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Katarzyna Łogożna-Wypych

The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin
katelogozna@yahoo.co.uk

(Un) cultural Cats: Multi-dimensional Transition of Felines in Human Society

Abstract. The status of cats has changed in both society and literature. In human society and literature. Cats have fought their way to human homes, hearts, and to the centre of interest of various fields of science. In the time of buoyantly developing field of animal studies and Athrozoology, cats have been given a chance to be appreciated and understood. Their transition in both real world and virtual reality has been a multi-layered and complex process yet to be completed.

Keywords: Athrozoology, animal studies, nature, culture, animal welfare.

Cats' grace and beauty, their noisy sexuality, devoted motherhood and secretive nature have made humans feel both respect and disgust toward them. Their transition in society has been a thorough and painful process. From mere pest controller pets to dominating both the real and virtual world, the history of cats has been far from trouble-free. The purpose of this paper it to present the essence of a changing perception of "cattiness," its notions and issues in society.

The field of what is called animal studies in the humanities has been rapidly developing, discussing the position of non-humans (animals) in history, culture as well as society. The notion of animal nature is addressed by scholars who engage in animal studies with angles ranging from geography, art, history, anthropology, psychology, literary studies, philosophy, communication, and sociology, to name but a few. Anthrozoology (Human-Animal Studies), the science of studying human-animal interactions, investigates the varied ways in which humans perceive, engage, compete and co-exist with non-humans in a range of cultural contexts. Not only are the two fairly recent fields compatible but they also complement and mutually enrich their findings.

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The attitudes towards animals usually oscillate between two approaches. Anthropomorphism, understood as the attribution of human qualities to animals, prevails when we give our pets names, and insist they have personality, when we interact, care for and bury them. In contrast, the animalistic approach, the "de-animalisation"(e.e. cummings, 1959, 108) of human beings, enables humans to perform (at times unnecessary) experiments on animals, call their personalities "individual behavioural syndromes" (Koolhaas, 1999, 926), keep some of them in cages, abuse, kill and eat them. Interestingly, the approach shifts, and according to James Weinrich, when animals do something we appreciate we call it natural, but when they do something which we do not, we call it animalistic (Weinrich, 1982, 22). In other words, there seems to be a limited number of codes of behaviour we are able to accept in our culture. Despite Darwin having pinpointed the elements unquestionably common for the human and non-human worlds, psychologists, sociologists, and anthropologists have been continuously setting the boundaries between what it means to be a human being and what it means to be an animal (Konecki, 2005, 29). The biological fact that human beings are animals is often either ignored or disregarded, in compliance with Christian teaching, persisting that man is superior to animals.

In the 17th century, notions about animals were not much different. The essence of the renowned philosopher Rene Descartes' view on animals is that they are non-sentient automata (Cohen, 1936, 50, 51, 53). Despite the subsequent clamour of disapproving voices, the notion of animal-machine has been rooted. Surprisingly, a different view was presented about a century earlier. In the sixteenth century, Michael de Montaigne, one of the most significant philosophers of the French Renaissance, expressed his concern about the limitations of human knowledge of animals "when I play with my cat, who knows if I am not a pastime to her more than she is to me? If I have my time to begin or refuse, so has she hers" (Montaigne, 2003, 401). Not only does he put the cat into the focus of enquiry, but, at the same time, he questions human power and animal inferiority. The boundary between human and animal has been contemplated by current philosophers. J. Derrida, for instance, challenges the conventional thinking that it is man who holds absolute power over the world. In his essay, *The Animal and Therefore I Am*, Derrida persists that in order to answer the question about the position of animals in the world an enquiry, whether they can suffer, should be first asked 'can they suffer?' (Derrida, 2008, 27). For the philosopher, it is the capacity of the creature to feel pain that defines its place in the world. Thus, non-humans should not be degraded.

Felines in Focus

The objectification, and, at the same time, anthropomorphism applied to cats can be traced across a wide historical span, in customs, habits, and also in art. In Renaissance, for example, the purpose of presenting cats was mostly symbolic; they embodied hu-

man features. The 1504 engraving *Adam and Eve* by Albrecht Durer captures Eve at the moment of accepting the forbidden apple from the serpent. A fat cat is laying at her feet, symbolising sexual lust, temptation, and feminine fertility. A century later, the attitude and symbolism of cats did not change. The feline presented in *The Fall of Man* by Henrik Golthius symbolizes instinct, desire, and lack of control, thus immorality. An example of felines symbolising betrayal and sin is *Last Supper* by Domenico Ghirlandaio (1480). A lone cat sitting next to Judas is the personification of treason and influence of evil. What is interesting, in Christianity the negative symbolism has been attributed to cats even though the species itself is not mentioned in the Bible.

