

A HISTORY OF CATS - F. A. PARADIS DE MONCRIF

Edition Illustrated with a portrait-frontispiece and with an Introduction by Georges Grappe.

House of Sansot, Bookseller, Rue de l'Eperon, 7, Paris

Near the departure of the Orleans State Coach.

1909



François-Augustin Paradis de Moncrif

(Attributed to Maurice Quentin de La Tour)

A Henry Roujon - "Imagine, madam, the great fortune of a citizen whose sole duty throughout his life is to take care of Cats and to enjoy public consideration." - Moncrif, (Les Chats. — Letter 2.)

[Translator's Note: For the convenience of the modern reader, I've included the footnotes from one edition at the end of each letter as well as the Introduction from the 1909 edition. I've added notes where I felt further clarification was needed. To give some idea of how Moncrif's book was received by some of his contemporaries I've also included some of their parodies as Appendices.]



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INTRODUCTION

Posterity has curious ways of sharing out fame or at least renown. With the ease afforded by the almost universal consent of men, it distributes places in immortality, without excessive scruples. Some illustrious men who deserve to be honored, find themselves unjustly relegated to the lower ranks of Posterity's Pantheon. Another may find himself sufficiently in good graces, astonishing us at this favor. It seems that Posterity acts much like some of the great ladies who hold literary salons in the world.

Honestly, you would not believe me if I argued that François-Augustin-Paradis de Moncrif is among the poorly known. It is quite obvious that he did not greatly contribute to the history of French literature, and you think you are done with him once you have mentioned his "History of Cats," but if the process is rather unjust – which I will try to show - the injustice is small, because this devil of a man, who played the devotees on occasion, makes up for it elsewhere. You cannot write a book on French society in the time of Louis XV, without his lively shadow appearing in the margins of works on one subject or another.

Can we mention the good Marie Leckzinska? The reader is immediately attentive during the chapters of this biography. He wiggles his shadowy shadow, hypocritical and fine, around the prie-Dieu of the Queen. When some old house is demolished, like the much loved Hotel de Bussy, full of memories, if we tell the story of those old walls, we will find his name at the forefront of those who frequented it. It is the libertine's face and unconstrained merry look of one of the best drinkers at Landelle's Cellar that illuminates these pages. [G. Lenôtre. —A Short History; Hôtel de Bussy: "Le Temps" 2nd December, 1905.]

But in a time of curiosity, such as ours, where one perhaps loves the eighteenth century, especially because of its love stories, the great triumph of Moncrif is his chronicle of scandal. At each step we bump into him. He is involved in the lives of all the famous dancers. He hovers in their skirts. His life could be subtitled: From Camargo to Mazarelli [A. Jullien. - Dancers' Loves, Daragon, 1909]. He composed innumerable ballets, much more with the idea of living the lives of these performers than of making a work of art. What does it matter to him that Rameau writes the music as long as he becomes the lover of the opera girls? He purrs with Guimard or with the Salle, with the suppleness of a cat in love. He frequents all the societies where one amuses oneself, to forget the cavagnole [a game of cheat] of the Queen. In Madameoiselle Legrand, in the world of gallantry, you meet him, with Grébillon junior, Collé; he knows Dubarry, who was yesterday still a young working-class Frenchwoman, who is now style herself with the finesse of a woman of pleasure. The secret memories of M. de Sartines do not forget him: you can find traces of him in all the debauched places of the capital [Paris in the time of Louis XV t. I, p. 118-149-339. — Mercure de France.] at the Lacroix or the Gourdan [The House of Mlle Gourdan, by E. Defrance. — Mercure de France, 1908]. Lastly, at Versailles, although he is obliged to show himself first and foremost as the lustrous, eager, and dull servant of Marie Leckzinska, he gravitates into the whirlwind of festivities which Madame de Pompadour created around the royal melancholy, and for her, he composes some grandly scenic Pastorals where she embodies in turn Ragonde, Ismene or Almazis.

For fifty years he has fluttered about, in this, the craziest and the most delicious century, around all powerful and glorious people. He incessantly gathers honour here and pleasures there. He is at all the parties, those of the Court and those of the small houses. For this reason alone, his life is interesting to study. It represents a whole species, which under Louis-le-Bien-Aime, developed into

the mob. A man of letters, a parasite, a civil servant, an academician, a boyfriend of young ladies, a cynical king of spirit and soul, he is a bourgeois Neveu de Rameau - less vigorous and less picturesque than the plebeian, but, on the other hand, more complex. But even more, if we reissue today his least bad work, *History of Cats*, it is first and foremost because it is not as bad as is generally believed, and also because it offers us a curious document, an enigmatic autobiography of such quality that it specifically becomes a masterpiece of irony, both towards oneself and towards others. It is par excellence the key book of the courtesan's profession and of parasitism.

François-Augustin-Paradis de Moncrif was born in Paris. This is fitting for a man who wanted to make his way in society. He was born in 1687, while France was still happy under the Great King. D'Alembert, who undertook the heavy task of writing the *History of the Academicians* of his century, tells us in terms worthy of the company; that he came from poor but honest parents. On the occasion of his birth, a formality is fulfilled in the life of the brave English bourgeois - his father and mother - which may seem providential and miraculous when one knows the future of the child. They Gallified their name in honor of his birth, as if they had had the tender presentiment that this would be necessary to smooth the road ahead for the young Paradis.

They had - and this little fact is enough to inform us in this regard - the formal intention of looking after his education, so that he might one day be an honest man in the world. But these good people were, as is the case of most parents in relation to their offspring, behind the times. They conceived the perfection of a young man, according to the traditions of the most envious academies under Louis XIV - and especially before his magnificent reign; and these methods appeared to be anxiously austere to this youthful ardor: d'Alembert, the panegyrist who guides my words, tells us "The young Moncrif disturbed their views by having quite the opposite inclination, preferring pleasant skills such as dance and music over serious studies. He became skilled in fencing and achieved a small degree of fame, but he had the merit, rare at his age, of not putting on airs and graces when frequenting the fencing halls. It was that talent that best served him in brilliant societies, often providing him with the opportunity to be with the most distinguished youth of the Kingdom. "

This tabloid, detached from a "Praise" of Moncrif (*History of the Members of the French Academy*, dying later than 1700) probably belongs to the genre of wicked and cruel dramas, and Jean le Rond d'Alembert had to be well entertained to compose it. All the details, gathered here, are true. And yet the general impression is otherwise false, or at least "rigged". The good little colleague forgets to say that young Paradis also studied seriously, and if he neglected certain culture, dear at Port-Royal but useless to his interests, he provided himself at random with a solid erudition. Even better, when we look closely at the little book we are reprinting, we can see that its author was more learned than he showed and moreso than most of his contemporaries in society.

This description by d'Alembert is widely cited and is alive and well. After all, the body of his work does not go beyond the limits of good academic criticism. Moreover, if we add the appropriate

eulogies, we have an accurate portrait of this young upstart, who was careful to put the finishing touches to his progress and willing to work hard to realize his goals. He undoubtedly had precocious knowledge of the human soul over the ages, and knowledge of his contemporaries in particular. He knew that his chosen career would have its adventures and that to live peacefully, in a somewhat false situation, it is good to know fencing. It was Tacitus during his readings who had taught the maxim: "If you want peace, prepare for war."

All the care he had taken of his training would not go unrewarded in a society where life was filled with frivolities. Good dancer, singer, alcove poet and with a well-turned calf, Paradis de Moncrif had all the right qualifications to call himself a man of letters. He took his name and courted the literary societies. Here he made a rondo, there a madrigal, and he established his reputation, thanks to the great ladies, to whom he rendered mundane services, and to the good girls who prided themselves on having a writer as their paramour. However, as he was well informed and did not delude himself, he did not print his little works. He reserved them for the right occasion, his first edition. Louis XIV being dead, he wrote an ode on this admirable theme, and being astute, during this poem, he spoke mostly of the living. Addressing himself first to the Regent, then to Louis XV, he said to him:

With a Hero's active prudence
And the faith of our hearts assumed,
He holds the sword and the balance
Still too ponderous for you.

These verses are in the manner of a "hopeless platitude". Did Moncrif, after publishing them, feel that he had exceeded a beginner's mediocrity? Who knows. Anything is possible in his case. And you would be inclined to believe it, when you see him trying, from that moment onward, smaller poetic heights. What he had sought by composing that Ode was to gain the favour of Philippe d'Orleans. Having achieved his goal, he confined himself to writing verses in imitation of Anacreon or small insignificant fables. With this concession to common sense in the country that had known Racine, Moliere, la Fontaine, and even Boileau, in a previous age, Moncrif passed for a poet.

Perhaps, even, for a great poet. The people of the 18th Century were too spirited to leave it at that - this young man was agreeable and composed verses to order for all occasions: baptisms, weddings, and burials. On top of that, he was also a man who could fulfil the amorous prowess he boasted of in his decasyllables, he produced a sweet mania in them, but a mania to which he was undoubtedly less committed.

These works gave him the advantage he sought in writing them. He was received by the Duchess of Maine. He belonged to the "Academy of Ladies and Gentlemen". He was a member of the "Théâtre de Bagnole" and "Dramatic Society of Berny". A diligent guest at "Dinners at the End of Bench"; he received his diploma from the "Order of the Cap" [Ordre de la Calotte]. As well as being eligible for the benefits, honours and serious positions that the society gave him, he was above all admitted into all the groups where one has fun ...

In this way he established himself as Master Jacques of great pleasures by his calculated tactics and perhaps also, let us say in his defence, through his personality. He gained their confidence and the kind of indulgence they reserved for those who entertained them. He had pulled it off. He became indispensable to them. During his hours of leisure he was given the chore of attending well paid functions. In between interludes, this human capuchin was kept in a golden cage, which was his great triumph. He was passed from hand to hand as a curiosity. He consented to be a steward of pleasures, to set up plays, to regulate ballets, to bring back dancers and actresses, they took him as secretary for his commandments.

This is one of the tastiest parts of Paradis Moncrif's life. Some of the great lords that he served at the same time were so entertained by his raciness and flattery that they vied for his services with gold. This licensed joker wisely alternated between the houses of the Duke de la Valliere and the Grand Prior of Orleans. The Count de Maurepas is seen to have removed him from the Count de Glermont. The youngest d'Argenson finally engages him and he only leaves that last master to devote himself to the exclusive service of the sovereigns, who appreciated his flattery better than anyone else.

Between this social whirl, Moncrif consolidated his credit and extended his fame by working on plays. He had an insatiable need to please and a desire to win public favour. At the same time, he got a secret pleasure from progressing in theatrical circles in the company of actresses who had easy morals, luxurious attire, and witty conversation. He was playing a comedy called the Oracle of Delphi at the Theatre of France. It was an unprecedented success. After the fourth performance it was banned in spite of - or perhaps because of - the applause it received under the pretence of ungodliness. It was a moment of glory.

For a first work, Moncrif had all the luck; he had literary success and scandal. After that, he was ranked among the best dramatic writers of his time, even though he later had only failures: The Abdérites, performed at Fontainebleau in 1732 received a cold reception. But in the theater, this was never important.

It was at the Opera, the National Academy of Music, that Moncrif was most brilliantly successful. His ballet "Zelindor, King of Sylphs", gained him a reputation that lasted as long as the regime, flattering praise – including that of Voltaire - and good royalties. Not only was this work played at the Opera, but on December 18, 1752 it was performed at Versailles, before the King, and some verses, given point blank in this world of the Allusion, did not adversely affect enthusiasm. Zelindor, the king of the Sylphs, abandons the Sylphids for a mortal and explains it thus:

Sylphids know how to love,
But Mortals are charming
So how can you to blame me
That this sweet creature enchants me!
Yes, I am transfixed by young Zirphé:
And by a thousand artifices and enchantments
I seek her affection with endless song and amusement;
A hundred times in the night,
I send her dreams of my reflection
And I proclaim my tender affection
I ensure everything in nature
Conspires for her pleasure
Does she seek her features in the folds of clear waves?
She will see that Love crown her beauty.

If you think about it, this ballet was composed in 1745, the same year that Madame de Pompadour – Zirphe in the allusion - became royal mistress. The masked ball at the City Hall had taken place at the end of February, and in 1752, Zelindor - Louis XV - still disdained all the Sylphides of the world, by which we mean all the aristocratic ladies, in honour of this "mortal." We see that this incorrigible flatterer, having found the fable of Zelindor, did not need another work of genius in order to triumph. It will also be understood that this ballet assured Moncrif the protection and friendship of the king's favorite.

The dramatic works of the author of *Ismene* has pulled us too far into Moncrif's life of fortune. We must retrace our steps to witness the blossoming of that fortune. It is more or less at that moment that he commits the only mistake of his conduct.

The Earl of Clermont had wrested this model servant from M. de Maurepas. He thought he had achieved a most magnificent feat. Having named Moncrif secretary of his commandments, he treated and cosseted him like a rare bird. At Court, in the city, he perpetually extolled his merits. He happily equated him to the greatest geniuses of the past. He sang the praises of the author of "The Cats" to the good Queen herself. He became so eloquent that she decided to acquire this phenomenon for herself. From the outset, based on that description, she named this phoenix her ordinary reader.

Moncrif recognised the benefits at once. This unexpected promotion transformed his status to the point of a miracle, and as a result he had to attest his boundless gratitude to his patron. To a degree he managed to do this. He did not immediately leave the house of the Count de Clermont, which he could have done, without any anxiety, the very next day. But when he lived there, he revealed himself to be admirably and astoundingly light-hearted. At the latter's home, he forgot himself in the charming and round arms of Count Abbe's mistress, the exquisite, the divine, the frivolous Camargo.

..

This trait was disconcerting when you think of the cool-headedness of our climber! Was he dazzled by the flesh or by the vertigo that can overcome even the most assured? Who knows. For my part, it comes to mind that this gesture of love was just as regulated as the steps of a dancer, and just as thoroughly as any of Moncrif's other actions. However, thanks to this delicious expedient, this model of household writers prevented M. de Clermont from retaining him, and by separating himself from Moncrif he did not regret losing him. Even better, he was forced to send Moncrif away - which was Moncrif's secret design and his desire.

This scandal, lapped up when it became public, was very useful to him. From that moment, he felt reassured in his love for women. He could philander and have good fortune in a continuous manner without anyone commenting except to laugh at it and envy him. Entering the service of the Count d'Argenson, he took advantage of this exploit to define his condition more precisely. He respectfully put his patron in no doubt, by some Oriental-style fable, that the service of his most Christian Majesty was in no way comparable to that of His Highness the Count, and that it would be very impertinent, even for the sake of the most pious Princess of Europe, to end up deprived of his God-given natural ornament. The honour aroused in Moncrif, while not exactly a boldness that could harm his career, was the sort of good assurance that gave all the court officials an almost unshakeable serenity.

By adopting this attitude, he showed himself to be logical with himself. He conformed his conduct to the theories he had developed, in turn under the guise of natural history and morality. In 1727, he had published a little book, which appeared only written by a friend of the creatures, against the

detractors of the feline race. In fact, his *History of the Cats* was foremost a discreet apology for those charming beings, with their beautifully supple loins, who had claws but went on velvet feet, leg-fubbers and lovers until they day they died, who were lazy and leisure-loving. It was, in spite of Coypel's plates which were engraved by Gaylus, and represented the most illustrious cats in history, a first test of a portrayal which he had devised in this manner.

Eleven years later, in 1738, although for 5 years the Academy had already been calling him to assume the succession of Monsignor Bishop of Blois, he resumed his theme, but this time stripped of the ornaments that fear had made him put around his cynical remarks. He published, assured of his honors, an *Essay on the necessities and the means to please*, and he was not afraid to formulate his philosophy of life in maxims of this quality: "The flip side of the fruits that naturally promise you mental advantages is getting a comfortable life. "

He lived that agreeable life with an admirable art, an unconsciousness that would disarm even a moralist. In that spirit, he did not ask for any serious roles. It did not force him to do any personal work. It only forced him to always be on the alert, so that he could meet the demands of his clients, whatever they were. It would be rude to say that he prostituted himself. And yet, Moncrif indeed made free with his mind, just as there are women who make free with their bodies. He sold it to all comers, indifferent to the chore, preoccupied purely with making money from it in order to live a nice life.

He had obtained the first advantages of his career during the Regency, by writing drinking songs and libertine poems which delighted the great lords who welcomed him. He composed some small works at the Cavern, in the company of Piron, de Vadé, de Voisenon or Crebillon Jr., which were just as good as the freest productions of those good spirits. When he became an academician, he worked with equal same ease in that boring genre to ensure his reputation. Reader of the Queen, to increase his pensions or to collect new charges he was constrained to court piety and composed spiritual songs. And M. Octave Uzanne, in the charming note he placed at the head of his edition of the *Tales of Moncrif*, reports a feature which completes this picture of a good man: "Moncrif was not satisfied to nourish, if we can call it that, the Queen's tender piety with his spiritual Canticles alone, he was also - to fully pay court to that religious princess - the mediator of some devout correspondence which she maintained with people confiding in unction and prayer; corresponding with, among others, an old actress who had given herself to God after having frequently lent herself to the devil. This old theater girl was named Miss Gautier and she lived as a Carmelite, serving heaven with the same zeal that she once had served the world. "

The masquerade could go no further, I believe. However, I am not one of those, with M. Uzanne, who are dealing with Moncrif the Tartufe [hypocrite] (Loc. cit. Quantin 1879, page X.). He was not a hypocrite, and if he consented to religious tasks that did not match his own thoughts or tastes, outside of his official function he did not hide his life of debauchery. Inside him were two characters

who knew nothing of each other, the official and the man. One made money from hard work, the other spent that money gracefully, wittily, and lavishly.

And it is because of this double life that Moncrif's masterpiece is not one of his poems, or one of his ballets, not one of his tales, nor even this History of the Cats, but his life itself. No man, with fewer precautions, and above all coming from a modest background, and consequently a precarious life, succeeded so well in satisfying the devotion of his patrons and his passion for the life of a libertine. With his vices and in spite of himself, he was once admitted into the Court, to be appointed secretary-general of the Post, reader to Madame la Dauphine, royal censor and secretary to the Duke of Orleans. And with the money that these positions gave him, he entertained mistresses chosen from the most beautiful girls of the court and the theatre.

Never - and this is another thing worth noting – did this devil of a man become a hermit. Grimm, the day after his death, buried him under this phrase that was intended to be nasty, but which only managed to move us: "He maintained his passion for the creature [body] or rather for creatures [animals] into extreme old age." He could well have said until his death.

At the age of seventy-seven, Moncrif again had an affair, one both very lively and very tender, with one of the most highly-rated courtesans of the capital. Thanks to the miraculous youth of his senses and the exquisite freshness of his heart, he satisfied all her desires. Their nights were legendary among the court gallants, and, close to death, the old lover was free of the proprieties he had observed until then. For the pleasure of this magnificent girl, he scandalized the Academy and to satisfy one of his caprices, on behalf of one who had no taste for writing he composed a Eulogy to the Duke of Sully which she signed, and a tale called Camedris which had the same fate. Right until his death, and even in his bed of love, it was Moncrif's destiny to "write for others." But no command, not even a royal command, could have seemed sweeter, even though the subject was so boring.

There came a moment, however, when the figurehead stood up in front of this Don Juan-civil servant: he had to surrender. But then, with perfect grace, without bravado, he consented to retire. He was content now to live, without trying his luck, among the dancers, actresses and girls. Old habit always brought his steps back to the Opera House, where he had known some of the most beautiful hours of his life, when he had picked the most beautiful roses of his epicurean destiny. Despite the distress of his desire, as an old customer, handsomely dressed, he went among the ballerinas begging for the night, accompanied by a melancholy smile, wishing to see and caress a beautiful body: "If any of these girls were tempted to dine with a clean old man, there would be eighty-five steps to go up, a nice little supper and ten louis to win. "

He had kept his apartment at the Tuileries, and it was there that he died on the 12th of November, 1772. In the last ten months of his life he could not go out, but he calmly awaited death, without regret, well-groomed, his conscience at rest, satisfied with the perfect work that had been, at his discretion, his life of ego. He had no terror of the hereafter and he freely spoke about death. We must read the story of his last days as set down by Bachaumont, they are not without grandeur. He writes: "He wanted to sow flowers for the rest of his career and always be received by the world: he was accustomed to seeing girls and actresses, his eyes still lit up at the spectacle of their charms; unable to go to the Opera where he usually went, he had music, concerts, dances at his house. "

Of the entire works of François-Augustin Paradis de Moncrif, today we have only an uncertain memory. Most of us would be hard put to quote some of his works' titles. The least obscure of his works is this youthful book "The Cats," which we reissue below. As copies have become rather rare, we rarely have the chance to the eleven letters which were famous during the lifetime of their author.

A few years ago, I came across a volume of the Historical Journal on Matters of the Time, which contained for July 1727, one of the first summaries made of *Les Chats*. It is worth quoting some excerpts, because it gives us the opinion professed by his contemporaries regarding this book. One critique writes (*): "Seeing only the title of this work, one would not imagine that it collected all that is found in the Latin, Greek, Arab, and Persian authors, comprising not only an Apology, but also praise of cats. As pleasant as this design may seem, the execution is infinitely more so, and nothing is more comical than the seriousness of the Author. He does his utmost to enhance the glory of the Cats: the ancient Mythology, the Alcoran, the observations of the Philosophers, the Proverbs, and all this is contained in eleven Letters; for he thus shared his work, to avoid a rather ordinary inconvenience. . . By allowing you, so to speak, to leave his Work and return to it later on, he makes you eager to read it all, something you cannot resist. "

(*) "The Cats" - This is the title of a work that has just appeared, and which was printed in Paris, at Gabriel-François Quillau son, rue Galande, at the Annunciation. Vol. In-8 [i.e. octavo format], 204 pages without the Contents Table.- The price is 3 pounds hardcover.

As can be seen from this piece, Moncrif had a good review and he was not mocked - perhaps the best measure of success. Letters of a Churchgoing Rat to Citron Barbet about the History of the Cats by Mr. Moncrif (*L'Histoire d'un Rat calobris à citron Barbet au sujet de l'Histoire des Chats*, par M. Moncrif, Ratapolis-Mathurin Lunard 1727 and 1731 in-12 [duodecimo format]) as well as a Courtly and Diverting Letter to Regulate the Life of Cats (*Lettre galante et divertissante pour régler la vie des Chats*, 1728, in-12 [duodecimo format]). Even better, it is in relation to this book that the poet Roy composed some rather sharp epigrams which earned him, among other things, a thrashing from the author's own hand.

[Letters of a Churchgoing Rat to Citron Barbet about the History of the Cats, an account of what happened on the subject of the famous Mathanasius at the Académie Française was written in 1727 by Louis Fuzelier (1672?-1752) and Pierre-François Guyot Desfontaines (1685-1745)]

[The Newsletter for November 1770 also spoke of Moncrif and cats: "The poet Roy having written an excessively biting epigram concerning him, Moncrif waited for Roy outside the Palais-Royal and took a stick to him. Roy was accustomed to such treatment. Protecting himself as best he could, he turned his back, and said: 'Velvet paws, now, pussy, velvet paws!' " ("Play nice, pussy, play nice")]

But if contemporaries tasted this fantasy, they let themselves be caught up in the fable. They did not guess the humour - let's not forget Moncrif's Anglo-Saxon origins - concealed by phrases like this one: "As I do not trust my own knowledge alone, I will consult all the scientific minds [savants] of Europe. You judge well, (Madame) that I will spare neither time nor effort. Works that are only a game of the mind, ask only a moment of our leisure; but one feels carried away by real rivalry, when one undertakes some essential point of history. " They thought that Moncrif, in his passionate love of cats, had bogged down himself in a wager, perhaps one originally accepted for entertainment. As believed by the benevolent critic mentioned earlier, most people found that nothing was "more comical than the seriousness of the author."

Obviously, if Moncrif had seriously made remarks like these: "Amiable Brinbelle, as we have already explained, married Ratillon in her third wedding ...", and also: "When a Cat died of natural causes (in Egypt) all the people of his acquaintance....", it would have been ridiculous. And he would have been jeered had he written, in all seriousness, sentences like this: "Who knows whether the example of this fable (of cats in ancient Egypt throwing themselves into a burning house) was not the secret resort that decided Q. Curtius's unselfish action of? In throwing himself into the abyss, his devotion to the safety of his country was only an imitation of the Cats of Egypt." But, it does not seem that one can attribute such madness to this courtly man who knew his people.

Cats may be loved to the point of professing a very indulgent fondness towards them, as did Maynard, Nicolardot, Baudelaire, Taine, and others like Messieurs Anatole France and Pierre Loti - and undoubtedly Paradis by instinctive affinity sampled the society of felines - but go from fondness to serious attaching cosmic importance to them is a far stretch. Moncrif had too much sense for that. He was probably first attracted to cats through envy; in the drawing-rooms he frequented he admired the place occupied by these beautiful little creatures, whose deep eyes seemed to judge human frivolity, and who had sliently conquered humans, enslaving them to their whims.

But precisely because he thought so and at the school of his "dear friends" the cats, he was surprised at this selfish and disdainful teaching, he could not grant them all these unimportant virtues

attached to them. Perhaps an old lady, a witty and fussy Marquise, sunk in her sofa in the corner of the hearth had asked her, half ironically, half-fondly, to write this panegyric of the Cats and say "What role did our dear friends play in antiquity"? Perhaps it was indeed a pretty socialite, his mistress, who had imposed this whim, which he received with good grace to pay her in the money of . . . a feline. We don't know, but it is always true that having accepted this task he made a velvet paw, as was his custom, but he also showed some of his claws in achieving it.

The eulogy he composed could be understood in two ways, and this little masterpiece of irony and delicacy, like the sacred books of the Trismegistus, might perhaps require a double introduction. On the one hand, this unpretentious book elevates the feline race to an almost divine status, gathering together epithets praising them, or making them heroes and supernatural beings, attributing all the virtues and talents to them; it contains this prodigious phrase which exceeds all limits: "There was such a Cat whose life may have been brighter and more star-crossed than that of Alcibiades or Helene", this book, which raises issues of metaphysics, art, theology, science, and literature may well be, in its own way, only a subtle mockery for those who felt the same way towards these creatures; those passionate and delirious feelings which the old song attributes to Mother Michel. Perhaps Moncrif found it a charming and juvenile way to tell the world that he was actually an immeasurable fool; perhaps that is also why, as he grew older and more cautious he disavowed the book, fearing that someone would one day understand it in the way it had been written.

For my part I prefer a slightly different interpretation. If Moncrif had a genius of such a quality, we would have had the chance to find traces of it several times during his lifetime. On reflection, I basically think, as mentioned above, that this book is in fact a symbolic autobiography; by praising cats and analyzing their feelings, if I dare put it like that, he actually wanted to rehabilitate himself and others of his kind [libertines, courtesans].

For he was part of a race of admirable self-serving philosophers. He was always looking for a corner of the fireplace, where a scented log burned bright, an easy chair to sink into as comfortably as cats occupy a cushion. The supple spine, the coaxing gesture, the ever-majestic look even during the worst debauchery, the neat coat, lazy and loving, self-serving, somewhat cunning but seductive, he liked to lie in the arms of a woman just like a cat curled in the warm fold of her dress on their mistresses round knees. Their gestures and in their expressions mirrored his own. Due to his position at that time he did not dare to celebrate the beauty of his servile but independent life, which was ideal for him, so he extolled hyperbolically his friends, "his dear friends", subject to the whims of their masters and free to the point of intoxication, in the gutter.

It is piquant to also see this little book, which still deserves to be read today - provided it is relieved by the explanations provided in the footnotes - resists simple explanation and that the subject remains as enigmatic as its author. In the pretty language of 18th century French prose, assertive

and pared down, it will still delight those tender souls who rarely hear cats so beautifully praised in such wonderful style.

Georges Grappe.

LES
CHATS.



A PARIS,
Chez GABRIEL-FRANÇOIS QUILLAU
Fils, Imp. Lib. Jur. de l'Université,
rue Galande, à l'Annonciation.

M. DCC. XXVII.

Avec Approbation & Privilège du Roy,

MONCRIF'S HISTORY OF CATS

LETTER ONE

TO THE MARQUISE OF B---

Did your heart throb all evening, Madame? They spoke of Cats in the house I have just come from; they unleashed themselves against them, and you know how hard it is to bear that particular injustice. I will not report all the absurdities or all the vices of which Cats were accused.

