MARK TWAIN'S LATE ANIMAL TALES: SENTIMENTAL ANTHROPOMORPHISM AS ANTHROPOCENE CRITIQUE

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Abstract

This article rereads two of Mark Twain's late and most explicitly political but understudied texts involving non-human animals, the short story "A Dog's Tale" (1903) and the novella *A Horse's Tale* (1906), within an Anthropocene context. Although the texts came into existence long before the notion of the Anthropocene was around, the article argues that Twain's sentimental anthropomorphism has relevance as Anthropocene critique and offers models for alternative narratives of the Anthropocene. After briefly introducing relevant historical and conceptual contexts, my analysis focuses on two specific facets of Twain's narrative technique, spotlighting its potential as Anthropocene critique and for Anthropocene storytelling. On the one hand, the article shows that Twain's sentimental anthropomorphism resonates with the Anthropocene by rescaling the imagination through its anthropomorphized people and arguing for an alternative, collective ethics of care that transcends species boundaries. On the other hand, I demonstrate how Twain's technique allows for rethinking and troubling the caesurae of species and race as arbitrary constructions, which interlinks with recognizing the Anthropocene as (also) a racial process.

Keywords: Animal Narrators, Anthropocene, Anthropomorphism, Mark Twain, Race, Species

LOS ÚLTIMOS CUENTOS DE ANIMALES DE MARK TWAIN:
EL ANTROPOMORFISMO SENTIMENTAL COMO CRÍTICA DEL ANTROPOCENO

Resumen

Este artículo es una relectura de dos textos tardíos y políticamente más explícitos, aunque poco estudiados, de Mark Twain, que incluyen animales no-humanos, el relato corto "A Dog's Tale" (1903) y la novela corta *A Horse's Tale* (1906), dentro del contexto del Antropoceno. Aunque los textos existieron mucho antes de que la noción del Antropoceno se usara, el artículo argumenta que el antropomorfismo sentimental de Twain tiene relevancia como crítica del Antropoceno y ofrece modelos para narrativas alternativas del mismo. Tras introducir brevemente contextos históricos y conceptuales relevantes, mi análisis se enfocará en dos facetas específicas de la técnica narrativa de Twain, destacando su potencial como crítica del Antropoceno y para la narración del Antropoceno. Por un lado, el artículo demuestra que el antropomorfismo sentimental de Twain tiene resonancia con el Antropoceno al redefinir la escala de imaginación a través de la gente antropomorfizada y al argumentar una alternativa, colectiva ética de cuidado que trasciende los límites de las especies. Por otro lado, demuestro cómo la técnica de Twain permite replantear y perturbar la cesura de las especies y la raza como construcciones arbitrarias, que se interrelaciona al reconocer el Antropoceno (además) como un proceso racial.

Palabras clave: narradores animales, Antropoceno, antropomorfismo, Mark Twain, raza, especies

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1. INTRODUCTION

Readers familiar with Mark Twain have long been aware of his love of non-human animals and their prominent role in much of his writing. While this is reflected in animal-focused Twain collections as well as a growing ecocritical and animal studies engagement with the writer's work,[1] there is still comparatively little attention to Twain's most openly political texts involving non-human animals, written during the last two decades of his life. Being darker, more sardonic and often expressing both the author's pessimistic vision of humankind and his animal welfare activism, this late animal-writing, as Twain notes in his correspondence, came with "a righteous purpose" (Rasmussen 2013, 231), and had "a sermon concealed in it" (qtd. Fisher Fishkin 2010, 30). In the following, I focus on two of Twain's most explicitly political yet still understudied texts of this period, the short story "A Dog's Tale" (1903) and the novella *A Horse's Tale* (1906), to analyse what I read as their sentimental anthropomorphism and to argue for their relevance for contemporary Anthropocene discourse.

Although the stories came into existence long before the notion of the Anthropocene was around, I propose that Twain's sentimental anthropomorphism has the potential to function as Anthropocene critique and to offer strategies for storytelling in the Anthropocene. Building on historian Jean-Baptiste Fressoz's (2021) proposal to recognize the "main strength" of the Anthropocene concept as "primarily aesthetic" (288), my argument is that Twain's technique of using anthropomorphized animal narrators in "A Dog's Tale" and *A Horse's Tale* addresses aspects (e.g. scale, species) relevant to contemporary Anthropocene discourse and can be part of alternative aesthetic responses.