The feline biology, history, psychology and their place in human world have been studied thoroughly. It seems the words of Confucius "When the majority dislike a person, it is important to find out why; When the majority like a person, it is also important to find out why" apply to cats perfectly (Shan, 2004, 4). Felines are being studied and observed closely by a growing number of researchers.

Małgorzata Rutkowska concentrates on the modern *Dogs, Cats, and Humans: Companion Animals in American* Literature, aiming at the presentation of human-animal relationship in selected literary works. The author states that cats are the most popular pets in America (Rutkowska, 2016, 9). The choice of literature may suggest the cat is still being perceived as mysterious and unapproachable, thus proving not to be an easy research project. However, it is notable that the number of popular publications on cats is steadily growing.

The position of felines in human world is one of the interests of Krzysztof Tomasz Konecki in People and Their Animals: *A Symbolic Interactionist Analysis of the Social World of* Pet *Owners*. The discrepancy between attitudes towards cats and dogs, based on the language, customs and religion is studied in the publication. The analysis of family photographs suggests women tend to show their emotional connection with their pets, whereas men turn into expressing their dominance over them. Cats are often held in the photographs, treated like babies, which shows the hierarchy of the whole family (Konecki, 2005, 149, 156, 157). On the other hand, many cats portrayed in the photos are caught in the moment, clearly planning their retreat, which only adds to the feline elusiveness as now it is the man who is struggling to include the cat in human culture. Nowadays it is the human being who aims to include cats in human society rather than the feline searching for food and protection.

One of the works on cats is *Cult of the Cat* by Patricia Dale-Green who proposes a convincing notion of an archetype of a cat, particularly the division into " The White Cat" and "The Black Cat," referring to the "light and dark aspects of cat's reputation rather than to its natural colouring" (Dale-Green, 1963, xvi). The author classifies attitudes towards cats based on the positive or negative powers aligned to the felines; "The White Cat" is associated with goddess Bastet, whereas "The Black Cat" holds occult, demonic and deadly connotations; there are no "grey" cats which is consistent with modern attitudes towards cats as they are either cherished or hated, with virtually no in-between approach, a notion supported by today's media. It seems, however, that

the direction of today's attitudes is closer to "The White Cat" archetype, followed by an enormous number of websites and Facebook groups praising felines.

An ambitious research, presenting cats in the cultural context of the Medieval western Europe, has been set by Laurence Bobis in *The Cat: Stories and Legends* (Bobis, 2008). The vast amount of resources provided by the author uncovers the historical and cultural process of the feline transition in human society. The author provides different names associated with cats, closely connected to their physical features, but also, most importantly, she thoroughly studies the process of the cat becoming the symbol of evil, occult and demonic powers. What may seem like a downside of the research is the lack of the twentieth- and twenty-first century references which would have completed the outline of feline history in society, especially that modern literature tends to concentrate on felines as protagonists of the stories (e.g. *Felidae* by Akif Pirinçci, *I Am a Cat* by Natsume Sōseki and/or human saviours (e.g. *Homer's Odyssey* by Gwen Cooper (2009), *Dewey's Nine Lives* by Vicky Myron (2010) and a 2012 book and 2016 film *A Street Cat Named Bob* by James Bowen).

A cultural turn in society is signalled by Bradshaw in his works, *Cat Sense*. *The Feline Enigma Revealed*. The biologist and founder of the world-renowned Anthrozoology Institute at the University of Bristol skilfully mixes cat lore with accounts of feline evolution, anatomy and genetics with elements of cat-psychology with reference to human culture.

The changing position of felines has been reflected in literature. The number of literary books on animals available is impressive ranging from pet memoirs, psychological accounts, philosophical musings and training guides to stories of pets as human companions. The expanding collection has also become more animal-focused than ever before. What is quite significant, however, is the fact that a vast majority of the publications concentrate on dogs, rather than on cats, the reason possibly being that cats have not become generally accepted as pets until the twentieth century. Only fifty years earlier were they deemed too autonomous and self-concerned in comparison to the ever-sacrificing dog.