It would vex me greatly to repeat them.[1]

I attempted to defend their cause; it seems to me that I spoke sense, but in disputes is this how we persuade people? It would have taken wit: Where were you, Madame? I initially contended their against me, with the coolness and moderation which one should maintain when expounding very reasonable opinions when they are not yet well established in people's minds, but an incident occurred that completely disconcerted me: A Cat appeared, and at first sight one of my adversaries had the presence of mind to faint; they got angry with me; they declared to me that all my Philosophical reasoning could do nothing against what had just occurred; that Cats have not been, are not, and never will be anything but dangerous, unsociable animals. What pierced me with sorrow was that the majority of those conspirators were intelligent people.

I must confide to you a great project, Madame. Among so many memorable facts which people have tried to clarify and put in order, no one has yet thought of preparing a History of Cats; isn't this astonishing? Homer found it worth his Muse's while to describe the war of the Rats and the Frogs. One of the chapters of Lucien, treated with great licence, praises the Fly; and even Asses have had the satisfaction of seeing a eulogy written.[2] Why have Cats been neglected? I would not be surprised if I had to resort to the imagination in order to compose a work to their glory; but as soon as we look at the Cats of past ages, what a crowd of events we discover, each more interesting than the last. Before presenting this picture, I would appear quite ridiculous if I dared propose that there had been a Cat whose life was perhaps more brilliant and more star-crossed than that of Alcibiades or Helen. However, if both have ignited famous wars, if Helen saw altars raised to her beauty, such advantages put them not in the least above a great number of he-cats and she-cats who hold an equally good rank in the Temple of Memory.

The History of Cats should naturally arouse imitation by the most illustrious Writers. But since since such a History has not yet been written, mediocrity of talent should not stifle zeal. I will dare to

attempt this work, and I believe I can be successful, if you promise to help my enterprise. We will start by looking for the sources of the false prejudice against Cats which is common here. We will expound in good faith the insights we have gained from long acquaintance with their affairs and from reasoning. We will report the different forms which the interests of Cats have taken successively among the Nations, while keeping all proper precautions to not revolt those people who have, purely through emotion, antipathy towards them. We will always bear in mind that there are certain natural repugnances, which according to Father Malbranche[3] may be the effect of the unbridled imagination of mothers which has influenced that of the children; or, as a famous English philosopher explains it,[4] the result of nursery stories.

Fear is a child's first lesson, says La Fontaine, and besides, it is easy to recognize that natural or acquired antipathies may fall upon the very objects which seem least to attract them; one person cannot see birds without shuddering; another will flee at the sight of a cork. Germanicus could not bear either the crowing or the appearance of a cockerel.[5] Cats are not characterized by this sort of hatred as dangerous or wicked. Children hear from the cradle that Cats are naturally treacherous, that they steal the breath of infants, even that they are sorcerers. Later on, reason vainly denounces these calumnies, but because illusion spoke first it will, for a long time, continue to be persuasive even though it has been recognised as false - even if Cats are no longer believed to be sorcerers, they will continue to be feared as much as if they actually had been sorcerers.

M. de Fontenelle confesses that he was brought up to believe that on St. John's Eve there was not a single Cat left in the Cities, because on that day they went off to a general Sabbath. What glory for them, Madame, and how satisfying for us, to dream that one of M. de Fontenelle's first steps on the path of Philosophy led him to rid himself of a false prejudice against Cats, and to cherish them?

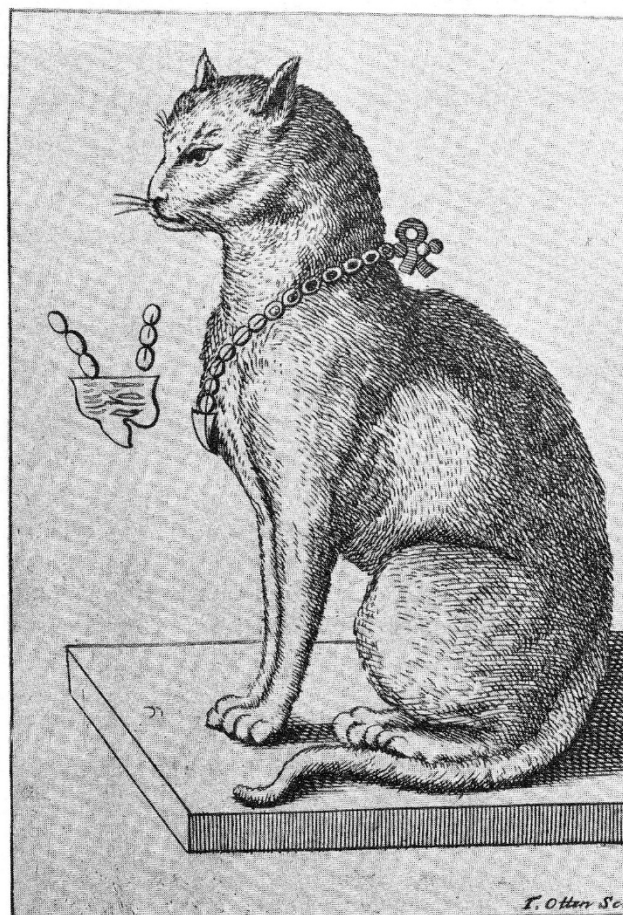
Therefore, this apology, as I have just proposed it, will only be looked at by persons who follow an ancient prejudice through laziness, or those to whom it is a sign of delicacy to profess a fear of Cats.[6]

You know, Madame, what a role our dear friends played in Antiquity. If man's respects, however ridiculously founded, can do any honour to the object of that respect, there can be no creatures with more brilliant titles than those of the Cat species. It may not be prudent to portray it so advantageously at first; but to put some order in our work, we must begin with the deified cats of Egypt, which were honoured by statues, and by a mysterious cult transmitted in turn to the Greeks,[7] and Romans;[8] and without stopping at a great number of ancient monuments which appear to have been preserved expressly to prove the glory of the first Cats, we will first show only the Cat God as it was represented in Egypt in its natural form, wearing a necklet in the middle of which a tablet was attached, adorned with hieroglyphic characters.[9] It is true that we do not understand the meaning of these characters; but we might explain them by piecing together different events of Egyptian Mythology.

These people had a tradition that the Gods, pursued by Typhon,[10] conceived of hiding themselves in the shape of animals. Anubis,[11] later worshipped as Mercury, was transformed into a Dog. Diana, who according to Apuleius is the same as Isis,[12] became a beautiful Cat, and as Plutarch aptly remarked[13] (we must not omit citing him) the Egyptians did not randomly imagine which animal's form each Divinity had supposedly taken. For example, Mercury only chose the form of the Dog to show his faithfulness in fulfilling his Master's orders.

If we follow Plutarch's reasoning, it would be reasonable for us to find some correspondence between Diana and her metamorphosis, and to conclude that the Egyptians imagined this Goddess disguised as a she-cat because they saw in her the cautious qualities manifested in she-cats. [14]

It is next necessary to explain another ancient figure adorned with symbols that will put anyone who has resolved never to esteem Cats in a bad mood. The Cat God is represented there having before him a sistrum[15], whose handle is placed in a small cup, or, if you will, a goblet. We must first remark that the Sistrum was an instrument dedicated to the greatest Divinities of the Egyptians;[16] we at once find an opportunity to establish that Music was admitted in their feasts, without yet discovering how much this Music has to do with our Cats.



We must mention that Plutarch mentions a famous song that was sung at all Egyptian suppers. This song praised the young Maneros, whose name it bore. The Egyptians considered him the inventor of Music; he was the son of King Maltander and Queen Astarte, who welcomed Isis when, seeking her husband's body[17] which Typhon had divided into several pieces, she found it thrown by the waves on the coast of Biblus,[18] where the father of young Maneros reigned as King.

Another circumstance which is essential to recount is that the upper extremity of the Egyptian Sistrum was ordinarily embellished by a beautiful sculpture representing a Cat with a woman's face, and that there were sometimes Cats scattered on various other areas of this instrument.

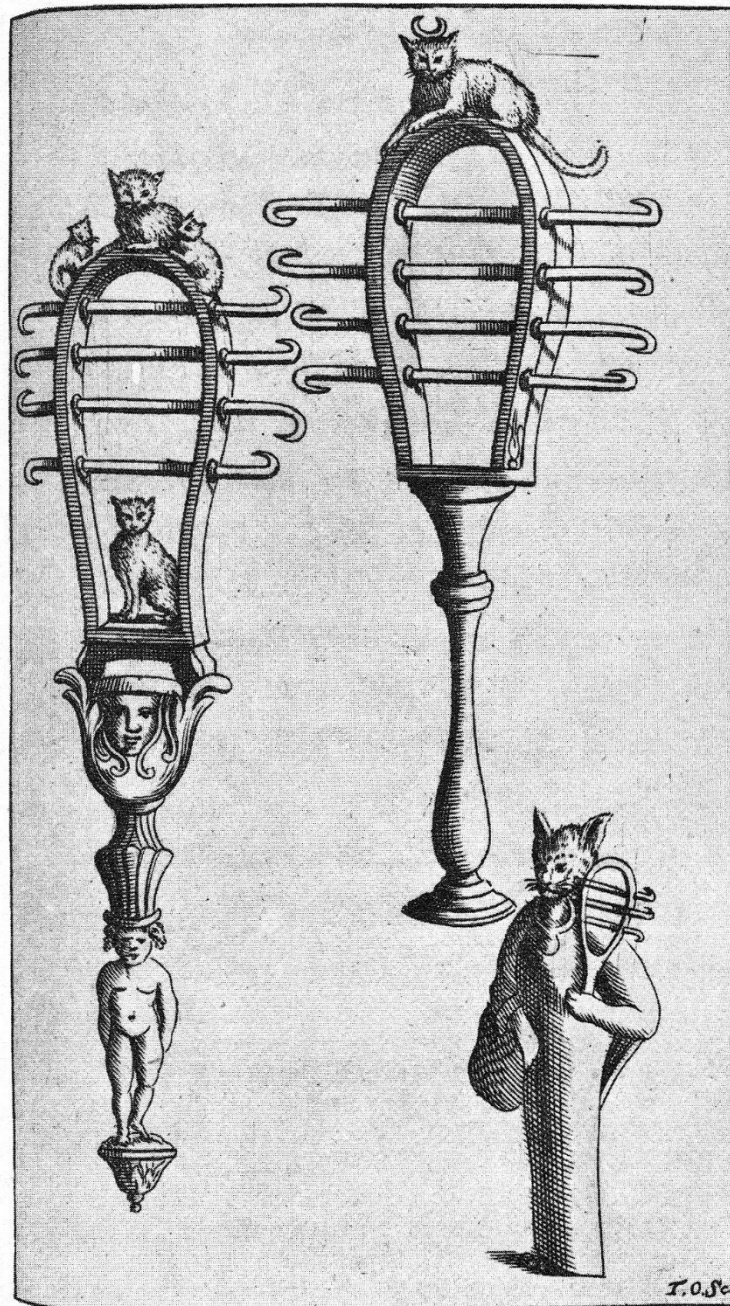
But we have another, even more imposing, ancient monument. The Cat God is represented with his natural head upon the body of a man. He holds this same Sistrum with a dexterity and striking air of familiarity that shows that he knows how to use of this instrument. Hey! why shouldn't there be a real relationship between musical instruments and Cats? Especially as Dolphins have, for many centuries[19] been stirred by the strains of the lyre, and since Stags delight in the sound of the flute; and since Greek Mares loved songs so much that one was written especially for them and bore their name.[20] According to Plutarch's reports, this was a sort of epithalamium [bridal song] whose charm softened the sternness of these Mares. They would only consented to receiving a mate when they heard that voluptuous air, an air that was only used only for that purpose.[21]

But here is quite another discovery that must be made absolutely clear. Cats are most advantageously organized for Music; they are able to give various modulations to their voices and use different tones to express the different passions that take hold of them. Those who object to this proposition will be quite astonished to learn that we have expressly used the terms of two men famous for their science.[22]

Cats have been given a great and beautiful voice, we will ask their adversaries what they think of this arrangement of sistrum and goblet Goblet so often found between the Cats' paws. It seems to me, Madame, that they will confess in good faith (for there are certain truths which cut across prejudice) and agree, say I, that the sistrum, a symbol of music, and the goblet which necessarily awakens the idea of feasts, clearly reveal that the Egyptians admitted Cats to feasts where they delighted everyone present with their charming voices.

But suppose that they do not grasp the simplicity of this proposition right away, and that like those strong minds in M. de la Mothe's fable,[23] who consider anything they don't understand to be impossible, they dare to dismiss the song of Cats as caterwauling on the basis of a verse wrongly attributed to Ovid,[24] that this song, say I, is neither harmonious nor even bearable, and appears

foolishness to us; but we will hide our knowledge of it so as not to appear prepared. We will content ourselves at first by replying that this what seems to them a caterwauling among the Cats today proves nothing against the Cats of Antiquity, the Arts being subject to great revolutions: We will add, with utmost circumspection, that the dissonances they complain of are perhaps nothing but a lack of understanding and taste on their part. This may need some clarification, and it is then that the truth will be seen in its best light.



We can say that our own Music, to our modern ears, is limited to a certain division of sounds which we call tones, or semi-tones, and we are sufficiently limited in ourselves to suppose that this same division comprises everything that can be called Music. Hence we unjustly call those sounds whose

intervals and admirable relationships, at least among their own kind, escape us through being outside of our self-imposed limits, as bellowing, mewling, whinnying etc.[25] The Egyptians were evidently more enlightened; they had probably studied the Music of animals; they knew that a sound is neither right nor wrong in itself, and that it almost always appear to be one or the other only because of our habit of judging whether a collection of sounds is a dissonance or a harmony. They sensed, for example, whether the Music of Cats progressed from one tone to another in the same steps as our own, or if they broke down that same tone and struck the intervals that we call commas [a minute interval between notes, quarter-tones], which would have made a prodigious difference between their Music and ours. They discerned in the chorus of Tomcats, or in a recitation, the simple or more subtle modulations, the lightness of the passages, the sweetness of the sound, or perhaps a sharpness that made it appealing. Hence, what seems to us to be no more than a confused noise, a pandemonium, is only the result of our own ignorance, a lack of delicacy in our organs, of correctness and discernment.

The Music of Asian Peoples seems quite ridiculous to us. For their part, they find no common sense in ours. We believe reciprocally that we hear only caterwauling; thus each Nation, in this respect, is so to speak the Cat of the other nation, and both sides are, perhaps, led by ignorance so that they can only form false judgments.

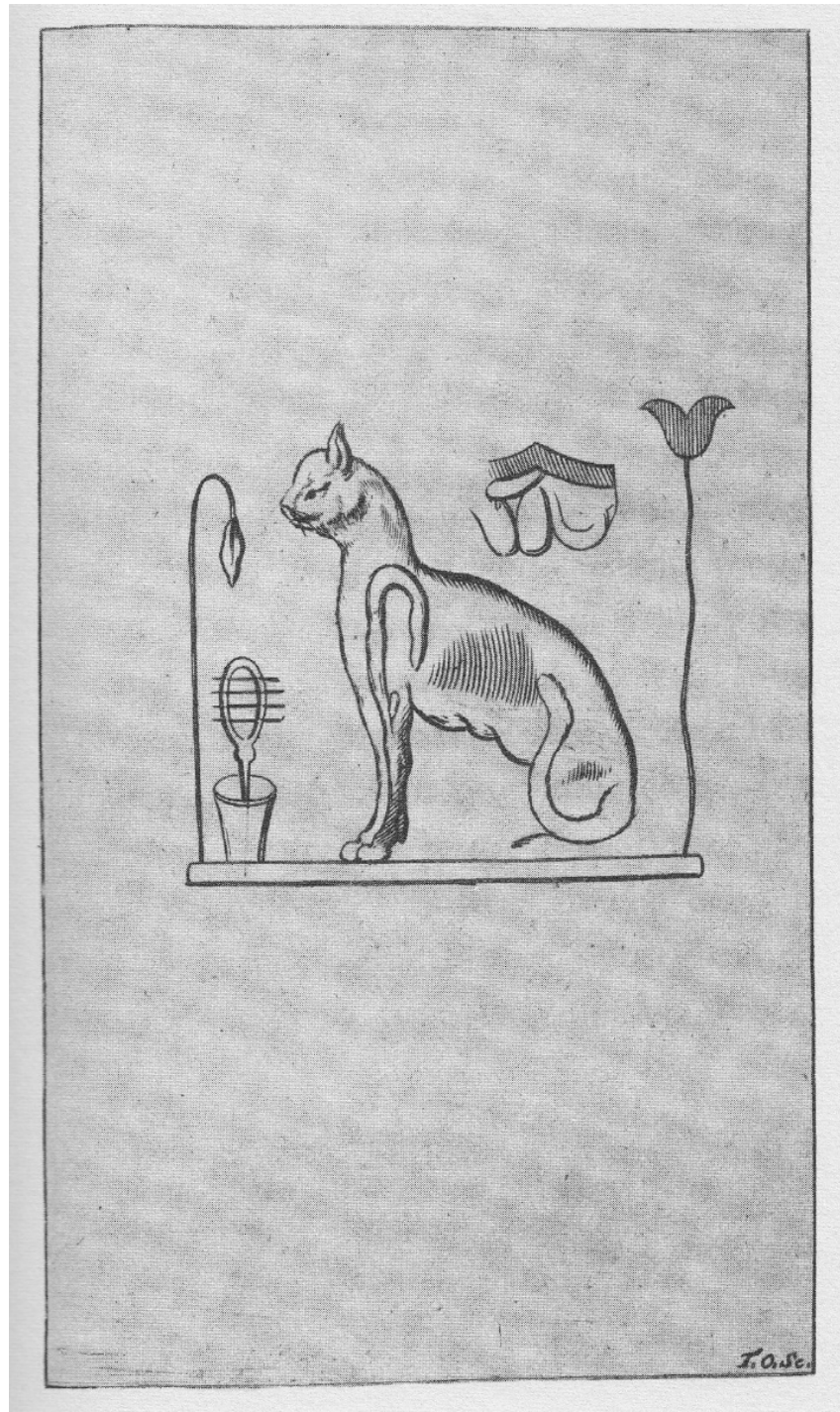
Hence no doubt gaiety imperceptibly seizes the feast. In our Songs, where this same background is found quite commonly, it is at least presented by images that seem to have more relation with the feelings that we want to inspire.

To this simple reasoning, which will no doubt make a great impression on them, we will add a reflection which will finally convince them. The Egyptians put everything to good use in order to sense the happiness of existence. The skeletons brought to the feasts were a warning to take advantage of every moment of life. Drink, they said, and be glad, because you may die tomorrow. [26] Regardless of how accustomed Egyptians were to this spectacle and this exhortation, on first impression it does not give pleasant thoughts. It is not a precept to inspire pleasure, but the image of pleasure itself. The Songs, sistrums, and Cats then came to the rescue, brightening up the sombre truth which had just been announced. Doubtless gaiety then imperceptibly took over the feast. In our songs, where this same theme is commonly found, it is at least presented by images that seem to have more in common with the sentiments they want to inspire.

Pardon me, Madame, the small vanity of quoting myself here as an example. This song is only the same idea of the Egyptians, but rendered in softer colours, which are in this respect the sistrums and cats that enlivened the display of skeletons.

These are the ideas which have awakened in me in the first moments of my chagrin. This letter must carry a sense of my agitation, be kind enough to read into it all the charm which it lacks. I am going to make serious inquiries, before assembling the Glory of Cats with the order and accuracy suitable to such an interesting, and equally unknown, subject ignored by the commoners.

I have the honour to be, etc.



Footnotes to the First Letter

[1] Monsieur de Fontenelle.

[2] By M. de la Mothe le Vayer, under the name of Orasius Tubero. Jacques Pelletier of the City of Mans, a Poet published in 1581, wrote a Poem praising the Ant. Le Sieur Perrin, Introducer of Ambassadors to the Duke of Orleans, put that eulogy into verse, and wrote eulogies to the Cricket, Gnat, and Silkworm, printed in 1661.

[3] One sees many people who cannot abide the sight of a Cat, on account of the fear which these animais have caused in the mothers of these persons while they were pregnant. Rech. de la vérité, vol. 1, 1.2, p. 18p. See also on page 175, the first note.

[4] Mr. Locke. He holds the same opinion as Father Malbranche, but adds that most often these antipathies, though believed natural, are acquired. Their origin is the accidental joining of two ideas, which the violence of a first impression, or a too great indulgence, has so strongly united that afterwards they remain connected in a person's mind. The ideas of spirits or of phantoms have no more relationship to shadows than to the light, but if one succeeds in often inculcating these different ideas in a child's mind, and in exciting them as joined together, the child might never be able to separate them throughout his life; the fear of Cats is, therefore, nothing but one of these irregular combinations of ideas which dishonour our understanding. *Traité de l'entendement*, p. 488-489, book 2, chap. 33, trans. from the English.

M. de Coulange has written on the subject of children in one of his songs:

We make them fear the werewolf;

We make them fear the bogeyman;

The Dragon comes out from his hole

To devour them as quick as he can;

These small unfortunates are made aware

That there are monsters everywhere.

[5] Plutarch, Book of Envy and Hatred, 107, translated by Amyot.

[6] An outstanding example of the chimerical causes which almost always underlie a person's hatred for Cats is found in the Poems of Ronsard in an Epistle to the Poet Belleau.

No man alive hates Cats, the world around,

As much as I, with hatred so profound;

I hate their eyes, their faces and the way they stare,

And should I see one I will quickly flee elsewhere,
I tremble in nerve, and vein, and in each limb,
And never may a Cat can enter into my Room;
I abhorring those who, it seems, cannot abide
Life unless they have a Cat always by their side.

Thus far his declaration of hatred is explained in great detail: the cat's eyes, its brow (face) and its gaze are singled out and set before us. We imagine that the Poet will give his reasons for this hatred, but that's not the case at all, and he moves on to this recitation:

But still this awful creature joins me on my bed
Stretches out his body right beside my head,
Seeking the feather pillow soft and deep,
Where on my left side I lie sound asleep.



This fortunate revelation of Ronsard's sleeping preference, proves as much against Cats as against Ronsard. We then sensibly continue the main subject:

For gladly on my left side I would slumber on

Until the crowing cock'rel wakens me at dawn.

But the Cat cries out, his caterwaul makes fright;

Beside myself, I waken startled in the night,

And sat bolt upright I call Servants to my room.

One lights a candle to illuminate the gloom;

It's such a happy sight, the other servant said,

To see how the white Cat favouring its Master's bed;

A single Cat, the other one assured me,

Signifies the end of some lengthy misery;

But with tearful eyes and deeply furrowed brow,

Unplacated I at once informed them how

The mewling of a Cat is but a prophecy

Of the onset of a long, vexatious malady;

And for what length of time it will confine me,

Just like the Cat, through four seasons it will find me,

Constant to his post in his Lord's household,

In Spring and Summer, in Autumn and in Winter cold,

Come sun or snow, dark night or brightest day,

The cat stands firm and never takes himself away,

He makes his rounds, and returns then to his chosen post,

Like some forgotten Roman Legionary's ghost

With Dog and Goose beside him, that latter named's harsh call,

Saved the Roman Capitol by giving warning of the Gauls.

There are so many inconsistencies in the orator's ideas and his rant. He supports his antipathy to Cats by praising them, he mentions their steady temperament and their faithfulness in guarding their Master's home. Finally, he compares them to the sacred Geese who saved the Capitol. It's not surprising that Ronsard's fame has not lasted. His lack of philosophy highlighted the shortcomings of his Poetry, and this work quite probably starts to confirm why this poet is not generally held in contempt.

[7] Orpheus brought the Religious Ceremonies of the Egyptians to Greece, and passed them on to the Thebans. Diod. of Sicily, first book, page 11.

[8] Lucien, Dialogue of the Assembly of Gods.

[9] Refer to The Antiquities of Father Montfaucau, Book VI of the Supplement, plate XLIV of the eleventh Volume.

[10.] Brother of Osiris who was the husband of Isis, Diod. of Sic. book 1, page 6.

[11] Son of Osiris and Isis.

[12] Isis, daughter of Saturn and Rhea, and according some Mythologists, of Jupiter and Juno, children of Saturn and Rhea, succeeded them to the Kingdom of Egypt, gave laws to the Egyptians and established the cult of the Gods. Diod.

"I am Isis, Egypt's perfect Queen, // Bubastis City it was built by me." These words were carved in the city of Nysa in Arabia. Diod. of Sic., book I, pag. 6 and pag. 15.

Isis simultaneously Cybelle, Minerva, Venus, Diana, Proserpine, Ceres, Juno, Bellona, Hecate, and Rhamnusia; because of this that she has been called Myrionyme, Goddess of a Thousand Names. Apulcius Metam. Book XI.

[13] Lib. de Matrim.

[14] She said "Thus Jove became a ram, the Lord of flocks, and even to this day Libyan Ammon is represented with curving horns; Apollo hid in a crow's shape, Bacchus in a goat; the sister of Phoebus in a cat, Juno in a snow-white cow, Venus in a fish, and Mercury in an ibis bird. ' Ovid, Metamorphoses, Book V. [translated by Miller]

[15] The Sistrum was a musical instrument; Isidore states that the Amazons used it in war.

[16] See the antiquities of Father Montfaucau, the second Volume of the second part.

[17] After killing Osiris, Typhon cut the body into twenty-six parts, which he scattered and hid in different countries. Isis searched for the body parts and gathered them together, with the exception of the male parts, but she had an image made of these and consecrated it by feasts and sacrifices, and called it Phallus. Diodorus, Plutarch, and others.

[18] Biblus, Biblis, or Biblos, the maritime City of Phoenicia, is one of the most ancient Cities in the world. Steph. Bizant.

In their Pamyliens feast, the Egyptians carried a triumphal statue whose sex organs were exaggerated, in order to convey the idea that generation is the principle behind all things. Plut. Chap. Of Isis and of Osiris.

Arion, an inhabitant of Methymne, invented the Dithyramb. He played the lyre so beautifully that when he threw himself into the sea the Dolphins welcomed him and carried him to Taenarus. Pindar. Plutarch. Ovid. Athenius.

“As the Dolphin goes his way // Skirting round the seacoast spray // Where he hears the plangent sound // Of oboes . . . “ Plutarch VII. Livre des propos de table.

[20] This song was called Hippotauron. Plutarch VII. Livre des propos de table.

Without resorting to past centuries for examples, in a Province of France we have animals over whom certain tones have the same influence as Plutarch’s song had over the mares.

They start by calling the lover by his name: Let’s get along, my handsome Martin, they say; let’s get along, young vanquisher; haven’t we chosen you a charming mistress? Look how she views you with favour; come along, what are you waiting for to make you happy? This invitation, which is uttered with a sort of singing style, never fails to produce the desired effect.

[22] M. Grew and M. le Clerc. The changes in the windpipe are remarkable among animals. The segments of this tube are so disposed that they can be used by animals to give various modulations to their voices. Among the Cats (who, in expressing the passions which possess them, make use of various tones) these segments are separate and flexible. Depending on whether they are more or less dilated, or whether all or just some of them are so disposed, the tone will be higher or lower, in the same way as the string of a viol under a greater or lesser pressure of the finger. M. le Clerc, Bibl. chois, tome I. p. 293 and 294. Extract from the Sacred Cosmology of M. Grew.

[23] Styling itself infallible, this rigid mind // Denies in arrogance the world beyond its ken. // know it not, so it’s impossible: where can we find // A truer syllogism of stupid men?

[24] Pardus hiando felit. Philomel. Poem. Carm. 50.

[25] According to Montagne, “These new Peoples of India, after being conquered came to sue for peace and pardon from the men, and brought them gold. They were on the point of offering as much of it to the horses with a harangue completely identical to that for the men, believing their neighing to be talk of compromise and truce.”

