on a misunderstanding; however, Mr. Gray's attitude toward Aileen can be described by what Singer calls "speciesism." Singer defines this as "a prejudice or attitude of bias toward the interests of members of one's own species and against those of members of other species" (7). Paramount in an anthropocentric worldview is the mentality that nonhuman animals are below human beings, so therefore it is "natural" to use and/or abuse these nonhuman animals. Singer also identifies a key question that can be applied to Twain's story. In a line which Singer borrows from Jeremy Bentham, he states, "The question is not, Can [nonhuman animals] *reason*? nor Can they *talk*? but, Can they *suffer*?" (8).

Twain's understanding of human indifference to nonhuman animals leads to what Shelley Fisher Fishkin identifies as a "part of this broader disillusionment and despair" with American imperialism ("Introduction" 33). Fishkin also briefly mentions the possible metaphor between nonhuman animals and African Americans during the pre- and post-Civil War America era (28). The link between blackness and animality seems quite apparent due to frequent associations of black men and women with animals as well as the commodification of each during Twain's lifetime. In fact, Lesley Ginsberg remarks, in "Slavery and the Gothic Horror of Poe's 'The Black Cat,'" that those who supported slavery heavily relied on blurring the lines between "slaves" and "animals" (103). "A Dog's Tale" could be seen as a metaphor for the self-sacrificing mammy, or a broader representation of the denigrated position of blackness in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century America. Like the emotionally removed man of science, the slave owner must also ignore the cries of pain, must turn a blind eye to the blood that flows. One may recall some of the derivatives of "dog" which are targeted toward specific groups of people. The derogatory term "mutt" is used to describe a person of mixed racial heritage. The term "bitch" can be used to insult a woman or to depreciate a male's masculinity. Even calling someone a "dog" is generally interpreted as a pejorative.

When speaking of the African American slave, Lindon Barrett's "African-American Slave Narratives: Literacy, the Body, Authority" provides another needed connection between Twain's animal narrative and the importance of language. Barrett notes, "Literacy provides manifest testimony of the mind's ability to extend itself beyond the constricted limits and conditions of the body" (419). While Barrett's article focuses on, as the title suggests, African

American slave narratives, he makes an important association. He remarks that within American slave narratives there are “inexorable connection[s] between literacy and African-American corporality” (415). That said, the connection between corporality and literacy can also apply to corporality and the ability to communicate; it seems the further one moves away from literacy, the lower he/she measures against an established “gold standard,” or the only standard (i.e., human). The problem one encounters once again is the hierarchical relationship embedded in and around language, or a lack thereof, as a means of separation.

After the fire incident in “A Dog’s Tale,” a physically hurt and emotionally wounded Aileen contemplates running away. She cannot understand why Mr. Gray abused her for saving the family’s baby. The sole reason she decides to stay is Robin, her own child. Once Aileen returns from her hiding, the family showers her with praise and affection. She states, “The days that followed—well, they were wonderful. The mother and Sadie and the servants—why, they just seemed to worship me” (172). Aileen’s trust toward her human companions seems to restore itself. When a friend of Mr. Gray compliments Aileen’s exquisite “instinct,” Mr. Gray is quick to correct him. He states, “It’s far above instinct; it’s *reason*” (172). It appears that Aileen is again a member of the Gray household. Mr. Gray believes in Aileen’s capacity for reason, and this acknowledgment removes the common justification of animal experimentation. *Reason*, however varied individuals choose to define it, is used by many to support a position of superiority over other “lower” animals.

By digging down further into human and nonhuman animal relations, one can also identify the firmly rooted subject/object dichotomy between human and nonhuman animals. Mark Bernstein comments on this in *Without a Tear: Our Tragic Relationship with Animals*. Bernstein notes that humans are thought of as having a “worth” that does not come from any service(s) they afford; rather, humans have an “intrinsic value” (4). Nonhuman animals, on the other hand, are thought of as “objects.” These nonhuman animals possess only an instrumental value (4). Both Singer’s and Bernstein’s philosophically grounded ideas seem to work in tandem, and both can further our understanding of the subversive hues present within Twain’s text.

