

Implications of a Snoopy-Saturated Society

By Judy Thomas

The passing of Charles Schultz and the slow slipping of Snoopy into the world of reruns has been met with much sorrow. Recently many have been pondering the merit of Schultz' work and his impact on the art world. Perhaps more intriguing is what he and other cartoonists have done for the empowerment of the animal kingdom.

A fellow cartoonist in a television tribute to Schultz implicated him as a contributor to the evolution of cartoon animals from four legged friends to creatures of stance. Snoopy was also credited with embodying behaviors and thoughts we attribute to our own animals.

Many cartoon animals have acquired voices and been personified, not unlike our pets, who now sport clothes, beg for gourmet treats, have themselves professionally groomed, see doctors for shots and even visit psychiatrists!

Our artists have often been ahead of the times, sensing the subtle pulsing of the world to come. Could our pets one day develop into an upright breed? Would this be a more extraordinary transformation than what has occurred in human history? It is doubtful prehistoric man imagined our present condition, that his early grunts would give rise to an "advanced" written and verbal communication system.

Our pets clearly communicate. Birds speak and others have definitive sounds for anger, pain and joy like their human friends. And we communicate with them. Many owners will admit that they talk to their pets.

Animation is not alone in humanizing the animals in our lives. Movies and books have also been instrumental in illustrating three-dimensional animals.

Author Neale Donald Walsch in *Conversations with God* supported a belief in the existence of the animal soul. James Van

Praagh in *Talking with Heaven* spoke of an animal existence after death.

All Dogs Go To Heaven, Dr. Doolittle and Babe have explored the depth of the animal condition in film. A recent television commercial features a car and career-driven canine.

Is it just a fanciful fictional concept, or are we seeing beyond their feathered, furry fronts and recognizing an emotional and intelligent being in our animals?

The mere existence of strong animal characters, according to psychological tradition, would have them affecting the consciousness of a world that allowed such figures to flourish.

A cursory glance at the English language reveals an overabundance of animal-inspired expressions. It would seem we have animals on the brain, and liken their condition to our own. When we find a person's criticisms "petty" we describe them as "catty." We find humans "sheepish," behaving like "rats" and describe ourselves as being "in the doghouse." We have been known to refer to our work world as "a rat race."

Interestingly, the name we've given to canines is "god" spelled backwards, perhaps a reminder of the way we revere our furry friends. We show them indirectly, by giving them names like Sam and Max, that we at least believe in their humanity.

What is going on in the animal kingdom?

Many pampered pets are taking over the home, becoming increasingly possessive and territorial, using an imposed, permanent version of birth control, being given human names and treated like people. For better or worse, they are behaving like humans. Perhaps this is an adverse side effect of their continued companionship with our race? Fortunately they seem to have retained at least some of their natural instincts and are reluctant to acquire some of our habits.

They have made remarkable strides since they have entered the home. Their food is no longer sought but supplied for them. But what have they lost in having their supper or snack for a song? It seems like some animals have become complacent.

For all the progress they have made, their domestication has not been without peril. Like many of their owners, pets are taking to the couch.

Now when house training and chewing become an issue, hopeful owners are forking over exorbitant fees in an attempt to eradicate these animal instincts from their pets.

Perhaps they have been burying their conflicts with their bones in the backyard for years. Depression can be unavoidable in this dog-eat-dog world. It may take a while for them to recover from the psychological damage caused by time spent in the doghouse.

But seriously, are animal therapists barking up the wrong tree or is there reason to probe into our pets' psyches? It seems it might be better to let sleeping dogs lie.

More than likely, pet psychoanalysis is indicative of our own compulsion to hu-

manize the animals in our lives. Funny how we imposed this oddity on their kind. They probably knew nothing of separation anxiety and other frailties of the human condition until they had owners.

If they could speak our language, they might say we've created an unnatural codependency. Have house pets, in their adapting to the home, lost their ability to survive in the outside world?