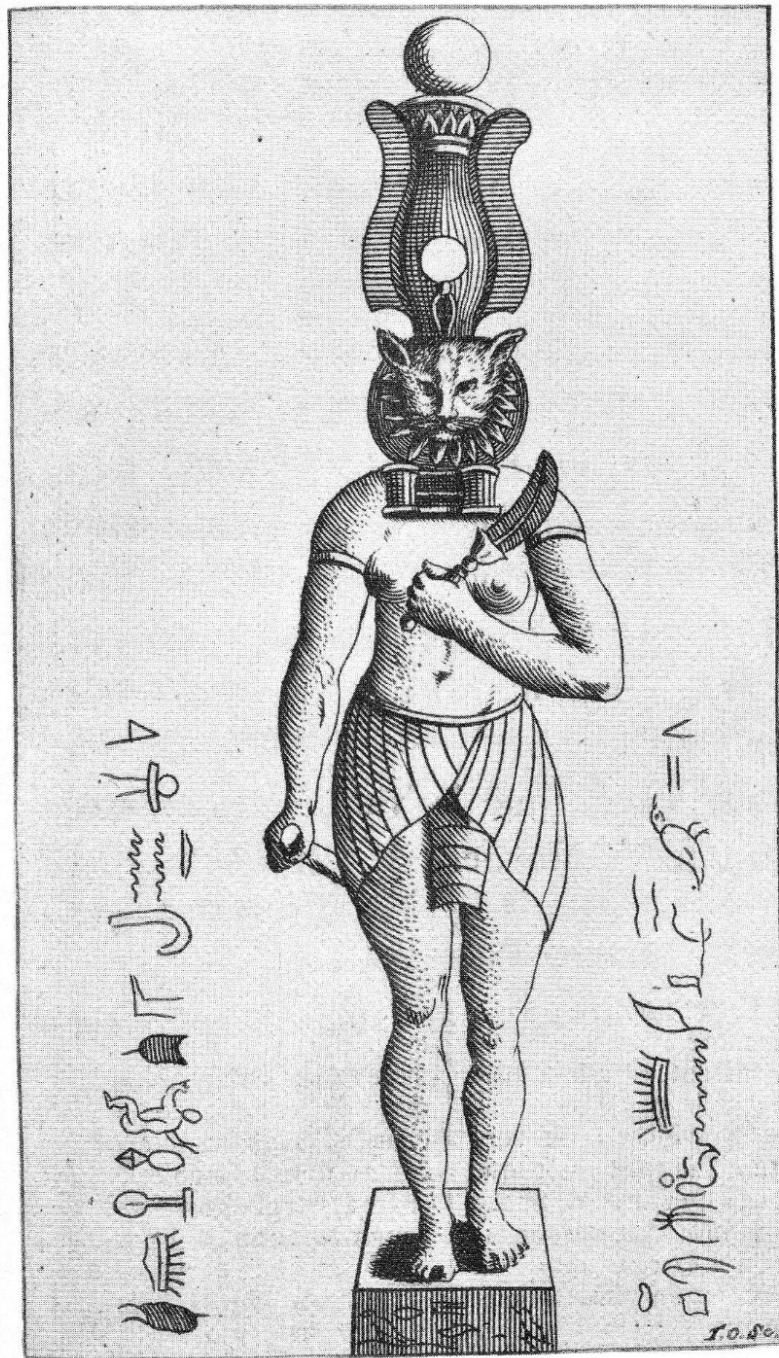
[26] Herod. in Euterp.

More inconstant than the clouds and sea

Shall we regret time’s never-ending fickle flight?

Though you are forced to leave us, we are free

In your passing to seize our delight.
And hold onto your sweetest hours:
If life a thoroughfare must be
Along the way we will at least smell flowers.



LETTER TWO

Although it was very late, Madame, when I closed my letter last night, you will understand that it was impossible for me to sleep. I spent the night reading all the books about Antiquity that I have. We can now arm ourselves with beautiful quotations in Latin and also in Greek, which are evidence for the glory of Cats, for it is necessary that we do not spare our adversaries. It seems to me that it is easier to be right in Greek than it is in French.

As we have sufficiently proved that the Cats had Altars in Egypt, we need not describe a number of ancient monuments which leave no room for doubt in this matter. For the sake of accuracy we will only quote all the images of this Divinity found in the table which lists the mysteries of Isis, and point out that the Cat God called Elurus is sometimes represented with human traits, a mystery of which a scholarly commentator assures us is because a she-cat is very comparable to the Moon, with which this animal, he says, conforms harmoniously.[1]

But this assemblage of human traits in the Cat God has a metaphysical cause, which I find even more important to clarify. I am sure, Madame, that this struck you at once.

You know that the vanity of men makes them draw as close as possible to what they have elevated above themselves. As soon as the Egyptians had erected Altars to Elurus, they unconsciously substituted in him some of their own features. It is represented in a monument having the body of a man and the head of a Cat; it is adorned with several more attributes common to Egyptian Figures, but the most worthy of admiration is a crown of light that is cast from the God's head. I Father Montfaucon[2] remarks that if these are not actually rays they come close to being so; if they are rays, he adds, they are appropriate to this God, one of the most honoured of Egypt.

The reflection we have just made on the effects of self-esteem lead us to suppose that the Egyptian ladies felt, in turn, the advantage of resembling the Cat Goddess. No doubt it was they who gave some human traits to the statues erected to her. How will they respond when we reveal the portrait of the Cat Goddess depicted as a beautiful woman, adorned with a beautiful plume in the manner of Egyptian figures, and holding a kind of sceptre[3] at the top of which is the goblet whose allegory we have already mentioned, or when we show her seated with dignity in an armchair? Could we see another monument of this beautiful Goddess keeping her Cat's head properly poised on the body of a woman without admiring it? She wears a type of headdress that covers her shoulders and part of her arms, and which reveals a ravishing bosom. She has a tunic that descends modestly to her ankles, and holds below her breast a man's head restrained by the chin, a manifest symbol of the ascendancy which the Egyptians believed she had over the heart; and on the other arm she holds a kind of urn, which was apparently another mysterious eulogy of her charms.[4]

With this assemblage of graces, isn't it easy to believe that the Cat Goddess was regarded in Egypt as the mother of Love? All the beauties of Memphis probably prided themselves on resembling her, and the Poets who made verses in her honour had the art to have eyes as round and luminous as those of the Goddess. You can well imagine the annoyance of women who make a great show of fearing Cats when we convince them that there is no greater flattery than to be revered as greatly as an Egyptian Cat.

It would not be a daring idea to call the Cat Goddess the Mother of Love. It was Isis herself whom the Egyptians adored under that pleasant form; and Isis presided over the heart. Lovers appealed to her to give them the gift of pleasing; they doubtless called upon her to persuade their mistresses, while they swore by the number thirty-six,[6] the most solemn and sacred of their oaths.

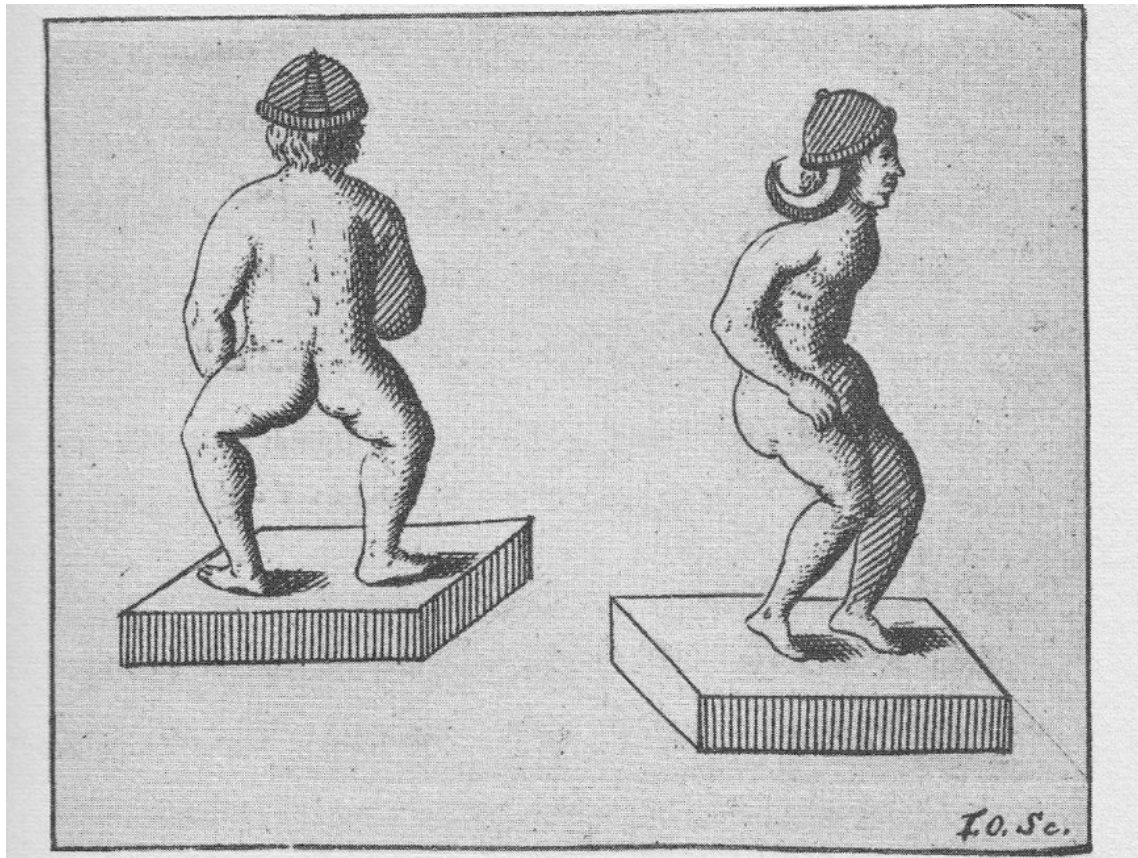
Let us now clarify things, that is to say, let us talk about the worship of the Cat God.

Each Egyptian divinity had several Priests, one of whom had superiority;[7] and it was from the order of these priests that the Egyptians elected their Kings. It appears that the Pontiff of the Cats always had most right to the Crown. We must remember, I believe, that these Priests bathed twice a day in cold water; that they were dressed in linen, since the flax flower is a heavenly blue colour. We can also say that their sandals were made from a certain plant called Papyrus.[8] It only remains for us to put this word into Greek, and claim a miracle about this plant. The Biblians claimed that a head made from the Papyrus plant was carried regularly every year from Egypt to Biblus for a period of seven days. They regarded this wonder as testimony of the favour of their God Osiris.[9] It is true that this fable only slightly touches upon to our subject; but at least it will illustrate the footwear of our Priests, and one more quote is not to be neglected. We can add that these High Priests, by reason of cleanliness suited to the dignity of their office, shaved the body regularly every three days.[10]

We can presume, and it seems to me a very prudent remark to make, that these Priests, in their ceremonies, conformed as far as possible to the Spirit and attributes of the Divinity to which they were devoted; and thus joyfulness, physical suppleness, and pantomime attitudes must have made up the main part of the mysteries of the Cat God. If Signor Tomasini, who gracefully performs the role of Harlequin in our Italian Comedy, had lived in the time of the ancient Egyptians, the devotees of the Cat God would have regarded him as the image of the Divinity. Such strange contradiction of the human mind! That which is Comic on the Stage today would then have constituted all the dignity of the Temple.



But regarding Cats as Divinities proves only human foolishness, and are no more illustrative in this respect than the Egyptian Storks, the Rats, and the God of Farts,[11], which have also had their mysteries; nothing better characterizes this rivalry than a fable of Monsieur de la Mothe, entitled the Gods of Egypt. It is one of those which, in substance and form, is most charming and philosophical.[12]



Let us leave such an extravagant religion[13] to establish the pre-eminence that Cats had over other animals in Egyptian society. They personally enjoyed the most honourable distinctions and privileges. When an Egyptian deliberately killed a Cercopithecus, which is a type of Monkey, or an Ichneumon, a type of Rat, which according to Elianus destroys Crocodiles, or the Apis Bull himself, it cost him his life. But the law was far more severe regarding those who made an attack upon Cats, whether deliberately or by accident. They were immediately handed over to the secular arm. The people seized them, and furiously tore them to pieces, so, as soon as an Egyptian saw a dead Cat, he took himself away from it, tearful and trembling, and went to announce this catastrophe, protesting his own innocence, and the whole Town was filled with clamour.[14] Then the Magistrates ceremoniously came to remove the body; they embalmed it with scented Cedar oil, and several other aromatic herbs necessary to preserve it.[15] They then transported it to Bubastis to be interred in a sacred building.

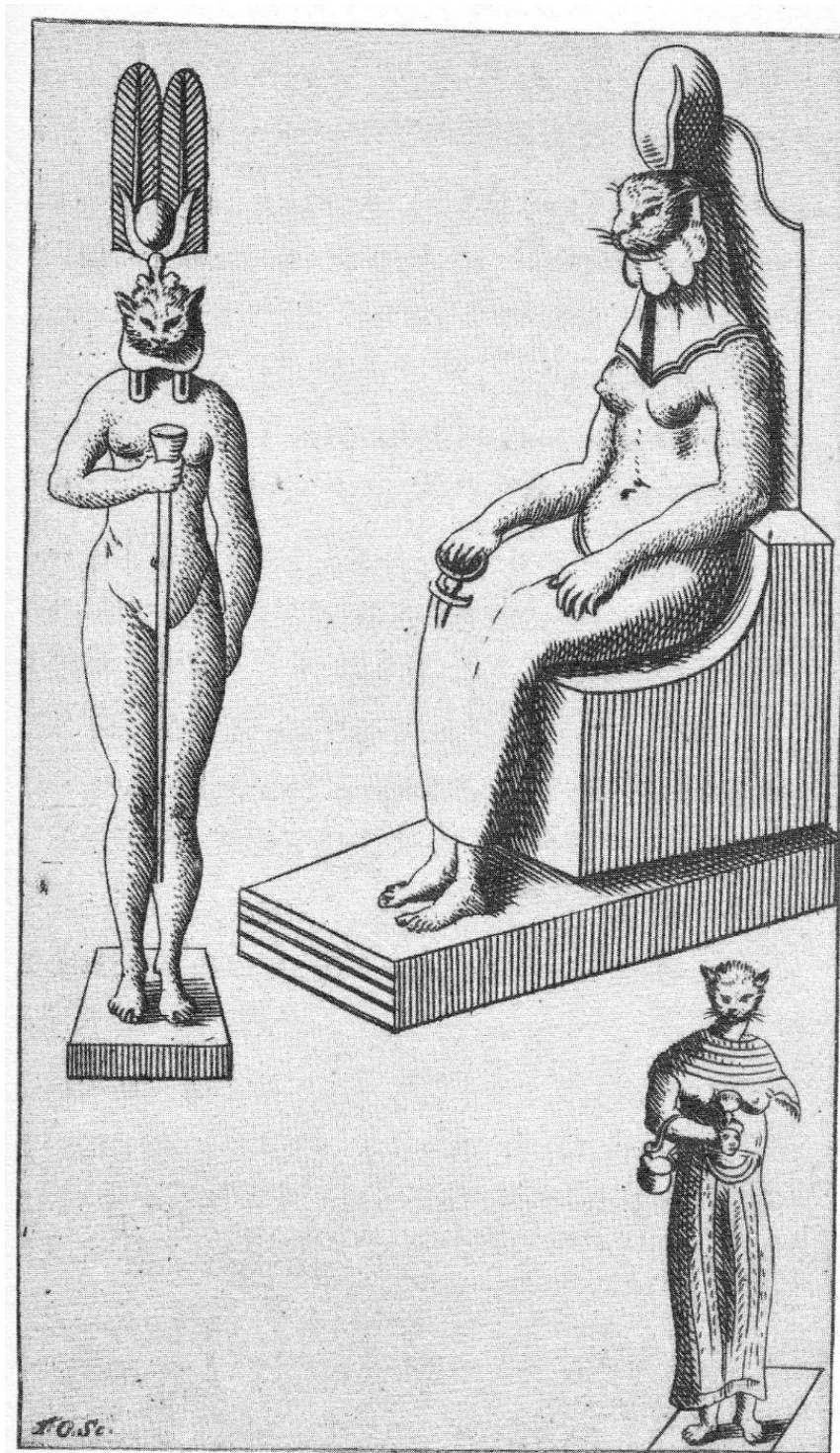
The honourable treatment which they were given during their lives shows even better how valued they were in society. The Egyptians perfumed them and provided them with sumptuous beds to sleep in. They employed all the secrets of Medicine to treat and preserve those who were born with a delicate constitution; at the right time, they gave each She-cat a suitable husband, paying great attention to matching their tastes, temperaments and features.[16]

When a blaze broke out, the Cats played quite another role. They went into a divine fury: the Egyptians, accustomed to this marvel, neglected the blaze, and surrounded the cats. Some of these tutelary Cats escaped and leapt over the assembly, throwing themselves into the flames. When this misfortune occurred, the Egyptians went into solemn mourning.[17]

This mourning was so marked and so sincere, that the women forgot about their beauty; and, to avoid the shame of still looking attractive during such reasonable sadness, they smeared their faces and ran dishevelled around the City, in a state of desolation. They tied their clothes at the waist and beat their uncovered breasts, their nearest relatives, also half-naked, followed them, abandoned to the delirium caused by the great sorrow.[18] Who knows if the example of this fable was not the secret source that determined Q. Curtius's generous action? There is every reason to believe that his devotion to the safety of his country, in throwing himself into the abyss, was only an imitation of the heroism of the Cats of Egypt.

When a Cat died a natural death, all its acquaintances fell into consternation; they bore the marks of their sorrow to the point of shaving their eyebrows.[19] There may have been such a Cat in Memphis whose funeral obsequies were more lavish and more widely observed than those of Alcestis and Egestion. Admetus,[20] to demonstrate his sorrow at the loss of this beloved wife, ordered that they should cut the manes of the horses that drew the funeral hearse.[21] Alexander, it is true, cropped the manes of all the horses in his empire, stipulated the same for the mules, and pulled down the battlements of the cities. But what are such sacrifices compared to the tears of the most beautiful women of Egypt, running in disarray through the town, and demanding yet again of Destiny a Cat whose best days have been cut short by the Fates? What could match so many eyebrows shaved from the most respected foreheads in all Egypt?[22] And what effort was not spared in maintaining the household Cat? What concern for all its tastes? What attention to giving it a pleasant life? We have seen an offended Cat cause political projects to miscarry, and sow disorder and rebellion. Egypt, under one of the Ptolemies, was the scene of this great adventure; the name of the Romans being equally feared and honoured there at this time. The Egyptians submitted to everything that came out of Italy. It happened that a Roman made some sort of unintended insult to a Cat, nevertheless, all the people took arms against him in revenge, and neither the presence of Magistrates, nor the threats of Ptolemy, could stop their fury. The guilty man was butchered, and thus the power of Rome could not be enforced when it rivalled the cause of an offended Cat.

This respect for animals influenced all the actions of the Egyptians. Those who lived in the cities consecrated their children to these sacred animals. You judge well, Madame, that it could only have been to Cats that fashionable people were devoted. Here is how this ceremony went. They shaved the child's head either entirely, or half, or only a third of it, then the hair was weighed in a balance against a proportional quantity of gold or silver, and when the weight of metal prevailed this offering was given to the person who cared for the Cat to whom the child had just been dedicated: with this sum he bought fish and bread, which he mixed with milk to feed the revered animal.[23]



This function was extremely envied and they paraded the marks of it with pomp. They openly wore the portrait of the Cat to whom they had been consecrated: this display gained the respect of citizens who were always ready to prostrate themselves before those to whom the care of sacred animals had been entrusted;[24] and, as each Palace dedicated to animals contained only a single species only, imagine, Madame, the great fortune of a citizen whose sole satisfaction during his life was to care for the Cats and thus enjoy the high esteem of the public.[25]

This love of Cats among the Egyptians never appeared with greater constancy and greatness of soul than in the war they had to sustain against Cambyses in the fourth year of his reign. They were then governed by Psammenitus who had just succeeded Amasis.

The ambitious Cambyses, unable to force entry into Egypt without first taking control of the town of Peluse, [26] which appeared impregnable, devised a stratagem worthy of his high policy. Knowing that the garrison of this town was composed entirely of Egyptians, he put at the head of his troops a great number of Cats: his captains and his soldiers each bore a cat as a buckler. It was only because of these chiefs that his army took control of Peluse. The Egyptians, afraid confusing these Cats with their enemies, dared not launch any arrow, and allowed themselves to be conquered instead.[27]

Here are all my discoveries so far, Madame, and as I do not trust my own knowledge alone, I will consult all the scientific minds of Europe. You judge well, that I will spare neither time nor effort. Works that are only a game of the mind, ask only a moment of our leisure; but one feels carried away by real rivalry, when one undertakes some essential point of history.

I have the honor to be etc.

Footnotes to the Second Letter

[1] Vignere adds: Through this Symbol the Egyptians sought to understand the Moon, with which this beast has a great accord and conformity of habit, whether you observe the changes, spots, and specks of her skin, or her cunning, or that she goes abroad more by night than by day, besides which they say that, in her first pregnancy, she produces one Kitten, produces two in her second, three in her third, and so on consecutively up to the seventh, each time increasing by one; so that in her whole life she eventually has as many Kittens as one counts days in each Lunation; for all these numbers added together amount to twenty-eight; furthermore the enlargement of the pupils of her eyes at the full Moon, and their contraction in its waning, gives us enough reason to understand the degree by which she conforms and adapts to this Star's permutations. Notes sur Philostrate. chap. du Nil, pag. 37, 1615 edition.

[2] Sixth book of the Antiquities, eleventh Volume of the Supplement, forty-fourth plate.

[3] Possibly an augur's baton.

[4] Antiq. Of F. Montfaucon, Book VI, Vol. II, plate XLV.

[5] To satisfy ourselves that Cats can have a true relationship with the graces and with beauty, without seeking out authorities in Egypt, is there not in Paris an infinitely agreeable person

nicknamed Princess Miaou? I certainly know of no sworn enemy of Cats who would not consider herself most fortunate to resemble her.

[6] In Plutarch, who tells of this oath, we are not told why it was current among the Egyptians. What relationship does the number thirty-six have to the tenderness of a lover? Surely the preference given to this number over all others comes from the fact that thirty-six has a greater number of factors than the preceding numbers, except for 24, which is equal to it in this regard, but which still yields to it in that 36 is a square, and that 24 is not.

[7] Plutarch in Isis and Osiris.

These Priests led an extremely austere life. They were forbidden to drink wine and did not offer it to their Gods; they regarded this liquor as made from the blood of Giants who made war on the Gods, which produced wine when it moistened the ground. Plutarch ib.

[8] A type of reed from which paper is made in Egypt; this paper was used throughout the known world before the invention of rag paper. The Kings of Egypt were most jealous of this secret, and the Egyptians alone carried on this commerce.

[9] In Dea Syr. Luci.

[10] Euterp. C. 37. Herodot.

[11] See Volume II of the second part of the Antiquity of Father Montfaucon.

See also the Memoirs of M. de Sallengre, on the Dissertation of M. Terrin of the Academy of Arles concerning the Dieu Pet. pag.18.

[12] In Egypt of old each beast was a God

While men were all dull as beasts;

The animal elsewhere denied an abode

Had in Egypt both Temples and Feasts.

One day, sacrificed at the Shrine of the Cat,

Was a flawless white Rat to the feline Most High:

Next day was the turn of the mighty God Rat;

One thing alone would satisfy,

That at his Temple a feline should die, etc.

[13] The women of Egypt rendered a rather ridiculous homage to the Bull Apis. This is how this ceremony is described by Amyot after Diodorus of Sicily. When Apis dies, the Priests first bring a Calf into the City of the Nile, and feed it for 40 days. Afterwards it is put into a covered ship on which there is a cabin or deckhouse of gold, and conduct like a God to the City of Memphis. There it is lodged in the Temple of Vulcan, and right from the start only women may look upon the Bull, and

when before their dresses are raised . . . The rest is too indecent to be reported here. Trad. d'Amyot. book I, p. 55.

[14] If anyone killed a cat, whether intentionally or accidentally, he was certain to be dragged away, usually in a very rough manner, and beaten without benefit of the law by the mob that had come together about the corpse, etc. pag. 74, edit. ann. 1604.

[15] Indeed in the town of Bubastis dead cats are carried to a sacred edifice where they are embalmed and ceremoniously interred. Herod. book 2, c. 67.

According to Herodotus, the ancient Egyptian city of Bubastis was situated on the eastern shore of the Nile delta.

The Grand Priest Onias built a Fortress at Bubastis. Joseph, b. 7, c. 30, War of the Jews.

This City was the preferred as the sepulchre of Cats, and was one of the most renowned of Egypt. Feasts in honour of the Goddess Diana were celebrated there, and as many as sixty-thousand men and women might travel by ship for the feasts. They sailed to the sound of flutes and cymbals, and when they were about to land, the women, cried out loudly to surmmoned the inhabitants, who gathered on the bank, and joined in their dances and concerts. So they progressed to the Temple where the sacrifices were conducted with extreme magnificence. Herod. L. D. Euterp.

[16] Plutarch.

[17] When a fire broke out something akin to the supernatural took hold of the cats. The Egyptians, ignoring the fire, immediately tried to save the cat, for the cats, to tell the truth, whether from distraction or from leaping around to get away, fling themselves into the fire. When this occurs there is great lamentation among the Egyptians. Herodot. second book.

[18] Herodotus. Second book.

[19] They shave off the eyebrows. Herodot.

[20] You who harness together the fourfold chariot teams and take care of the single riding horses, shear close the manes from their necks. Euripides. Alcestis. edit. Aldi 1505

[21] Diodorus of Sicily reported that in his time a person charged with the care of one of these sacred animals spent up to nine thousand marks for its funeral rites, pag. 54.

[22] Indeed so greatly did men venerate animals, and to such lengths did everyone take this obstinate reverence, that under the circumstances even King Ptolemy's title of 'Friend of the State' was revoked by the Romans, and the common people, made apprehensive, anxiously gathered together to obsequiously honour the persons arrived from Italy and give them no cause for crime or strife. But if a cat was killed by some Roman the mob rushed to his home and neither the King's officials, sent to intercede, nor the commoners' fear of Rome could save him from retribution however much the deed might have been accidental. What we relate comes not from hearsay but from what we ourselves witnessed during our Egyptian journey. Diod. Sicul. pag. 74.

[23] As set forth in various languages, they serve up bread crumbled in milk accompanied by much tongue-clicking [Poppysmo] for their cats or fed them with shredded fish from the Nile. Diod. of Sic. p. 74.

[24] Egyptian cities were taxed to pay for an infinite number of Portraits of sacred animals, which were distributed to the Citizens. Diod. Herod.

[25] In truth this ritual has not changed appreciably, or rather the people are ashamed to deviate openly; on the contrary, as if they would furnish the gods with highest honours, they march round the cities with appropriate signs, and you can see from a distance which animals they care for by the bending of everyone's knees; in addition, the animals are honoured in other ways. Diod. of Sicily, p. 74.

[26] Peluse was formerly called Avaris, and even earlier was called Triplion, according to Manethon.

[27] Polyenus book III, Herodotus book II, Diod. of Sicily book I. Also Prideaux History of the Jews Vol. I, book 3, page 303.

LETTER THREE

Our work advances, Madame; many intelligent people have perceived its usefulness, and have assisted me with their ideas; seriously, I fear that the Lady of the day before yesterday did not faint in good faith: it is no longer fashionable to do anything but play at certain fears, so soon enough no one will think of being afraid of Cats. Women scarcely adopt anything ridiculous unless it carries some pleasing quality; their vanity is in this regard is rather more sensitive than our own.

But will it be enough for us to see the antipathy for Cats disappear? Should not all eyes be open to their merit?

Will you never return, Astraea's happy age?

Those days of peace and pleasure, drunk on joy,

Where, love once sworn and given sway,

Reigned in the heart, forever and anon;

And where the tender, cherished wife

Knew no sweeter spell than that

Of passing all her happy life

Between her bridegroom and her Cat.[1]

But, Madame, let's not be held back by too flattering ideas, let's move on to some of the historical truths which we still have to express.