The fact that the dog-narrator is given a name and humanlike qualities might seem like an attempt to “humanize” her; but perhaps rather than this, it “individualizes” Aileen. This individualization allows readers to move toward recognizing what Bernstein calls “intrinsic value,” and one can move beyond identifying Aileen as purely an object. Then, as Singer posits, one can determine

that this “individual” can (and does) suffer. A reader remains aware throughout the story that Aileen is a dog, yet in the process of naming and developing her as a character Twain makes Aileen more than a mere faceless, identity-less dog. She is Aileen Mavourneen, a half St. Bernard, half collie canine; she is the mother of Robin. Simultaneously, Twain creates what Joe B. Fulton, in *Mark Twain’s Ethical Realism*, calls a “switching” effect. Fulton explains: “Twain allows the characters themselves to become like ‘another conscience’ inside each other, and to create, to a sometimes surprising degree, consciousness itself. Twain’s attempt to ‘be authentic’ encompasses the ethical interaction of these voices and the aesthetic attempt to create a realistic literature by making them ‘talk as they do talk’” (23). While Fulton is referring to Twain’s use of regional dialects, perhaps this can be taken a step further and applied to the nonhuman narration of Aileen. The southern dialects that Twain uses throughout much of his work gives his readers access to these alternate consciences, one of which is a piece of the southern black experience; he breathes life into characters like Jim in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and, in turn, invites readers into another conscience. Additionally, Twain gives a voice to “others” who normally do not have the ability to be heard—nonhuman animals. While dogs do not speak in an articulate language, outside of fictional stories they do suffer. Twain identifies this and gives a voice to a voiceless nonhuman animal. Because Aileen is unable to verbally communicate with the human characters in the story, the “ethical interaction” occurs between the narrator and the reader; it becomes empathy caused by suffering.

Another of Twain’s stories, “A Horse’s Tale,” presents a nonhuman animal raconteur. The opening narrative by the horse, Soldier Boy, evidences a non-human narrator who shares Aileen’s voiceless position. Soldier Boy notes all his useful skills and traits, yet he cannot directly communicate with humans. When he states that he can name any Native American tribe simply by looking at their moccasins, he adds that he can only name the tribe “in horse-talk, and could do it in American if I had speech” (197). Like Aileen from “A Dog’s Tale,” Soldier Boy cannot speak to his owner(s), and like Aileen, his “story” does not end well on account of his exploitation by his multiple masters. Boy has only brief sections of narration, leaving the rest to be filled by human narration (mostly in the form of letters). Regardless, Boy’s voice is heard both at the beginning and end of the tale, and this seems to have a similar individualizing effect as Aileen’s first-person narrative in “A Dog’s Tale.”

There are a number of other memorable scenes and stories from Twain’s corpus of writing that deal with nonhuman animals. In a majority of these, the

animals are not narrating. Granted, a reader knows that Twain lurks behind all narration, human or nonhuman, but the overall result of animal stories told by a human narrator seems to reduce what Fulton names the “switching effect.” In “Baker’s Blue-Jay Yarn” for example, the narrator possesses an omniscience that allows him/her access to the bird’s thoughts and feelings. The first line reads, “When I first begun to understand jay language correctly . . .,” thus explicitly noting that the bird’s language is being interpreted (87). The bird does “talk”; however, a “talking” bird brings to mind a parrot, which can learn to mimic words and phrases. This speech does not seem to interest the narrator though. He/she is more fascinated by the bird’s tireless efforts placing acorns in a hole, even remarking, “He laid into his work like a nigger” (89). Action takes primacy over words, perhaps because, again, the vocalizations of birds are mimetic and therefore seem to lose their authenticity or legitimacy (both for the reader and the fictional narrator). But “understanding” jay language is not a means of understanding the bird’s actions; rather, it gives the narrator a means to laugh at this “simple” bird.