The creatures in-between

Cats are an excellent example of how symbolism attributed to a particular animal diverges depending on a cultural context. What is more, its status as a symbol is ambiguous and hard to define. The archetype, understood as a universal, archaic pattern (Jung, 1967, 20) and its attributed symbolism is deeply rooted in human perception, the archetype of a cat being no exception. Consequently, the inability to categorise cats in human culture has been a "semantic discomfort" which was dealt with the use of different methods, domestication, and destruction being the main measures (Michalski, 2011, 109). This notion is compliant with Jung's view about bipolar structure of archetypes, i.e. having a constructive and destructive side (Jung, 1967, 20), in cats' history meaning domestication (the constructive side) or massacre (the destructive side).

The complexity of cats' personalities, their volatility and dexterity have, throughout the last centuries, amounted to the popularity of felines. According to Morris, the reason for this tendency is the everlasting desire of humans to acquire the features represented by cats. Their "independence, cunning evil and patient intelligence" (Morris, 1967, 22) to name but a few, make humans want to categorize and entrap them both in real and in a fictional world.

A different reason for interest in felines, according to Rogers, is that "people projected onto […] animals the physical appetites that they did not want to recognize in themselves – dogs are dirty, pigs are greedy, goats are lustful […], donkeys are stubborn and stupid" (Rogers, 1998, 9). Doniger states that in many rituals we masquerade as animals, whereas in myths we imagine that animals masquerade as humans (Doniger, 1995, 17). Interestingly, in her article, Lawrence states that it is people's beliefs and not their experience that determine the nature of interactions with the species. What is more, the author claims that the misinterpreting of an animal behaviour in metaphoric terms may result in a false classification of the animal as being "good" or "evil," which, consequently, determines the treatment it encounters in the society (Doniger, 1995, 624–625). Such anthropomorphic thinking, attribution of mental states to cats, has been one of the causes of foul treatment of felines in Europe enhanced by Christianity and witchcraft associations.

Due to the fact that cats are semi-domesticated animals, it seems difficult to culturally domesticate them as they are "carrying the immense symbolic responsibility with which our culture has always charged the feline race, from La Fontaine to Tieck (author of *Puss in Boots*), from Baudelaire to Rilke, Bauber and many others" (Derrida, 2008, 378). Because of the ambiguity concerning felines it is virtually impossible to classify them. Michalski warns that the particular instability of the meaning concerning cats may be, on the one hand, considered as wealth of diversity, and, on the other hand, however, it could be risky for the feline itself (Michalski, 2011, 112).

In one of Emily Dickinson's poems the volatility of the feline species is expressed. The author focuses on both, the feline's nature and symbolic associations with the species.

She sights a Bird—she chuckles—
She flattens—then she crawls—
She runs without the look of feet—
Her eyes increase to Balls— (Dickinson, 1967, 507)

The female cat, whose gender is stressed in the first line, seems to be the only female authority in Dickinson's poetry, not objected to higher powers. *She* is able to attack small prey only, and, although she goes to great lengths to succeed, she fails and is hence degraded to a humble non-human creature. Furthermore, the suggested gender of the cat is significant as females are often compared to cats to prove their connection with nature rather than culture (which, stereotypically is applied to men), displaying the unfortunate place of both female and feline in "the man's world."

In ancient Egypt, sacred and cherished, cats were believed to manifest divine powers. Feline's remarkable sensual acuity was thought to enable them to predict weather, earthquakes, and even death, making them live between the real and spiritual worlds. Cats were believed to embody "profound spiritual forces" (Lawrence, 2003, 629). *Doctor Sleep* by Stephen King may serve as an example of the Egyptian beliefs incorporated in a horror story. The cat in the novel is able predict the death of patients in a care home, a reference to the spiritual powers attributed to felines. The special qualities of the cat are not questioned. On the contrary, they are appreciated and the cat's habit of "…staring into thin air at those things only cats can see" is fully understood (King, 2013, 108). It seems hard to imagine any other species holding occult power and being accepted in society.

In the novel by Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass*, a Cheshire Cat acts as Alice's protector and guide in the peculiar world, regardless of the fact that his answers may be perceived as puzzling rather than explanatory.

> Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here? asked Alice. That depends a good deal on where you want to get to, said the Cat. I don't much care where, said Alice. Then it doesn't matter which way you go, said the Cat. (Carroll, 2009, 53)

Yet, the characteristics of the Cheshire Cat are consistent with the common perception of cats and their dual nature. On the one hand, they are domesticated and concerned with human world, and on the other hand, however, they manage to retain their nature thus come and go as they please.