Ironically, one of the reasons for a traditional lack of attention to these stories is also the reason why they are so promising in relation to the Anthropocene discourse: namely their use of animal narrators to convey a bleak view of the (moral) qualities and supposed superiority of humankind. As Fisher Fishkin (2010) has pointed out, over the course of Twain's career, non-human animals turned from providing a "reliable source of humor at the start of his career" into functioning as "an Archimedean point from which to view –and evaluate– humans" (2). This trajectory toward an often stunningly pessimistic evaluation of humankind, combined with the overwhelming sentimentalism and pathos of the texts considered here has often led critics to either ignore them "in uncomfortable silence or dismiss them as occasional accidents or use them to damn Twain altogether for capitulating to a turn-of-the-century 'feminized' culture" (Camfield 1991, 97). Although more recent scholarship has increasingly returned to and found value in the stories, e.g. in light of language

[1] Collections of Twain's works focusing on non-human animals are found in Fisher Fishkin 2010; Rasmussen 2016; and Dawidziak 2016. For ecocritical work on Twain cf. e.g. Marcus 2016; Wolff 2018; Morel 2020; see also the contributions to the special issue of *The Mark Twain Annual* on "Mark Twain and Nature" (2019).

and interpretation (Guzman 2015), as a response to Modernist anxieties of isolation (Jacobs 2016), or as representing frontier values (Bradshaw 2019), Twain's sentimental anthropomorphism, with its dark view of the human animal, was traditionally one of the reasons for a relative scholarly silence on "A Dog's Tale" and *A Horse's Tale*.[2]

However, it is precisely this narrative technique of Twain's sentimental anthropomorphism that, I argue, holds potential as Anthropocene critique. Not only do I concur with and build on claims that Twain's animal writing "speaks to readers today as much as it did in his own day, as we continue to grapple with the status of animals in society and to debate the ethical limits to the uses of animals for entertainment, science, food, and fashion" (VanDette 2020, 272). Moreover, I propose that Twain's technique in "A Dog's Tale" and *A Horse's Tale* resonates particularly with concerns of contemporary Anthropocene discourse. The stories are relevant, for example, for discussions of Anthropocene storytelling as they involve questions of (temporal) scaling through their animal narrators and their ideas about family and lineage, thus corresponding with the critical questions highlighted by Ursula Heise (2019): "If the Anthropocene indeed calls for a scaling-up of the imagination, how might that imagination translate into narrative? What characters and plot architectures would it involve? What models do existing narrative forms offer for telling the story of our climate-changed presents and futures?" (279). Additionally, Twain's stories help us focus on aspects of species and race, as they interlink slave narrative discourse with animal welfare activism, thus highlighting the Anthropocene as a racial process and providing strategies to aestheticize the Anthropocene in ways that enhance socio-political critique.

To demonstrate the relevance of these Twain stories to the Anthropocene discourse and contribute to a growing ecocritical engagement with the writer's work, I will analyse his sentimental anthropomorphism in "A Dog's Tale" and *A Horse's Tale* in three steps. First, I will briefly introduce the most relevant historical and conceptual contexts. Subsequently, my analysis focuses on two specific facets of Twain's narrative technique, spotlighting its potential as Anthropocene critique and for Anthropocene storytelling. On the one hand, I argue that Twain's sentimental anthropomorphism resonates with the Anthropocene by rescaling the imagination through its anthropomorphized people and arguing for an alternative, collective ethics of care that transcends species boundaries. On the other hand, I suggest that Twain's technique allows for rethinking and troubling caesurae of species and race as arbitrary constructions, which interlinks with recognizing the Anthropocene as (also) a racial process.

[2] More scholarship on both texts has appeared in recent years, in addition to the studies mentioned above e.g. by Skandera-Trombley 1997; Fisher Fishkin 2010, 26-32, 270-280; Marcus 2016, 225-228; Jassim 2019; and VanDette 2020. Scholars, however, still tend to treat the texts in passing or by doing the (important) work of historical contextualization, rather than providing close readings.

2. CONTEXTS: TWAIN'S SENTIMENTAL ANTHROPOMORPHISM, EVOLUTIONISM, AND THE ANTHROPOCENE

Before analysing more specific facets of Twain's sentimental anthropomorphism in relation to the Anthropocene discourse, a brief introduction and contextualization of the stories is in order. There are two primary contexts for my reading of "A Dog's Tale" and *A Horse's Tale*, an immediate historical one of post-Darwinian evolutionism, and the conceptual context of the Anthropocene. With respect to the former, Twain's historical context, scholars have drawn attention to how both stories polemically participate in a late-nineteenth-century animal welfare discourse, particularly the Transatlantic anti-vivisection movement and the activism against bullfighting in Spain (cf. Fisher Fishkin 2010, 257-270). Inspired by the publication of Charles Darwin's *The Descent of Man* in 1871, Twain contributed to this discourse by publishing various texts that negotiated the much-debated question of the biological and psychological relationships between human and non-human animals, and which often actively take a stance against cruelty toward non-human animals. While others have explored in much detail how Twain acted on the question of vivisection (cf. e.g. Fisher Fishkin 2010, 267-270), the crucial aspect of the historical context for my argument is Twain's broader attack on the notion of (evolutionary) human superiority. His late texts frequently respond to Darwinian discourse by de-throning the human, have a strong impulse against anthropocentrism, and "A Dog's Tale" and *A Horse's Tale* –perhaps counterintuitively given their anthropomorphism and their overt animal welfare concerns– are no exception in this respect. Though gaining a special place in Twain's *oeuvre* as featuring animals as narrators, they also mirror the concerns of pieces such as the "Letter to the London Anti-Vivisection Society" (1899) or the anonymously published philosophical dialogue "Instinct and Thought" (1906). The stories are an expression of Twain's famous renunciation of his "allegiance to the Darwinian theory of the Ascent of Man from the Lower Animals" and his proposal that a "new and truer" theory should be "named the *Des*cent of Man from the Higher Animals" (2010 [1896], 117, emphasis in original), and thus to be read as part of a deep and fervent critique of the human as a superior figure.