Likewise, in an early scene from *Pudd’nhead Wilson*, one may recall how David Wilson gets his eponymous name, Pudd’nhead, after hearing a dog “yelp and snarl and howl” (25). The voice of the dog is distanced from a physical body. As the text clearly states, these noises were heard from an “invisible dog” (25). Wilson jokingly makes the comment about wishing to own half of the dog so he could kill his half, but the humor of his remark is lost to the “simple” townsfolk. A reader understands the miscommunication, but the other characters do not. The townsfolk try to reason through Wilson’s joke, finally deciding he is a “Pudd’nhead.” Again, Twain confronts his readers with a disembodied representation of a nonhuman animal and evidences another example where words and actions conflict.

In the final scenes of “A Dog’s Tale,” Mr. Gray takes Aileen’s puppy into the laboratory. Aileen watches with pride, unaware of the events which unfold. Her puppy, bleeding from his head, stumbles and then falls to the floor. The experiment causes Robin to go blind. Gray’s associates praise the experiment, stating, “It’s so—you’ve proved your theory, and suffering humanity owes you a great debt from henceforth” (173). Robin dies a few moments later, and Mr. Gray orders a servant to bury “it” in the far corner of the garden and continues his conversation with the rest of his colleagues. Aileen cannot understand why Robin will not grow like the seeds that they plant earlier in the story.

In his “Letter to the London Anti-vivisection Society” (1899), Twain mentions Claude Bernard, a “notorious French vivisector” (139). Lori Gruen, Peter

Singer, and David Hine also mention this same French vivisector in *Animal Liberation: A Graphic Guide*, explaining, “The growth of animal experimentation gave another boost to the movement of animal welfare because of the horrific—though entirely accurate—details that emerged about what was being done to animals” (41). Claude Bernard himself argues, “A physiologist is no ordinary man. He is a learned man, a man possessed and absorbed by a scientific idea. He does not hear the animal’s cry of pain. He is blind to the blood that flows. He sees nothing but his idea” (qtd. in Gruen, Singer, and Hine 41). Clearly Twain knows of Claude Bernard and this type of “deaf” man of science during the time “A Dog’s Tale” was written (1903). One can easily identify something akin to Bernard’s “physiologist” within Twain’s fictional representation of Mr. Gray. More generally, Bernard illustrates a prime example of scientific exploitation of animals as well as the disconnect between human and nonhuman suffering.

In *When Species Meet*, Donna Haraway discusses Jacques Derrida’s lifetime struggle against the idea that “response” is limited to humans and that animals possess only the ability to “react” (77–78). As Derrida states, “The question of the said animal in its entirety comes down to knowing not whether the animal speaks but whether one can know what *respond* means” (qtd. in Haraway 79). Susan McHugh, in “Literary Animal Agents,” expands on Derrida’s struggle. McHugh posits, “So often applied to examples of existing canon, this formulation of nonhuman traces as deconstructing human attempts at self-representation elaborates the logic of substitution through which the animal’s sacrifice (i.e., its real and representational consumption) supports the human. But it creates more problems than it resolves. . . . This implies that animal subjectivity remains significant only as an essentially negative force against which the human is asserted—hence the appeal of metaphoric animals” (489). In the case of Aileen, one knows what her “responses” mean, but regardless, McHugh makes a valid objection to a deconstructive approach in assigning value to nonhuman animals. Do these beings exist only to reaffirm what constitutes a human (e.g., those beings which are not animals)? Moreover, Haraway explains that “the problem is actually to understand that human beings do not get a pass on the necessity of killing significant others, who are themselves responding, not just reacting” (80). In addition to voice, Twain inverts human response by illustrating Mr. Gray’s propensity to act in a reactionary manner. Again, these serve to support Twain’s comment, in “The Lowest Animal,” that Darwin had it all wrong about man’s ascent from lower animals (at least in a moral sense). The poignant line from Huck, in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*,

that “human beings can be awful cruel to one another,” perhaps underpins Twain’s later feelings toward the maltreatment of “lower” animals (321). This cruelty persists when those being hurt do not possess the ability and/or opportunity to “talk” back and merits a connection to the other forms of dehumanization, such as slavery and racism, which Twain observed throughout his life.

