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## Svevo's Dogs: Kafka and the Importance of Svevo's Animals

In *La coscienza di Zeno*, Zeno posits that the introduction of a dog into the workplace indicates Guido's foolishness: "Per me la presenza di quel cane nel nostro ufficio, fu la prima prova che Guido fornì di non essere degno di dirigere una casa commerciale. Ciò provava un'assenza assoluta di serietà" (Svevo 2004 *Romanzi*, 919). Zeno's attitude toward animals reflects a conventional tendency, since in the past many critics thought the study of animals was a potentially frivolous topic, belonging to the realm of children and free time. Over the last decades, however, the study of animals, which has been organized under the rubric of Animal Studies, has become a notable site for interdisciplinary study and central in debates about what being "human" means<sup>1</sup>. These debates have not included Svevo's works, although Svevo's animal portrayals reflect serious attention, in contrast to his protagonist's views. In this essay I explore Svevo's dogs in order to focus Svevo's important investigations on aspects of being an animal, particularly in relationship to human animals.

In great contrast to Svevo's, Franz Kafka's animals hold a prominent place in debates on the human-animal boundary. To provide just a few examples, Kafka's work makes notable appearances in *The Lives of Animals* (Coetzee 1999), *Animal Acts: Configuring the Human in Western History* (Ham, Senior 1997), *Savages and Beasts: The Birth of the Modern Zoo* (Rothfels 2002), and *Representing Animals* (Rothfels 2002). Kafka has been read as marking a transitional point in our understanding of ourselves as human and in our relationship to other animals: "In a post-Darwinian world, *all* stories are stories about apes told by other apes — or at least primates. Implicitly, all stories are about the struggle of a particular species of ape to invent and preserve a nonanimal identity for itself. Only a few writers consciously incorporate that struggle into the bodies of their texts" (Scholtmeijer 1997, 139). Scholtmeijer, as others, views Kafka as one of these rare authors. While dogs, canine imagery, and animals in general have been a point of focus in Kafka studies, Svevo's dogs have received less attention and, moreover, have been almost completely ignored by Animal Studies' scholars. However, as critics have claimed for Kafka, Svevo's animals reveal that Svevo anticipates and complicates many of the debates within this growing discipline. Particularly because Kafka's work has been so central to Animal Studies, a comparison of these two Austro-Hungarian figures, Svevo and his last literary love (Veneziani Svevo 1958, 144), helps integrate Svevo into broader discussions.

From his earliest writings to his posthumous works, dogs and dog imagery make important appearances in Svevo's plays, novels, shorter works, notes and letters. For instance, in "Lo specifico del Dottor Menghi" the experimental serum initially has a disastrous effect on a dog, destroying it in forty seconds:

Con un decigrammo nel sangue si uccideva un cane giovine e forte in quaranta secondi.  
Dapprima mia madre non voleva credere si trattasse di una morte reale. Accarezzava il

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<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, a recent *New York Times* article on the rise of Animal Studies classes (Gorman 2012).

cane per farlo tornare in sé. Poi, convinta, piegata ancora sul corpo dell'animale, pallida, pallida mi domandò: — Tu non volevi questo? (Svevo 2004 *Racconti*, 70)

The mother did not want to believe that her son's trial had killed the dog. The dog's death and mother's reaction raise the question, among others, of the humaneness of scientific experiments on dogs and other animals, a question that is still debated today. In a letter from near the end of his life, Svevo notes the differences between Parisian and Triestine dogs: "io ho completato i miei studii sui cani di Parigi scoprendo che si risentivano tanto di essere guardati, perché non vi sono abituati. A Parigi nessuno ha il tempo di turbarli" (Bertoni 2004, 870). This spirited and funny characterization demonstrates Svevo's attention to cultural differences not just between human communities, but also canine ones, and highlights the interplay between the two. These examples are just two instances of the interesting appearances dogs make in Svevo's work.