At the same time, this critique intimately relates Twain's stories conceptually to the second context of my argument, contemporary Anthropocene discourse, especially if we theorize the Anthropocene as a concept that, as Fressoz (2021) claims, is not merely to be viewed as "a scientific discovery" but whose "main strength" is "primarily aesthetic" (288). The Anthropocene thusly understood "provided the thrill of a new grand narrative, a new grandiose horizon for political and technological action" (298), yet it is rooted in, drawing from, and must be seen in relation to "old cultural tropes" (297). While Fressoz reads the Anthropocene primarily in relation to old cultural tropes of the sublime, considering Twain's late animal stories raises the question of how a sentimental anthropomorphism, too, might speak to and provide strategies for (narrating in) the Anthropocene. With their anthropomorphism, the texts' focus lies explicitly on the question of species –the primary way through which Twain's stories conceptually interlink with questions of the Anthropocene discourse. After all, this discourse centres on introducing the human as species,

if we recall its "official narrative" that "'we,' the human species, unconsciously destroyed nature to the point of hijacking the Earth system into a new geological epoch. In the late twentieth century, a handful of Earth system scientists finally opened our eyes. So now we know; now we are aware of the global consequences of human action" (Bonneuil/Fressoz 2016, xii). The human species central in this narrative is always on the verge of translating into human hubris seeing our (im) potence as we recognize humanity as the first geological superpower to be conscious of its role. There is, of course, awareness in the Anthropocene discourse that "[t] his story of awakening is a fable" (xiii) and inadequate in a variety of senses. In this context, reading stories like Twain's reminds us of historical forms of human hubris and gives us insights into earlier critiques of humankind as (in Twain's case evolutionarily understood) the crown of creation. Here, we could thus learn from additional cultural tropes by probing the potential of (narrative) strategies and forms of (socio-political) critique for today's contexts. This, I argue, can also be true for anthropomorphic forms of narration such as Twain's, especially if we recognize with Dipesh Chakrabarty (2016) that, for the humanities, our current "crisis requires us to 'imagine sympathetically the predicament' of not just humans but of nonhumans as well" (380). Twain's sentimental anthropomorphism can be enriching as one way to "imagine sympathetically" beyond the human in its anthropocenic negotiation, if we understand Twain's critique of the human as providing open (and imperfect) strategies that might help politicize the Anthropocene in alternative ways. A sentimental anthropomorphism may offer frameworks to represent and act well in the Anthropocene understood as "a far more perverse and unequal process that accentuates other forms of vulnerability and injustice" (Fressoz 2021, 292-3).

In the context of the Anthropocene discourse, Twain's sentimental tales with their animal narrators serve important functions not only as reminders of our entanglements within the more-than-human (whether in light of potential recognition of ourselves, in Twain's times, as crown of evolution or, today, as geological force), but also because they provide opportunities to rethink the processes and caesurae that construct the (multiplying) figure of the human and offer narrative models that Anthropocene storytelling could rely on. The central and most obvious function of Twain's strategy of sentimental anthropomorphism is that it is counter-intuitively driven by an impulse against anthropocentrism, and seeks to dethrone the human as a superior figure. The stories are in this respect cases supporting theoretical positions and analyses that argue against anthropomorphism as a primarily damaging form of discourse (cf. for an introductory overview e.g. Herman 2018, 5-7). Ecofeminist Val Plumwood (2002), for example, though conceding that there are damaging forms of anthropomorphism, has suggested that "cross-species representation, like cross-cultural representation, is not automatically colonising or self-imposing, and may express motives and meanings of sympathy, support and admiration" (60), and Twain's texts are certainly examples of the latter. They do not withstand charges of sentimentality, to be sure, but the "anthropodenial," understood with primatologist Frans de Waal (1997) as the attempt "to build a brick wall to separate humans from the rest of the animal kingdom" (50-53), that is reflected in the traditional ignorance and devaluing of these two Twain-stories –often precisely through terms such as

anthropomorphism or sentimentality– is symptomatic of hyper-separating forms of thought that are much more damaging than Twain's stories' featuring of non-human animals as narrators.