Gray’s hypocrisy is clear from his inconsistent behavior toward Aileen. One moment he treats her as a member of the family, and the next moment he vivisects Aileen’s child. In the story, Aileen’s moral behavior far outweighs the actions of her human counterparts. Gray exclaims, oblivious to the irony of his own words, “There, I’ve won—confess it! He’s as blind as a bat!” (175). When the associate of Mr. Gray announces that “suffering humanity” owes him a great debt, one cannot overlook the cost of this frivolous “experiment.” This phrase also carries a dark causticness because the only beings who suffer in this story are *not* human. But what seems obvious to the men of science is not apparent to the canine narrator. Once again, the interpretation of human language becomes problematic when words and actions conflict with one another.

When a human strikes a dog, does the dog not respond? As Aileen drags the “screaming little creature” from the fire and is assaulted for her valor, she retreats to a dark corner of the house (170–71). She remarks how she resisted the urge to whimper, “though it would have been such a comfort ” (170). Likewise, when Mr. Gray blinds Robin, the puppy “shrieked” (173). A dog will “yelp” or “whimper” in times of pain. One might venture to guess that David Wilson (aka Pudd’nhead Wilson) wished he had not heard, or commented on, the yelps and howls of a hound. In times of extreme emotion, humans will also resort to prelinguistic forms of expression. In moments of overwhelming sadness one may cry; in instances of gaiety one may laugh. The speaker reverts to Whitman’s “barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world” (76). In other words (irony intended), there are limits which human language cannot reach. The “barbaric yawp,” then, can communicate between species, albeit primal and inarticulate, if one is not too deaf to hear these cries.

Admittedly, the study of nonhuman animals and their representation(s) in literature continues to remain a strictly human affair, but this does not mean we should not strive to allot these nonhuman living beings their due consideration. This also does not mean we should cease to expand, refine, and question how we choose to carry on the discussion of this relationship. Twain identifies our hypocritical relationship with these “lower” creatures, some of whom we label our “friends.” History is swollen with similar inequities, many of which

were socially condoned, propagated, and legally enforced. With these groups of subjugated people, there came a silence. There was silence because speaking out meant sometimes dire (and nonfictional) consequences.

Twain's story, therefore, can be viewed as a move beyond the objectification of animals, yet this movement is located outside this fictional context. It provides no transcendental movement within its human characters. This movement, however, can occur within our own capacity to apply "reason" to the plight of nonhuman animals. It is a movement that does not seem to require the deconstruction of beings into diacritical configurations; hence we might avoid gauging humanity's moral progress by its distance from "the animal." Twain's short story, which some dismiss as "sentimental" and/or "pathetic," does evoke a certain pathos within readers, but the emotion is not simple "pity" or "nostalgia." Perhaps this feeling could be labeled an empathy which crosses species, a "barbaric yawp" which echoes in our ears long after this short story has ended. By critically analyzing Twain's "A Dog's Tale," with careful attention to the representation of nonhuman animals and the disconnection between words and actions, we can, in effect, begin to reimagine, reconstitute, or at the very least reevaluate the way we perceive and discuss the relationship between humans and nonhuman animals. There is something humanity can learn from this simple short story, and it moves far beyond any emotional response. The lesson stems from the actions of human characters as well as the devoted, although exploited, position of Aileen. We can look to the problematic limits of language and begin to hear the "yawps" and yelps.

MATTHEW GUZMAN received his bachelor's and master's degrees from the University of Texas at San Antonio, and he is currently a Ph.D. student at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln. His work focuses on nineteenth-century American literature, with an emphasis on the representation of nonhuman animals.

Notes

1. In the United States alone, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's "Animal Welfare Report," in 2005, 66,610 dogs were used for scientific testing. More recently, in 2010, the same government organization reports that 64,930 dogs were subjected to experimentation. Although the number of guinea pigs or rabbits used is a much higher figure (each at over 200,000), the number of canines remains relatively constant. In 2010, these 64,930 scientific subjects contributed to a staggering total of

1,134,693 nonhuman animals used in the name of science. These figures, again, reflect usage only within the United States, and they do not include the most common species used in experimentation, rats and mice.

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