The Arabs adored a golden Cat;^[2] they had so great an opinion of Cats that they could never bring themselves to believe in an origin similar to that of other animals. They singled out the cat in a fable which soon acquired the authority of history among them. According to this fable, the Rats, multiplied in the Ark and devoured the food of the other animals without restraint. Noah resolved to destroy them, and finding himself near the Lion, he gave him a slap in the face. This slap made the Lion sneeze; he sneezed out a beautiful Cat, the first Cat who came to make war on the Mice.^[3]

This marvellous event was, as you see, Madame, was only poorly developed by the Arabian Author; he never explained what prompted Noah to choose to slap the Lion; but fortunately we find this same Fable rendered more clearly in one of the Persian Letters. This is how it is told. Out of the Pig's nose came a Rat which went about gnawing everything that in front of him. This became so unbearable to Noah that he thought it advisable to consult God again. He was ordered to give the Lion a great blow on the forehead, making the beast sneeze a cat out of its nose. ^[4]

The events of this Fable, fortunately restored by the Author of the Persian Letters, prove with what choice and delicacy he felt the exact touches for putting the true niceties into a work; and this fragment of the history of Cats probably contributed a great deal to the success of a book so generally applauded. And the Persians, Madame (we know that they were an enlightened people) can we believe they did not hold Cats in high esteem? We have only to read what happened during the reign of one of their most illustrious kings. He was called Hormus. Quiet in the midst of peace, this Monarch learned that an army of three hundred thousand men commanded by his kinsman, Prince Shabe-Shah, was invading his Empire. He assembled his Ministers, and while he deliberated on such a pressing contingency, a venerable old man presented himself, and spoke thus: King, the Army of the Rebel can be destroyed in a single day. You have in your Realm the Hero to whom this victory is reserved. You will know him among your Captains by a distinction as rare as it is to his advantage; but in order not to appear suspicious in what I propose, I must remind you of the services I gave to your illustrious father, King Nuchirvan. It was to me that this Monarch entrusted the task of asking for one of his daughters in marriage from the Khacan of the Turks. I was introduced into the Palace of the Princesses; they all appeared to me extremely beautiful, I would indeed have been at a loss to decide had I believed that beauty alone should determine my choice; but I wanted it to be the qualities of the heart and spirit that tipped the scales. I asked Khakhan for the liberty of remaining at his Court for some time in order to become acquainted with the character of his daughters the Princesses. They all showed an equal eagerness to become the King of Persia's wife. I secretly examined the various tricks each played to induce me into giving her the preference. Only one (the one who has become the Queen your mother) and this one alone, I say, used nothing but the same manner which she had always kept; this was a great sweetness in her character, and

the same relish for her duties, a certain charm in her spirit that made her loved by all who approached her. After all, to fix my choice, she did not try to appear other than she was. I thought I recognized by this mark the true quality of virtue. I asked for her in the name of my King, and her father, the Emperor, following the custom of his Realm, had the Princess' horoscope cast by the most able Astrologers before her departure: They all agreed on one circumstance: they predicted that she would bear a son who would surpass all of his Ancestors in fame; that this Prince would be attacked by one of the Kings of Turkestan, over whom he would obtain a complete victory if he were fortunate enough to find one of his subjects who had the countenance of a wild Cat.

This story finished, the old man who had the Science of the Sages, disappeared in a flash.

The King now thought only of finding the hero who was destined to save his Realm. The old man had not given his name, nor any information as to where he lived; but the fortunate likeness to a Cat quickly made him recognise the person of Baharam, nicknamed Kounin. He came from the Princes of Rei's line, and governed the Province of Adherbigan at the time.[5] Hormus urged him to take the command of his army, and was marvellously surprised when Baharam chose only twelve thousand men to fight the three hundred thousand rebels; this troop, animated by the admirable omen of their general's countenance, conquered the enemy army. With his own hand Baharam slew Prince Shabe-Shah, and took his son prisoner, therefore the victory most worthy of illustrating Persia can be considered as the work of Cats. When Sennacherib,[6] King of the Arabs and Assyrians, lost the famous battle against the King of Egypt, would he have experienced this great reversal of fortune had he taken the precaution of having Cats in his army? He was camped near Peluse, when one night rural Rats, fell upon his camp, gnawing the bows and the staps that secured the shields. Sethon,[7] who reigned in Egypt at the time, and who had only a handful of soldiers, attacked Sennacherib's troops at that point, who without arms had no means other than flight or captivity. Had the King of the Assyrians been seconded by some Cats, he would have conquered Egypt.

If not all celebrated Historians have also endeavored to record the marvellous events occasioned by the Cats, we at least find that they generally all have a marked esteem for them. Lucian, in his Dialogue of the Assembly of Gods, examining the animals honoured in Egypt, ridicules the Monkeys, Baboons, and Sphinxes, but he maintains a respectful silence towards the Cats. This restraint in a cynical Philosopher can only be regarded as a veritable eulogy; and this is not the only occasion where Cats have been treated with great respect. Among the Romans, Dogs were never allowed to enter the Temples of Hercules;[8] the sacrifice would have been interrupted, and the mysteries profaned. Those who had made this law had doubtless foreseen that Cats, who by their agility could make their way into places forbidden to Dogs, could easily find a way into these Temples,[9] as Cats are never mentioned in this law of exclusion.

What more obvious proof that the presence of Cats was regarded favourably in the most august assemblies? We have already shown them in the place of honour at Egyptian feasts, eating, and

delighting the table by the charm of their voices. This circumstance of their triumph, which may seem most difficult to believe, finds however a clear enough proof in what Plutarch[10] says on the subject of Cicadas, which he calls Musicians. He claims that they were esteemed as such by Pythagoras; and that it was because of their music that he forbade anyone to allow swallow's nests to remain on the houses, because those birds ate Cicadas. We will not dispute the point, I believe that Pythagoras was the most delicate connoisseur of music that Antiquity had.

Whoever hears the Music of the Spheres, who feels that Planet Earth produces by its movement an exact third or octave with the sound formed by the Planet Venus, must be believed when he declares that Cicadas are Musicians; and in good faith, if their song is melodious, he would have to be very ill-disposed to deny Cats[11] the same advantage. We admit that the voice of Cats is more strident; and, besides, we more clearly distinguish the variety and design of their song; it is so simple and so agreeable that children who have just left the cradle remember it and find pleasure imitating it. But we have, Madame, in a party given at the Court of Louis XI, a music beside which a concert of Cats becomes the simplest thing in the world. They had the idea of performing an Opera of an entirely new sort before this Prince; it consisted only of Pigs, and it was very successful.[12] After this example, we would blush, as you may well judge, Madame, to continue to support approval of the music of Cats. Those who are not sensitive to it can only blame the little care they have taken to cultivate their taste.

Hermes Trismegistus discovered first in Egypt that the three parts of Music had a considerable relation to the seasons of the year: that the treble resembled Summer, the bass Winter, and the middle range the Spring;[13] we did not expect these resemblances. Music has a number of characteristics which only present themselves when one is quite determined to discover them; we still have confused ideas about the qualities expressed in the voices of Cats. It is to be hoped that one day a new Trismegistus will make them understandable, and make their nicety and their beauty known; perhaps this curious knowledge is not so far removed as one might think. A man of our times, to whom we owe some very pleasant poems,[14] has made himself even more commendable by his study of the Language of Cats,[15] a satisfying study and one which is happily successful in that he understands exactly what the different inflections of their voices express; and what is admirable is that to acquire this ability you need only once listen to a recitation of this Dialogue he composed, where two Lovers converse. Here, Madame, is this charming scene; it loses much if it is only read, though it was written with elegance and precision; the manner of declaiming Cat-fashion, as he does, gives it a complete air of realism. The scene is the kitchen fireplace.

The She-cat, watching the spit go round and is washing her face: That's nice.

The Tomcat catching sight of the She-cat, approaches her timidly: Are you doing anything?

The She-cat gives him only a half-glance: Ohn.

The Tomcat says in passionate tones: Are you doing anything?

The She-cat, modestly: Oh nothing much.

The Tomcat, piqued: I dreamed it then.

The She-cat, softening: No-o

The Tomcat appearing to move away: I dreamed it then.

The She-cat, sheepishly: Go upstairs, (louder) Go upstairs.

Together they run up the stairs.

Let's go upstairs (louder) let's go upstairs.

The two Lovers quickly arrive on the roof; and the scene ends with amorous outcries, interspersed with those naive expressions used in our older Romances, and which the delicacy of the century has banished from the Works.

I have the honour to be, etc.

Footnotes to the Third Letter

[1] Plato's depiction of the golden age under Saturn lists one of the principal advantages of men at that time as their communication with animals. They introduced themselves to each animals and made inquiries, coming to understand the true qualities, and acquiring a most perfect intelligence, and leading much longer and happier lives than we could know how to lead. Montagne chap. 12, pag. 210.

[2] In the city of Nabata a golden Cat was worshipped by the Arabs. Plin. book VI. cap. XXIX. de Fele sive catto animal.

[3] According to the Genharime, Murtadi, a Resident of the Arabian city of Tybe, in 1584 prepared a Treatise on the wonders of Egypt. This was translated into French by Valtier in 1665, and it is from this Treatise that this tradition is taken.

[4] In this letter, entitled Ottoman Tradition, the spirit of Japhet speaks and is interrogated by the Jew Ibesalon.

[5] Or Medea.

[6] Bibliotheque Orientale, cites Kondemire,

[7] Sethon, Priest of Vulcan, succeeded blind Anysis. Anysis was dethroned at the start of his reign by an Ethiopian named Sabach, who after coming to the throne showed only the virtues of a true Monarch. Having been wamed in a dream his safety would necessitate gathering together all the Priests of Egypt and cutting them in half at the waist, he preferred to relinquish the Crown and

return it to Egypt rather than to keep it by performing such an inhuman act. After Sabach's abdication, Anysis reascended the throne and, upon his death, was succeeded by Sethon. Herod.

[8] The Priest of Jupiter, called the Flamen Dial, was forbidden from having any Dog in his house, and equally forbidden to say the creature's name, because, says Plutarch, the Dog is a naturally violent and quarrelsome animal. L. des Demand. des Chos. Romaines.

[9] The Greeks were careful to bar Dogs from their Sacrifices of Purification, a custom which they called Peryscylacism. Plutarch in Romul. pag. 37, Amyot's translation.

[10] Because there was a Temple to Diana on the Acropolis, and also on the Isle of Delos which was sacred to her, no Dogs were allowed in those places, because dogs indecently couple in public. Plutarch liv. des propos de table.

[11] Cats are so happily constituted for Music that they are the soul of a Concert, even after their death. The Violin is the most agreeable of all the Instruments: the First String of the Violin is the most sonorous and the most moving, and the best of these are made of Catgut.

[12] Louis XI one day requested the Abbé de Baigne, a ver clever man and an inventor of new things (where musical instruments were concerned) who was in his service, to create something harmonious out of Pigs, believing that no-one would ever be able to do this. Undismayed, the Abbé de Baigne asked him for money to do it with, and this was delivered to him without delay. The Abbe devised something as peculiar as anyone had ever seen. A great number of pigs of various ages were assembled under a velvet-covered tent or pavilion in front of which was a wooden table painted with a number of keys and resembling an organ. As he touched those keys they made little barbs prick the Pigs. This made them squeak and grunt in such order and harmony that the King and his companions were pleased by it. Bouchet. Annales d'Aquitaine, fol. 164.

[Note: This appears to be a porcine version of the Katzenklavier where cats were made to mew or cry out in turn by similar means.]

[13] Diodorus of Sicily, book I, pag. 7.

[14] Monsieur Hauterot.

[15] Aesop understood the Language of Crows and of Jays. Plutarch livre du Banq. des sept Sages.

LETTER FOUR

Alexander and the Caesars^[1] saw Cities eager to bear their names; Cats enjoy the same glory.

Near Paphos which, without regard for Poetry, has changed its name to that of Bafa, is a famous Cape at the tip of the Isle of Cyprus called the Cape of She-cats, and it is with justice that their memory is highly honoured there. We see there the ruins of a Monastery whose monks formerly

kept a great number of Cats to make war on the Serpents that laid waste to the country;[2] and these cats were so well disciplined that at the sound of a certain bell they all returned to the Abbey at mealtimes, and afterwards went back to the countryside, where they continued their hunt with zeal and admirable skill.[3] When the Turks conquered this island the cats were all destroyed along with the Monastery: changes of rulership always involve great disasters.

It was only in the sixteenth century that we finally possessed any of that breed of Cats so beloved in the Levant.[4] I have carefully researched the evidence of their establishment in France, and the details of the different branches which have been spread here; but in order to better illustrate the history of this house I have prepared this genealogy. I send it to you, Madame; please inform me if the style seems sufficiently clear to you, and sufficiently well ordered.

Historical Genealogy Illustrating the House of Brinbelle, Originally from Asia.

Brinbelle, first of that name, was born in Constantinople in the 1101st year of the Hegira, equivalent to the year 1699 of our era, first married the favorite Cat of the Grand Seigneur. After losing this husband, she embarked on a journey to France, and gave birth in the ship to two posthumous She-cats. She married a second time in Paris, to Marmotin on the May 1st, 1700; and her third wedding was on August 17th, 1704, to the famous Ratillon d'Austrazie.

The heroic conduct she kept after the revolutions that happened in the sex of her third husband, will make her famous as long as there are She-cats in the world. This event is dealt with in great detail in the following letter:

Litter 1: Brinbelle II and Manon I

Having been sent to the country without her confession, she became fiercely depressed, and no longer deigned to interact with men. She eventually reappeared, however, with the same sweetness of character that she had been known for. She brought with her two young kittens, her children, whose father is unknown; and seeing that they were welcomed, and satisfied at their establishment, she returned to her lonely country. These beautiful kittens were named the two Arreopagites, because of their serious demeanour and their measured behaviour.

Arreopagite the Elder, and Arreopagite Cadet - Their character is very amiable, though rather cold at first. They are only at ease with their true friends; but then they have the most engaging ways in the world.

Litter 2: The Grand Rouroux (Great Red)

Litter 3: The Grand Blanblanc (Great White)

Neither one of these had any posterity, due to the perfidy of the traitor, Chaudronier.

Remarks: I considered it necessary to set down this genealogy in imitation of those of the People of the Indies, who trace their descent through the female line the lines of descent are more accurate, and moreover it is a She-cat who is the source of this admirable line of Asiatic Cats in France.

Note. - In this Genealogy of Brinbelle, the date of her arrival in France is false, those of the births of her illustrious children are also false; apart from this, the genealogy is extremely faithful.

The renown of Cats is spread throughout the Orient; in Constantinople they are treated with the same consideration as the children of a household. We need see only the foundations established by highly-placed people for the care of Cats who choose to live in independence. There are open houses where they are courteously received, where an expensive table is set for them, and where they can spend the nights; and if these dwellings are situated somewhere that does not suit the health of any of them, they can choose another refuge, there being a great number of these establishments in almost all the cities.[5] The oldest writing about Cats have among the Turks is a tradition connected to the history of Mahomet; it is certainly the most beautiful episode of his life. He cherished his Cat so greatly that one day, when he was consulted upon a point of Religion, he preferred to cut off the trim of his sleeve, which it was resting on, rather than wake it up when he went to speak to the person waiting for him.[6]

Let us return to this great passion that Asians have for Cats. Some may object that it is only the result of superstition. The example of Mahomet, it will be said, is the only motive; but, to show the fallacy of this reasoning, we need only refer to history.

Mahomet, among all his followers, had the most intimate confidence for Abdorraham and wished to honour him by giving him a shining nickname. It was Arab custom to be called the father of something connected with your manners or talents; this was how Chalid, Mahomet's host during his journey from Medina, acquired the name Abujob – Father of Job - because of his extreme patience. Among Abdorraham's most esteemed qualities, Mahomet judged it impossible to draw a more honourable nickname than that reflecting his attachment to a Cat that he always carried in his arms. He therefore gave him the excellent nickname of Abuhareira, i.e. Father of the Cat.[7]

Mahomet then, in the first stages of his seduction, weighed all his demands; he was too astute to name a Disciples to whom he wished to give authority Father of the Cat, unless Cats were regarded in high esteem by the Arabs. The effect that proper names produce in our imagination surely give us reason to believe that, in all Countries, there has always been an idea of elevation or degradation attached to those proper names? It doubtless would have been a great oddity in Mecca and Medina to call himself Father of Pigs, since these animals were proscribed by the Koran.[8]

An Oriental tradition of the origin of cats seems to have escaped the researches of different travellers, but it seems to me to be more important than any of those just reported, being plausible in its circumstances. I have it from a Mulla,[9] who accompanied in France the late Ambassador of the Porte. Here is this tradition:

During the first days that the animals spent shut up in the Ark, astonished by the ship's movements and by the new home they found themselves in, they all remained in their separate quarters without finding out much their animal neighbours. The Monkey was the first to get bored of this sedentary life; he proceeded to tease a young Lioness in his neighbourhood. This example caught on universally and a spirit of coquetry spread throughout the Ark and lasted throughout the voyage and, among some animals, even when back on dry land. An astonishing number of infidelities occurred between the different species, resulting in the birth of previously unknown animals.[10] The affair between the Monkey and the Lioness resulted in the birth of two Cats, one male and one female, who, in marked difference to the other animals born of the gallantries that went on in the Ark, were born with the faculty of reproducing their own species.

All the nations of Asia are full of traditions that glorify Cats, even among the Indians where the Brahmins, those first Philosophers, have long maintained a high reputation, we see in their works of Philosophy a parallel drawn between Brahmins and Cats. I have discovered in this respect an authentic enough fragment of the history of the Gods of India; it is a handwritten manuscript which is in the hands of a person known for great wit and profound erudition.[11]

A Fragment from the History of the Gods of India - The Cat, The Brahmin, and The Penitent.

An Indian king named Salamgam had at his Court a Brahmin[12] and a Penitent,[13] both famous for their virtuousness. Between them there arose between them a rivalry and a dissension which often resulted in many marvellous events.

One day, as these illustrious Champions disputed before the King over which of them was most virtuous, the Brahmin, outraged at seeing the Penitent share the Court's esteem with him, declared loudly that his own virtue was so acceptable before the God Parabaravarastou, who in India is King of the First Order of Divinities, that he could instantly and at will transport himself into any of the seven Heavens to which the Indians aspire. The Penitent took the Brahmin at his word; and the King, whom they had chosen to judge their disputes, ordered him to proceed to the Heaven of Devendiren,[14] and to bring back from it a flower from the Parisadam tree, whose mere odour conveys immortality.

The Brahmin bowed deeply to the King, rose upwards, and disappeared in a flash. The Court waited in astonishment, but did not doubt that the Brahmin would lose the wager. The Heaven of Devendiren had never been accessible to mortals. It is the residence of forty-eight million Goddesses, whose husbands are one hundred and twenty-four million Gods, of whom Devendiren is Sovereign; and the flower Parisadam, of which he is extremely jealous, is the chief delight of his Heaven.

The Penitent took great care to point out all these difficulties, and was already applauding the impending shame of his rival, when the Brahmin suddenly reappeared with the famous flower which he could only have picked in the gardens of the God Devendiren. The King and the whole Court fell to their knees in admiration, and the Brahmin's virtue was exalted to the highest degree. Only the Penitent refused to give tribute. 'King,' he said, 'and you, too easily deceived Court, you regard the Brahmin's access to the Heaven of Devendiren as a great marvel. It is only the work of a common virtue; understand that I send my Cat there whenever I please, and that Devendiren receives it with all sorts of friendliness and distinctions.' Without waiting for a reply, he made his Cat 'Patripatan' appear and said a word in its ear. The cat rose up, and in full sight of the rap Court, was lost in the clouds, pierces through them into the Heaven of Devendiren, who took him in his arms, and gave him a thousand caresses.

Up to that point, the Penitent's project went marvellously; but the favourite Goddess of Devendiren was struck, as though by a thunderbolt, with such a fancy for the amiable Patripatan that she was determined to keep him.

Devendiren, to whom the Cat had first explained the subject of his embassy, opposed this. He argued that Patripatan was awaited with impatience at the Court of King Salamgam; that the Cat had left there risking the reputation of a Penitent, and that the greatest affront one could do to anyone was to steal his Cat. The Goddess would not listen, and all that Devendiren could get from here was a promise that she would only keep Patripatan for two or three centuries, after which she would faithfully return it to the awaiting Court. Salamgam, however, was becoming impatient when the cat did not return, and only the Penitent kept his composure. Eventually they waited for three whole centuries without any inconvenience except impatience, for the Penitent, by the power of his Virtue, prevented anyone from growing old.

When this time had elapsed, the skies suddenly became beautiful and from a thousand-coloured cloud emerge a throne formed of various flowers from the Heaven of Dvendiren. The Cat was sitting majestically upon this throne, and when he arrived in front of the King he presented to him, with his charming paw, an entire branch of the tree bearing the flower of Parisadam. The whole Court proclaimed his victory and the Penitent was universally congratulated, but the Brahmin, in his turn,

dared to dispute the Penitent's triumph. He argued that the virtue of the Penitent had not achieved this great success on its own, and that everyone knew of the great liking which Devendiren and his favourite Goddess had for Cats, and that doubtless Patripatan, in this marvellous adventure, deserved at least half the glory. The King, struck by this judicious reflection, dared not decide between the Penitent and the Brahmin, but all opinions were united in admiration for Patripatan, and after this event the illustrious Cat was the delight of the Court, and dined each evening seated on the Monarch's shoulder. Believe it well, Madame.

I have the honour to be, etc.

Footnotes to the Fourth Letter

[1] Alexandria in Egypt, and Cefaree in Cappadocia , etc

[2] Debrevés. Voyages in Levant.

[3] Villamont, in the account of his voyages, reports all the events of Cape Delle gatte in even more detail. He says: The Serpents of this Island are white and black in colour and at least seven feet long, and as great around as a man's leg; it was difficult for me to believe that a Cat should be victorious over such a huge beast, and that they should have the industry to go hunting for them, and not return until the midday bell is sounded, and that when they finish dining they should continue the hunt until evening, except that a monk assured me that he has witnessed this, and it has been confirmed for me by many persons who have also witnessed it.

[4] Voyages in Levant by M. de Tournéfort, of the Academy of Science: "The Cats of the Levant - he says in this same account - are no more beautiful than our own, and those beautiful slate-coloured Cats are quite scarce there. They are brought there from the Island of Malta ", and to declare that these Cats are not beautiful and that they are infinitely pleasing is to praise enough, and accords them that certain *je ne sais quoi*.

Corneille le Brun in his tour of the Levant also reports all the details of the good treatment given there to Cats . He mentions this with regret and, therefore, cannot be suspected of embellishing his account: "The Cat - he says - whose good qualities, if it has any, are nothing compared with those of the Dog (who is the most faithful of all the beasts), is considered a perfect animal by the Turks. They are very kind to the cats that live in their houses, while the poor Dogs are obliged to lie in the streets." That is to say, "they flatter the Cats, they caress them, they display them in front of their shops as is the custom in Venice and else where." Corneille le Brun condemns the general taste of a voluptuous nation, who, sequestered in the bosoms of their families, prefer to occupy themselves with only pleasing objects, and pass their lives with Cats. This Traveller, I say, established a most important truth to the glory of the very Cats he disdains. The greatest eulogies are the ones wrested from one's enemies. We see that this man, whom we esteem in various other regards, has in no way developed his taste through his travels; he left with a hatred of Cats and he returned with the same unjustified prejudice.

Rarely, roving the world over // Makes one a better man.

[5] M. de Tournefort. Id.

[6] Prideaux, Vie de Mahomet, pag. 227 and 228. He reports by the authority of Elmacin and Bochart.

[7] Socrates regarded as the first evidence of a father's prudence the giving of beautiful names to his children. Montagne said on this subject: A Gentleman, my neighbour, considering the benefhs oj the old days, did notforget to take account oj the pride éL magnificence of the names oj the Nobility in those times, Dom Grumedan, Quadragan, Argesilan, <et_ he who heard them would sense, by their sound alone, that they were indeed différent peoplejrom Pierre, Guillot et_ Michel, pag. 472, book I.

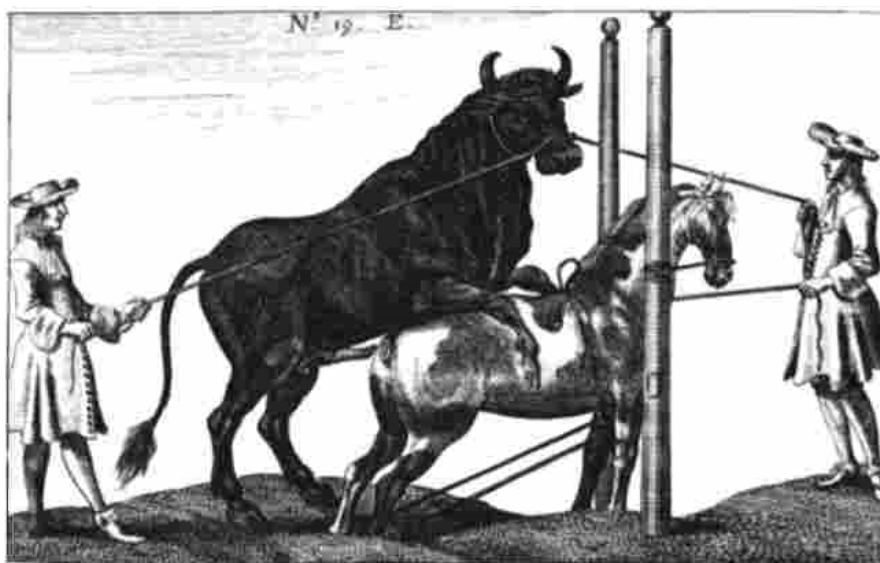
[8] In the Chapter of the Tablet Mahomet declares Pigs to be unclean.

[9] Mulla - a Minister of Religion.

[10] Mules, Jumarts and others.

[Note on jumarts: Jean Léger wrote: "The Jumart is the least known of the domestic animals that live in the southern provinces ... it is sufficient to prove the existence of jumarts, to show that the animals to which this name was given were neither mules nor hinnies, nor individual varieties in the style of oxen. It will not be difficult."

According to Georg Simon Winter von Adlersflügel's Stuterey (Stud Management) in 1703: "Keep the bull in a darkened stall, accustom him to wearing a rope halter and feed him well. Also rub him frequently with the same grooming powder used for stallions. Keep him this way for a few months, leading him about regularly by his halter (at night), and each day, use a sponge to rub him well under his nose with the scent of a mare in heat. Then, on a quiet night, lead him to the mare and make him cover her. We emphasise that this must be repeated until the mare conceives, at which time one need no longer lead him to her. In addition, place the mare in a ditch dug in the ground and restrain her head between posts so that the bull can easily mount her. One should also cover her head so that she will not see the bull."



After Moncrief's time, in 1815, Mr. de Villeneuve-Bargemont, prefect of the department of Lot-et-Garonne, member of the Society of Agriculture, Sciences and Arts of Agen, in his work "Travels in the Valley of Barcelonnette, Department of Basses-Alpes" the jumart is common in this region and is greatly appreciated because it combines the strength of the ox with the patience and sober nature of the donkey; it is born from mating a bull to a donkey which are locked up in the same stable at night." (Letter XII)]

[11] M. Freret of the Academie des belles Lettres.

[12] The Brahmins are the highest rank in India; they are the keepers of Philosophy and Religion.

[13] The Penitents, in Indian mythology, are equivalent to the Heroes in Greek mythology; the Penitents, though mortal, sometimes engage in trials of strength with the Gods. See the Letters of Father du Hald. Delon l'Histoire des Bramines et others.

[14] The Indians believe in many Heavens where one enjoys different degrees of voluptuousness, according to the virtues which one has practised in the world.

LETTER FIVE

Cats, Madame, are suspected of having a penchant for harm; how little we understand them! It takes only one stroke of the pencil to apologise; this trait which will prove their gentleness and good nature is much to the shame of men, but it is a question of justifying innocence; we could not hide anything. Let us make an effort, Madame. Let us carefully consider Cats at the moment of an outrage [castration] which we dare to do to their persons through the barbarous ministry of Boilermakers; before the perfidy takes place. A Cat, seduced by the caresses of a man whom he wished to have as his master, finds himself in the hands of an enemy. He finally escapes. He is outraged. He always has his claws, whose attacks have been exaggerated, but haughty contempt becomes his sole vengeance. He is content to flee those men who so inhumanely betrayed him, but is soon overcome by his unfortunate inborn inclination towards their company so he returns, and as his only reproach he shows them that taciturnity and languour in which he spends the rest of his life.

Monsieur de Benserade's rhyming sonnet is an admirable picture of the noble anguish of Cats when they have experienced the horrors of mutilation [castration]. The Cat of Madame Deshoullieres is the hero of this tragic adventure.