In their sentimental anthropomorphism, the stories share a fundamental strategy of establishing strong empathy and emotional bonds between readers and their first-person animal narrators, with an aim to radically expose through gruesome endings what human hubris and disregard for non-human others leads to. Both "A Dog's Tale" and *A Horse's Tale* begin with engaging readers emotionally by introducing their animal narrators –a female canine named Aileen Mavourneen and a male equine named Soldier Boy– as admirable protagonists displaying flawed reasoning capacities but high ethical standards. In the first story, first published in *Harper's Magazine* in 1903 and subsequently as a hardcover book in 1904, the dog as first-person narrator begins to tell her tale light-heartedly enough and with typical Twain-humour, as she reveals to her audience "My father was a St. Bernard, my mother was a collie, but I am a Presbyterian" (Twain 2010 [1903], 165). Aileen shows herself equipped with an admirably selfless ethics, inherited from her mother's "kindly ways, and from her we learned also to be brave and prompt in time of danger, and not to run away, but face the peril that threatened friend or stranger, and help him the best we could without stopping to think what the cost might be to us" (167). As the protagonist is sold to another family and bears a "little puppy," she continues to embrace this philosophy when rescuing the family's baby from a burning nursery, only to be beaten and severely injured by the head of the family, Mr. Gray, a "renowned scientist," who initially fails to see her heroism and suspects an attack on the newborn. Gray ultimately kills the narrator's puppy in a laboratory for the purpose of proving a point to his scientist friends (169, 168). Though turning into an obvious condemnation of the mistreatment of animals, the tale has also been read as more than just literary anti-vivisection activism and one of Twain's "worst sentimental excesses" (Rasmussen 1994), for instance, as criticism of Calvinism (Fulton 2009) or as a condemnation of slavery (Herzberg 1977-78).

With *A Horse's Tale*, written during the fall of 1905 and first published in *Harper's Weekly* in the fall of 1906, parallels in terms of narrative strategy abound. This novella, too, which has been read e.g. through themes of crossdressing (Skandera-Trombley 1997) and the frontier (Bradshaw 2019), deploys anthropomorphism through a first-person narrator, as its equine protagonist, the military horse Soldier Boy, begins to introduce his admirable pedigree and character features. Although different from "A Dog's Tale" in featuring a variety of both human and non-human narrators, and partly presented through letters, the text centrally involves dialogues and monologues by non-human animals to tell its tale about nine-year-old Cathy Allison, orphaned in Europe, who is sent to live with her uncle, General Allison at a frontier outpost in Oregon. Cathy becomes the fort's darling and Soldier Boy's best friend and is made a mock officer. In episodes set on the prairie that seemingly turn a large portion of the text into a harmless children's story, during which the horse saves the child from a pack of wolves (Twain 2010 [1906], 219), Cathy lives through various adventures before eventually moving back to Europe with her uncle and Soldier Boy. The most striking structural parallel with "A Dog's Tale" occurs with

the radical, dramatic ending of *A Horse's Tale*, which, like the former story, does not spare readers feelings of despair. In Southern Spain, the horse is abducted, sold multiple times, mistreated by various owners, and ends up as a mount in a bullfight, where little Cathy, accidentally in the audience, recognizes her lost companion, tries to save him, and is killed together with her equine friend.

In both cases, it is crucial to see that Twain, through his sentimental anthropomorphism, humanizes non-human animals as narrators, but that he does so with an aim to deconstruct notions of human superiority. Both texts overtly refrain from proposing through their anthropomorphism that animals were reasoning in a human way or that they had identical capacities for human knowledge and means of communication, but at the same time attack the notion that reasoning capacity marks the singularly most valuable form of life. This reflects Twain's idea that "just because animals didn't put their thoughts into human language, it didn't mean that they did not think, and just because animals didn't put their emotions into human language, it didn't mean that they did not feel" (Fisher Fishkin 2010, 260). "A Dog's Tale," while stressing (and drawing humour from the fact) that non-human animals do *not* have reasoning powers –as signalled unmistakably through the various misunderstandings and canines' inability to use (human) language meaningfully, as they mix up words and "flashed out a fresh definition every time"– implies that such reasoning powers, especially in what is presented as unfeeling science with its "frosty intellectuality," should not be considered the single most significant factor in designating value in forms of life (Twain 2010 [1903], 166, 168). *A Horse's Tale*, on the other hand, offering a more complex communicative situation with multiple human and non-human narrators, deconstructs the singularity of human knowledge production by implying through its animal characters that, though unable to communicate with humans through shared language, they do possess a deep knowledge and (especially ethical) understanding about the world, for example, about the character qualities of their owners and of their plans, such as an ambush on Buffalo Bill that the non-human animals sense (cf. Twain 2010 [1906], 216). As pathetic and pessimistic as the endings of both stories are, Twain's sentimental anthropomorphism therefore also presents a broader philosophy set against notions of human superiority that emerges historically out of Twain's anti-Darwinian stance, but that also bears relevance in an Anthropocene context.