One of the powerful aspects of dogs in particular as characters and images is how polysemous they are. Dogs, like humans, have a range of personalities and ways of interacting; in a Svevo fragment the narrator observes a, "cane bastardo, non grande e non piccolo, un cane come tanti altri e perciò profondamente umano" (2004 *Racconti*, 269)<sup>2</sup>. The range of dogs is revealed even in the variety of dog expressions Svevo uses: both Kafka and Svevo portray dogs as philosophical, bestial, loyal, irrational, or kind, depending on the situation. Kafka's "Investigations of a Dog," which in this article will be the primary point of reference for Kafka's canine work, has been read as part of a long tradition of philosophical dogs (Ziolkowski 1983). Svevo's "Argo e il suo padrone," his longest story about a dog, is described as philosophical within the work itself and Magris comments on the similarity that Argo's philosophy bears to Jorge Luis Borges due to, "l'impossibilità di istituire un rapporto stabile fra una categoria e i suoi oggetti, lo svanire di ogni identità che si dissolve di continuo in sotto-unità sempre più piccole" (Magris 1980, 70).

Observations on dogs frequently provide an opportunity to explore power relations, since dogs, like humans can switch from a position of power (over smaller mammals like cats) to subservience (to their masters or other dogs). Kafka and Svevo played with these roles. In Svevo's "La morte di un gatto," the cat's fear of an aggressive dog is so strong the fear remains even when the dog is not physically present (2004 *Romanzi*, 720-721). For the cat, the idea of the dog's power is as fearful as its actions: "Non c'è il grande avversario, ma la rappresentanza del suo potere, che supera tutte le difese e coglie il ricercato nel profondo del suo nascondiglio" (Gioanola 2009, 124). Dog stories and real life instances of canine behavior can prompt consideration of human dynamics. Kafka commented on experiencing turmoil at enjoying watching his dog torture a mole, a comment on his own feelings about power (Kafka 1977, 17).

Instead of positing culture, reason, kindness, or humanity as what differentiates us from dogs, several of Kafka and Svevo's characters and narrators focus on our reaction to death as a potentially distinguishing feature: "Le odiava quelle bestie perché una delle cose che ad esse manca del tutto è il lutto. Come un cane annusa con curiosità la carogna di un compagno. Per un momento stupito e poi salta via giocondo che una simile cosa non gli sia capitata" (Svevo 2004 *Romanzi*, 1155). The last lines of *The Trial* highlight the shame of dying like a dog, without awareness or self-determination. K. is killed at the end of the novel, and the final words are: "With failing sight K. saw how the men drew

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<sup>2</sup> For an investigation of relationships between humans and dogs within Italian literature, see Giardina 2006.

near his face, leaning cheek-to-cheek to observe the verdict. ‘Like a dog!’ he said; it seemed as though the shame would outlive him” (1998, 231). A comment from Svevo’s “La morte” could be seen as a gloss on Kafka’s famous end: “Io volevo proprio prepararmi alla morte. Per te, per me, per tutti. Niente mi parve mai tanto compassionevole e ridicolo quanti i movimenti scomposti dell’animale quando il coltello del macellaio lo raggiunge” (Svevo 2004 *Racconti*, 414). But, in the end this character is unable to prepare for death the way he would like. Svevo and Kafka’s works raise the question, “Do we all die like dogs?” or rather, “Is death really something one can prepare for or control?” In these stories, characters hope to process death differently than animals or that they can conceive of their own mortality, unlike dogs, but Kafka and Svevo’s works interrogate if this is possible.