Even though cats seem to have become more popular than dogs both in human homes and on the Internet, some of the popular TV shows seem to be proving otherwise. The distinction between felines (fouls) and canines (friends) is still deeply rooted in the human mind, being plainly displayed by two popular American shows, *My Cat from Hell* and *Dog Whisperer.* The shows present methods of dealing with improper (troublesome) behavioural issues of cats and dogs respectively. The titles themselves reveal the essence of stereotypical ways in which the two species are recognized, the former immediately indicating the presumed nature of the felines in question. In the former, the pet is the demon that needs to be dealt with; in the latter it is "just" an animal that needs to be guided. Each episode of *My Cat From Hell* (2011–2017) is based on two case studies on behavioural issues of cats, aggression being the main problem. Jackson Galaxy, a cat behaviourist states, contrary to what is commonly thought about cats, that felines display aggression only when left with no other devices. An interesting conclusion may be made – most, if not all, of the problems with the cats derive from basic misunderstanding, negation, or ignorance of a feline's needs and wants. It cannot be denied that, in all probability, the process of mastering cats' social skills has yet to have ended. Even though mankind has always valued cats for their independence, which, throughout the centuries has not only been tolerated, but also encouraged, it seems nowadays their autonomy does not fit our "cultural" world and felines need to evolve.

According to Bradshaw what cats need in today's world is human understanding that they have never been under so much pressure to become fully domesticated, thus, unlike dogs, have never been deprived of their wild features and drives, on the contrary, they were encouraged to act independently. Cats are. Indeed, in "transition between the wild and truly domestic" (Bradshaw, 2013, 273). This suspension between the two worlds has resulted in cats often being misunderstood and their behaviours misinterpreted, and, consequently becoming creatures that are easily demonised and ill-presented both in literature and beyond as the source of evil, concealing taboo issues and symbols of the unexplainable.

Unworthy creatures

Historian Robert Darnton in *The Great Cat Massacre* states that during the Medieval times cats in Europe were the objects of unbelievable tortures – being burnt alive, skinned alive, smashed against the ground, and hanged. People subjected cats to all kinds of treatment that would be condemned today. *Apt Pupil* by Stephen King presents cruelty towards cats deeply rooted in folkloric tradition. A future murderer practices his skills on a feline, putting and "roasting" it alive in the oven, an allusion to burning cats on stakes in Medieval Times when cats were not of much value to humans. Furthermore, it is mentioned that when cats become insufficient to the torturer he will proceed to dogs.

The peculiar unimportance of cats in society is reflected by the 1972 Road Traffic Act which states it is not necessary to report an accident involving a cat, but dog accidents must be reported. It seems to be, to say the least, surprising, given the widespread notions of animal rights at that time, but it again shows the remains of applied worthlessness of the feline species in human perception.

Cats tend to be one of the most disregarded and underappreciated species, Lessing's *On Cats* being one of the examples. Having killed about 40 cats, the narrator admits, "I was angry over the holocaust of cats, because of its preventable necessity, but I don't remember grieving" (Lessing, 2002, 18). The "preventable necessity" being getting rid of the kittens at the time they were born. Killing cats is not perceived as a moral or problematic issue. It is "humane" and "necessary." Further proof cats are regarded things rather than living creatures in the novel is provided by a landlord of the narrator's flat when he complains it is "bad enough clearing up after us lot, he wasn't going to clean up after cats as well" (Lessing, 2002, 39). And so the visiting cat loses his life. Furthermore, what is even more disturbing, but unfortunately common and acceptable even nowadays in some cultures is the fact that "if they got sick, and had not recovered in a few days, they were destroyed" (Lessing, 2002, 23). Inhumanity in the human world seems to be prevailing.

(Lack of) Communication with Cats

An interesting view on the lack of communication skills or rather the lack of desire of cats to communicate with humans is neatly presented by Confucius.

> The rat says: I am a charmer and great conversationalist.
> The ox says: I am reliable and dependable.
> The tiger says: I dazzle people, I am a natural leader.
> The rabbit says: I am kind and considerate. Luck is always on my side.
> The dragon says: I am an independent soul. People admire me.
> The snake says: I am simply irresistible.
> The cat miaows […] purrs […] hisses. (Shan, 2004, 4)

In real life as well as in the poem, cats do not obey humans, but, at the same time they do not disobey them either. Confucius' cat does not remain silent; it *does* make a sound; however, it is not the sound (words) human might anticipate or appreciate. Consequently, the cat is noticed, but fails to be understood. It is not an uncommon situation beyond the literary world either.