3. RESCALING THE IMAGINATION THROUGH ANTHROPOMORPHIZED PEOPLE

One of two specific observations I wish to make regarding the potential of Twain's sentimental anthropomorphism as a means to think about aspects of the Anthropocene discourse concerns the ways in which his writing may help expand our imagination of life in the Anthropocene with respect to questions of scale. Chakrabarty (2012) explains what is at stake with scaling as a principal factor of the Anthropocene when describing how "the need arises to view the human simultaneously on contradictory registers: as a geophysical force and as a political

agent, […] belonging at once to differently-scaled histories of the planet, of life and species, and of human societies" (14). The Anthropocene changes the conditions and coordinates of human existence, as it conceptually multiplies dimensions of the human figure by introducing "other modes of being" that, in Chakrabarty's (2015) view, humans have "no way of experiencing" (180). Others disagree with the latter assessment and literary scholars in particular have weighed in by thinking about representational strategies and asking through numerous concepts and analyses which literary forms could provide adequate means of scaling up the imagination for the Anthropocene.[3]

In this context, a narrative technique such as Twain's sentimental anthropomorphism, too, has the potential to contribute to the discussion of scaling that is central to the Anthropocene discourse. With Twain, I argue, diversifying scales and modes of being occurs not by focusing on human existence and (non-) agencies through explicitly multiplying a figure of the human or a play with (deep) time, but instead through introducing modes of non-human existence, perception and agency through anthropomorphism. My argument at this point aligns with suggestions for (certain) anthropomorphisms' usefulness, e.g. Bekoff's (2013) suggestion that anthropomorphism "allows other [than human] animals' behavior and emotions to be accessible to us" (63) in however limited ways, but extends this idea of accessibility to an Anthropocene dimension. Perhaps surprisingly, given the direction of a "scaling-up of the imagination" that is usually cited with the Anthropocene (Heise 2019, 279), Twain's strategy draws its power from a meaningful *re*scaling (more of a "scaling-down" than a "scaling-up") that multiplies temporalities of life in presents made narratively accessible to humans. Thereby, Twain's sentimental anthropomorphism simultaneously estranges and familiarizes human perspectives, playing with the notion of a multiscalar existence that does not explicitly address a planetary or deep temporal scale but nevertheless resonates with the Anthropocene discourse as it deploys non-human narrators to multiply modes of existence and introduce the thought of collective experience beyond the human.

Twain's strategy in this respect is twofold and involves, on one hand, a play with temporalities through anthropomorphized units, and, on the other hand, a strategy that ridicules ideas of lineage in favor of an ethics of care. With respect to the former, it is important to note how Twain's sentimental anthropomorphism fundamentally relies on a play with narrative time. The texts do not simply have animals tell stories, but also realize their anthropomorphism through what Genette (1980) called anisochronies, i.e. narrative's play with the relation between narrated time and time of narration (cf. 86-95). Both texts, in the space of a few pages, cover considerable time spans, such as entire years or seasons. "A Dog's Tale" begins with Aileen Mavourneen's birth and swiftly depicts her puppyhood and her move to a new home and her own motherhood, deploying phrases such as "[p]retty soon it was spring" or "I have watched two whole weeks" (Twain 2010 [1903], 173). The

[3] Among these analyses are e.g. those by Trexler 2015; Ghosh 2016; Heise 2019.

same is true for *A Horse's Tale*, which does not reveal exactly how much time passes in the diegetic world, but nevertheless suggests a considerable discrepancy between narrated time and time of narration, since the events of the tale probably take more than a year, from the beginning of Cathy Allison's moving from Europe to the U.S. through her prairie adventures to her resettling in Europe.

While such play with narrative time is central to the texts' anthropomorphizing strategy, a related feature of Twain's anthropomorphic play with temporalities that simultaneously makes "animals' behavior and emotions […] accessible to us" (Bekoff 213, 63) and multiplies and rescales modes of existence in ways that resonate with the Anthropocene discourse, comes with the animal narrators' use of humanly perceivable and measurable units. In *A Horse's Tale*, Soldier Boy's language includes human forms of sizing up and measuring the perceived world, as he conveys his perspective in "months" (226) and "years"; weighs the world in "pounds" (195) and marks its distances in "feet" and "miles" (196, 197). In "A Dog's Tale," on the other hand, it is primarily the idea of family that functions as an affective as well as temporal unit enabling accessibility for a human experience. Twain's strategy of making Aileen Mavourneen, her puppy, and the father Robin Adair identifiable as a (nuclear) family not only aims to incite intense emotional responses against the horrific practice of vivisection, but also deploys family as a measurable unit capable of translating a differently scaled way of being into a human perceptive framework. As the stories introduce humanizing categories such as family, age, or stage in life (puppyhood, motherhood, etc.), their engagement is therefore not in an upscaling of the imagination through different figures of the human. Instead, we find a strategy that draws attention to the constructedness of human perceptive frameworks and measuring relations to the physical world that manifest both through Twain's animal narrators, and in his passing comments on the uncertainties that mark human perceptions of time, for example, when suggesting that "nobody can keep account of days or anything else where she is" or that Cathy "[i]n some ways, is just her age, but in others she's as old as her uncle" (2010 [1906], 201, 211). Units seemingly fixed within human perceptive frames are unveiled as non-absolute, as Twain's anthropomorphism deconstructs notions of objectively measurable properties, temporalities of life, and belonging to collectives. Twain's sentimental anthropomorphism may not scale up our imagination, but it forces readers to reconsider more flexibly the ways through which we claim to experience the world and "trains" them thereby to consider potentials for multi-scaling beyond the human.