From Kafka’s pets to his father’s frequent use of animal expressions (“If you sleep with dogs you’ll wake up with fleas”) to Darwin to his being a vegetarian to which films he watched to the development of zoos in Kafka’s lifetime, the multiple origins of Kafka’s animal fascinations and representations have been discussed in detail and repeatedly (Lucht, Yarri 2010; Williams 2007). Although some historical context, like Darwin’s influence on Svevo (Minghelli 2002), has been a point of critical exploration, I want to discuss other background that is of interest when considering Svevo’s dogs, before exploring his literary canines in more detail. In Svevo’s posthumously published dog story, “Argo e il suo padrone,” the master reads about a talking German dog who says things even the narrator could not: “Diceva delle parole difficili tedesche che io non avrei saputo pronunciare” (2004 *Racconti*, 97). While the choice of a German dog seems like a fitting one for Svevo who attended school in Germany and lived in Austro-Hungarian Trieste, there is another potential source for the dog’s nationality: Rolf, the German talking dog who was famous in Svevo’s time<sup>3</sup>. Argo, unlike Rolf and the dog the master reads about, never learns how to speak but is instead eventually understood by his human master. Svevo’s relationship with his own dogs is another source for the interesting portrayal of how a dog thinks in “Argo” and other works. While the photograph of Kafka, a lady of debated status, and a blurry dog has often been discussed (Baillly 2011, Damrosch 2003, Hawes 2008, Spann 1976), the photographs of Svevo and his dogs have received little attention. In one photo from 1915 (Svevo Fonda Savio 1981, 97) Svevo holds his dog’s paw, in support or congratulations, and stares down at the pet’s new puppies. In another Livia Veneziani Svevo holds a bunch of the puppies, like a new mother would, with Svevo standing by, helping to support them<sup>4</sup>.

Mentioning that Svevo liked dogs and kept them as pets may seem superfluous to some readers, but it may have a literary significance that extends beyond even the confines of Svevo’s own work. Richard Ellmann draws attention to the commonalities between Leopold Bloom and Svevo as opposed to Bloom and Joyce, by pointing out Bloom and Svevo’s shared fondness for dogs (1959, 385)<sup>5</sup>. When Svevo attended a show in England, his favorite part involved a performing dog, since he could understand the

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<sup>3</sup> Rolf has recently been a prominent point of discussion in Bondeson 2011. Rolf was not the only talking dog of Svevo’s time. Svevo reported to his daughter that he was impressed by his encounter with Wilhelm Stekel (the psychoanalysis and Freud’s student) who owned a dog that could say mama and papa (Benussi 2007, 217 and Bertoni 2004, 870).

<sup>4</sup> The puppies apparently were left to Svevo by Joyce (Svevo Fonda Savio 1981, 136).

<sup>5</sup> See Benussi (2007, 217) for more on the relationship between “Argo e il suo padrone” and Joyce.

dog's performance despite the language barrier: "Di tutto lo spettacolo che più gustai e compresi fu un cane ammaestrato. L'inglese mi fa ancora sempre stentare" (Moloney 2003, 40). Dogs were animals Svevo felt he knew. The narrator of "Una burla riuscita" discusses that known animals, not unknown ones, should be the focus of literary representations: "Dapprima, ripetendo l'errore commesso in gioventù, scrisse di animali che poco conosceva" (2004 *Racconti*, 201). This statement reveals attentiveness to the varying degrees of knowledge humans can have about other species. It is not just "us" versus "them," but humans have different types of understandings depending on the species. Dogs may show up particularly frequently in Svevo's work because they are animals Svevo often interacted with and observed.

Considering Svevo's background, like Kafka's, helps account for aspects of the numerous dogs he portrayed. Almost all of Kafka's dogs have been read as representing Jewishness in some way. When Kafka's "Investigations of a Dog" was translated into Hebrew it caused controversy in Israel where a number of readers were angered by the portrayal of Jews as dogs (Bruce 1992, 4). Instead of objecting to this debatable (and often debated) interpretation, one of Kafka's contemporaries wrote that dogs in Prague had positive, not negative connotations so the supposed Jewish-dog comparison should not be a point of contention (Bergmann 1972). While using Kafka's Jewishness as the interpretative key to un-lock all of his dogs is extreme, Svevo's Jewishness has rarely been considered when discussing his dogs, despite the fact that, from Giacomo Debenedetti who recalls a conversation with Svevo about Kafka in which he referred to the difficulty of being Jewish at that time ("Sì, [Kafka] era ebreo. Certo quella dell'ebreo non è un posizione comoda . . ." [Debenedetti 1190, 68]) to more recent criticism (Benussi 1998, 329; De Angelis, 2006; Schächter 2000, 53), Kafka's Jewishness has been productively used as a point of reference for Svevo's.