As domesticated as they have become, will we one day come home to find our male pet perched on hind quarters in front of the pot, dribbling on the seat, bringing final closure to his psychoanalysis? Would we be satisfied? I have to wonder where we are going with this.

We assume that a pet relieving himself in our living room is a sign of maladjustment. Perhaps they are dogging our confining conventions, revolting at the repression of their animal instincts.

Do animals really need psychiatrists, or are their owners insane? Are we diserving our pets by attempting to humanize them?

I bet they were just fine until we started trying to fix them. We've been fixing them for years in curbing the inevitable results of their drives. Can we expect a sexual revolution in the animal kingdom? I'm sure this must make the top ten list of pet peeves.

It seems they are undergoing a transformation of biblical proportions. No one wants to own up to it, but someone let the cat out of the bag and told our animals they were naked!

It's true, pet clothing has become very vogue. Modesty and style aside, it stands to reason that these domesticated animals, accustomed to indoor heating, would be less able to withstand the cold of the winter months. My own pet's coat was always confused by indoor temperatures and used to fluctuate accordingly.

Our pets are probably going through an identity crisis. With role models like Snoopy and Mickey, who could blame them? I know my own dog Freckles felt very insecure without his dog tag and would circle it until we put it back on him. We want them to dress up like humans, but still expect them to use the backyard as their latrine.

They are receiving confusing messages from the media and from the humans they interact with.

They have been so spoiled with table scraps and doggy bags that they balk at boxed feed. I wonder if they knew cancer and tumors before they consumed human food? What kind of animal have we created?

Our pets are not only well fed, but furnished. A wide variety of animal accessories and furniture are now available. Their value and necessity is as dubious as many of the items we purchase for ourselves.

In a world where animal icons are standing on their own two legs, and a mouse has more or less taken possession of the state of Florida, what can we expect in the future of our animals? Where is the animal rights movement taking us?

Will they want to frequent restaurants and

take public transportation? They could argue that seeing-eye dogs are afforded these benefits, and this could be considered an occupational discrimination. House dogs should have the same opportunities available.

Don't you see, it could be complete animal anarchy! It could lead to, as Bill Murray exclaimed in *Ghostbusters*, dogs and cats living together! Would animal cohabitation result in a series of half-breeds like the birddog and catfish?

Or will they go in an entirely different direction, leave the home completely and take a back-to-basics approach that some humans have embraced, spawning a hippy pet generation? Will they jump on the psychedelic Volkswagen and return to their natural instinct to roam and explore with abandon?

As domesticated as our family pet was, we could never cure him of his desire to run. Even in his dying days when he could barely walk, if given the opportunity, he would take to the road. A beagle like Snoopy, he always found the scent of adventure so much more interesting than mere homely existence. House pets, like housewives, get fed up. As we watched him meander through a gate that was carelessly left open I could swear I heard him mutter under his breath "I'm out of here!"

Where will this animal evolution end? Will there be leash burning and hunger strikes? Will there be a complete role reversal where we are led around by a leash? Some would say we already are for the inordinate amount of time and money we invest in our animals.

Did Snoopy, Mickey, Garfield and others start a revolution, or merely mirror the insanity of pet owners? Or did they just solidify what many of us suspected all along, that our animals really are people.

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nity." After Franklin wrote these words for Pennsylvania, they were adopted into Vermont's constitution where they now support same-sex partner benefits. Despite Pennsylvania's early history, it is a shame that it was one of the first states in the union to pass a law defining marriage as between one man and one woman.

Open Fall Conference

SPARC's next project is the annual fall conference to be held in State College. SPARC is also working on organizing a youth leadership program in which they would sponsor young activists to intern with it's member organizations such as The Gay and Lesbian Center for Civil Rights in Philadelphia, the Pennsylvania National Organization for Women or the Pennsylvania Alliance for Democracy.

For more information on SPARC go to www.sparc-pa.org or call 861-1260.