I never say a word and I look good

But make bad sport since that unhappy day

When my ability to love was cut away,
The finest flower of cat-dom's lost manhood.
Thus Moricault must now complain and rage
Against the hand which did him such a turn,
That made him cold where once his ardour burned,
He once was busy, but is now a joker made;
No longer brave, he's now a coward and a fool;
Who lurks among the chimneys of the roof;
Once talented in realms of sweet romance
It makes his Seraglio so heartily enraged
To see him reduced to this sad and slothful state -
One cut has made the knight lay down his lance.

Don't try to tell us that Cats do not understand the price of this attribute that we believe (being tyrants) we have the right to rob from them. It is only men that can sustain such affronts without blushing. In ancient times a Priest of Cybele,[1] who in his delirium was, so to speak, separated from himself, reappeared in society with more confidence and esteem. Today a child given as tribute is proud of the misery that will give him access to the interior of his Sultan's Palace; he is congratulated for that shameful route into his master's favour. A mutilated Cat not only feels all the weight of his privation, but in the eyes of other Cats he becomes a defective creature and this exempts them from all obligations to him; they offer him a hundred insults; they overwhelm him with outrages. It is a common error that the female Cats keep up this hatred, but this false conviction is only a result of the ignorance of the common man regarding that which happens in the roof gutters. If anyone had bothered to write the memoirs of the famous Cat of the Hotel de Guise, whose genealogy is laid down in the preceding letter, certainly no further evidence would be needed to establish that it is the Toms alone who dare to abuse the misfortune of their mutilated colleagues; at the same time, the writer would make known the loving affection and the delicacy a female cat is capable of.

The lovely Brinbelle, as we have already explained, became the wife of d'Austrasie in her third marriage; never did spouses feel such a lively and lasting love for each other. They mutually fell in love at first sight, and this way of uniting has many charms.

A love that must one day be born

It would not be too soon to form;
Let's both start by loving one another,
It's the sweetest way to get to know each other!

Our Cats loved each other from the first meeting, and the more they knew of each other, the more they loved each other. There was not a single roof where they did not demonstrate a union so worthy of envy and meow (if I dare to steal this agreeable turn of speech from M. de Voiture [2]) their mutual love. A neighbour of rather savage manners, did not enjoy their lovers' talk interrupting his sleep, so he lured the young Tomcat with feigned caresses, and set snares that a cooler-blooded Cat would have discerned, but he allowed himself to be caught.

Love, Love, when we are in your hands,
We might as well say farewell to prudence.[3]

Thus he fell into his enemy's hands, who in his fury makes him another Atys [a castrated high priest of Cybele –subject of Louis XIV's favourite tragic opera]. Imagine the sorrow of the loving Minette when she discovered this mystery of inhumanity. Do not imagine that our modern Heloise behaved like the wife of Abailard, regretting the well-being that her husband could no longer provide her.

The heart does all, the rest is useless.

M. de la Fontaine seems to have said this expressly for the glory of our Cat. In vain did a host of lovely and willing She-cats offer him their attentions, which they considered the surest consolation he could receive.

Nothing could shake her faithfulness. Heloise consented to shut herself in a cloister whose austerity allowed her no chance to be unfaithful to her Abailard. Our Cat, more sure of herself and more attached to her Lover, did not force herself to be virtuous; she maintained her complete liberty, and employed it to remain faithful.

Not for a moment did she lose sight of that dear Cat; and while others of her species were very fastidious regarding the perfection of their fellows, outrageously treating those who, like him, are so to speak separated from their being, she fearlessly defended him. She was seen a hundred times

unsheathing her claws against the persecutors of her adored Cat, between whose paws she deliciously passed the rest of her life.[4]

Admit, Madame, that ever since there have been Lovers there are few models so pure in passion, or such good examples. We often hear that the topics of Tragedy are exhausted. Why not make recourse to events as impressive as these, and which took place before our eyes ? What a dramatic poem we might compose upon the generous loves we have just described? If, for fear of strangeness, we dare not put our Heroes on the stage in their natural form (which, in my opinion, would produce an admirable effect) it would be simple to produce them under Greek names. Have we not, in the decadent days of the Eastern Empire, a large number of well-known personages who experienced the same misfortune of the Tomcat of the Hotel de Guise? This circumstance, which might form the crux of the piece, would thus be linked to history; but I always come back to the thought that the picture would be much more interesting if we represented the subject in its original simplicity: we are so accustomed to only seeing men upon the stage, and it would be a piquant novelty in the theatre, and would doubtless be a great success.

We have discussed the fidelity of She-cats. What more glorious proof for them than the sympathy they have for their husbands, and which so many naturalists have recognized! When he dies while they are full, to use the vulgar term, whether or not they understand this loss, a revolution takes place within them that makes them immediately miscarry.

And those loud cries that She-cats make at night in the upper part of our Cities, the vulgar regard these as purely mechanical clamours. The Ancients are divided on that viewpoint. One has claimed that it is the effect of the claws of the Tomcat, embraces her too violently in his excessive zeal;[5] another imagines it the result of another amatory cause,[6] but it is difficult to conceive how we might learn which. It turns the She-cat into Semele, and the Tomcat into Jupiter; but the true origin of these cries is the result of a prudent She-cat who had a grand passion in her heart.

Here is the most generally accepted opinion on the subject of the exclamations of She-cats; the one I have just spoken of was in rendezvous with a Cat whom she loved to distraction. Those who follow ancient Philosophy claim that it was the precise moment when her Lover triumphed over her weakness . It is true that this belief is founded upon the opinion of Aristotle,[7] who maintains that She-cats, being more temperamental than Toms, far from having the strength to hold their austerity any longer, are eternal flirts – shameless, incautious, immodest, to the point of violence, if the Tom’s ardour seems to be failing.

Be that as it may, a Mouse appeared, and here our gallant takes off in pursuit of it. The piqued She-cat, as you may well imagine, thought of an expedient so she never again experienced such an

affront; this was to shriek from time to time whenever she tete-a-tete with her lover. These cries never failed to carry a long distance to frighten away the mice, which no longer dared come and disturb their rendezvous. This precaution appeared so wise and so loving to all the other She-cats that ever since then, whenever they are with their favourite Tomcat they affect to spread these clamours - the certain scarecrow against the mousely species. My Goodness, how happy women would be if they needed nothing but this expedient to prevent their lovers being distracted from their company.

I have the honour to be, etc.

Footnotes to the Fifth Letter

[1] Among the Greeks and Romans, Cybela had Priests who consecrated themselves to her mysteries by renouncing their Sex; they were called Galles. One the day of their initiation, from the time that the sound of flutes began to sound out, many of the assistants were seized by a frenzy, then the young man to be initiated threw off his garments, uttered great cries and seized a knife; he himself achieved the dishonour of his body, a sacrifice that brought him great praises. He was conducted in triumph through the whole city, carrying in his hands the proof of his mutilation. *Fastes d'Ovide*. Lucian. Plutarch.

[2] .. . And every night // For you my crying soul mews out its plight.

[3] M. de la Fontaine, *The Amorous Lion*. Fable to Mademoiselle de Sevigné.

[4] The attachment of Psyche for her lover was not so disinterested as that of our Cat for hers; all her regrets are not falling upon the heart of that lover when she says:

Though I still will not know half of your charms // I've seen them all // I have seen all the weapons // That make you victorious. I. La Fontaine, *Love of Psyche*.

[5] Pliny records certain particulars regarding the conduct of Cats in their amours. Cats, he says, copulate by the male standing over and the female thrown underneath.

[6] Among Cats the male is the most lecherous, the female, in truth, the most affectionate to her young; wherefore she avoids copulation with the male, whereupon he most passionately like a blazing fire expels his seed and hence burns up the female's genital parts, etc. *Elian*, lib. 6, cap. 27.

[7] Moreover the female cats, etc. are themselves naturally lecherous and salacious, therefore, they themselves call the males to mate with them; encouraging and compelling them, even punishing them if by chance they do not surrender. *De Mirabilib.* tom. I, pag. 1166.

LETTER SIX

In examining moral axioms, we discover that those which have a proverbial form are the most generally established in the mind;[1] but that what is good in the praise of Cats is the care with which we have had to choose them to form the central figure of most of these judicious maxims.

The Ancients gave definitions of prudence, well worthy of long being credited in men's minds; and they maintain their authority and we still we admire the person who, with unexpected imagination, said "a scalded Cat fears even cold water." Every other image has vanished to leave Cats in possession of being the perfect symbol of caution. What glory for them that their conduct obliges men to draw from Cats the wisest examples to follow! But also what a comical sight for these same Cats to see us fall again each day into the same traps whose dangers we have already experienced! A Mistress who has betrayed us a hundred times, still finds in our weakness some resources of confidence in her, which makes her more ready to commit new treason. A Cat can only be fooled once in its lifetime; it is armed with mistrust not only against whatever has wronged it, but also against everything that gives rise to the idea of being wronged. Hot water will have injured it; that is enough, it will fear cold water as well, and will always have as little as possible to do with it.

Let's not blush at this; it is on the roof-gutters that we would do well to go for education; it is there that we should find admirable examples of activity, of modesty, of noble emulation, and a hatred for sloth. When Hannibal, not allowing himself to rest, incessantly watched Scipio in order to find a favourable chance to conquer him, what model had he before his eyes? He was watching his enemy like a Cat watches a Mouse.

It is true that in the number of proverbs where Cats are principal subject, there are some that seem to exist to make them ridiculous;[3] but there is little we don't abuse! And how often has the vanity of saying a bon mot led to unjust mockery! When we wish to depict an unrestrained love which latches onto the first objects which present themselves, we commonly says that this is to run the roof-gutters, thus compromising the conduct of She-cats, without considering whether they deserve such a charge. If we have an analytical mind, should we not admit that condemning She-cats for roaming the roof-gutters is much like giving the shortcomings of a pretty woman just because she walks out on the terrace of her house? She-cats certainly never abandon precise propriety when they roam the rooftops and chimneys. It is only a matter of considering what attracts them there during men's hours of rest.[2] Is it love, you ask, that wakens them? Without a doubt. But it is the pleasure of loving, and not a maladjusted imagination, as some suppose. They are usually looking for a single favourite Cat and, moreover, when one among them has a weakness for Tomcats trying his luck, surrendering to him through vanity, there is always another she-Cat, whose reserved conduct may well be admitted in compensation. All you need do is this famous Sonnet about Madame Lesdiguieres puss-cat.

Menine of golden eyes, her fine fur grey,
Charming Menine, unique among her kind,
Loved by an illustrious Duchess, could we find
Mortals who would not envy such a destiny?
Chaste Menine who never knew a Menin;
In her time she was a feline Lucrece,
Puss-cat to the world, but to Tomcats a Tigress;
In the middle of her days her life is ending;
Does it matter now that scornful proud Menine,
Never with a rooftop roaming Tom was seen
And never listened to their amorous regrets?
From all who breathe Fate will have its due
And loving none, now withdraws the tempting fruits.
This life is sad, and on its heels comes death.

[Lucrece: Titus Lucretius Carus, Roman poet and philosopher whose only known work is the didactic philosophical poem *De rerum natura* (On the Nature of Things).]

However we have used Cats in common sayings that have become established, the result is an advantageous consequence for them. Had we not been in the habit of concerning ourselves with them, it would have been very simple to choose other animals, or else other symbols, as the centre of these proverbs. But Cats were esteemed; they could not be used to often as topics of conversation; they have been linked to moral maxims. Eh! what could be substituted in their place? How could we describe someone who knows how to get away from all embarrassing situations? It is so simple and elegant to say, he has the nature of a Cat, he always falls on his feet.

It must be admitted that this attribute, with which they are born, is most admirable. The Academy of Sciences did not consider the task of explaining how Cats do this to be a pointless study. Have the pleasure, Madame, of reading the following extract from the Memoirs of this Academy.[4]

Cats, when they fall from a height, usually fall on their feet, even when they first have their feet topmost, and should, therefore, fall on their head. It is, of course, not possible for them to turn themselves over while in mid-air, where they have no fixed point to lean against; but they are gripped by a fear which makes them bend their spine in such a way that their entrails are pushed upwards. At the same time they stretch out their head and their legs towards the place from which they fell, giving these parts greater leverage; thus their centre of gravity moves from the centre of the body, and is placed uppermost. From this it follows that these animals can make a half turn in the air, and point their paws downwards which almost always saves their lives. The finest knowledge of mechanics could do no better on this occasion than what is done through confusion and blind fear.

Madame, it seems to me that this is not too high a praise of Cats. I did not notice it myself at first glance. I was touched by pleasure that the Academy of Sciences busied itself with them. Shall we let them save themselves like fools, thanks to a confused and blind feeling? But since it is Monsieur de Fontanelle who wrote this, who should we complain to? His works have embraced all kinds of minds. He has admirers everywhere; he has the right to be wrong about Cats with impunity. Let us confine ourselves to responding that if it is only fright that serves them so well, nature has at least treated them with great distinction, making them find even in their weakness, resources for their preservation ; and that it would be very desirable for men if their own fear resembled that of Cats.

I have the honour to be, etc.

Footnotes to the Sixth Letter

[1] What are the sources of the ascendancy which proverbs have over our minds? We get our ideas either through our senses or by reflection. The ones that come from sensations, such as cold and heat, are within the scope of every mind; but the ideas that come through reflection are themselves a gathering of ideas, such as the ideas of doubt, perception, and understanding; those sorts of idea, I say, strike and interest only those who are accustomed to using their minds. Pythagoras wanted to establish how dangerous it is to awaken sleeping troubles i.e. to attack the repose of those able to avenge themselves, so he said "You must not stir the fire with a sword." And when Afranius had to describe prudence, he explained it thus: I am the daughter of Custom who engendered me in, Memory, my mother. Amiot in his Preface to Plutarch translated this in two lines: I am Prudence and Custom is my father // Who engendered me in Memory my mother. These two maxims now fall quite flat in society. We need to be able understand the entirety of the ideas underpinning them in order to comprehend their full meaning. They would make no impression among the common rabble, but if Pythagoras and Afranius had set down their definitions in terms that were within the scope of every mind, one might have said "Let sleeping cats lie," and the other might have phrased it "A scalded Cat fears even cold water." This gives two moral maxims simple enough to be equally striking to all minds.

[Note: There is, of course an English saying reflecting “You must not stir the fire with a sword” – “Stir with a knife and stir up strife.”]

[2] In order to avoid the snares of vanity which blind us even to our personal faults, we need only consider this proverb frequently: “He looks like a burnt Cat; worth less than he thinks.”

The greatest example of activity which one could set as a target is “to be up before the Cats are on their feet.”

The Magistrates never forget how much their presence is required to restrain the licence of the people, when they have learned it in the form “Where there are no Cats, the Rats walk about at their ease.” [When the Cat’s away the mice will play.] Extracted from “Illustrated new and historical proverbs, explained by various curious and moral questions that can be used by all kinds of people to entertain themselves in company.” [Illustres proverbes nouveaux et historiques, expliqués par diverses questions curieuses et morales qui peuvent servir à toute sorte de personnes pour se divertir dans les compagnies.] Tom. 2. pag. 30, 196. imp. en 1665.

[3] I call a Cat a Cat, and Rolet a Rogue. Despreaux. Sat. He is going to throw the Cat at your legs (blame it all on you) and others.

But it is necessary to remark that in these sayings, Cats are only indirectly implicated, whereas other animals are often named explicitly in the proverbs, simply and individually. We cannot be more of a Rogue than a Screech-owl, sadder than an Owl, or more cruel than a Tiger. Are we greedy? We are as as a Dog. What is the worst dinner the world? A Dog’s dinner. We might as well be a Dog if we speak badly of our Mistress. What does we do when we are the unhappiest person in the world? We runs mad like a Dog. Those madmen who go spewing ineffectual abuse against others are Dogs who bark at the Moon. In reading Works which displease us, like this one perhaps, we might be as bored as a dog. In the Iliad, when Achilles was furious at Agamemnon, he found no insult more cutting than to call him Dog-face. [Note: The explanation is incorrect. Dog-face refers to the cynocephalus i.e. the baboon.]

One commonly uses “Rominagrobis” to refer to those large Cats whose juvenile playfulness gives way to a grave and circumspect demeanour. Furthermore, this name is used to describe men who affect a serious and formal appearance.

One of the most pleasing applications of this saying is found in “Melusine” by M. Fuselier, a comedy of the new Italian Theatre which was presented with great success in 1718. Fuselier asks the difference between love and Hymen. Trivelin who replies: “Love is a little Kitten, playful, and endearing; but Hymen? Oh! Oh! that is a Rominagrobis!”

[Note: Hymen was the Greek god of marriage ceremonies, so the question was “What is the difference between love and marriage? Marriages in ancient Greece were arranged and based on business interests or family alliances, with little concern about the groom opinions and and no regard for the bride’s wishes.]

Rominagrobis is a composite of Raoul, Hermine, and Grobis, which properly signify “A Cat who plays the great Gentleman under his Ermine robe.” Remarq. sur Rabelais, liv. 3, chap. 21, page 115.

[4] If the weight of a foreign body plunged into water is greater than the weight of an equal volume of water, and if its centre of gravity has been raised up, not only must this body sink in the liquid, but it must make a half tum in sinking, because its centre of gravity must necessarily drop as low as possible, after which the body continues to sink, but without turning further. The turn is made at a point that is not equally distant from the centre of gravity and the centre of the figure, because the two forces applied are unequal.

Therefore the Cats, etc. Extr. de la Diss. de M. Parent, Mémoires de l'Académie des Sciences, annee 1700. pag. 156.

LETTER SEVEN

A marked advantage, Madame, that Cats have over other animals is their natural cleanliness. Several of the Sages of Antiquity[1] recognized, before us, the hatred Cats have for bad smell, the modesty with which they hide themselves in the moments when they answer the call of nature, and the care with which they hide from sight the results of surrendering to nature's call.[2] This etiquette (if you will permit us to call it that) is not at all the result of training them through violence and punishment, as it is in other animals, but is a gift of nature in cats. Eh! What fortunate provisions has nature not given them? When a Cat, through thoughtlessness or whim (for all societies have some defective members), say I, commits as discourtesy or a wrong, it is unnecessary to use insults or threats as a punishment. We need only call him by name, simply saying Come Here Cat. At this word he returns of his own accord, he smells his wickedness and can no longer bear the looks which have highlighted his mistake. He flees, going to the solitude of the roof-gutters to hide his shame, and to surrender to his remorse.

It is not surprising, then, to see that so many first-rate persons understand the value of association with Cats. Madame Deshoulières could not refuse her Muse the pleasure of celebrating them: A great Princess [Madame la Duchesse du Maine] has immortalized Marlamain, her illustrious Cat, in verses worthy of being engraved in the Temple of the Graces. What advantages will we not derive from this work? Let's read it again, please, Madame:

A RONDEAU IN THE STYLE OF CLÉMENT MAROT

When I wish to paint Minon, my puss,

I must use an excellent paintbrush,

To depict her kindness correctly,

And display her pretty flexibility;
But alas! a puny Poëtereau am I,
And naught can contain her sweet beauty
For even Cupid, though pleasing to the eye,
Has not the spirit of delicacy
Of my Minon.

If Jupiter should change his shape anon
He'd not choose Serpent, Bull or Swan
To touch the heart of some sweet Maid
His divine form would he exchange
For the shape and skin he would put on
Of my Minon.

THE FAREWELL

Pretty Puss, my joy and my solace,
If all your charms I wished to celebrate
I would have to recall to life the man
Who of Lesbia's sparrow sang.
Or the one who wrote exquisite psalms
To celebrate sweet Issa's charms.
But, alas! From Styx's shadowed shore,
We can evoke the famous dead no more,
So you must content yourself today.
With this Rondeau writ by love's dictates.

[Note : Poëtereau – a work by Antoine Furetière, published in 1690.]

What Heroes would not envy Cats the glory of such a eulogy? And what Muse would not be honoured to have written those verses?[3] Cats can, therefore, boast of having had the most famous persons of our century sing the praise of their illustrious personages. Those who have tried to wrong them have fallen into obscurity; a hatred of Cats is, among Authors, a mark of mediocrity – just read this quatrain by Chevalier d’Acilly.

Dear Pussy will you please recall
If you should slap our Bitch at all,
That you’ll find yourself become a muff
For our little Fanny soon enough.

That is what a vulgar spirit produces. Scarron, gifted with a fine imagination, is far from making the same mistake. We still have a fragment of it which proves again what a keen interest there is in Cats. Scarron relates an adventure which appears, I am sure you will agree with me, suitable as the subject of an excellent Comedy.

EPISTLE OF SCARON to Madame de Montatere[4]

A lady whose name, I swear, stays secret,
Because, of course, I am most discreet,
I’ll mention not the Lady’s name and age,
Not appearance, nor her parentage;
But one of her friends has told me this -
That this Lady - and that word must suffice -
Her greatest joy, her sweet obsession,
Was the tomcat in her possession.
One day, wishing for diversion
She dressed him up – what strange perversion,

With pretty tresses he was be-wigged,
With rich earrings his ears were sprigged,
And once his pretty head was dressed,
The Lady turned attention to his dress.
A jewelled necklet, at his throat to shine,
Each pearl bigger than a blackbird's eye
(I'd say a Cod-fish or Whiting,
But these fishes did not fit my writing.]

Next there came a fine white shirt,
A matching frock-coat and a skirt,
A ruff and neckerchief in the height of fashion
Transformed her tomcat, strong and dashing
Into the image of a demoiselle
Though in truth one not too beautiful;
But the Lady who embellished him
Still found the sight quite ravishing.
In front of a large mirror, she
Held him up that he might see,
But unsurprised, and unimpressed
He saw himself disguised and dressed,
And caught up in this Lady's folly
A figure of her Idolatry.
But then the second act took place
When tomcat escaped from her embrace,
And paying no heed to hurt or harm,

He fled full speed from his Mistress' arms,
The good Cat quickly gained the stairs,
Up to the attic, and from there,
The safety of the roof-tiles made,
While down below his Mistress prayed.
Imploring of her household servants
To retrieve him, her tones most fervent.
But in the country of the roof-tiles,
Where tomcats exercise their cunning wiles,
They vainly that feisty fellow followed
As he fled them in finery borrowed.
Next day, from a neighbour, I received
This tale which at first I'd not believed,
And though stunned at sights upon the roof
There were others who confirmed its truth.
The angry cat has not returned,
His Lady's embraces forever spurned,
Her own rage was not for the collar's cost,
But for the beloved Tomcat she had lost.

[Paul Scarron (1610-1660) was a French poet, dramatist, and novelist.]

[Of pearls, each larger than a blackbird's eye // I'd say a Cod-fish or Whiting, // But these fishes did not fit my rhyming – a blackbird is 'merle,' which rhymed with 'perle,' while 'merlan' is a whiting (fish).]

It appears from this adventure that Cats do not like to perform for others; anything to do with subservience appears to be repugnant to their inborn independence. A few days ago, Monsieur de Fontenelle related that, as a child, he had a Cat which kept him greatly amused. You may well believe, Madame, that I very carefully made not of this fact, hoping to conclude from it the natural consequence that a childhood love of Cats could be seen as a predictor of superior merit. We have,

moreover, proof that this same taste continues still when a child reaches the age of reason and is compatible with even the most serious occupations. We see that, for Montagne, it was a real recreation to study the actions of his Cat, and everyone is aware that one of the greatest Ministers in France[5] always had a number of kittens playing about that same cabinet in which so many institutions, both useful and honourable to the nation, had their origin. But let us return to what I have to tell you about Monsieur de Fontenelle. Among other games, he then thought of giving a discourse that he composed on the spot; but getting no attention from the other children who had to listen to him, and not wishing to do this without an audience, he took his Cat and, placing it in a chair, made him a spectator. The Cat soon forgot that he alone formed the entire assembly and headed for the door. The orator had to run after his audience from stair to stair, still declaiming enthusiastically, right up to the point where the Cat reached the roof-gutters and was lost from sight.

I am disappointed that he did not put this event into verse. What an honour it would be for the Cats, if they were placed between the Sonnet of Daphne and the Worlds!

Our work would be more extensive than that of the seven Sages of Greece, were we to report all the works of the famous Poets in honour of Cats; but I have used these different Poems in the course of these Letters wherever they serve as authority or clarification for some circumstance essential to the glory of our Heroes; I have nevertheless collected all of their these works. Such a curious collection can only be pleasing to those who like to exhaust every subject, and will present to Cat-lovers, in a single panorama, all those different and widely scattered opinions, with which they occupy themselves with such pleasure.

Cats still have among us honours of another kind. Paris contains a structure whose simplicity and elegance does great credit to Architecture; this is the tomb of Madame de Lesdiguieres' Cat. The Epitaph engraved there proves sufficiently that this Cat was the delight of its Mistress' life, who loved it, it is said, to the point of madness – a mark of great attachment. I have the honour to be, etc[6]

I reopen this letter, Madame, to tell you how much I share your grief over Marlamain's death, which you surely already know. Consider my position; someone told me of quite bluntly. Has anyone told you all the details of this sad event? Half an hour before he expired, his restlessness showed that he wished to be carried into the apartment of his illustrious Mistress. As soon as he was placed near her he gathered all his remaining strength to make the most tender farewell. A few moments later, when they saw that he wished to be carried away, no doubt to spare his Mistress the sight of his death, they put him back in his room, where he expired. His last sigh was one of those sweet and tender mews, which he was accustomed to make when honoured with those caresses that made him so illustrious. I have just tried to compose his Epitaph: I will show it to you; but do not read it if

you know the one written by Monsieur de la Mothe because it will show how little mine is worth in comparison.



EPITAPH FOR MARLAMAIN

Wherever you are, Puss, hold your step,
Now enslaved to Atropos are your claws,
Understand now the sternness of death.
When from sweetest life you have been torn.
Alas! for I have the passing of delicious hours.
Oh! Egyptian cats, my august ancestors -
Sat on altars and by garlands wreathed.
The love of each heart, the charm of every eye,
With hymns and offerings lavished upon thee;
I do not envy you those vain tributes;
Ludovica loved me, your glory pales at that;
To have lived beside her as a simple cat,
Is worth far more than to be a God like you.

Footnotes to the Seventh Letter

[1] Because, however, Cats detest above all things a foul odour, they therefore bury their excrements in a previously dug ditch. Elian. lib. 7. cap. 40.

They bury their excrements in a ditch in the ground. Plin.

[2] Du Bellay rather poetically rendered the sentiment of the Ancients regarding the cleanliness of Cats; it is in the epitaph of his Cat, Belaud.

Belaud, was a well-bred creature,
And sometimes was constrained by nature
To perform a less-than-proper act,
But through propriety, in fact,
Beneath the ashes he concealed
That which he was constrained to yield.

[3] in one of her letters Madame Deshouillieres did not hesitate to tell her husband that during his absence her attachment for Grisette, her admirable Cat, kept her fully occupied. Here are the sections of this letter; they are set out as song verses. Madame had previously recounted the sad loss of one of her horses. To the tune of "La jeune Iris sans cesse me suit. "

To be on foot is not the only care
Which makes me feel so melancholy
I sleep almost like an elf,
I am alarmed, and I forget myself
And if my heart to you I must lay bare,
I'm in love to the point of folly.

To the tune of a Gaillard:

Come back from the astonishment
You feel at such a compliment.
I love, 'tis; but thank God that
My love is for my little Cat.

To the tune of "si l'Amour étoit ivrogne." (If Love Was a Drunkard)

My pretty little Grisette
Her name is widely known ;
But sometimes she makes me fret
Far more than I have shown;
So believe this Chansonette
Which round the world has flown.

To the tune of "Quand le péril est agreable." (When Peril is Pleasant)

Deshouillieres is just an ingrate
For her whose lovely eyes are caught ;

And her heart caught like a Rat
Is captured by a Cat.

To the tune of "Des Feuillantines."

Look! See what a spirit

Out of spite

By my bed composing,

I watch my grey Cat reposing,

Rolled up upon my clothing.

After several couplets on the news of the day, in order to give the end of her letter a piquant tum, Madame Deshouillieres declared :

Done at my Toilette

June the seventh,

Torn between Grisette,

My concerns, and my pen.

[4] This work is not actually in the Collected Works of Scaron; it is found in a Collection of "Gazettes" of verse.

[5] Monsieur de Colbert.

[6] Here is a pretty Cat: // His Mistress, who loved nothing, // Loved him to madness; // Why would you ask? It's plain to see.

The example of Madame Lesdiguieres is not unusual, one often finds persons who delight in their Cats; they are usually those who have a delicate spirit and tender passions. This is not because a love of Cats cannot be found in a heart ruled by tumultuous passions, but it is more ordinarily found in those who lead a life that is voluptuous rather than stormy.