One of the earliest pieces of writing of Svevo's that still exists is from the "newspaper" he wrote with his brothers in 1879. Part of the newspaper reads: "Fu perduto un cane (ciccio) che risponde al nome di Ettore. Siccome questo cane è assai pigro e dorme volentieri al sole, sarà facile trovarlo nelle adiacenze dell'Acquedotto" (Veneziani Svevo 1958, 16). Ettore Schmitz uses his name for a lost dog and later chooses the pointedly mongrel (one translation of 'ciccio' [Furbank 1966, 13]) penname of Italo Svevo. The term "mongrel" gives the idea of a background that cannot quite be placed. For instance, Alessandro Piperno has talked about his own "mongrel's lament" to discuss his partially Jewish heritage: "I think that the theme of both my book on Proust and my novel is not Jewishness, but rather the pros and cons of having one foot inside and one outside Hebraism. Mine is the mongrel's lament" (Cohen). The expression "essere come un cane in chiesa" points to how being a non-human animal, even a beloved dog, can exemplify being an outsider<sup>6</sup>. The idea of being Jewish, feeling out of place, and dogs is subtly linked by the end of the phrase, "in chiesa". The unique position of Jews in late nineteenth and early twentieth Italian society adds particular relevancy to feeling out of place in a church. A more extreme, obvious, and negative linking of being Jewish, dogs, and being outside society is the shop window sign, highlighted in *La vita è bella*, "Vietato l'ingresso ai cani e agli ebrei", which foreshadowed the persecution of Jewish Italians.

Animals are often used to reflect the situation of feeling somewhat outside society.

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<sup>6</sup> Many thanks to Barbara Sturmar for calling my attention to the relevance of this phrase to my topic.

Critics have mentioned that Kafka's animals are so powerful partially due to the fact that they reflect the insecurities of his culture:

What is clear in 'Investigations of a Dog' is that Kafka is not only attempting to portray the obsessive introspection that dominated his life, but also the alienating other(ness) that defined his existence. This need to define the self — and consequently, this need to define other(ness) — was a chronic attempt to search for a reason or a cause for his position as other in European society." (Powell 2008, 137)

Kafka and Svevo's explorations of animal thought highlight problems of perspective, identity, and language, considered especially prominent themes in Austro-Hungarian literature: "the investigation of animal minds became only a more far-flung case of figuring out how other human minds worked, the difficulties of understanding one's dog differing only in degree from those of making sense of a Frenchman" (Daston 2005, 49). Kafka's cultural position is often used to decode his animal stories and, as multilingual, multiethnic Prague partially explains Kafka's varied dogs, Trieste's also complex linguistic and cultural situation can also be viewed as one of the reasons for Svevo's many dogs. The convincing work that has been done on Svevo's cultural background, by scholars such as Camerino (1974, 1994), Lunzer (2002), Magris, and Schächter (2000), helps point to underexplored themes and images in Svevo's work, like dogs, that he shares with other Austro-Hungarian authors, like Kafka<sup>7</sup>.

Numerous biographical homologies between Kafka and Svevo have been noted (see for instance Bondanella 1971; Camerino 1974, 135-7; Furbank 1966, viii; Lebowitz 1978, 204). Camerino has called attention to the similarities between Kafka and Svevo's positions as "other" even within their families: "L'estraneità e l'incomprensione che l'intellettuale incontra nell'ambiente familiare non sono diverse in Svevo e in Kafka" (1978, 33). Each author's biography has been used to reflect on the other's work, and vice versa. Reiner Stach, for instance, underscores the ties between Svevo's autobiographical novel and Kafka's autobiography:

In 1892, Italo Svevo published his first novel, *A Life*, the prototype of the modern novel about a white-collar employee. The protagonist, a minor clerk named Alfonso Nitti, seems almost a malicious caricature of Kafka. Like Kafka, Alfonso fails to find erotic gratification. His resolve is stymied by the dreary routine of endless hours at the office. He clings to the illusion of future intellectual productivity but never manages to generate anything aside from a few paltry fragments. (2005, 2)

Stach's characterization of *Una Vita* highlights aspects of Kafka's life, but, since it was published when Kafka was nine, Svevo's novel is clearly not based on Kafka. Although Svevo appreciated Kafka's work, which he read toward the end of his life, an explanation for many of the authors' similarities is most likely due to their shared cultural heritage rather than direct influence.