The question whether cats (and other non-humans) are able to respond has been asked by Derrida. The query, according to the philosopher is "not whether the animal speaks but whether one can know what respond mean. And how to distinguish a response from a reaction" (Derrida, 2008, 377). *Through the Looking Glass* may serve as an enquiry into the matter on the example of kittens.

> It is a very inconvenient habit of kittens that whatever you say to them, they always purr. If they would only purr for 'yes' and mew for 'no' or any rule of that sort, so that one could keep up the conversation! But how can you talk with a person if they always say the same thing? On this occasion the kitten only purred: and it was impossible to guess whether it meant 'yes' or 'no'. (Carroll, 2009, 269)

Alice ponders the inability of kittens to talk, but interestingly, in the nineteenth century novel, she has no problem with calling the cat, responding or not, a person, which seems to have become a tendency in animal studies nowadays. Alice attempts to combine the world of a purring kitten, i.e. nature with human world, a responding cat-person, i.e. culture.

Similar to the Cheshire Cat, the cat in Gaiman's *Coraline* acts like a guide, enabling the human being to suppress fear and find the courage to defeat evil. Interestingly, the cat is no longer evil itself but is able to confront and triumph over it. When in the real world, the feline acts like a cat normally would, enjoying being petted, hunting, and then bringing what he had caught home. At the same time it is able to understand what humans say but replies only with its body language, meows, or purring. In the Other World, however, the cat is more human-like; it understands what people say and re-

sponds to what is said in human language. Given clear instructions by the cat, Coraline is able to deal with the challenging situation. Notably, in order to allow the inter-species (human-cat) communication the cat speaks the human language; it is and not the cultural, intelligent human being who makes the effort of learning the cat speech.

What is there in a name

Cats are have been human companions for over 9000 years; however, it is not until the eighteenth century that they were given human names (Thomas, 1983, 95). This statement of anthropomorphism is a clear sign of changing attitudes towards animals. Giving a pet a name amounts to giving it the status of an individual, *almost* a member of a family. Nevertheless, it is not uncommon to replace the animal when it is a nuisance or obtain a new "family member" after the death of the previous one.

In the literary world the possession or the lack of a name is an important sign as it conveys the attitude towards an object or person. Even the famous Cheshire Cat does not possess a name of his own. In his famous poem entitled *The Naming of Cats*, T.S. Eliot manages to capture the core of human perception of the feline, which seems to be its enigmatic nature. According to the author, "a cat must have three different names," as one name is not able to depict its complex nature: "a cat needs a name that's particular, a name that's particular and more dignified," otherwise it will not be able to "spread out his whiskers, or cherish his pride" (Eliot, 1939, 51). Despite all the human efforts put into naming a cat, each feline has "the name that no human research can discover – But THE CAT HIMSELF KNOWS, and will never confess" (Eliot, 1939, 55). According to Nikolajeva, a cat's ability to hide its true name makes it impossible to acquire power over the feline (Nikolajeva, 2009, 248); thus, it can maintain its independence and control. Similarly, even though Derrida's thoughts are immersed by a feline, in *An Animal and Therefore I Am*, he does not grant the cat a name. The philosopher does not consider it necessary to fully include the cat in *human* society despite trying to analyze and culturalise it in human terms.

An extraordinary reason for the cats lacking names is provided in Neil Gaiman's *Coraline* " …you people have names. That's because you don't know who you are. We know who we are, so we don't need names" (Gaiman, 2006, 37). On the one hand, names are to be a symbol of acceptance (by a human family), and on the other hand, they are perceived as a form of constraint and restraining of freedom.

In *On Cats* by Doris Lessing, the Nobel Prize Winner, the felines the narrator owns or takes care of have no names either. In the first part of book, *Particularly Cats*, the fact does not seem to be surprising, as the enormous amount of cats present on the farm makes it virtually impossible to name them all, especially since their life span was often on the shorter side. The most liked cat is simply referred to as "a favourite cat" or "old favourite," which does not mean it cannot be abandoned or killed if necessary. The rest of the felines are just "cats," "kittens" or referred to by their origin, for

example “a bluish-grey Persian”. In the course of the story, what seems to be a close, mutually fulfilling relationship between the protagonist of the story and the felines is, to some extent, disintegrated by the fact that she refers to them ‘grey cat’ and ‘black cat. ‘Despite the clear admiration ”Oh beautiful kitten! Delicious beast! Pretty cat!” (Lessing, 2002, 49), the cat has no name of its own, possibly suggesting a mental detachment of the narrator. Similarly, in *The Great Cat Massacre* cats are murdered in bulks, and again, even the favourite one (nameless) is not spared.