Additionally, Twain's play with the notion of family is important because his sentimental anthropomorphism thereby engages in a second strategy relatable to Anthropocene ideas about scale, of ridiculing lineage in favor of an ethics of care that transcends species boundaries. Family, in Twain's stories also involves a differently-scaled temporality that comes through family understood as lineage, and making fun of the latter is one of the primary sources of Twain's humor in both "A Dog's Tale" and *A Horse's Tale*. This is visible from the outset in both texts, which open with lengthy portrayals of their protagonist-narrator's pedigree. While as Aileen Mavourneen proudly reveals her descendance from a St. Bernard and a collie, claiming that this makes her a "Presbyterian" (Twain 2010 [1903], 165),

Soldier Boy prides himself in being the son of an "all American" mother of "the bluest Blue Grass aristocracy" and a "broncho"-father (Twain 2010 [1906], 197, 198). Through the latter in particular, Twain ridicules concepts of lineage, as Soldier Boy explains that descending from a broncho is "nothing as to recent lineage, but plenty good enough when you go a good way back." Citing a Yale professor who "found skeletons of horses no bigger than a fox, bedded in the rocks" that were "ancestors of my father," Soldier Boy claims that this "makes me part blue grass and part fossil" (198) –a humorous conclusion that is both contributing to Twain's overall strategy of evoking sympathy for his animal narrators (and outrage at their eventual perishing), and another way through which the stories deconstruct our accepted terminologies, units, and processes of making sense of the world, which may be just as myopic as Soldier Boy's (no doubt existing) logic.

Moreover, these attempts of Twain's animal narrators to give themselves an ancestry are meaningful when read more globally as part of Twain's proposal of an ethics of care that transcends species boundaries. The stories convey the idea of a fundamental collectivity that transcends identifiable species boundaries by interlinking and representing them in moments of living together and suffering together. The former moments occur especially at those points where solidarity beyond species boundaries saves lives, for example, when Aileen Mavourneen heroically saves the human baby in "A Dog's Tale" (Twain 2010 [1903], 170-171) or when Cathy in *A Horse's Tale* is defended by Soldier Boy against a pack of wolves (Twain 2010 [1906], 218-219). By contrast, the latter moments can be found in the gruesome endings of the tales, which highlight suffering and dying across species lines, whether in the foreshadowed despair of the returning Gray family's children over the death of Aileen and her puppy (2010 [1903] 174), or, drastically, in Soldier Boy and Cathy's joint perishing in the cruel spectacle of a bullfight (2010 [1906], 227-228). Ultimately, Twain thereby suggests that lineage becomes a matter of secondary importance in comparison to an ethics of care that transcends species boundaries, because in the stories the fates of different species are shown as inevitably entangled. Beyond speaking to Anthropocene questions of scaling by inciting readers to reconsider and become more flexible with respect to a rescaling of human experience through considering non-human animal perspectives, Twain's sentimental anthropomorphism thus also acts as a productive reminder of the irrelevance of a scaling-up through human figures, if we do not simultaneously address questions of collective, trans-species agencies and lives in the presents of the Anthropocene.

4. RETHINKING THE CAESURAE OF SPECIES AND RACE

Another way in which Twain's sentimental anthropomorphism resonates within the Anthropocene discourse is through fundamentally challenging categories of species and race. In this respect, Twain's stories present ideas that correspond with critiques within the Anthropocene discourse that seek to fracture and "replac[e] the rather vague 'anthropos' with the nations and companies, institutions and imaginaries, technologies and ideologies that are the true drivers of the

Anthropocene" (Fressoz 2015, 70). Such critiques of a perceived flattening through the concept of the Anthropocene that regularly lament the lack of a structural critique and the risk of depoliticization take various forms, for example, in models that fragment and multiply the human figure (e.g. Chakrabarty's (2015) distinction between "*homo*" and "*Anthropos*") or in the alternative names prominently given to the proposed geological epoch (capitalocene, plantationocene etc.). A more specific context of Twain's texts as challenging the human as superior category are moreover the racial critiques of the Anthropocene that have emerged over the past years (cf. e.g. Davis et al. 2019; Pulido 2018). Instead of rehearsing the latter, I want to focus here through a close reading on two ways in which Twain's stories speak to the Anthropocene as a racial process by challenging categories of species and race. On one hand, I argue, "A Dog's Tale" and *A Horse's Tale* trouble the boundaries of species and racial categories through their discourse on lineage, on the other hand, they play with narrative templates of slavery and anti-Black violence.