Sometimes this fondness for Cats is taken to extremes. Last Autumn in the little village called Tassy, situated on the road to Evreux, a Lady came from Paris with a great retinue and arrived very late at a rather mediocre Hostelry. Her first concern before descending from her carriage was to ask if there was a Cat in the house. They told her there was no cat there, but promised her all sorts of other marvels. She replied that they had to have a Cat for her, and she would not be able to stay there without one. The hostel owners at once woke up the whole village, and finally brought her the

Curate's She-cat. As soon as she had taken the cat in her arms, the Lady entered the Hostelry and considered herself in the Palace of Psyché. She vowed that whenever she passed the night in an apartment without a Cat present, she was suffered from unbearable vapours [faints]. Her health suffered badly whenever she was away so she was reduced to borrowing a cat at each stop along the route. Whenever she could not find a cat, she spent the night out in the open.

LETTER EIGHT

You will be pleased, Madame, to see the name for Cats written in Hebrew, and here are the characters

חתול

They are read Chatoul. According to the learned M. Menage,[1] this is where the genealogy begins for the different names which Cats have successively received in various Nations. From Chatoul, the Greeks made Katis; and this became Catis among the Latins. Cautus, which means cautious and prudent, characteristics of the cat, made the word Catus appropriate. From there were have taken the word Chat. Madame, here you see a choice of names for our friends; names made all the more suitable because their etymology reveals certain qualities of the amiable animal to which they are applied. We are disgusted to see that, instead of drawing on such fertile sources, in almost all households Cats are given nicknames at random, names that lack any reasonable meaning. The greatest of our modern men have also made this mistake. A hundred tiems over in his Fables, Monsieur de la Fontaine seems to assign ridiculous names to Cats in the same places that he praises them. Why not imitate the divine Homer in this respect? When he speaks of Cats, it is always with the respect and the propriety that is their natural due. One only has to read his poem Batrachomyromachia, where portrays their talent for catching Mice. The Rat Prince Psycarpax speaks thus to Bouffard, King of the Frogs:

My Lord, the ravening Cat has sharp slashing fingers,
And in my terror my senses are become bewildered,
For while it's true that baited traps are formidable,
A hundred times more do I fear its paws, implacable,
Lying in wait beneath our very roofs (oh false security!)
Hidden ready to spring and poised to slay me;
My valour, though great, vainly opposes its rage,

Against such claws, alas, what use is courage?[2]

It is from the deeds of Heroes that we have always drawn our cats' nicknames. When we search the Naturalists works for the Cats' attributes a thousand honourable epithets spring to mind. It is true that we sometimes see Cats in a less favourable light. When we consider the suppleness and silence with which they slip into places where they can catch birds,[3] this dexterity will not please those who prefer birds to Cats. They will call it injustice, assault, and tyranny, but reproaching them for eating a few birds[4] must be done with great care because they are also the natural enemies of many other animals which are harmful, and for which we have great antipathy. The destroy Lizards and Snakes.[5]

Fortunately I have collected verses on this subject which I believe are translated from Arabic. It's an Idyll entitled "The Cats." The person into whose hands this verse had fallen was accustomed to seeing this sort of work describing Birds, Goats, and Sheep, and was very surprised that Cats had become a pastoral subject. When she communicated these verses to me, I immediately recalled the Cats of the Isle of Cyprus which I mentioned in my fourth Letter; they spent part of the day hunting Snakes in the fields, and went at regular hours at the Monastery where they lived.

I imagine, as will seem quite natural to you, that the Monk entrusted with the task of ringing the Cats' dinner bell, and who led them into the fields, cared for them in the same way shepherds care for their Sheep. The leisure of this happy life doubtless inspired his taste for Poetry, and having no shepherdess to praise, he at least san of his Flock. I believe, Madame, that my conjectures will appear sensible to you once you have read this work. Here it is:

THE CATS - AN IDYLL

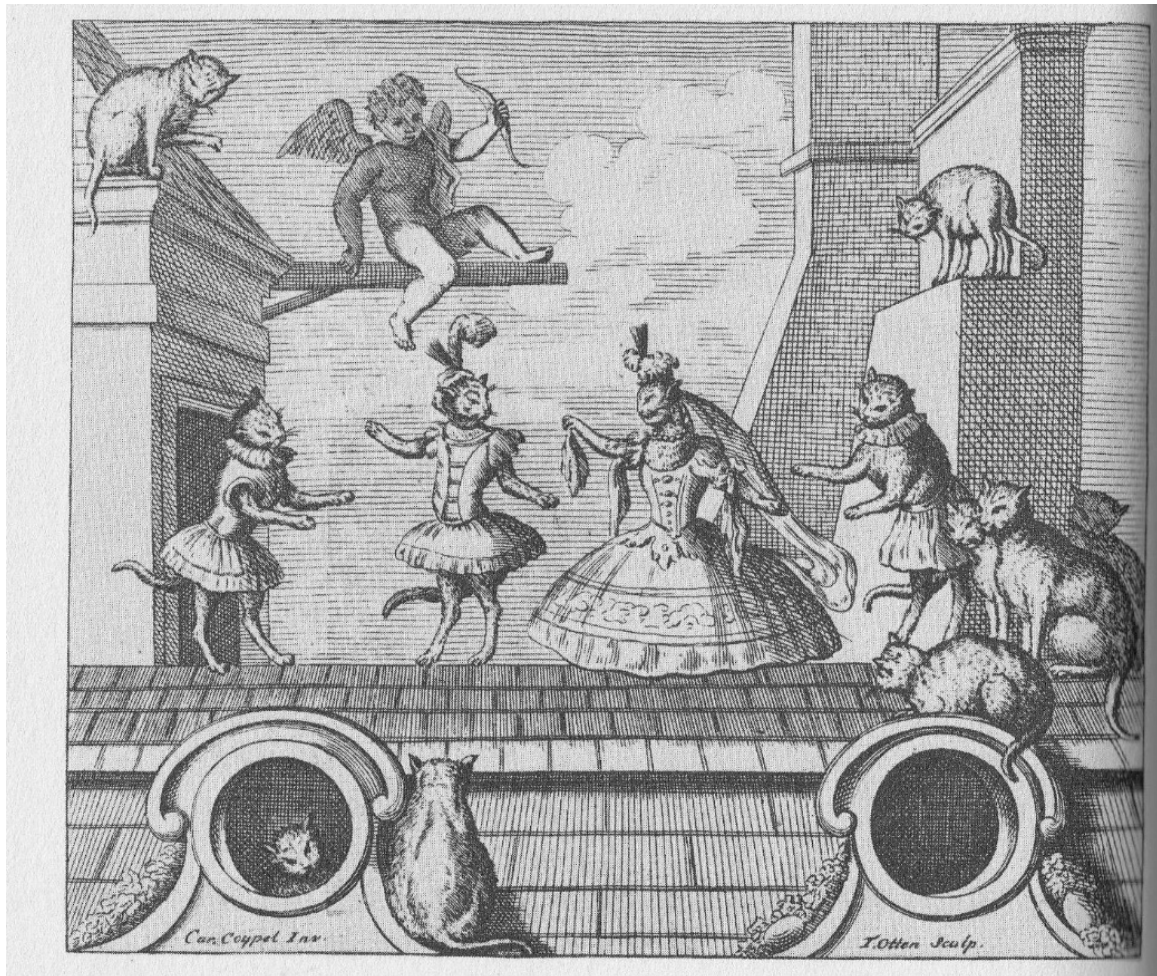
Enough, pretty Cats, time to suspend your zeal,
To climb thick branches and there to take your ease;
During the noonday heat rest and enjoy sweet peace,
Your labours make this island beautiful.
Its bright enamelled lawns of vivid colors,
Its evergreen groves, the meandering wave that winds,
Can you believe, alas, the terrors that we find -
The thousand snakes that hide beneath the flowers?

For your protective claws, this much is clear,
That slay those perils and that stay their course.
Let all here celebrate your talons dear;
It's to you Cats alone these lovely days we owe.
The God of hearts will grant you conquests,
Immortalise your glory in our woods
Hold a triumph for you every day in our feasts:
And echo a hundred times your deeds.
O beautiful Cytherea, o heart's delight
Nothing compels us more; we will always follow you;
Where once you were worshipped on this Isle,
The Cats have returned their games and love restored.
Sweet kitties, it is due to your examples,
That Fidelity may now rebuild her temples.
You set an example for our own hearts,
That when you find beauty that is dear,
You're fired with zeal, your zest is sparked!
Not for flattery, not for vain pride to please,
It's the pleasure of loving makes you content:
That Shepherds are coming here to learn,
And to feel fires they never before have felt;
When with tenderest love we want to burn,
We must love just like these Cats.

Do you not think, Madame, that this new piece of pastoral verse has something grander and more piquant about it (without however going beyond rural simplicity) than the pastoral genre of the Ancients? What a shame that Theocritus did not have the idea of this one. In Sheep, one can only boast of the whiteness of their fleece, their leaps on a sloping hillside, or the bleating of a Ewe calling her little Lamb. There is nothing there to stir the heart. If you want to stir the reader with

images of love, you must make him forget the flock and concentrate on the Shepherd and Shepherdess alone; but in a Pastoral of Cats, you may find the entire theme of an interesting Eclogue in the bosom of the flock itself.

[Note: an eclogue is a classical-style poem on a pastoral subject, also called a bucolic. French courts liked to amuse themselves by playing at being shepherdesses and swains.]



Did not Madame Deshouillieres, who understood so well how to capture images and ideas proper to Poetry, write the amours of Grisette in great detail ? Do we not have her tragic lyrical Poem upon the death of one of this beautiful Cat's Lovers ? As you know, Madame, I thought of having this poem set to music, but the work was important enough to make it difficult for me to choose the Musician. It is Cats that form all the action. [6] I consulted our most delicate music connoisseurs, and they have informed me that the song of the Cats could be rendered exactly by many of our modern Musicians, assuring me that they would perform this Poem in all its brilliance. On the other hand, Italian scholars have shown me in good faith that their Music should in many respects, be preferred, especially for the recitative. This last reason thought to tip the scales, but as this Opera is not one of those whose presentation and success should be confined to a single nation, and is intended for all of Europe at least, I wait for the two parties to agree before I make a decision. I

know many upper-class persons who are impatient to see this question settled, and who will certainly never see a new Opera other than this one. Imagine, Madame, how brilliant and varied the ballet will be, being executed by Cats. These new Dancers, by their extraordinary lightness, will characterise the marvels of the Opera incomparably better than the flights, chariots, and trapdoors whose mechanisms we always see.[7]

[Note: The modern reader must remember that this idea of a cat-themed opera was written 254 years before Andrew Lloyd-Webber's "Cats – The Musical"!]

I have the honour to be, etc.

Footnotes to the Eighth Letter

[1] Chat from Catus, the Comments of Isidore Murilegus Catus. The Lexicon of Cyril. The old Lexicon, Greek, Latin Catta. The Scholiast of Callimachus on the Hymn to Ceres, kattos. The Latin Catus was formed from the Greek Xorns which signifies virerra, which Homer contracts to katis. In Celtic Cat or Cas; according to Pezron it is from this Celtic Cat that we have made Chat, in the same way as making Charbon from Carbo, and Chambre from Camera. Menag. Diction. Etimologiq. Lettre C.

**Chat de *Catus*, les Gloses
d'Isidore *Murilegus Catus*. Le
Lexicon de Cirille *αιλυρος*.
Le Lexicon ancien, Grec,
Latin *κατλω*, *Catta*. Le Scho-
liaste de Callimaque sur
l'Hymne de Cerès, *αιλυρον*
ιδιωτικως, *Καττον*.**

**Le Latin *Catus* a été fait
du Grec *κατις* qui signifie *vi-
verra*, pour lequel Homere a
dit *κτις* par contraction.**

In Arabie, Hareira. See the life of Mahomet by Prideaux. In Italian, Gatto. In Spanish, Gato. In Dutch, Kater [male] or Kat. In German, Cats. In the Maldives, Boulan. See the voyages of Peyrard de Laval in the Dictionnaire de la Langue Maldivoise [Dictionary of the Maldives' Language].

There are a number of Plants and Mechanical Instruments whose names of are derived from the word Chat, no doubt due to various relationships whose tradition is now lost; but we must point out that these names are given only to agreeable or useful things.

We call the setting of a ring a Chatton (kitten). We give the same name to the part of the Tulip that encloses its seeds. Chatte, in Marine terminology, is a Barque of 60 tons. Chatte is a species of Cucumber found in different parts of Egypt and very agreeable to the taste, and also good against fever.

To pay in Cats and Rats, a saying which signifies a bad Debtor, has no relationship at all to Cats ; in olden times Chas meant a house, and Ras signified a field; its meaning was to give developed land and undeveloped land as inheritances instead of money. Dictionaire de Trévoux.

Cat. The name given to certain Northern vessels with rounded sterns, and which have only one Bridge [Note: 18th C Norwegian coal and timber ships, strongly built with a narrow stern, projecting quarters, deep waist and no ornamental figurehead on the prow. Three masts and a bowsprit, rigged similar to an English ship, but having pole-masts and no topgallant-sails. The mizzen-mast is gaff-rigged.]

Cat, in Artillery terms, is a piece of iron used to scrape the inside of a Cannon to check for anything in the chamber.

Chaters, this is the name given in Persia to Runners. Tavernier. This word could only have been derived from the Hebrew word Chatoul.

Chat levant or Chat prenant, Terms of Common Law.

These words signify a clause used in olden times in the region around Metz. The clause gave power to those who took lands in mortgage to receive their fruits.

[2] The Cat with hook-clawed toes,

Of all the beasts alarms me most ;

And though I also fear the deceiving baited trap,

Above all, I fear the strength of the Tomcat:

They are my greatest enemies, without a doubt,

For underneath our very roofs they seek us out.

[Version in Moncrif's footnote was trans. from the Batrac. by M. Boivin.]

[3] Indeed with what silent, and what light footsteps, do Cats creep up upon birds. Plin. lib. XI. cap. LXXXIII.

[4] Montagne reports with admiration an event that occurred before his eyes, by reciting what he saw, showing that he recognized surprising qualities in Cats. Here are his own words : At my house we lately saw a Cat lying in wait for a bird high up in a tree, each of which fixed their eyes on the

other from time to time; the bird let itself fall as though dead between the paws of the Cat, either intoxicated by its own imagination, or drawn by some attractive force of the Cat.

[5] Cats are useful against Asps with their deadly bite and against other injurious kinds of Serpent. Est. Diod. Sic. page 74.

To the South of the region of the Marmarides, which is a desert, there were Snakes called Cerastes, which had an extremely venomous bit; they were made even more dangerous because they were the same colour as the sand, so that you stepped on them because you could not see them. In olden times these creatures moved into Egypt where they turned many areas into deserts. Diod. de Sic. L.3. pag. 132.

The Ophiade Isle, which is situated in the Red Sea, was long deserted because of the multitude of Snakes that lived there. Diodorus reports that it was freed of snakes with the help of the King of Egypt. This aid was, without doubt, an army of Cats which was sent there; but History only ever honours the Monarchs for the great events that take place in their reigns.

[6] The Characters are Grisette, Madame Deshouillieres' She-cat; Mimy, Mademoiselle Deshouillieres' Tomcat, the lover of Grisette; Marmuse, another of Madame Deshouillieres' He-cats, and confidante of Mimy; Cafar, Tomcat belonging to the Monks of Chaillot, and Deputy of the Cats of Village cats; a troupe of neighbourhood Cats. See this Poem at the end of the Verses collected in this volume.

[7] In Paris we have a famous painting which tells a Story, and which is an eternal monument to feline cleverness. We first discern a male and female Cat in rendezvous at the foot of an elegant building, and upon a corner of a cornice we see a Cat, half hidden, holding a pistol aimed at the He-cat who is robbing the onlooker of his mistress. This event, represented in allegory as it is, might cost Savants entire volumes of essays in times to come. The essence of this Story is that the Cat we see on the cornice, having surprised his mistress with his rival, throws himself from the height of the roof-gutter with such accuracy and force that the leap crushes his rival.

LETTER NINE

Madame, if ever it were necessary to settle one's choice on a single species of Cats, the blacks would be preferred without argument. Black Cats are those whose nature has always been most miserly; she seems to show them to us sometimes just to prove to us that she has the secret of making them. To all appearances, the She-cats who take most pride in their beauty are this colour, or at least try to be so. I have noticed that they are tremendously well known by all sorts of He-cats. In the he-cats' eyes they obviously have that zest which is found in Brunettes of all species, and it would be well to honour these Verses by M. de Fontenelle, which much flatters Brunettes.

Brunette haired was the pretty creature
Who charmed wise Solomon's gaze,
And quite upset his sagacious nature,
Where sense and reason once held sway.
For Brunettes are lively, witty creatures,
Living impishly from day to day,
And I must warn you that their pretty faces,
Have maddened too many Grecian Sages,
Who were led, like goslings, by the beak,
By Brunettes with their soft dark eyes
Into convivial merry soirees,
And who said, God knows, sweet things in Greek;
These days I am tormented by a Brunette,
A Philosopher, a deep-thinking man, that's me,
Aspiring to the title of man of philosophy,
And all the boredom an unbiased soul can get.
You Gentlemen, who hold up in vanity
The sad gifts of your life austere and wise,
If on the the street a Brunette girl you see.
Cross to the other side in all humilty,
Because Brunettes collect your species as a prize.

It is true that the colour black is very harmful to Cats among the uneducated; it greatly brings out the fire in their eyes, and this is enough for people to think them sorcerers at the least,[1] but in recompense this same aspect, together with their charming manners, for sensible people it is a naïve image of people from Africa, whose swarthy complexion gave them a savage look, but who, when they became masters of Spain, seemed to have conquered the country only to bring good manners and gallantry to it.

In this respect the late Madame de la Sabliere furnished a most remarkable example. She had spent part a part of her life in the midst of a number of Dogs. One fine day her friends were very astonished to find them all exiled, and to see in their place a rather triumphant troop of Cats. They asked her the reason for this revolution, and she confessed that having felt herself passionately attached to Dogs, which seemed to her very unreasonable, she was determined to have only those animals with whom business went no further than she wished. What a guide is human prudence! She chose Cats, especially black Cats. While it is true that she first succeeded in breaking her initial attachment, it was only to take up an attachment a hundred times more tender and enduring. Constantly surrounded and occupied with these Cats ; she was more and more given to an unforeseen enchantment: amusements, passions; these all became subordinate to the Cats. She no longer allowed anyone but her Cats and Monsieur de la Fontaine into her intimacy, and this pleasant relationship lasted until she died.



Among these rare Cats, this century has produced one in whom we find, to an astonishing degree of resemblance, the seductive intercourse of the Zegriss and the Abencerages. Like them, he had an endless taste for festivities. A lover of walks, and also an enemy of the sadness spread by winter over all of nature, he chose a gallery where he could enjoy eternal spring. It was an Orangery, and he could be seen breathing its perfumes, and wandering among its branches and flowers. You may judge well, Madame, that the theatre of his loves could only be

Under this arbour that love has made on purpose,

To soften a soulless woman's heart

To it he leads a tricoloured She-cat who wears a mask as black as is his own, and whom he loves with all the much-extolled gallantry and fidelity of olden times. This constancy is greatly to his merit.

Charming as he is, with the art of attracting Beauties into this delightful place, where he reigns on on the gloomy days, he has only to imagine conquests in order to accomplish them.

What She-cat is so full of despite,

She'd harshly arm herself these clear lit nights,

With nothing but a lover's torch!

It was beneath an arbour, on such evenings of delight,

That Cleves, despite herself, dallied with Nemours.

Yet I have still exposed only the weakest evidence of the merits of this admirable Cat. A Princess to whom the Fates have made a gift made more precious by her charming wit than by her high rank; this great Princess, I say, cherishes and delights in him. At this price, would not Anacreon himself have reasonably judged his talents sufficiently rewarded?

I have the honour to be, etc.

Footnotes to the Ninth Letter

[1] In this regard, each year at Metz there is a ceremony that is very shameful to the intellect: The Magistrates come gravely into the public Square and reveal some Cats in a cage placed on a Pyre, which is set on fire with great formality. At the frightful cries which are uttered by the poor Beasts,

the people believe that they are also hearing the suffering of an aged Sorceress who is supposed to have metamorphosed into a Cat on the occasion when they were going to burn her.

The Cats are most unfortunate to have been chosen for the supposed metamorphosis of the old woman. It would be just as natural to imagine her changed into a Dragon.

M. Locke has good reason to say that there are certain terrors which dishonour our understanding. Is there anything as absurd as the adventure of the Mathematician* who one day imaged that his Cat had spoken, and who thought he would die of fear? While he was working, noticing that the Cat had its eyes fixed upon him, he said: You're watching me most attentively; to which he claimed the Cat had replied, Eh! Why not?

The Mathematician, no doubt intoxicated by the fatigue of his work, had taken a Miaou for an "Eh" Why not?"

* The mathematician's name was Monsieur Drouin, and he lived in Paris at the house of Monsieur de Treville.

LETTER TEN

So far, Madame, we have only considered the pleasant form of our Cats in draft; it is one of those forms that do the most honour to nature. They combine the solid bearing of the Quadrupeds with a charm and dexterity given to only a small number of species. Covered with velvet fur, where nature plays with a variety of colours, they are born armed against the inclemency of the seasons.

There is a very curious mechanism in the art with which Cats arrange their fur to either receive or avoid, as they please, the influences of the air; this discovery, which I fortunately made, is the result of a great number of observations.

When Cats wish to protect themselves against the wind, I noticed that they hold their hair flat against their skin, which turns this surface into bulwark from which the forces of cold or heat will slide, whereas when the season is agreeable to their constitution, or flatters their senses, they open up their fur, so to speak, ruffling it and giving free passage to the breeze which they consent to hit them. These precautions are doubtless a continuation of their knowledge of changes in the heavens.[1] The circuits their paws trace on their faces when washing are omens of rain or fine weather, which, as even the least enlightened people have observed, supplements mathematical instruments; thus Cats can be regarded as living Barometers.[2]

But let's suppose that these relationships between Cats and the Stars are imaginary, and let's look only at aspects of them that are indisputable; their eyes, for instance, have long been envied by

beautiful women; we cannot give women greater flattery than to describe their eyes as sea-green, that is to say, as changeable as Cats' eyes; or green, as we notice is commonly found in cats.[3] Monsieur de la Fontaine, in the Fable of the daughters of Minee, after describing the dispute between Neptune and Minerva on the subject of the City of Athens, in order to characterize the dignity of the Goddess, represents her with the sea-green eyes that are the natural heritage of Cats.

She took the prize and named the city;

Athens offered their thanks to this Deity;

Presenting a hundred hand-picked virgins to her,

Skilled in sewing, both beautiful and clever.

The first bore many diverse presents,

The rest surrounded the sea-green eyed Goddess.

To paint the portrait of Venus in a single stroke, didn't Marot say:

The first day, Venus with her green eyes.

The Sire de Coucy, famed for his loves, vowed in his Poems, written in the time of Philippe Auguste, that this was the charm to which his heart had yielded.[4] These beautiful eyes, which belonged to a Madame de Fayel, caused, as we know, the most tragic adventure in the world.[5] Green eyes inspire only great passions, and nature, which has refused them to the beauties of this century, has lavished them on the feline race.[6]

Knowing these agreeable animals only by the many qualities with which they are endowed, would we not assume that they enjoy a long life? However, while an annoying Raven a span of six or seven centuries, according to the opinion of the Ancients,[7] a Cat's lifespan is, at most, ten or fifteen years. Why does nature preserve for so short a time something seemingly created with so much pleasure? In the different climes where they are scattered, she has varied their form only to multiply their charms; it has been remarked that the Cats of Europe exactly resemble the Lion in many of their traits.[8]

[Note: a cat's lifespan is "deux ou trois lustres" - a "lustre" is a five year term.]

Syrian Cats, which are larger than ours, are very curiously variegated;[9] and as their eyes are not both in the same position, and as their mouth are slanted towards the ear, ignorant travellers, who only understand regularity in common proportions, have reported that they had mouth and eyes askew; and concluded from this that they were monstrous. But philosophically examined, their appearance is very pleasing and agreeable. The Cats of Malabar live ordinarily in the trees, flight is natural to them, and what is surprising is that they fly without wings.[10]

But above all these species of foreign Cats, it is those of Persia, we must admit, which surpass them all in beauty. In 1521, a famous traveller enriched Italy with this new race; a present she so carefully and jealously preserved that it was not until almost a century ago that any of these beautiful Cats were transported to France. For this, we are obliged to the renowned Monsieur Menard who brought a female Cat from Rome, and upon whose death he wrote a Sonnet well worthy of honouring his Muse:.

SONNET

It's a shame my puss has passed,
Into the country of the dead;
From her swift paws no Rat was fast
Enough to 'scape her when it fled;
She was a Roman matron lovely,
A daughter of the noblest blood,
My lackey took her, without gloves, he
Found her near the Temple of the Gods;
Memory of her in me burns bright,
Of plush fur in black and white.
Much admired by all her met her,
(Except cruel Dame Cloton's attitude)
And in my house, with Mice took pleasure,
Which she did with solicitude.

It is not surprising that Monsieur Menard so tenderly missed his Cat ; she was doubtless the delight of his solitude, and the buttress of his philosophy when he composed the verses which so characterized his manners and his mind.

I'm weary of hoping and complaining,
Of Love, Great Things, and Destiny,
And for death, I now sit waiting,
With neither desire nor fear.

But what advantages have not been brought about by Cats? One of the most famous Houses of England owes its riches and its glory to a cat. Richard Whittington [note: also rendered "Whigtinton" by Moncrif], in his early youth, deprived of the benefit of wealth, but born with excellent tendencies, wanted to go to India to seek better fortunes. He presented himself as a passenger to embark on a ship. He was asked how he expected to subsist during the journey, and replied that he had no wealth except for his a Cat, and the desire to make a name for himself. They were touched by the noble frankness with which he stated his situation. Whitting ton and his Cat were received on board ship, and the vessel set sail. When they were in the seas around India, a tempest took them by surprise, and drove them aground on a coast where the ship and all aboard it were seized by natives. The young Englishman, carrying his treasure* in his arms, was taken with the others before the King of these people; and while they were at this audience, they noticed an immense number of Rats and Mice running throughout the Palace, and even swarming over the King's throne, causing great annoyance.

Whittington recognized the voice of fortune calling to him. He simply let his Cat loose and instantly a world of Rats and Mice were strangled and the rest were put to flight. The King, charmed at the thought of finally being delivered from the plague that was laying waste to his States, entered into transports of gratitude which he could scarcely express strongly enough. He embraced both his feline liberator and the young Englishman, and to accord them both worthy marks of his great gratitude, he declared Whittington his favourite, and he gave the marvellous Cat the title of Generalissimo of his Armies, the Armies having had no enemies to fight except for the rodent plague that incessantly besieged the land.

Whittington, supported by the esteem given to him by his follower, the Cat, rose above all the factions of the Court and governed that Empire for many years. Finally, overcome by homesickness, he obtained the freedom to return to his homeland. In exchange for General Cat, who was to stay behind, the King gave Whittington a ship loaded with riches. Scarcely had the young Englishman returned to England than he was raised to the dignity of Mayor of London.[12] In his new rank, in order to publically acknowledge the gratitude he owed to Cats, he took their name and was

henceforth known as Mylord Cat. His descendants were successors to this name. Likenesses of him are still scattered around several parts of London; we can see him represented with great pomp upon emblems, triumphantly bearing on his shoulder the Cat to which he owed his was indebted for his fame and good fortune.

M. Bayle,[13] considering the gratitude we owe to Animals for the services which they give us, recalls the testament of a Mademoiselle Dupuy, a very sensible testimony of the obligations she believed she owed her Cat. Mademoiselle Dupuy had an astonishing degree of talent for playing the harp, and attributed the excellence of her attainment to her Cat. He listened attentively whenever she practised on her harp, and she had noticed a degree of interest and emotion in him, in proportion to whether her performance had more or less precision and harmony. By studying his response she had developed a style which had earned her universal renown.

