



Mad Dog! *The vilification of the* *white Pomeranian or* *Spitz dog in 19th century* *New York City*

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'...the Spitz will be exterminated'

The old type white Pomeranian or Spitz dog fell from grace on May 24th 1876. An article appeared in the New York Times ominously titled 'A Whited Canine Sepulchre'. Having dealt an artful character assassination of the breed, the journalist concluded that as soon as the public are convinced 'he is internally full of rabies and all varieties of distemper' at that moment 'the Spitz will be exterminated'.

The purpose of 'exposing' this flawed impostor was ostensibly to alert the public to the Spitz dog's pre-disposition to rabies. However, the writer's impassioned case against the breed was at times excessive. He was keen to clarify that this was an unwelcome task, he was no fanatic, nor did he write this from revenge or malice. He apologised for inflicting pain on the breed's friends while comparing the unpleasant duty of revealing the dog's character to exposing a criminal. The white and spotless Spitz a 'hitherto respected beast' mingling with 'the best circles of society' was in the opinion of the journalist a wolf in sheep's clothing.

The journalist anthropomorphises the dog's character - on morality 'the Spitz is thoroughly and irredeemably corrupt' and 'he is a tireless and shameless thief'. He was credited with having perverted skills enabling him to steal the bones of 'honest and frugal dogs'. He was vulpine, with a cunning and treacherous face, and vain 'he ostentatiously wears throughout our hottest months the heavy fur of an Arctic animal' adding, no cat 'ever manifests so absurd a degree of vanity in regard to her tail as the Spitz habitually displays in regard to his own'. Cowardice - he ambushed, bit when his victims least expected (a back-biter) and took flight when challenged.

First of all it should be clarified that the Spitz and the Pomeranian were one and the same!

The breed classification system, of both the American and British Kennel Club, has made it difficult for the modern enthusiast to understand the early history of the Pomeranian or Spitz dog. In Germany they have always been known as Spitz, with a descriptive name to indicate the region of origin and eventually to reflect size. Thus the Pommer or Pommern Spitz became the Pomeranian Spitz in England. In Holland they are called Keeshond (regardless of colour) with a further description to indicate size. In France they were called the Loup Loup. The English and the Americans used the names Pomeranian and Spitz, the English also called them Fox Dogs, but more typically in 19th century America, they were called a Spitz dog. The size ranged from little and 'frisky' to large 'brutes' as evidenced in various articles in the New York Times. Not all were white of course, there are reports of black Spitz, but it was the white coloured Spitz that was singled out by the newspaper.