Stach's biography is an unusual example of a work on Kafka prominently referencing Svevo. Although Svevo critics frequently mention Kafka, more extended studies comparing the two authors are relatively rare and rarer still are non-Italianists who discuss the similarities between the two authors or who consider, as mentioned, Svevo's potential significance to Animal Studies. While once an outsider, who did not

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<sup>7</sup> Many works mention, and a few explore in more detail, the connections between the two men and their works. More concentrated works on the two authors also include Bondanella 1971, Camerino 1974, 135-152; Camerino 1994, 15-29; Scharer 1978, 114-126; Meynaud 1985, 306-7; Westwater 1996, and Ziolkowski 2011.

achieve affirmed, international status until years after his death, following World War II, Kafka is now a recognized modernist master and world author. His fame is unquestionable. Svevo's international position is less clear. Comparison between the two authors can reveal a great deal, particularly since Svevo is still sometimes ignored in broader, comparative studies, whereas Kafka frequently features in them. Kafka's exceptionalism within Animal Studies has often been noted: "Kafka, the only writer, it seems to me, who has given animals speech [. . .] and succeeded in doing so in a register that was no longer that of the fable" (Bailly 2011, 39). Svevo's "Argo e il suo padrone" can be described this way, revealing the absurdity of this statement.

Svevo's "Argo," is remarkable partially because of how realistic the portrayal of Argo and the master's ability to communicate is. Elvio Guagnini notes that the master's struggle to understand his dog is akin to dog-language experiments that scientists are currently attempting (2001, 13-14). Most talking animal stories do not portray this process of communication:

Given all the talking-dog stories, comic strips, and movies, it is surprisingly rare to find those that take seriously the attempt to find an adequate voice for that which remains inaccessible. For how can one possibly capture the subjective character of an animal's experience in a language foreign to it? (Kuzniar 2005, 52)

Svevo portrays the strangeness of Argo's perspective not only through the animal's unique vocabulary, but also because his monologues are translated by his master, making it hard for the reader to know exactly what Argo himself may have meant. In addition, the master's process of trying to understand Argo is emphasized and it is difficult.

From Argo's homonymous precursor, Odysseus's Argos, to the present day, dogs are common literary tropes. Svevo's and Kafka's dogs are distinguished from most of these other literary canines by questioning, not confirming, man's centrality in the world. In Kafka and Svevo's longer dog tales, the dogs reconceive the world in different terms. Both stories include almost inexplicable formulations, since the language used represents a foreign point of view. Like Kafka's posthumous dog tale, "Investigations of a Dog," Svevo's dog tale can be seen as a critique of anthropomorphism and anthropocentrism via cynocentrism, a dog-centered view of the world. Svevo's and Kafka's dogs often point to man's inability to see outside of himself and to the frequently humorous problem of limited points of view.

While both authors' communicating canines challenge anthropocentrism they do so in different ways. In "Investigations of a Dog," the dog narrator may be completely unaware of humans. Unexpectedly for "man's best friend," an animal that is thought of as loving humans unconditionally, the dog in Kafka's story appears to feel absolutely nothing about human beings, is unaware of them, does not consider them worthy of discussion, or has some reason for not wanting to acknowledge their existence. This animal, for whom man is supposed to mean the most, does not even mention humans. The dog narrator claims, "All knowledge, the totality of all questions and answers, is contained in the dog" (Kafka 1971, 289-290). While a seemingly ridiculous and amusing statement, philosophers have made similar claims for man (that philosophy is an exploration of man and his place in the world). Meanwhile, Argo supposes humans have powers they do not and attributes dog behavior (such as perception through smell) to them.

