

The Bitterest of all Culture Wars



by Reg Green

A few days ago, the *New York Times* ran an article headlined “Why Your Dog Loves You.” It brought to mind a friend who has a PhD in physics from Stanford, enjoys Charles Dickens and likes exchanging clever anecdotes with his friends but who, when talking to the dog he and his wife adopted from an animal shelter a few years ago, plunges headlong into goo. “Is ‘um warm enough, lil’ gurl?” he says or something like it (jettisoning in a sentence the hundreds of thousands of dollars spent on his education.) “Duzzem want sumsing to eat?”

The dog’s response is no better. Instead of saying what she thinks, which is probably, “What kind of a dummy do you think I am? Do you seriously think baby talk is easier for me to understand than a passage from Henry James or even a simple declarative sentence?” she plays along, slobbering all over him. Far from registering the embarrassment this dumbshow deserves, he delights in it, as if they were discussing an intriguing problem in spectrometry or robotics.

In the interests of full disclosure I have to say my wife and I have a cat, who rubs herself against my legs when I get up in the morning until I have served her with breakfast and then, never doubting her intellectual superiority, ignores

everyone for the rest of the day.

I expect these observations to provoke strong opposition – the cat and cur divide is as bitter as anything in politics or religion – but they remind me that when we have guests for dinner, the cat-owners talk about the latest developments in philology or jurisprudence or why the Rams won the Superbowl, the dog-owners about their pets' terrifying medical costs, chef-selected diet, cute habits and, for the most pampered, the wag hotels with simulated television screens and get-acquainted sessions with other dogs where they stay when Mommy and Daddy are traveling and worrying about them.

It has to be said: dogs may be your best friend, but they are conversation's worst enemy.