Upon her death she wished to give to her Cat a suitable mark of her gratitude, and she made a will in his favour, bequeathing him a very pleasant home in the city, and another in the country. To this she attached an income more than sufficient to satisfy his needs and tastes, and in order that the Cat's well-being should be faithfully procured for him, she left considerable pensions to several persons of merit, on condition that they would watch over the revenues of this friendly heir, and that they would go a set number of times each week to keep him company. This will was attacked. The most furious Advocates took sides and wrote. To date, I have fruitlessly done the most exacting research to uncover the facts of this important matter. Every day such curious and interesting works are lost, and it is unjust for the public to be deprived of them.

I have the honour to be, etc.

Footnotes on the Tenth Letter

[1] Vigenere,* who has collected the opinions of the Ancients on this subject, in explaining the symbol of the human-faced Cat on the Egyptian Sistrum, expresses himself in these terms: "With regard to the human face," it can have no other meaning except that "this animal considers and notices the changes which occur each day to the globe of the Moon." Cardan maintained to the contrary that these changes in the pupils of their eyes, which expand and contract, are purely voluntary. Others have believed that the approach or the retreat of the Sun also influences them, observing that in the morning they are dilated, at midday contracted to a point, and in the evening are full of torpor and nonchalance. Johnston.

[*Notes on Philostrate, Chap. The Sistrum.]

M. Boyle, of the Royal Society of London, in the book entitled "A disquisition about the final causes of natural things, etc," that is to say, "Dissertation touchant les Causes finales des choses naturelles," claims that Cats have pupils long and set perpendicularly; the reason for this being, adds one of his

friends, learned in Optics, is that Cats, whose ordinary procedure is to climb walls in pursuit of Mice and Rats, which they live on, can observe them because of the perpendicular arrangement of their pupil more easily than if it were transverse like that of Horses, Cattle, or others.

[2] The Poet Ronsard took his ideas of the understanding he credited to Cats much further. He did not hesitate to place them, so to speak, on a par with the Sybils; this is perhaps the only praiseworthy part of his Poetry:.

Now as one sees that there are born among men

Augurs, Diviners . . .

See also that there are Prophets of our ills,

And of good, born among the animals,

Who, by signs, our future can predict ; . . .

But above them all a domestic creature,

The Cat, has the power of prophecy,

And so those old Egyptians did well

To honour them . . .

Epistle to the Poet Remy Belleau

[3] We do not claim that sea-green eyes and green eyes are the same. Sea-green eyes are ordinarily pale blue, or sometimes of the colour of water, and they vary with further different Shades during the course of the day. In humans, green eyes do not change their Shade, but in Cats green eyes have the same augmentation and diminution of colour which characterizes sea-green eyes.

According to Ménagé, Pers (sea-green) comes from the Greek Τρεπξος or uepvos, which he explains as Subniger.

Pallas, taken for the wind, was called Glaucopis by the Egyptians, that is to say having eyes of a verdant purity. Diod. Sic. lib. I. page 5.

[2] From the start, I found her so sweet,

That for all ills I would endure;

But such lovely green eyes, laughing, and clear,

So surprised me . . .

[3] Reynaud de Coucy, wounded at the Siege of Ascalon, in the Crusade of Phillipe-Auguste and Richard, King of England, charged his Squire to take his heart when he was dead, and to carry it to the Dame de Fayel, who was in Gatinois, and with whom he loved deeply; he attached a most tender

letter to it which he signed with his blood as he died. The Squire, on returning to France, was surprised by Sieur de Fayel, who had been most jealous of Reynaud de Coucy, and who, took his wife's lover's heart, and had it served at the table, so that she ate it. She died of despair as soon as her husband revealed this horrible vengeance to her.

Fauchet, in his researches on the ancient Poets, claims that Reynaud de Coucy, killed at the Siege of Ascalon in 1191, is the same as Raoul, first Seigneur and Chatelain de Coucy, and cites several fragments of his works. In one of his songs, says Fauchet, "the Seigneur Chatelain complains that he dare not declare his love because ill-speaking people," in another, he "wishes to have his Lady naked in his arms before going overseas," which leads us to believe there was no liaison between himself and his Lady except for one of pure sentiment. This lady's death can be considered sure proof of this: when those who lose their lover regret circumstances other than their hearts, it is not customary for them to die of it. A secret voice, which perhaps they have not listened to, cries to them that they will recover what they have lost, and this persuasive voice always binds them to life, but when the blessing they regret is only the mutual tenderness that both begins and ends in the heart alone, there is nothing to tell them that another object might inspire the same passion in them, and they die for not perceiving another means of consolation.

In those distant times, the land of Lovers was a long perspective; one only glimpsed from afar the happiness of being loved, one perceived almost nothing beyond, or at least one dared not believe something only vaguely perceived. Today the perspective is extremely near; we interests ourselves only in the background of the picture do not pay attention to the rest.

[4] For a long time Cats have been credited with having beautiful eyes. One of our ancient Poets compared those of his Cat to the Nuances of the Rainbow.

Eyes which like the Persian sloes,

Imitate the diverse hues,

That we see in the rainbows,

Arching through the skies. - Dubellay.

[5] Crows live nine of man's lifetimes. Plutarch. ch. des Animaux. pag. 271. Translated by Amyot.

The Stag and the Raven, and the reproachful Crows,

And the Bird of gold flying where the great Ganges flows

Are reputed to watch while a century passes,

Two centuries, or three, such thoughts make me marvel.

Poems of la Peruse, printed in 1573. Sonnet on the death of the Seigneur Jean de Voyer, Count de Paumy.

[6] In Spain many methods of hunting Rabbits have been invented; among others there is truly this method: the hunters carefully train wild African Cats and insert them muzzled into the burrows, from which with their claws they drag out any rabbits found inside or drive them into the open where they are snatched up by those standing by. Strabo lib. 3. pag. 99. edit. ann. 1587.

[Note: This sounds like a description of hunting with ferrets. In Greek the term wildcat was used for the ferret as well as for the feline wildcat so this may have been a mistranslation from Greek into Latin.]

[7] Johnston.

[8] Scaliger and many other modern Travellers.

These Cats of Malabar fly by means of a very wide Membrane, which extends from their hind feet to the fore; it is pulled up and folded when they walk, and is spread out when they want to fly. The Cats of the Philippines have the same attribute. See the flying Squirrel which was sent last year to M. de Maurepas.

There are many other species of Cats in the Indies; some have ermine-like fur and a tail ringed with black et white stripes; some others have six paws. The Author of the present State of the Isles of England reports that in Florida, adjoining Virginia, there are wild Cats that wage war on savage beasts by leaping on their backs and clinging there to subdue them and make them their prey. Other Indian Cats carry their young in a pouch placed on their flank, and are no less nimble for it.

An old French Poet, who was a Physician at the same time, draws this portrait of a marvellous Cat.

This rare Kitten which was made by Nature,

With her own hands she perfected its features,

This strange marvel we cannot help but praise -

It has eight feet, one head, one eye, four ears and two tails.

Paul Contant, Master Apothecary of Poitiers, pag. 40. fol 37.

[Note: This is one of the earliest descriptions of a conjoined kitten.]

But it is not enough that the earth is sown with these different species, and another French Poet has most judiciously remarked that the Seas also have their Cats.

Who has not also seen that the grassy field

Has no rare animal that water does not yield ?

The ocean has its own Elephant [and] its red-coloured Cats.

Dampiere, in his voyage around the world, describes the form of this admirable fish. The Sea-cat, he says, is primarily distinguished by its whiskers, and by its brilliant eyes which glitter in the night.

[Note: There was a belief that everything on land had its parallel in the sea.]

[11] Pietro del la Vallé; this Traveller, who seemed to have a great deal of good sense, revealed in his letter written from Ispahan that, as a good Citizen, he did not believe he could make a greater use of his voyages, for Rome his beloved Country, than to transport there a new race of Cats; he stated that he had married an Asiatic beauty named Maani, and that he passed a delightful existence between his Wife and these handsome Cats.

Pietro del la Vallé enjoyed a large fortune, and went nowhere in his travels without a large retinue, leaving signs of his discernment and his magnificence everywhere he went.

Those beautiful Cats were from the Province of Chorasán, on the borders between Zagathay and; the region included the Province of known to the ancients as Ariane, and part of the lands of Parthia and Bactria. Its principal Cities were Herat, Nisabur, Saiachas, Turschie, Mervera, etc.

[12] He was the one who erected the exchange building in London.

[13] Diction, article Rosen under note C. pag. 2485. Rotterdam edition, printed in 1720.

LETTER ELEVEN

Cats considered as they are today.

Our previous Letters, Madame, have revealed the splendour of Cats in a manner which, I believe, is satisfactory to those of us who recognize their merit. But do you think it will make a sufficient impression on those people prejudiced against them? We have many kinds of adversaries to combat. There are severe spirits who assume an extreme scepticism of history, and who will shamelessly deny the facts which we advance in our faith in respectable antiquity. Others will remain slaves of their childhood prejudices, accustomed to lacking any regard for Cats, and who will learn of the Cat's past glory, without changing their opinions. There is only one more cause to take, Madame, and that is to examine the cat species as it is today, set apart and considered in itself. You have given me much enlightenment in this respect, which it is time to make use of.

Let us first transport ourselves to a region superior to that of the terrestrial Animals; it is there that we will find Cats in repose and in an abundance which is not due to men. Can we not then recognize that it is purely from courtesy that Cats have anything at all to do with us? Given free choice, they choose to live, according to their ambition or philosophy, in the porticos of the Monarch or under the Citizen's simple roof. It costs them neither complacency nor concern to please to obtain access there; their lightfootedness and agility open, so to speak, a road for them in the breezes; therefore,

in the upper regions of all Cities, Cats populate their own private City. It is there that they form a kind of Republic that blossoms and maintains itself through its own powers. The lofts of houses are only occupied by animals that reproduce themselves purely for their own subsistence. Thus, without any human assistance, there is no Cat which, excepting the time he devotes to idleness or to his love affairs, does not find in abundance everything he needs to make him happy. And how economically they enjoy their well-being! They ennobles life's necessities, adding to them the appearance of liberty and pleasure; they begin by making a spectacle of the Mouse that will become their prey; they only decide to kill it when driven by increasing need. In their agility and in their claws, Cats thus carry, so to speak, their fortune and their native land.¹

It is from the bosom of this happy independence that they descend into our homes. Eh, but under what auspices? And what charms do they produce there? The most amiable playfulness, and exquisite and varied poses that were formerly imitated and became the glory of the most famous acrobats; those are their inborn talents that they bring among us. In addition, aren't they also looking for masters? Born in a happy state, always free to remain in it, nothing leads them to servitude. It is only pure affection for men, convenience, and shared humour, that makes us happy to possess them. They are a hundred times more esteemed in these regards than dogs, which many people have nevertheless are unashamed to hold in higher regard than Cats. Dogs only attach themselves to us because they would die without our support. Let us examine them well: humiliated by their lowly position, there is no sort of insult or ill-usage that they will not endure. What a difference! In the most perfect Dog one finds only a faithful slave; in one's Cat one possesses an amusing friend, whose loyalty is purely voluntary; the moments he gives to you are so many sacrifices of that freedom and that agility which do not limit either his visit or his inclinations.

But we must still consider their superior qualities. If we analyse their sentiments, dare I say, what superiorities do we discover? Nothing astonishes them, and nothing coerces them. Anything that moves becomes the object of fun. They believe that nature exists only for their amusement. They do not imagine any other cause of movement and when we excite their frisky attitudes by our teasing, does it not seem that they see us only as entertainers and all our actions as buffoonery? So we amuse ourselves and entertain each other, while thinking it is only we who are only entertained.

This gaiety so natural to Cats reminds me of what we read of those Kings of Turkestan⁸ who never showed themselves to either their subjects or their enemies without having that appearance of joy that comes from the depths of the soul, and who, regarding this as the foremost of all blessings, took the very appropriate title of "the Prince who is never sad."

If a Cat tires of the tumult of the Cities, the countryside offers him a new homeland where nature seems to have foreseen all his needs. Eh! what has nature not done for him? Is there a more happily constituted animal? We never notice any deterioration in his health; he seems exempt from all anxiety as we never see him bothering about tomorrow's needs. What an advantage he has over

other animals! Foresight, as highly valued as it rightly is to us, is nevertheless the daughter of fear; it is one of those virtues that implies a state of misery in those that possess it. A Dog surrounded by everything his voracity makes most precious to him does not enjoy the tranquility that constitutes true happiness. At the very moment of his satisfaction, he feels a sense of approaching poverty, and he distrustfully hides part of his wealth. The Cat, master of his situation, tastes in the bosom of abundance the pure pleasure of tranquillity; his cleverness and restraint almost certainly guarantees him a pleasant future.

We cannot reproach Cats, as we may legitimately do with Dogs, that their association is bought with care and constraint. Cats are philosophical in their choice of home, there being no part of a house that does not appear a pleasant retreat. They are indifferent to the hours when meals are served, and in the intervals we do not fear that they will be driven mad by thirst, becoming the terror and destruction of the family which raised them in its arms, They do not bring even the slightest inconvenience. They express themselves to us by a soft murmur which seems to be as much flirtation as friendship. They thus preserve, with as much art as prudence, that voice which soars so clearly when they return to that region where men dare not go and disturb them. In short, we need only busy ourselves with them for our amusement. Dogs, happy only to be our slaves, nevertheless sell us their servitude and their uselessness in Cities; they multiply our domestic cares. Cats, possessing a well-being that expects nothing of us, deliver our houses from destructive animals,⁴ and lavish the pleasure of their society on us. When we receive them into the intimacy of our families, they want only to play the role animals, and demand none of the attentions which men owe only to men. They spare us the shame of reckoning among our occupations the duty of satisfying their needs or their caprices.⁵

If animals were susceptible to egotism, in which ones would it be more forgivable? On examining the play and harmony found in all their members, surely it seems that nature has given particular care to their construction? She gave them an advantage that always succeeds in humans, that of having a face. The whole of their features have a character of finesse and mirth, especially their whiskers, and are gifts they could not have received only as amenities. The brightness of their eyes, still so esteemed among men, is certainly squandered upon the cat species. Our eyes have no other faculty than to enable us to perceive objects with the aid of light, and they become useless to us whenever there is no light. Cats' eyes carry their own light with them. The Sun, or the artificial lights which are indispensable need in almost all our actions, are only a spectacle to them. While we are often stopped during our most interesting projects and impatiently wait for the darkness to end, Cats in love clearly see each on the roof-gutters and, being luckier than us, when their eyes seek the object they desire, their eyes provide sufficient light to find it.

These luminous qualities are so worthy of attention that they merited a eulogy in the book written by one of our most celebrated Academicians of Science.⁷ He did not hesitate to honour the Cats' eyes, and the sparks we see glittering when we rub their fur the wrong way,⁸ and which we call

natural phosphorescence. This remark will make known to future ages that Cats were not useless in the Academies, and that they contributed to the perfection of the Sciences.

Let's now examine their character. It is dangerous, if we believe vulgar opinion, and this error, however shameful it may be in our judgment, is adopted even by persons of common sense. We must not be surprised at this. Intellectual men are ordinary people in many ways. It is the result of a certain degree of laziness, which always remains in those who have the most inclination to learn; and some, moreover, barely reproach themselves for their own credulity if a belief does not harm their pride.

As we have already established that Cats are capable of loyalty and attentiveness in their conduct they maintain with men, as long as we go into detail we will also prove that they have all the delicacy of friendship. We can count on some people to dispute that this friendship is constant; they will not fail to cry out against the Cat's scratching paw. It is then a question of making known the candour and innocence of the much reproached claw. First let us examine first its form: it is so sharp, and requires so much attention from the Cat, a dexterity so perfect that it does not catch it, that even the least reasoning men agree when they say that Cats make velvet paws. This manner of speaking which appears to be only an expression is, however, a very fine analysis of the admirable skill with which a cat must use his paw in order that his nails do not scratch. Behold then, Cats are in a perpetual state of restraint, and, moreover, what sort of restraint? A restraint that demands such inconvenient concentration that it completely disturbs the natural order and action of its mechanism. Cats that live with us are in a constant state of attentiveness to retracting their claws. If we opened our eyes to this situation, dare we not admit that the Cat's affection is the most flattering and the most tender that we can inspire? It is true that during his life, a Cat may have a dozen distractions and despite himself, his claw will resume the game that nature imposed on it, even if this only the transport of an involuntary joy, the scratch, moreover falling only on distrustful hands. Nevertheless, there are minds that are appalled. They do not take into account past virtue. They become furious, forgetting how much it costs a Cat to not scratch more often. Such injustice! Such ingratitude!

Here then is a friend who is amusing and delicate, and who has spent his life in self-restraint, and you will not forgive his friendship for a few moments of distraction? Could society be preserved among men if they regarded with the same severity the clawings (if I may call it that) they willingly exchange during their liaisons and their friendships? This small loss of fair treatment in the conduct of Cats, far from disposing us against them, is morality in action; we should consider them animals as capable of teaching us as they are capable of amusing us.

Rest assured, Madame; one day we shall see the merit of Cats generally recognized. It is impossible that, in a nation as enlightened as ours, prejudice should trump reasoning in this regard. Do not doubt that, in social circles, at spectacles, at promenades, at the Ball, and even in Academies, Cats

will be received, or rather sought after. It is impossible to not feel that in the Cat we possess a friend who is excellent company, an admirable pantomime artist, a born Astrologer, and a perfect Musician; in short an assemblage of talents and the graces, but we cannot yet determine with real precision when this epoch will arrive, which will justly be compared to the golden age, reason will overcome the handiwork of prejudice. The progress of reason is never rapid and she is circumspect with those men who lead the way. She seems to fear letting them see that it is reason who schools them; this is humiliating for humanity, and contrary to the interests of the Cats.

I have the honor to be, etc.

Footnotes on the Eleventh Letter

[1] The Allans , the Vandals, and the Sueves, all lovers of freedom, knew no better symbol to represent liberty than the Cat; they carried a sable Cat on a ground of gold. Meshod. Favyn. Hist. of Navarre, liv I, pag. 34

In Heraldic terms, the Cat is called Effarouche (startled) when it is rampant ; but when it has its hindquarters higher than its head it is called Herissone (crouching).

Felis efferata , Felis arreata.

[2] The charm of feline society becomes more generally recognised in Paris each day; they are starting to find there the same consideration that they have in the Levant. One could make a long list of cats who lead a delightful life there. The Princess of Bouillon has two cats that could certainly see the position of the most fortunate Cats of Asia without being jealous.

[3] Bibliot. Orientale.

[4] Indeed how silently . . . how secretly and watchfully, do Cats spring forth upon Mice. Plin. Lib. XI. Cap. LXXIII

[5] In speaking of Dogs, Montagne says, with what pains do we not inconvenience ourselves on their behalf? It certainly does not seem to me that the most abject servants would willingly do for their Masters what Princes boast of doing for their Beasts. pag. 227. ch. 2. l. 2.

[6] The eyes of nocturnal Animals such as cats glitter and shine in the darkness. Plin. lib. XI. cap. XXXVI.

[7] M. Lemery, Traité de Chymie.

[8] Others, so I have heard, shook out flames from a black Cat by rubbing the beast's back ; so runs the text. Fortunius Licetus de Lucernis, pag. 262.

THE END.

EPITAPH FOR A CAT

These days, living vexes me;
And do you know why, Magny,
Know why I feel so morose?
No, it is not because I've lost
My rings, my money, or my purse;
I have suffered something worse
Three days ago I lost such treasure -
I lost my love, and thus lost pleasure.
When I recall what death has taken,
I can feel my sad heart breaking,
And when I speak or when I write,
I feel the wound of lost delight;
Belaud, my small gray cat, deceased.
Belaud – nature's finest masterpiece,
Wrought in flesh, fur and form of cat;
Belaud, the deadly scourge of rats
Whose beauty was such, 'tis true to tell,
He was worthy of being immortal.
First of all, I must say
That Belaud was not entirely grey,
Not like French cats bred here at home,
But more like those we find in Rome -
Silvery grey with lustrous shine,
Like richest satin, smooth and fine,
Lying like waves upon his spine,

And white beneath, just like ermine.
Small teeth housed in a muzzle short,
Eyes not too ardent, but full of warmth;
And like the shining Persian sloes,
Nuanced with tints stole from rainbows,
With glowing colours, iridescent
Like those painted on the rainy heavens.
A well proportioned, short-eared head,
Set upon a compact neck.
Belaud had ebon-coloured nostrils,
Tipping that little leonine muzzle,
Either side of which there grew
His whiskery beard of silver hue,
A wisp of hair to add such grace
To his little lion-face.
Slender legs and little feet,
Softer than a fine wool mitt;
Except for when, with unsheathed claws,
He scratched, and then had not soft paws!
An elegant and soft, sleek throat,
Long monkey's tail and nuanced coat,
Variegated, flecked and freckled,
Subtly shaded, somewhat speckled.
The raised-up flanks support their burden,
Of his rounded, ample abdomen,
Below the back, moderately long,
And overall, a jovial form.

Belaud was such a handsome beast,
From his head down to his feet,
Rarely is such beauty seen,
In one single living being.
Oh what a misfortune! Calamity!
He cannot be restored to me!
What mourning has my soul received -
Death has dealt such bitter grief,
Far more savage than a bear,
If death had seen my Belaud, rare,
Death would have softened and relented,
And I would still be quite contented,
Instead of this sad and lonely path,
That life became when Belaud passed.
But cruel death had never gazed
Like I upon his silly games,
The agility and nimble tricks
Of Belaud's graceful antics,
Seen him scratch, or jump, or race,
Or turn about with supple with grace,
Become a whirlwind of a cat
To whisk about or snatch a rat
Then release it to prolong the play
His pastime sporting with his prey.
With what care he used velvet paws
To clean his whiskers and his jaws,
So that Belaud the little knave

Became then dignified and grave.
He was permitted even on my couch,
And would take gently from my mouth
Some tasty morsels of my meat
When together we sat down to eat -
For one of his thousand fetching traits
Was to watch me at my plate.
My God! What a pastime he found,
My Belaud as he twirled around,
Made foolish by a ball of thread,
And what pleasure, when his silly head
Chased time and time his furry tail,
And went whirling like a spinning wheel!
Or when sitting on hi well-furred stern
Like a garter that same tail was worn,
Its tip pointing to his stomach, white,
And for all the world this funny sight
Was a wondrous caricature of some
Solemn learned doctor of the Sorbonne!
Or when, when teased he used his paw
Like some fencer with a sword,
But for me there was not any danger
For fuss would soon appease his anger.
And so, Magny, can you now see,
How Belaud passed his time with me;
And can you realise why I mourn?
I'm sure no other cat's been born

So skillful, learned or adroit
To engage the rats and mice in combat.
Belaud knew a thousand ways
To surprise them in their lairs,
And even if they'd thought to scrape
More than one hole for their escape;
There was not a single rat
So fast it could outrun my cat
Once in front of Belaud. Now I'll say more
No ignoramus was my Belaud:
He understood things well, was trainable,
To eat his meat sat at my table,
If, when he begged, he was not offered food,
As a sharp reminder he'd scratch you,
But if offered food, he'd stay his claws
And take his meat with outstretched paw.
Belaud was almost always well-behaved,
And rarely were his acts depraved,
He did just a few things that displeased -
Such as when he ate a vintage cheese,
Or my linnet and my chaffinch killed,
When they annoyed him with their trills.
But Magny, those things were forgiven
For we men are not perfect either.
Belaud was not the sort of feline,
Who prowled about both day and night,
To his appetite enslaved:

But for his mealtimes he would wait,
And he ate with great sobriety,
For he was not prone to gluttony.
Also it was not his nature
To defecate just anywhere,
Like so many others make their soil
Where'er they like and leave places spoiled.
Because Belaud had better taste,
And when he needed to make his waste,
Restrained himself with decency,
And always had the honesty
To hide his soil beneath ash-pile
That way my garden was not defiled.
Ah Belaud, my dearest plaything;
Ah Belaud of endless purring,
Rumbling his tuneless litany
Was how he often spoke to me;
He made complaints in sweet-voiced mews
Protesting kitten-like and cute.
The times Belaud annoyed me,
(Or at least the only times in memory)
Was when he roused me from my dreaming
When the night-time noise intrigued him -
Of nesting rats gnawing my mattress
And just as noisy he gave chase!
Dexterously he seized and snatched them
Never did he fail to catch them;

Now death has stole my bodyguard
The rats are chewing twice as hard
And with no cat his night-watch keeping
I'm more disturbed than e'er when sleeping
And I slumber fitfully in fear
That rats will now chew on my ears.
I fear that all the verse I write
Will be eaten by the rats and mice.
Truly the Gods lack sympathy
For miserable humanity,
An animal's demise foretells
The approach of yet more ills,
Or some other evil presages,
For in omens heaven sent a message,
It was a warning from dire Fate,
When she took Peloton, my dog away.
With foreboding I could sense,
There was some malignant influence
Hovering and filling me with dread
And then, my God, Belaud was dead!
No crueller storm could blast my head,
My cherished cat, Belaud was dead!
Belaud was my dearest friend
Was my companion, till his end,
In my room, on my bed, at table,
Belaud was more companionable,
Than any little fawning hound.

He did not prowl at night to howl
Like those monstrous tomcats, squalling,
In their horrid caterwauling;
But now that little tomcat fine
Will never found a family line.
And for Belaud, it is sad indeed,
That you'll not perpetuate your breed.
If it please God, my little Bel,
That I many fashion words so well,
And in some pretty style, with passion
My proclaim your grace in finest fashion,
If my verses be as sweet as true,
Belaud, in faith, I promise you,
That you'll live on, as long as cats
On earth wage warfare on the rats.
(Par du Bellay, Gentleman of Angevin, 1568.)

What a tough career it would be to find moral examples were it not for the conduct of Cats! Does M. de la Fontaine need to depict a natural beauty that could be corrupted by temptation? Does he wish to warn us against ourselves, even though we follow the path of virtue? A Cat provides him with the subject of his apology.

THE CAT AND THE TWO SPARROWS

Fable. A. M. le Duc de Bourgogne.

[Note for the modern reader: Pierrot – in this case the sparrow - was portrayed as a bungling but acrobatic pantomime clown at that time, and mock fights or knockabout with the character of the wise Rat – in this case the cat.]

Once a cat lived alongside a young Sparrow,
Who'd lodged close together since their days in the cradle,
For the cage and the basket were in the same household;
The bird very often tormented the young Cat -
The bird fenced with his beak, the cat's paws patted back;
Always sparing his friend however it teased him
Correcting it gently whene'er it displeased him:
Scrupulously using just soft velvet paws
Though well it knew it was armed with sharp claws.
The Sparrow, however, was less circumspect,
Belabouring the kitty with unrestrained pecks;
But master kitty both was wise and was discreet
Excusing the Sparrow for the use of its beak.
For between friends we must never surrender
To real wrath which would tear that friendship asunder.
From infancy bird and cat both knew the limits,
Living in harmony laid down by long habit,
So that their games never turned to real combat.
One day there appeared a neighbourhood Sparrow,
At first coming to visit, and then became a companion
To clowning Pierrot and his games with wise Raton.
But alas, the two Sparrows got into a real fight,

And wise Raton took his life-long friend's side;
Saying "This is a fine thing you insolent stranger,
By insulting my friend you have invited danger
Little neighbourhood Sparrow are you trying to eat mine?
Not if this Cat can help it! " and the Cat joined the fray,
Quickly crunched up the stranger and, surprised, he did say,
"Such exquisite flavour, that Sparrow, such savour,"
And reflecting on this he consumed his friend too.
So, from the fable, can we infer some moral?
For without one this tale is imperfect and hollow.
I think I see something, but its shadows confuse me,
Prince, you will find them immediately;
These are games for you, and not for the Muses,
For they do not have the same wit as thee.

THE FOX AND THE CAT

Fable. Verses by the Chevalier de S. Gilles.

There is nothing like having sharp wits,
Said a fox, and you cannot contradict,
I have much more than any other can boast.
No doubt about I have more than most.
In my repertoire I have two hundred good tricks.
Me, said the cat, I know to my benefit
A wonderful trick that I learnt from my mother,
And glad of that one, I know no other -
There is nothing like it.

Both creatures heard at the very same moment

The barking of dogs, and both of them left:

The tomcat climbed up to the top of a Sycamore,

The other fell prey to the dogs, was devoured.

A point of finesse or common sense is sufficient.

There is nothing like it.

LETTER FROM TATA

Tomcat belonging to Madame the Marquise de Mongla.

TO GRISETTE

She-cat belonging to Madame Deshouillieres.