In a precursor comment to "Argo," Svevo considers that dogs' way of perceiving is, in fact, comparable to ours: "Il mondo olfatto dev'essere altrettanto complesso quanto

quello della vista. La parte del corpo del cane che si spiega più chiaramente è la coda e quella ci dice troppo poco” (2004 *Racconti*, 746). Svevo frequently groups himself and other humans with dogs, calling humans beasts or animals: “La fabbrica è oramai piena di bestie (senza calcolare me). [. . .] Abbiamo due cani perché c’è anche il figlio di Paris, un brutto can bastardo molto vivo e aggressivo” (Moloney 2003, 115). In his fictional works and letters, Svevo also often refers to dogs as people: for instance, in “Argo e il suo padrone” the master consistently calls his dog Argo, a person, and in Svevo’s most famous novel *Zeno* includes the office canine, also named Argo, in the same category as himself<sup>8</sup>. Svevo contemplated that dogs could also be open to their grouping and even confused about their species: “Io credo che fedeltà del cane sia basata su un malinteso. Certamente egli ci crede tutt’altro animale” (2004 *Racconti*, 746). Svevo blurs categories that people tend to keep separate. Svevo’s openness to considering himself and dogs together is an instance of embracing at least one part of Darwin’s thought, which has been characterized as ending the separation of human animals from other animals: “What Darwin’s theory proposed, then, was an end to human distinction: an end to the separation of man from beast” (Fudge 2002, 19). Largely inspired by Kafka’s work, Deleuze and Guattari offer a more theoretical interpretation of the open relationship between human and non-human animals: “There is no longer man or animal, since each deterritorializes the other, in a conjunction of flux, in a continuum of intensities” (1986, 22)<sup>9</sup>. Another critic states that, “Kafka actually transformed himself into, and identified himself with, the animal” (Seyppel 1956, 79).

The fact that Svevo and Kafka focus on and play with perception in all of their works is perhaps as significant as their interest in animals for why they anticipate and add to more recent concerns with anthropocentrism. Svevo’s short, untitled piece about a tall man and a small dog highlights the importance of differences in perspective, particularly between humans and dogs. In the story the man picks up the dog and, so terrorized by the sudden height, he remains forever fearful of the man: “Ma io sentendomi buono e pieno di benevolenza per il grazioso animaluccio non badai alla mia sproporzionata altezza e lo presi in braccio dolcemente. L’altezza le fu troppo grande [. . .]” (2004 *Racconti*, 768). The man may have felt himself to be “buono” and benevolent, but from the dog’s perspective he is fearsome, never to be trusted again. Both Kafka and Svevo pay attention to the numerous factors that contribute to differences in understanding, including even physical stature.

One of the joys of reading Kafka and Svevo is attempting to figure out another’s (animal or human animal’s) perspective. In their works, the narrative focus is often ambiguous so the reader cannot be sure when statements are ironic and when true. In works like *Senilità* and several of Kafka’s stories in the third person (like “The Judgment”), interpretation depends on whether one reads moments in the text as free indirect discourse or something approaching narratorial objectivity. The impossibility of determining when it is which at key moments is part of the brilliance of these works. In *Senilità* critics have called attention to two moments that are special because they focus on Balli’s point of view, and have him standing “outside the story” (Furbank 1966, 168). In addition to Balli, both scenes feature dogs. In one scene Balli is lost in thought behind

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<sup>8</sup> “La quinta persona ammessa nel nostro ufficio (calcolando anche Argo) fu Carmen” (Svevo 2004 *Romanzi*, 920).

<sup>9</sup> For the relevance of Deleuze and Guattari to Italian literary dogs see Giardina 2006.

a 'canicida' when Emilio finds him in order to talk to him about Amalia. According to Emilio, Balli's behavior is harming his sister: "Il Brentani ricordò con amarezza che anche nel lamento di Amalia si era sentita una sorpresa ed un'enorme, impotente indignazione. La presenza del canicida gli facilitò però il suo compito. Il Balli lo ascoltò distrattamente, e dichiarò di non aver niente in contrario a venire da lui quel giorno stesso" (2004 *Romanzi*, 522). Balli, considering his passionate response to the dogs' "lamenti," is almost unaware of what Emilio is saying or the effect he has on Amalia, whom he is helping push toward death and whom Emilio directly relates to the dogs. Blinded by his compassion for the dogs, Balli's empathy does not extend to poor Amalia.