At the heart of Twain's texts lies an attack on what Michel Foucault once described in relation to his influential notion of biopolitics and explaining the emergence of modern forms of racism, as "a way of establishing a biological-type caesura within a population that appears to be a biological domain" (2003, 255). This view of racism as "primarily a way of introducing a break into the domain of life" (254) pertains to the core of how Twain's sentimental anthropomorphism troubles constructions of species and racial categories through representations of lineage. As laid out, both "A Dog's Tale" and *A Horse's Tale* are humorously engaging questions of lineage in conjunction with Twain's ridiculing of his talking animals' inability to use human language adequately. However, besides being evidence that Twain's anthropomorphism resists anthropocentrism by negating the possibility of cross-species communication, this strategy also offers a powerful critique of the arbitrary and violent human constructions of species and race. Consider, for instance, the following discussion between "Soldier Boy and the Mexican Plug" (chapter VI), which features the story's hero and another horse discussing Shekels, a dog at the fort:

> "I [Soldier Boy] have always regarded him as a doubtful dog, and so has Potter. Potter is the great Dane. Potter says he is no dog, and not even poultry – though I do not go quite so far as that."
> "And I [the Mexican Plug] wouldn't, myself. Poultry is one of those things which no person can get to the bottom of, there is so much of it and such variety. It is just wings, and wings, and wings, till you are weary: turkeys, and geese, and bats, and butterflies, and angels, and grasshoppers, and flying-fish, and – well, there is really no end to the tribe; it gives me the heaves just to think of it. But this one hasn't any wings, has he?"
> "No."
> "Well, then, in my belief he is more likely to be a dog than poultry. I have not heard of poultry that hadn't wings. Wings is the *sign* of poultry; it is what you tell poultry by. Look at the mosquito."
> "What do you reckon he is, then? He must be something."
> "Why, he could be a reptile; anything that hasn't wings is a reptile."
> (Twain 2010 [1906], 213, emphasis in original)

As the conversation takes its course, Twain not only makes fun of his animals' quaint logics, but also, in a more serious underlying critique, challenges the ways in which humans construct and define species and races. Moving on, the dialogue initially appears to gain more humorous facets than seriousness, as the Mexican Plug reveals his knowledge, allegedly gained from overhearing one Professor Cope of the Philadelphia Institute, that "any plantigrade circumflex vertebrate bacterium that hadn't wings and was uncertain was a reptile" (213-214). Thus, the two characters hilariously come to agree that, since Soldier Boy has never heard of "a more uncertainer dog than what this one is" the only possible conclusion can be: "Well, then, he's a reptile. That's settled." (214) However, there is more seriousness if one considers this conversation for the arbitrariness with which the two characters arrive at their agreement about the nature of living people, and the effect this categorization as well as other claimed "lineages" in the stories have. In this respect, Twain also uses his non-human animal narrators to scrutinize and critique human language, methods, and categorizations, as he shows the power effects of the animals' constructions of "biological-type caesurae" that "break into the domain of life" (Foucault 2003, 255, 254). Twain effectively seeks through his animals to demystify the construction of such caesurae, implies the ridiculous and arbitrary genesis of categories, but also draws attention to the power effects and hypocrisies that they enable. Shekels, in this example, upon learning of his alleged reptile-ness from the Mexican Plug, comes to embrace with pride being "a plantigrade circumflex vertebrate bacterium that hasn't any wings and is uncertain" (215), assessing this category not only as "wonderfully grand and elegant," but also as socially relevant, as Potter, the great Dane, will now "be glad to" associate with him (215).

Ultimately, Twain's stories suggest that species/racial categorizations emerge as both arbitrary constructions and with real effects of social power. Categories created through "biological-type caesurae" are simultaneously revealed as ridiculous and as discriminating discourse. The honesty of the animals in both "A Dog's Tale" and *A Horse's Tale* when claiming that they deploy "large words meaning nothing" (Twain 2010 [1903], 165) for power effects becomes also a fundamental critique of processes of speciesism and racism that shape the history of the Anthropocene, as Twain condemns human feelings of superiority through his narrators, who offer an alternative to the human model of handling differences between forms of life. Whereas humans, in the stories, despite their capacity for morality, opt for essentializing their categories to exert absolute power over (and potentially destroy) living beings, Twain's animals, echoing his famous statement that Darwin should have spoken of "the *De*scent of Man from the Higher Animals" (2010 [1896], 117, emphasis in original), are the ones who display the most formidable moral qualities. Soldier Boy formulates this alternative to human hubris most clearly when stating, in response to Shekel's hypocritical humbleness, "We cannot all be reptiles, we cannot all be fossils; we have to take what comes and be thankful it is no worse. It is the true philosophy." (Twain 2010 [1906], 216) Twain's animal narrators thus resonate within the Anthropocene discourse by reminding us of the arbitrariness as well as the effects of biopolitical caesurae, but also by engaging in a "true philosophy" that speaks to human hubris and seeks to introduce modesty.