Without names cats are again portrayed as creatures of little value in our society. Possession of a name means readiness to be classifies and categorised, and cats are yet to be ready to obey human rules.

The Fluffy Bridges

According to Sigler, cats are often placed in “liminal space” in folkloric tradition. The author persists that felines possess the ability to negotiate between the human and demonic worlds; thus, they seem to be an understandable choice in certain “Devil Bridge variants” (Sigler, 1982, 537,538). Dale-Green claims cats are themselves bridges of good and evil (Dale-Green, 1963, 810). One of the most obvious examples of such a bridge is the Legend of Beaugency popularized by James Joyce in a tale *The Cat and the Devil* in 1936. The legend states that the devil built a bridge over the river Loire and demanded the possession of the soul of the first person who crosses it. People manage to outwit the devil by throwing a cat at him and so the feline pays the price as he is taken away by the devil. It is interesting that again the word “person” is interpreted not as a human being but as a living creature. The devil is given what he already possesses as cats have been related to demon powers for a long time. The motif of “cat-bridge” has been eagerly used by numerous writers. In *Pet Sematary* by Stephen King, for example, it is the cat, by the name of Church, who, by his death, is able to awaken the demonic powers of the ancient Micmac Burial Ground. The cat symbolises the incoming change (Old Church / New Church). Furthermore, it is implied that the novelty is not a positive type. The Creeds (Church’s family) try to constrain the cat’s nature by neutering him; however, they are unable to prevent the animal nature of Church from appearing. The cat is the trigger enabling the demonic powers to wake and Frankenstein – like events take place. The story is an example of the culturally applied archetype of “The Black Cat” proposed by Dale-Green. The cat serves as a bridge between old and new, good and evil, his life being the price.

An interesting variant of a cat-bridge is proposed in Carroll’s *Through the Looking Glass*. The Cheshire Cat seems to be focused on challenging Alice’s common sense and, at the same time, highlights the common misconceptions about cats: “you see a dog growls when it's angry, and wags its tail when it's pleased. Now I growl when I’m pleased, and wag my tail when I’m angry. Therefore I’m mad” (Carroll, 2009, 28). Cats have suffered a great deal because of their habits, thus Cheshire Cat’s attempt

to explain or cover his nature under the layer of "safe" madness. Some other characteristics of the cat are also of great significance. The cat lacks its/his own name and also a physical body. Being able to adapt to the bizarre world perfectly, appear and disappear easily, change the body shape, and elusively managing to shape the chain of events in its favour may be perceived as a regular catty feature. Although the cat may appear as untrustworthy, in the course of events it proves to be helpful and determined. The text acts as a bridge between the child and adult worlds and it seems it is only the cat that is able to combine them. It is the cat, and not the girl, who is able to find the passage between the two contrasting worlds and, as a result, cause not a shift of power and conquer the evil queen.

A similar crossing between two worlds (the real world and the Other World) is constructed by Neil Gaiman in *Coraline.* The protagonist of the story lacks integrity and is confused about her identity, unlike the cat "I'm not the Other anything. I'm me" (Gaiman, 2006, 22). The cat has the ability to outwardly vanish and reappear at will. It understands the nature of the Other World in full detail, including its history and the disturbing truth and the knowledge of secret entrances into the Other World. The cat is the only creature able to trespass on the border between the two contrasting worlds and, as a result save Coraline. The feline is a both hardheaded *Felis Catus* and a mysterious, spiritual and shrewd creature.

The symbolism traditionally applied to cats has enabled them to be one of the species that is allowed to possess unexplainable, mysterious, and spiritual powers. A single appearance of a cat in a story causes confusing connotations. The cat in *Godfather* (1972) innocently sitting on Mafioso's lap can evoke opposing images. It may be the symbol of strength and power, but, on the other hand, compliant with folkloric tradition, it may be the prophesy of future unfortunate course of events. Felines tend to be animals always fighting for their unambiguous place in human life.