In Svevo's play *La rigenerazione* the wife's love of animals takes precedence over her affection for her husband and other humans: "Tu! Ricordi quando ci siamo visti l'ultima volta prima che io mi faccia operare? Perché appena operato, in fede mia, io ti guardai, non però tu me, perché tu guardavi gli uccellini, i cani, i gatti. Io ti guardai e male me ne incolse" (2004 *Teatro*, 765). It is not only dogs' perspectives, but also other humans' that require work to understand. Neither is necessarily logical or kind. Svevo's ironic comment on animals' compassion could easily include Zeno, Emilio, and other non-animal humans: "Gli animali hanno compassione. L'hanno per se stessi quando sono vittime" (2004 *Racconti*, 775). In Kafka and Svevo, dogs' observations and human beings' observations of dogs often expose how arbitrary human compassion can be. A real example of how dogs can expose the arbitrary nature of human empathy and understanding, Nazis were adamantly against dog vivisection and cruelty.

Svevo and Kafka's focus on perspective highlights the danger of making simple assessments of anyone, not only other animals but also with people: "[In "Investigations of a Dog"] Kafka gently and lightly reminds us of the distance between the narrator (and his experiences) and mankind and warns us against making crude identifications" (Pascal 1982, 205). In "Argo," humorous mistakes in interpretation result from Argo's sometimes facile identification with humans. Argo's attempts to narrate human behavior reveal how complicated it is for one species to try to accurately describe and interpret another's behavior. In "Una burla riuscita," the narrator points out that often when humans believe they are discussing animals, they are actually still talking about themselves: "[Mario Samigli] abbandonò l'uomo e la sua vita, l'alta e la bassa, o almeno credette di abbandonarla, e si dedicò, o credette di farlo, agli animali" (2004 *Racconti*, 201). "Una burla riuscita" thematizes the difficulty of realistically portraying another species' point of view<sup>10</sup>. For the protagonist Mario Samigli, animals are a means of discussing the world in his terms, of clarifying his own vision.

In Svevo imagination and delusion can be a means of survival, allowing a character to continue on, fixed in his own worldview. For example, Emilio creates and recreates Angiolina, as best suits him, and in a way that bears little relation to the reality of the woman herself. One reading of "Argo and il suo padrone" could be that the master never truly grasps Argo's language, but fabricates his comprehension to alleviate his boredom. In other words, the master creates, and does not translate, the monologues. There would be no way to validate the man's translation since the master is the only person who understands Argo and Argo is dead by the time the text is available to others.

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<sup>10</sup> "Ma il rapporto amaro e scettico con l'umanità – e il risentito pudore del Samiglia – si rivestono della trasparenza metaforica delle figurine animali con sconcertante evidenza, ciascuna, in certo modo, alludendo ad uno, specifico, dei complessi e intricate comportamenti dell'uomo" (Pimpinelli 1994, 489-90).



In this interpretation, a lack of comprehension (on the part of the master) leads to creating an imaginary world and, therefore, literature (Argo's monologues). The tie between animals, imagination, and literature is emphasized in Svevo's work. If literature has been defined as the process of inhabiting the mental space of another, other species pose particular difficulties and opportunities. In *Elizabeth Costello* (by Coetzee who has written on Kafka and Svevo) the titular character becomes a dog through her work: "'But my mother has been a man,' he persists, 'She has also been a dog. She can think her way into other people, into other existences'" (2003, 22). Svevo also thought his way into other existences, or rather tried to think his way into other existences, but included in his works the question of how possible it is to think like another, especially like another animal. The imaginative power of literature partially accounts for why literature has continued to play such a central role in "Animal Studies," whereas in many interdisciplinary fields it gets pushed to a more marginal position. Svevo deserves to be included in these discussions.

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