Yet another way in which Twain's sentimental anthropomorphism speaks to the Anthropocene, and perhaps the way that most explicitly relates to racial dimensions, lies in the stories' deployment of narrative templates of slavery and anti-Black violence. In this respect, the relevance of Twain's stories as Anthropocene critique lies less in their proposing or reminding us of a "true philosophy," and instead in Twain's offering of storytelling models and their potentials (and pitfalls) for strategies today. Both "A Dog's Tale" and *A Horse's Tale* deal with questions of slavery in implicit as well as explicit ways. Aileen Mavourneen is "sold and taken away" from her beloved mother, echoing scenes of family separations in slave narratives, and moves into a "charming home" reminiscent of living in the Big House of an antebellum plantation (Twain 2010 [1903], 167, 168). Here, she refers to the head of the house as "master," is allowed "visiting among the neighbor dogs" (169) to produce offspring, and is physically abused without reason. Similarly, in *A Horse's Tale* (2010 [1906]) the animals recognize their status as enslaved, as references to human "masters" and their knowledge of their status as "property" suggest (cf. 207-209). This becomes especially apparent in Soldier Boy's eventual fate of being sold "twelve times" and "each time it was down a step lower, and each time I got a harder master" (227), before ending up in the deadly bullfight. However, the most striking way in which Twain proposes analogies between violence against non-human animals and against racialized enslaved humans comes with a Spaniard's retelling of his experience of a bullfight to an American. Antonio, an expatriate for 13 years, recalls what he considers a "grand sport" (221) and describes the bullfight as a fascinating spectacle, to which the frontiersman Thorndike responds "Well, it is perfectly grand, Antonio, perfectly beautiful. Burning a nigger don't begin." (225) At this point, Twain goes further than drawing broad analogies related to slavery, as some have noted (cf. e.g. Herzberg 1977-78), offering a more concrete critique of both the bullfight and horrific forms of racial violence in the turn-of-the-century United States.

Although this facet of Twain's sentimental strategy is obviously extremely problematic, recalling how a prominent writer like Twain deployed such analogies can be important from today's perspective as it may enhance thinking through contemporary narrative and environmentalist strategies for the Anthropocene. In other words, it is important to read texts such as "A Dog's Tale" and *A Horse's Tale* to become aware of and to be able to recognize such "old cultural trope" (Fressoz 2021, 297), especially those with problematic implications, such as narratives drawing analogies between violence against Black people and against non-human animals. Within Twain's historical context, it certainly made sense to use this analogy, considering the historical links between the abolitionist movement and animal welfarism in the nineteenth century. At the same time, however, it is also clear that, though Twain's (and other much more recent) theoretical positions suggesting interlinkages between exploiting human and non-human animals are often philosophically convincing, drawing simplistic analogies today can be highly controversial and counterproductive, as, for example, reactions to the 2005 PETA campaign "Are Animals the New Slaves?" have shown (cf. Johnson 2018, 1-7). Ultimately, knowing these strategies and their histories as cultural tropes is

nevertheless important for highlighting the racial histories that have produced the Anthropocene as well as for alerting us to learn from and use new forms of addressing this history through literary, ecocritical, and environmental activism.

5. CONCLUSIONS

To conclude, I wish to make three broader propositions as to the potential of Twain's sentimental anthropomorphism in an Anthropocene context. First, it is important to recognize that Twain's stories are cases that highlight how texts written well before the Anthropocene discourse came into being have addressed some of its core concerns and should be considered, especially if we conceptualize the Anthropocene as "primarily aesthetic" (Fressoz 2021, 288). My readings of "A Dog's Tale" and *A Horse's Tale* demonstrate that the stories, openly political in their historical contexts of animal welfare and Darwinian evolutionism, also offer ideas relevant for Anthropocene questions of scale and species, and for racial critiques of the Anthropocene. Second, one should thus stress that Twain's technique of sentimental anthropomorphism should (in part) be considered as part of the repertoire of Anthropocene storytelling and that anthropomorphic strategies deserve to be further explored, especially if taken as gestures that can act as meaningful reminders of the forms of thought and practices that have created our Anthropocene moment. If we are indeed looking for new forms of Anthropocene storytelling, Twain's tales are of relevance as their anthropomorphic form potentially adds to positions ranging, as Erin James (2022) suggests, from those theorists who argue that our "top priority […] should be the pursuit of the right type of narrative" to those who are "critical of narrative's anthropocentrism" (9). Third, I believe that looking at Twain's stories shows the importance of historically identifying and (re-)combining different environmental traditions today. My readings stress the necessity to look for bridges rather than demarcations between different forms of environmental (literary) traditions. If we read the Anthropocene as an aesthetic process that relies on "old cultural tropes" and if we are seeking to keep the Anthropocene from "becoming a new tool of disinhibition" (Fressoz 2021, 297), considering voices such as Twain's and probing their effectiveness for an Anthropocene critique might well be part of our solutions.

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