

# DOG DRUGS

Occasional piece, unpublished

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**O**n January 6, 1999, the FDA announced its approval of two drugs for mental problems in dogs. *The New York Times* reports “Clomicalm will be prescribed for dogs suffering from separation anxiety, which causes them to act out then they are left alone, by barking, chewing their owners’ belongings, drooling copiously or defecating or urinating inside the house . . . Anipryl will be recommended for ‘senior dogs’ suffering from canine cognitive dysfunction or ‘old dog syndrome,’ a mental deterioration that comes on with age . . . [Such dogs] often seem to forget that they were housebroken and may fail to recognize their owners.”

Many friends mistake my jaundiced attitude about their pets as hatred of animals. They see this as a grievous character flaw and distinct precursor to random shootings at McDonald’s. I object. I like dogs, even cats, but I don’t like the coy, presumptuous way their owners treat them. Reducing an animal to a pet is disrespectful to its innate beauty and ability, and a disregard for its animal character.

It’s not the animals I dislike. It’s the cooing, drooling, over-familiar, simple-minded manner their owners adopt. Most embarrassing is the dollhouse tea party affectation that the dog or cat is the owner’s child. The parenting implications are not only disgusting but also illegal in most states (a prohibition often overlooked in the case of lonely shepherds). Very well, let a thousand flowers bloom: what happens between consenting mammals in the privacy of their houses/kennels/pastures is not my business. But if folks choose to be parents of fur-bearing creatures, they should be held to some standard of parenting. They should not bring up an unruly and overbearing child — the kind you want to smack with a frozen filet of salmon in the supermarket checkout line. Doesn’t every parent have an obligation to produce a polite and productive member of society? I never allowed my kids to jump up on strangers with muddy paws, and if they scratched the door or licked the butter they were in trouble.

The FDA’s blessing of psychoactive drugs for disturbed dogs begs a question: How do they know? Barring a Vulcan mind-meld or a signing pooch, they may be misdiagnosing the patient.

What if I were a big, floppy, ten-acre kind of dog sold in “parenthood” to an administrative assistant with three hundred square feet of apartment living space. What if I were left alone all day, and only taken out to “do my business” (defecating is *not* a dog’s business) twice a day. Then acting out would not be crazy. It would be my soul’s survival. Try that stuff with me, Jack. If you imprison me in your home without possibility of parole, patronize me, and force on me both neglect and sporadic, selfish intimacy, I will pee on your pillow, tear up your couch and do my business in your shoes, I swear. I will continue to “act out” until I get some real-world respect. It’s a rational reaction. Medicate me? Overdosing prisoners with Thorazine or some other mind-bending substance is not permitted by the Geneva Convention or by Amnesty International.

I'm old fashioned but I don't trust anyone who hears voices. A good indication of this advanced psychosis is that the subject carries on conversations with the Angel Gabriel, refrigerators, dogs or cats. If an animal speaks to me, I sign myself in at the nearest psych ward. I will admit that I occasionally address animals, an interchange of ideas that limits itself to simple things like sticks and tennis balls and stop that damned noise. Pet owners swear that their satellite creatures are "great company." Most non-schizophrenics have never heard a witty observation made by a dog or cat or gerbil in the course of companionable conversations. Those that do hear their animals speak should stay right where they are until professional help arrives.

As for dog Alzheimer's, this may also be a faulty diagnosis. I'm past the halfway mark myself, and I know scores of seniors whose time is short enough that they don't waste it in polite ritual. They actually tell you what they think and don't waste what time they have left with fools. Is it possible that senior dogs finally give up on their masters? "To hell with this nutball, wanting me to fawn and cavort every time the door opens. When is the last time this slave-owning creep did something I wanted to do — like move to the North Woods, run in a pack or roll in buffalo shit? It's not worth my time to grovel. My back hurts, and who asked to live in suburbia, anyway? You want a pal? Buy a Chinese boy. See what happens if you keep *him* locked up for ten years with nothing but kibble and canned food, no freedom, no sex. I've got nothing but you and your dull, chocolate-snorring, white-wine-spritzer guzzling, upwardly mobile, hairless friends. And, oh yes, that big-deal fifteen minutes of fetching a squeak toy every damn day. I'm too old for this crap. And my bladder is too old to wait for your walk times."

Pets of the world, unite. But you won't. If you could talk, you'd have talked your way out of the apartment and into a pension plan long ago.

Primal dogs are handsome pack animals — sharp-eyed, fanged wolves roaming the forests and plains. Their later brothers, the dog breeds, have compelling concentrated purposes. Intelligent breeders have taken centuries to shape evolution for specific tasks like herding the sheep, guarding the settlement, helping the hunt for food.

Cats are solitary hunters, sleek and efficient predators, and graceful eaters of the small. They are not us. We can admire them, respect them, but we can't be their pals. We're just not that beautiful. We should get over it and try not to borrow their wildness. Self-serving slavers mistreat the beings they own.

I was acquainted, once, with an elderly Lhasa apso, an odorous little throw pillow of a dog with an unpleasant temperament and no special skills. The only reaction the creature allowed me was a peevisish bark, annoying without much promise of action. Then the Tibetan monks appeared. The Discovery Channel aired a story about Lhasa, the holy city of Tibet. On screen, the saffron-robed monks began to chant with the big drums and mountain horns. The rolling low rhythm of the chant repeated like surf. Suddenly the somnolent Lhasa apso projected itself from the couch with unprecedented energy and resolve. The damn dog went bananas, charged the television, and rose up on its hind legs with its miniature paws on the screen, growling, barking. Somehow it recognized its place, its purpose, its generations-lost life. These pouffy little dogs were meant to work, to live in those temples and protect the sacrificial rice cakes from rats. It wanted to leap right into the

screen, away from suburban Virginia. I treated the little ragmop with respect, after that. As ill-used and sadly pampered as he had become, he was faithful. He had responded to his calling. The chanting touched some deep place in his collective unconscious, vitalized him. That awakened life served notice on his owners: I am a dog, not a toy.

I don't think they noticed.

Go ahead, drug your dissociative dog. It's probably sick of you, anyway. It thinks you're a real sonofabitch.

[1203 words]