[Note: Grisette was a term for a young, working-class Frenchwoman]

I have received your compliment,

Your nobly expressed sentiment;

And I can see well in your manners

That you despise the tiles and gutters.

And these things meet with my approval.

No other kitty is so beautiful,

No other kitty pleased me so greatly;

To no other was I so faithful

That I loved her and her alone.

When you offer me your tenderness,

Is it in good faith you speak?

Is it possible that you have interest

In an unfortunate like me?

Alas! Is this truly sincerity?
As a lover you'd regard me!
But I am forming now a fantasy;
Could I be loved? Could I be happy?
May I describe to you my anguish?
How friendship is all I can profess,
A jealous rival, enraged and ruthless,
Found me with his lover in a tryst.
Spare me from my story painful
Of his revenge and of my shame:
Pity me my dreadful destiny,
And let your pity soothe the injury
Both in my heart and my body's pain
That I can feel no more that pleasure.
I'm unworthy of you, sweet, pretty Grisette,
This pains me more than you could guess,
That I have lost my lover's fire:
A loss made more deplorable
Because it is irreparable.

GRISETTE'S RESPONSE TO TATA

How dare you recount to me
The losses you've sustained?
This is not the way to start,
No way to win a She-cat's heart
With stories pleading of your pain.

Ha! Fie! (a pack of priceless ladies
Would quite nonchalantly cry)
Ha! Fie! again, to such a lover, say we,
And Tata, I'll dare speak to you freely,
Far more am'rous are we ladies coy.
Woe to the others, and it's their misfortune,
That tomcats are disgraced like you.
Now I, made wise and tender by happy fate,
I will excuse you from pleasures more robust,
Let us make our love more chivalrous
In witty banter let us both converse,
And never will we exhaust our desires' source.
For you I will renounce the gutters and the tiles,
Where (by the way) I have never strayed,
For I am one of those proud queens who smiles,
On those who play the greatest airs, on gallant styles.
Alas! It's by these my heart is stole away,
When I learned what the others had to say,
Of your attractions and of your address
And of your incomparable Mistress.
Ever since that dangerous moment,
My every single thought you've occupied,
How to tell you? I had some designs,
To pay you some sweet compliment
From the love engendered by you in my heart.
You confirmed to me by pleasant verse
All I have heard of your talents so diverse.

In spite of your justified sadness,
I see, dear Tata, you are a shining gallant ,
My verse is doggerel, a poor response
Compared to the fine lines flowing from your talent;
But this is rare, they say, among men too,
So what should I, Grisette, be frightened of?
When by my lines you see that I love you,
And for one who seeks my love that is enough.

TATA'S RESPONSE TO GRISETTE

It's with good reason I am charmed by you, Grisette,
You have more wit than any Tomcat I have met;
Never, let me say, has any She-cat charmed me,
But in confidence I must ask you yet,
You surely are a flirt - you've quite disarmed me!
You can admit it and I'll not think you indiscreet.
The evil of coquetry is not that much indeed;
And such admission will not do you any hurt,
I will make my own admission if you need,
Despite my sorry loss, I'm still a flirt.
When love dies one can still write knowingly,
Gallantly, with knowledge of such love in mind,
Because, believe me, to speak happily
Especially of loving you will find,
Some visits to the roof-tiles are most necessary;

One does not become expert otherwise.
After all, it is a Tomcat's weakness
It's up to us to dare to play the tease,
And on this point there's really little need,
To flatter us on what comes natural to us,
We display this talent freely without cease.
In cats there are no virginal Lucreces,
And we never see prudishness in our species;
But I've no wish to anger thee,
So let us flirt, let us take pleasure,
In these things by fate decreed;
In short, let's love and at our leisure;
You've wit and spirit enough to please;
And I believe we belong together!
I present no danger to your honour,
Though enraged at my own misfortune,
A small advantage to Grisette, it's true;
For if you weren't so wise and tender,
I could not have attracted you.
Ah! you understand me, but let's change language,
For it seems I might offend,
Well, my dear Grisette, a suggestion -
A correspondence between us two;
May this faithful beau give satisfaction
In the respect he has for you.

RESPONSE FROM GRISETTE TO TATA

Tata, when I give up for you
Charming Tomcats, tender too,
Planning to establish our friendship perfect,
Because a friendship is all we can do,
So why do you call me a coquette?
That reprimand is indiscreet;
Did some strange whim of yours that epithet beget
Because I have the name Grisette?
Do you some flirty heart suspect?
My name does not my nature set.

What! In order to write gallant lines to me,
You need some past experience in mind?
That it's impossible to write without some understanding
Gained from your days cavorting on the tiles
And amorous adventures in the guttering?
We feline connoisseurs think otherwise.

But we'd still have some soft weakness,
Do I really wish to flirt with you, Tata?
Alas! It's only yourself that you like to flatter,
And it's time for that mistake to cease,
I'll not hide the fact I find it an insult.
No feline Lucrece? For that matter,
There also are no feline Tarquins, Tata,

I say this without wishing to cause upset.

When Cats like you propose to please,
It should be done in better fashion,
First rid yourself of your suspicious jealousy
And stop grumbling about past passion,
Or, Tata, you cannot flirt with me.

I really do not wish to spend my days
Listening to you say that you're enraged
It's not necessary to proceed this way,
To discourage me from being sage;
And often, out of spite one may be engaged
A trifle beyond mere words and language,
In saying so, once more, no offence is intended.

Farewell, Tata, confidante of Grisette,
Because a young woman like myself,
Find no great satisfaction in your letter,
Nor satisfaction in yourself.

GRISETTE'S RESPONSE TO COCHON

Dog belonging to Maréchal de Vivonne.

We would have known, even had you not said it,
That you come from a cynical breed,

The way that you answered what I'd writ,
Was proof enough indeed.
Nothing is sacred from your expert bite,
And nothing is granted grace;
You tear up everything despite
A twenty-centuries long space
That great talent of your race
Unaltered still burns bright.
Whether it be apocryphal or true,
That you count as your ancestors
That breed of biting Philosophers,
Though you have good teeth in your jaws,
The claws of cats are sharp-honed too,
However, I do not wish them to be used,
If you wanted you could dispense the hauteur,
That's unattractive in your nature,
Then, perhaps, with you I could be amused.
Perhaps you believe this She-cat too vulgar?
But of this notion you'll soon be disabused.
If you count Diogenes,
Crates of Thebes, and all the other hounds,
Me, whom you despise, for mine I count
All fabled Gods within my pedigree.
When the Titans daringly
Climbed up to the Heavens foolishly,
The god who threw his thundering lances,
Unwilling to to leave such things to chance,

Sent the Gods and Goddesses to earth for safety,

Away from the war that rent the heavens,

And, by the way, they obeyed him happily.

Of all the countries Egypt was chosen,

And there the gods went into hiding,

Adopting both pretty and ugly guises,

Safe from sight, those drinkers of ambrosia.

One took the figure of a bull, another was a bear,

And some in feathered finery were clad.

It was the supple figure of a female cat

That the Queen of Lovers chose to wear.

In feline form she was a comely Princess,

And to avoid earth-bound ennui,

She found contentment in the embrace

Of a lusty cat o'ercome by her beauty,

And after a while that glowing Goddess

Produced kittens in quantity.

It is from this source source

That I, Grisetter, draw my origins.-

Which of us, Cochon, tell truthfully,

Can best boast of quality?

Perhaps this discourse displeases you.

Let's talk about your wit which shows clearly through

In all your penned endeavours,

But is it your wit alone that knows how to please?

Are these brilliant lines in part due to your secretary

Whose fine phrases are so clever?

Between us, Cochon, I conjecture
That some sharp-witted Secretary,
Gives you more wit than you have.
I know his turn, I know his manner -
Lively, charming, and singular -
Apollo could not write such dazzling words.
For me, I must rely on my own knowledge
I tell you, if you've not already heard
That I do not roam the gutters or roof-ridges.

Never have sharp, scandalous cries
Come forth from my modest throat.
When Love makes me feel its fire,
And it's to my Mistress, her alone,
That my love's secrets I confide.
Then sensitive to the torment I display,
She finds for me a kind and worthy mate,
Do you consider this a destiny to despise?
If this Marshal's love is true,
He'd surely do the same for you;
If your master, the great Hero,
With spirit and valour enough for thirty,
Saw how Love disturbs his hound's repose,
For you he'd find a she-dog hot and flirty,
Instead you must make puppy-eyes
Forced by your needs, to idolize
A scratching Mistress fruitlessly.

GRISSETTE'S RESPONSE TO COCHON

Never had a Dog so much wisdom,
Never was a Dog so eloquent,
So much spirit, such visible affection.
Would the Immortal authors of my birth consent,
To aid me against you in my faltering obligation!

They listen to my wishes, and already I commence
To feel in my pounding heart their divine aid;
They show me your many flaws that will dissuade
This fire which would have cost my innocence.
Yes, now I notice your most maddening defect.
There's no fault greater than that unworthy weakness
That makes you renounce your learned ancestors
When you would surely be more glorious
If we could believe you had their wisdom and finesse
And that you, Cochon, could draw some nobleness
With the blood of the Gods as its source.

It's just like those humans and their foolish vanity,
They dredge up some illustrious names
That are associated with money,
From Houses glamorous and famed,
And that have an exalted history.
What if they discover names even greater still?

For sure some cunning genealogist
Will find some link, however tenuous, exists;
As often they change their clothes, they change their relatives at will;

They're governed by their pride instead of nature.
I know their faults better than they know mine.
But I did not know, Cochon, I swear,
That there were social climbers among your kind.
And here, it seems, at last we have your story:
A Cynic yesterday, a God today;
At once in heaven and on the Styx's black banks dreary
And on earth you're simultaneously placed;
Believing this, I find, is not so easy.
What! you would be these all-at-once
The great dog whose ardor burns us all?
Horrid Cerberus with triple-throated voice?
The fat dog whose baying quite unsettles,
Whose tend'rest barks to me are merely noise?
Do I seem so stupid, or so gullible,
To believe one dog is three? I'm more adroit!

When I described the gallant adventure
Venus had on the banks of the Nile,
Unlike you I resorted not to imposture.
So, you say I've not proved I'm the child
Of Venus, mother of the Graces.
And that you need more signs?

Let's leave the deeds of the first Races
In whom we still preserve the traces;
I may only have for myself
Just a single mythology.
Which book is more trustworthy,
Than a book that contains in itself
The very first Theology?

If among heaven's celestial fires
That regulate the fate of every being,
Just because your species is appearing,
Do not be so conceited you'd expire.

The Ass of ever-drunken Silenus,
A dirty, stinking he-goat, and a Scorpion hideous,
And a thousand more beasts monstrous
Like your canine constellation shine upon us.
But, Cochon, show me if you would,
A dog good enough in mind and brain,
To walk about in human shape,
As we cats did, thanks to the ancient Gods.

A handsome youth once owned a She-Cat pretty,
History says he loved her to distraction;
And every day this love-lorn madman
A hundred times kissed the mouth and paw of kitty,
But this strange love could bear no fruit;

And since he needed something more,
That poor lover was reduced
To ask the Gods to metamorphose her.

He spared no effort and he spent his earnings,
Wept a sea of tears to Goddess Venus,
And at her famous Temple in Erice
He burnt more than one sacrifice.
Until Venus finally listened to his yearning.
By excess of pity for his strange burning,
From his She-cat Venus made a woman.
Do not go to some canine ignoramus,
But know that I'm still obliged to that lovely Goddess;
For the honour given to my species,
And I can call Aesop as my witness.

But let us both forget our breeds immortal,
Let's finish, Cochon, I agree,
Let's not pursue this famous quarrel .
Be tender and to me be faithful.
Despite the Gods, I give in to troubled feelings.
These guiltless games and gallant exchanges,
Are born in us through tenderness
That cannot withstand the commerce of the senses.
So without delay let's go together
To Permessus' banks, sacred to Apollo and the Muses,
And pick those flowers that last forever.

Let's crown with them the peerless Master,
Who embellishes your words with genius divine;
And leave in the world a memory lasting
Of our uncommon love, both yours and mine.

**** THE END ****

A TRAGIC PLAY.

ACTORS

GRISSETTE - Madame Deshouillieres' She-cat, in love with Cochon.

MIMY - Madame Deshouillieres' Tomcat, in love with Grisette.

MARMUSE - Madame Deshouillieres' He-cat, Mimy's Confidante.

CAFAR, Cat belonging to Minimes of Chaillot, Deputy of the Village Cats.

LOVE

A Troupe of Neighbourhood Cats.

The Scene is a house in Paris, the home of Madame Deshouillieres.

The Theater opens, and represents a flat terrace level with the guttering.

SCENE I

MIMY, MARMUSE, Chorus of Neighbourhood Cats.

MIMY.

I can no longer suffer the rigours that Grisette

Imposes on me, nor the torment.

She mistreats me, preferring Cochon, you know. The ingrate!

Heavens, what a disturbance
That a cat should choose a dog for her sweetheart.
Can you believe it my dear Marmuse,
Can you imagine my excessive hurt
That for a year – no for two -
An ugly dog has that heart which was to me refused!

MARMUSE.

Mimy, I can feel your desperation,
I can barely express my sensitivities,
My awful feelings against that heartless beauty;
And besides I am your loyal companion,
Believe me when I say forget that cat
Give up on she who's so indelicate,
That she favours a Dog above the most perfect Tomcats.

MIMY.

I cannot stop worshipping her allures;
But today I'll finally explode with with vengeance.
Please do not abandon me, Marmuse
Come help me punish an ungrateful mistress.

MARMUSE.

Nothing is more sacred than to serve a friend,
Let's go, Mimy, I offer you my willing hand,
And I wait gladly for your command.

SCENE II.

MIMY, MARMUSE, CAFAR, Chorus of Neighbourhood Cats.

CAFAR.

Listen handsome tomcats, great news has come,

Cochon has just lost the day.

To a cruel and frightful rage -

Grisette is robbed of the object of her Love.

MARMUSE.

The heart of Grisette

Is for rent today.

With this Coquette

Who wants to play?

But I'm thinking that

As an important Cat,

I will do nothing,

That could make others

Say my heart aspires

To a dog's leftovers.

MIMY.

What favorable hand has washed away

Our insult in this cursed dog's blood?

Cafar, tell us the story if you would

Of the agreeable events of this day.

MARMUSE.

Do not imitate the triumphant style
Of those mortals who as Beautiful Minds are known.
Their talk could make an Elephant out of a Fly,
And we could travel from Paris to Rome,
Before they could express the sorrow of a child
From whom an apple was stolen.

CAFAR.

I do not care to be so dull of silly.
It happened in Chaillot, a nearby village,
A fruitful, pleasant place and populous beside.

MARMUSE.

Just as I said – we'll be in danger of dozing off
Before you even get to Cochon's death,
It would take less time to turn you into a muff
You glorious windbag with your boring eloquence.

CAFAR, to Mimy.

You fool, is all this really necessary?

MIMY.

Do not be diverted at his fits of rage.

CAFAR.

For a while, as we must surely be aware,

Chailot has been the usual residence
Of a Marshal brave as long-dead Caesar,
As wise as a Cato, and as learned as Homer.

MARMUSE.

Please stop there, my friend Cafar,
It's not your place to reciting eulogies,
We all know this Marshal,
Know what he can do, know of his deeds,
And we love him, with the faith of animals.

CAFAR, to Mimy.

Don't you want to shut him up, Mimy?
Silence the rascally little Tomcat?

MIMY, to Marmuse.

Shh! Marmuse, listen, even if it's just to please me.

MARMUSE.

Then I will tell it all, if you'll permit.

CAFAR.

His Master's favours made Cochon full of pride,
The wrath of the other Dogs knew no bounds:
It it too much, they said, we'll get revenge for all the hounds;
Who do not want this traitor by our side.
At that moment rage offered herself to them:

If one of you will take me in today,
Without it being perceived in any way,
To the prideful one I'll deal punishment.
Citron, with no thought and no delay,
Opened up his soul to cruel rage.
First this nimble dog was seen
Running wildly throughout the Village,
Then he seized Cochon in an ugly scene,
And right away he did him in.

MIMY.

Our fortunes have now become favourable.
That Dog, that formidable Rival,
Who made us neglect our tender interest,
Fate has stopped him in a manner irrevocable.
But perhaps the Love-pangs that we found unbearable
Will not be comforted in completeness.
Grisette will mourn her vanished pleasures strange
When we love, is it an advantage,
To see the proud object to whom we pay homage,
Have her lovely eyes ever full of sorrow's pain?

CAT CHORUS.

Miaou, miaou, we are avenged,

MARMUSE, to Mimy.

Instead of spreading pretty words,

We'd better go to the house with careful tread
To steal some soles, or from what I've heard,
Some capons, well fattened from the diet fed,
That I knew we've not yet eaten yet.

MIMY.

Marmuse, another thought is worrying my mind.

MARMUSE.

Like the Hero of a Romantic Novel, will you find,
That maybe you are being duped, my friend?

CAT CHORUS.

Miaou, miaou, we are avenged.

SCENE III.

GRISSETTE, MIMY, MARMUSE, CAFAR , Chorus of Neighbourhood Cats.

GRISSETTE.

Cruel Tomcats, what's this you say of me?

Do you think I'm insulted or outraged?

CAT CHORUS.

Meow, meow, we are avenged.

GRISSETTE.

If my cruel troubles are not enough for thee

My just despair will end my woe I fear.

Meow, meow, flow, flow my tears.

Despite the natural hostility,

That Heaven imprints in our hearts at our birth,

Cochon disarmed my austerity,

For him I lost for my reputation for harshness.

Miaou, meow, flow, flow my tears.

MARMUSE.

Grisette, blush for your foolish grief.

CAT CHORUS.

Grisette, blush for your foolish grief?

GRISETTE.

No, it is not enough to to simply cry

My lover's death demands my own.

Let's die for my illustrious Cochon:

To the wandering spirits of lovers I will be a sacrifice.

No, it is not enough to to simply cry

My lover's death demands my own.

MIMY.

So, unkind, barbaric queen it's not enough

That you betray your duty.

But through a passion strange enough,

Just as your rival's death rekindles hope in me,

I must now be forced to see

You prepare more pain to punish me for my love.

Fear that paw. . . . ah! my reason strays, enough!

I'm shivering. . . . I die. . . .

MARMUSE, to Mimy.

Good night.

MARMUSE, to Grisette.

He's a devil when something raises his ire,

Do not expose yourself to his flaming wrath.

When he invites you to satisfy his inner fire.

But Cochon had no other qualities

Than to by both a Hero and by Grisette be adored.

GRISETTE.

That Hero's choice was author of my fatal weakness.

And for my lover by his own pain he's sorely pressed.

My dear Cochon, the most handsome of all dogs.

Miaou, miaou.

MARMUSE.

Such a plague of miaous.

Oh you beauty so capricious,

Be a little less precious.

Ridicule follows closely on the heels of fashion,

That collection of wonders,

This Cochon, your beloved,

His tail was docked, as too were his ears.
He was, 'tis said, saved from the Marseilles sewer,
Named "Pig" for his appearance,
So much did he that filthy beast resemble.
Breathed from his mouth a fearful smell,
Which could be smelled a hundred paces all around.
A disteller's discerning eye was all that's left.
Apart from that he was the handsomest dog in the world.

GRISSETTE, CAT CHORUS.

Grisette: No, Cochon was made to inflame my heart,

Chorus: No, Cochon was made to injure the heart.

MARMUSE.

Throughout the course of his whole life,
There was no day, without exception,
That he did not harbour the sincere desire
To always devour someone.
Capons, Partridge, down his deep gullet he hurled,
Without him bothering to chew them.
No caress or benefactions moved him.
Apart from that he was the handsomest dog in the world.

GRISSETTE.

Why do you dare deliver such blows to my heart?

Ah! what horrors, and what blasphemy!

Slandorous Tomcats fear me,

Fear my extreme fury,
Tremble and shake before me.
You, divine Venus, from whom I am descended,
Come here to defend my rights
Give me tenderness and take revenge divine -
Punish these roof dwellers
For their brutal insolence,
For they offend a gentle child of thine.

MARMUSE.

We don't fear the Goddess's revenge.
In Egypt on the Nile's banks she dwelt,
And took a Tomcat for her husband then.
So with the Goddess we're acquainted well,
Stop invoking the lovely Goddess,
Grisette, return to your own species,
Your destiny will be much sweeter.

CAT CHORUS,

Grisette, return to your own species,
Your destiny will be much sweeter.

GRISETTE.

It's for Cochon alone that I have tenderness,
Though you might have a thousand times more envy,
It's still for him alone that I have interest.

CAT CHORUS.

Grisette, return to your own species,
Your destiny will be much sweeter.

MARMUSE.

Minuet.

You need not be mad nor a fool,
To love a paramour who's dead and gone.
Humans all are in accord,
And we learn also at their school
That the absentee is always wrong.

MIMY.

She's already gone, ungrateful wretch,
She has fled my burning flame.
Cruel kitty, stop! I call your name -
Grisette, Grisette, Grisette.

CAT CHORUS.

Grisette, Grisette, Grisette.
Stop, stop, cruel Cat, Grisette!

SCENE IV.

LOVE, MIMY, MARMUSE, CAFAR and CAT CHORUS.

LOVE (*sitting astride the guttering*)

Tender Tomcat, let her go,

Your misfortune in a while will end.

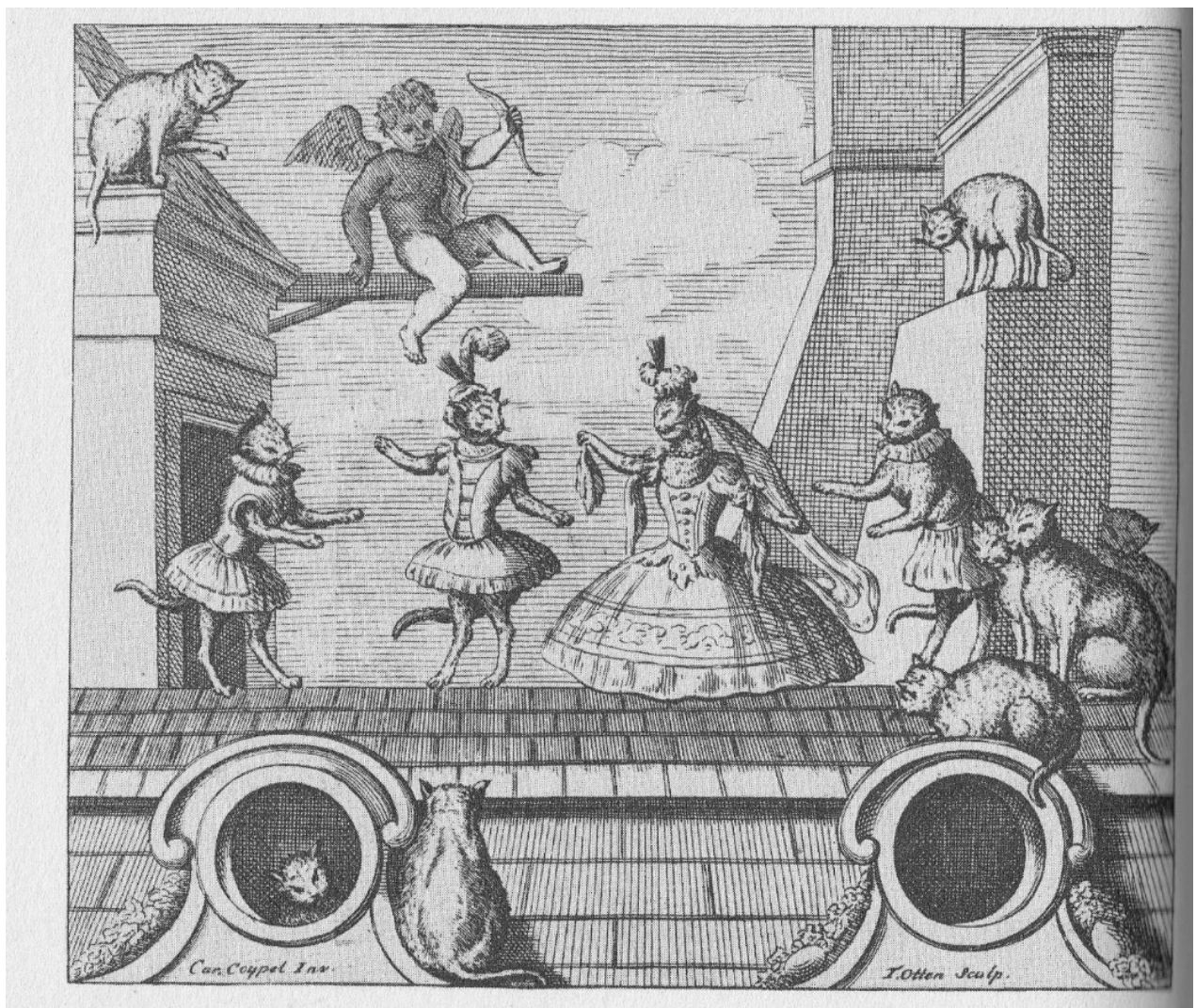
I swear by my bow, and by my mother Goddess.

That constancy is just a pipe-dream,

And Grisette will weary soon enough of grieving.

CAT CHORUS.

Love, please believe us, by God we'll be avenged.



****THE END****

ADDITIONAL NOTES FOR THE MODERN READER

François-Augustin de Paradis de Moncrif (1687 - 1770) was the son of a Scottish mother who wanted him to be a success at court. When he was born, the family Gallicized their surname from Moncrieff to Moncrif. He was a noted satirist and writer of verse on demand. He became speech writer for the Duc d'Aumont, Ambassador to England in 1713. He then joined the Comte d'Argenson for whom he wrote love letters. His *History of Cats* can be read as a parody of excessively pedantic scholarship. It has been described as an amusing trifle, which gave Count D'Argenson the opportunity for this witticism when Moncrif applied for the position of Historiographe (Historiographer, official chronicler): "Historiogriffe, you mean." (Chronicler of claws, you mean). He held the office of principal secretary to Count Clermont, and was afterwards appointed lecturer to the Queen of France. He was a member of the Académie Française, as also of the academies of Nancy and of Berlin. He was appointed official chronicler to Louis XV of France.

He wrote poetry, pamphlets, lectures and plays. Patronage of the house of Orléans gained him entry to the Académie Française. In 1735 he was elected to the Académie Française as a much-loved wit. A footnote to the printed French text of Galiani's letters about his cats states: "This work [*Histoire des Chats*], and the protection of the house of Orleans, had brought Moncrif membership of the French Academy. Maurepas wrote in his memoirs that on the day of Moncrif's induction into the Academy, while he was in the middle of his oration about his own work, a jokester present let loose a cat he had been hiding in his pocket. The poor frightened thing miaowed loudly, several members of the audience responded in kind, and this unexpected accompaniment to the discourse put an end to the academic gravity of the occasion."

Nicknamed the "laureate of cats," he seems to have been the first person to have written a book specifically about them. It was originally entitled *Les Chats* (Cats) and now known as "History of Cats". Unfortunately, it immediately became the subject of satires and skits, for example comedy entitled *Gulliver dans L'Isle de la Folie* (Gulliver on the Isle of Foolishness) by Dominique and Romagnesi which contained a scene between Gulliver and a musician who boasted of writing a magnificent Cantata to the honour and glory of Cats. The cantata's lyrics came straight from Moncrif's book, and the piece was performed to the accompaniment of enthusiastic meows. " Moncrif would be forever ridiculed for this book. Yet this is the work for which Moncrif is most famous. It was said of him that he rose in life by never scratching, by always having velvet paws, and by never putting up his back, even when he was startled.

When he was appointed a member of the French Academy, a song was published relating to his nomination as one of the forty:

The beautiful minds will teach us

Who among them should have the lead:

They have rats, they have rats;

They need someone to catch them;

They will choose the author of Cats.

If you don't choose Moncrif,

Clermont will show you his claws;

But when Moncrif is received,

Apollo will show you his arse.

Moncrif was a courtesan (i.e. a courtier), living at the court of his patron. Royal marriages were based on political alliances and, having assured the bloodline, the two parties led separate lives, seeking the company and entertainment from people living at court. A courtesan's role was precarious, and parasitic, but a good courtesan might be poached from one court to another. Moncrif was certainly obsequious and a flatterer. He is also described as a libertine, valuing physical and sensual pleasure (or debauchery) over the moral and sexual restraints of wider society.