Changes

The transition that cats have been encountering in the human society is multi-dimensional. Not only has the feline's size, brain, and habits changed, but also, more importantly, our perception of felines, and thus the law, as well as the cat's core purpose in human society have been significantly altered. Cats have been invited to share human homes, sleep on human beds, are groomed regularly and bred to satisfy the aesthetics of human beings. The market of feline toiletries, toys, and food is booming. This tendency is, to some extent, powered by a growing number of publication on cats. Felines are no longer regarded as incomprehensible, supported by a number of help-books, documentaries (e.g. Kedi, screened in cinemas), literature, and popular films.

In *On Cats* the narrator highlights the anthropomorphism applied to cats by highlighting human characteristics in a cat that "shares another characteristic with people who have not had enough mother-warmth. […] she is overready to see insult; over-

ready to sulk. And she is a frightful coward" (Lessing, 2002, 47). The changing attitude towards cats comes to the narrator in *On Cats* as a little surprise to herself when she reflects "...on the farm we fed cats bowls of warm milk as the pails came up from the milking; favourites got scraps from the table; but they never got meat – they caught their own" (Lessing, 2002, 23). It is a clear reference to the cats' prime purpose, a mice catcher. The narrator notices that the cats kept indoors "take no notice of the mice", instead "the cat lying on the kitchen table, watching two mice on the floor" (Lessing, 2002, 29). The transition of a cat's habits and needs in changed living circumstances (farm in Persia / flat in London), as well as the owner's irritability with the indoor cat's resemblance to the renowned man's best friend is expressed when it becomes obvious that a shift of cat's habits has occurred.

> I was bothered because she waited for people to come home – like a dog; must be in the same room and be paid attention – like a dog; must have human attendance when she had kittens. […] She never, not once, ate anything but lightly cooked calves' liver, and lightly boiled whiting. (Lessing, 2002, 25)

The narrator provides other examples of the changes that human lifestyle has imposed on felines. "On the farm, cats went off to have kittens in some well- hidden and dark place" (Lessing, 2002, 28), whereas the indoor cat's litter "was heralded by much complaint. She knew something was going to happen; and was making sure somebody would be around when it did" (Lessing, 2002, 28). The deficiency of the feline's maternal instinct as well as her inability to fend for her offspring is visible, proving against the common concept of cats being tender mothers. The growing fascination with cats and a noticeable cultural turn towards felines is stated by the narrator in *On Cats* when watching a new kitten, "It was enchanting, a delicate fairy-tale cat", "she was an exotically beautiful beast. She sat, a tiny thing, in the middle of a yellow carpet, surrounded by five worshippers" (Lessing, 2002, 44,45). "The beast" is a reference to the past representation of cats as evil creatures; "the worshippers" is an indication of felines being god-like creatures further signifying and symbolising the transformation of cats in society. At this moment the cat becomes an entity, a pure embodiment of beauty and perfection, its nature, looks and spirituality finally accepted and appreciated. What is more, a noteworthy change of human attitude towards cats is presented by Lessing when a woman admits "she was losing the affections of her husband to a cat" (Lessing, 2002, 44). A similar issue was raised in *Cat in the Rain* by E. Hemingway. An "American wife" complains "I don't know why I wanted it so much. I wanted that poor kitty. It isn't any fun to be a poor kitty out in the rain" (Hemingway, 2017, 71). The reference to the growing popularity of cats and also the changing attitudes towards felines is hence expressed. The "poor kitty" is not seen as a mere pest controller, but as a companion and potential friend.

An attempt to understand and include each other in their corresponding societies is made by both humans and cats in *On Cats*. The narrator states "Human and cat, we try

to transcend what separates us" (Lessing, 2002, 245). Shan goes a step further stating that his cats have socialized him into their unique world (Shan, 2004, viii). It is not the cat who is to adopt to human culture but the man who is to accept and appreciate the feline world.

According to Dostoyevsky, humans are able to adapt to every situation imaginable (Dostoyevsky, 1861, 7). Cats also present certain qualities that enable them to settle in a variety of circumstances. Bradshaw persists that "cats are elusive but we accept them on their terms" (Bradshaw, 2013, 10). It seems humans have no other option than to do that. Cats do not adapt to the new reality as a result of being obedient creatures; they are in constant search of comfort and tranquillity, thus obtaining it is more the matter of tolerance and maybe indifference to some of the situations rather than obedience.

