

## On Cats

Lur Isabel Pérez Osa\*

Once you get a cat, and it does not matter if you enthusiastically buy it or reluctantly find it, or it is inappropriately given to you as a gift by a friend, you will become instantly devoted to the cat, whether you like it or not. Food becomes a central issue and if you underestimate it you will have to face the consequences: if the food is not to the cat's taste, he will meow its lungs out or he will stand still next to the plate, accusingly staring at you, and starve for hours or even days. Both attitudes will have the same effect over you: whether it is on account of acoustic fatigue or fear, you will dash to the nearest store and buy him whatever he wants, no matter how expensive or eccentric it might be. You will also have to remember to change the cat's water every day (otherwise you will find him over the sink, eagerly drinking tap water), and to take care of his health (which involves feats such as taking him to the vet or making him swallow a pill). Those are cats' basic needs, and as annoying as they may be, due to their feline "specialness" and stubbornness, they will teach you to be responsible and patient, and not to care only about yourself.

As if this were not enough, another goal that you will have to reach is to strike a balance between giving the cat love and "personal" space at once. Cats love to be accompanied, pampered and caressed, but not all the time. They will not be available to show you their love or entertain you whenever you wish; they have their own busy lives, with their own schedules that include systematic naps, haunting trips, observation and introspection, smelling, exploring, hiding, climbing, playing, and other enigmatic activities. I think that this is an inspiring way of living and that we should follow their example: having a social life and building relationships with others is essential to human beings, but depending on others and not appreciating solitude, not having our own inner world and our personal interests and hobbies, is not beneficial at all. Pursuing peace and happiness is, partly, strike up a balance between our individual and our social sides, and loving others is only possible after learning to love ourselves, which implies enjoying loneliness.

Another interesting aspect of living with cats, related to their routine, is that when they are not socializing, they are still connected with their surroundings. Animals rely on their instincts and so they live in a constant state of alertness, indispensable for survival. Regarding cats in particular, this state seems to involve not only alertness but also pleasurable curiosity: noises, smells, shadows, insects, the movement of leaves, the human behavior, and sometimes even nothingness itself seem to fascinate them. As humans, we live so focused on our worries that we tend to forget to *really* pay attention to the outer world. We have no time for the little things, for the unnoticed, for the simple, for what only *is* and does not represent means or results, and when we do stop and look around us, we usually do it

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through our ideas, emotions and prejudices. As we do not connect with our surroundings, I think we neither connect with real time or with the natural pace of life, and that is why we end up obsessed with age or death; anthropologist Marc Augé stated that “the cat is not metaphor for humankind but a symbol for what could be a relationship with time that would make age an abstraction.” On the other hand, poet William Blake wrote: “If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, Infinite.” I think this last quote explains this quality of cats, which becomes apparent when you catch a cat staring attentively at the most insignificant thing, or when you unexpectedly realize that you have caught their eye, and it feels as if they were looking at your deepest core.

Cats, like any pet, need a lot of care: food, water, medical treatments, love, and space. But all this is worthwhile for we shall receive twice of what we give. Interacting with beings that are not human like us can help us regard things in a different and refreshing way, free from human concerns and prejudices. Cats are often labeled as selfish, vain, arrogant and distant, without taking into account that these are purely human characteristics. Cats are just small creatures that, if circumstances are not harsh, have fruitful lives by feeling pleasure in fulfilling the basic needs of life, living in a constant state of contemplation and awareness, and joyfully ignoring concepts such as “routine” or “age”. Their independence is another quality to point out; you can take care of them but do not expect to be adored in reward for this, because if you do not take care of them they will survive by themselves. Considering ourselves as their equals and friends rather than their owners or guardians, we will learn from them far more than we can imagine.