The cat phenomenon

Humans are often misled by cats' cuteness as they automatically presume that the interaction with them should be at least equally plausible. However, due to a human's unfortunate disability of reading the cats' body language, it may sometimes be a rather daunting experience. As Bradshaw states "cats are widely perceived as being far more socially adaptable than they actually are" (Bradshaw, 2013, 255).

In *Cat Sense*, Bradshaw notes that cats' physical features have always appealed to humans, with their child-like faces and overall cuteness (Bradshaw, 2013, 190, 191). What is more, the author pinpoints that the Japanese cartoon *Hello Kitty* can serve as an example of the apotheosis of the artificial cuteness with its head enlarged disproportionately (Bradshaw, 2013, 192). Lorenz's notion of *Kindchenschema*, or 'cuteness' is a set of facial and body features that make a creature appear cute and activate in humans the motivation to care for it. Cuteness may be ascribed to people as well as things that are regarded as attractive or charming and has also been applied to the characteristics of pet ownership with the implication that pets are purely "social parasites who have perfected the art of releasing and exploiting our innate parental instincts" (Serpell 2003). Nevertheless, it was the human being who first decided to domesticate animals so it is unfair to call pets parasites as they have never asked to be deprived of their freedom.

The transition of the place of cats in human society "has swung from reverence to demonization and back again" (Bradshaw, 2013, 6). This idea is supported by the growing number of websites, cat memes, and the overall fascination with cats. The omnipresence of cats has been largely supported by both the development of technology and globalization. The growing number of pictures of cats on the Internet is breathtaking, but the popularity of some cat characters can be particularly surprising. The *Grumpy Cat* phenomenon, for instance, began when a single picture of the cat was posted on one of the social media sites. The cat's cranky face tremendously appealed to users and the cat became an Internet star in no time. She is still the subject of many popular memes, known as negative lolcats, such as "I had fun once…it was awful"

(Facebook). The cat soon became the Official Spokescat of Friskies (cat food brand) later to star in a film *Grumpy Cat's Worst Christmas Ever* (2014).

Simon's Cat, an animated cartoon and book series by a British animator, is a fine example of a cartoon cat achieving a global success. The feline has become one of the most popular cartoon characters, and, at the same time, the series proves to be a detailed study of cats' behaviour habits, one of the issues being lack of (human) manners on the cat's side. The cultural turn regarding attitudes towards felines is reflected by the cat's ability to manipulate "his" human in order to change the reality into his favour. It is the cat who includes a human being into his world, not the human who modifies a non-human' behaviour. The owner does not oppose or try to alter the cat's nature. The growing interest in cats fuelled by the expanding field of both animal studies and Anthrozoology causes a visible transformation of the position of felines in our society.

A show concentrating on the welfare of cats, *Must Love Cats*, is an Animal Planet television series praising cats' lore and revealing surprising facts about the species. In each episode, John Fulton, the host of the series, focuses on a different aspect of cat lovers' lifestyle, from cat poo coffee, toys made of cat fur, to feline musicians.

The number of websites offering cat gadgets may be an obvious follow-up of feline popularity; however, the tendency to deprive cats of their natural features is somehow disturbing. Cats are physically being forced to fit into human world. Felines are declawed, causing phantom pains and aches, are dressed up, wear collars with little bells so that they are unable to catch birds. Gadgets such as nail cups are in demand as they prevent the precious furniture from being damaged. Cats are to be cultural, regardless of the costs.

Conclusions

It is not surprising that the most treacherous, challenging and unpredictable areas of human life are favourably assigned to and represented by cats in paintings, literature, film, theatre, music, and video games equally. Fortunately, there seems to be an ongoing trend to include non-humans rather than exclude them in the humane society, thus there is hope humans will become more cultural towards the non-humans.

The gruesome history of felines with humans has deeply influenced the literary world. The frightful "cattiness" has been transforming into the acceptable and desired cuteness. The habits of cats have been changing to fit into human world, but, at the same time, human attitudes towards felines have been modified. The situation has been reflected by new types of literature dealing with felines (e.g. pet memoir), the way of portraying cats (from elusive and canning creatures into human saviours) and the number of publications on the species. The needs of felines are addressed, their rights accepted. They have become partners of humans, even though nowadays there is no need for cats to serve their prime purpose of pest controllers. They have become a global cultural phenomenon, taking control over both, human real world and fictional reality.

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