

## Cats

We have three cats. Among them they have about as much mental acuity as one puppy. All pooled their cerebral resources might fill a tea cup (which happens to be the name of one of the cats). Actually, now that I think of it, perhaps it's because of the notoriously poootsy names we give cats that they reward us with appropriately unreasoned behavior. Don't get me wrong, I am a cat person, as they say. I spend far too many hours stroking and napping and feeding and scooping and catering to a long list of feline whims. It's part of my life. I like it.

But I don't have to lie for them. I don't have to conjure them into something they are not. And intellectuals they are not. Cats have very simple vocabularies. Their sentences are usually one or two words and, unless mental illness is involved, a cat thought never has commas; punctuation of any kind is forbidden, whereas immediate association is paramount. A sentence like the previous one made up of 31 words and 5 punctabits is out of the question. Here's an example of a cat sentence, ergo thought. Violet (the smartest of our cats and also the least stable) was perched on me, fully awake and eyes wide open. You could tell she was formulating a phrase to accurately encompass the situation. Here she was sitting on my leg, surrounded by peaceful security and familial bliss, sun streaming through the windows and this is what she was thinking. "mine"

That's all of it. The whole state of things summed up by "mine". Oh, cats never capitalize either. In a one word world the use of capital letters is hardly necessary. Cats do not emote. Cats do not reason. Cats do not look forward. Cats do not look back, except for their vague genetic memory that they are all Egyptian royalty. Cats react. Cats find themselves in situations, each one of them brand new (even if it's the nine-thousandth time that the event has occurred). Cats are. Cats are, now. That's all. Here are some examples of cat speech and thought expressed as closely as possible to their original meaning even though translated into our human idiom.

When your cat greets you in the morning all doey eyed, winding herself through your legs as you stumble into the kitchen, looking up to you with what seems to be boundless affection, here is what she is thinking. "hungry". More sophisticated cats like Violet might throw in the variation "hungry hungry".

When your cat, like our own Tea, sits staring into the corner, lost in contemplation, you can bet your cat treats he is not reciting Keats. Here is what he is thinking. " ". All other thoughts, without exception, are not on his mind.

Billie (named after Billie Holliday in part because of her splendid voice) is easily our most expressive cat. It seems that she must be in touch with what we would call an aesthetic. She will tilt her head and study the subject at hand from all angles. She will vocalize with what seem to be contrapuntal thoughts. The other day when a guest brought a stunning bouquet of fresh cut flowers into the house Billie ambled over to the arrangement and poured over it in her artist's mind. "bite that" is how her vision might best be expressed. And she did.

When any of our cats rises from a necessary nap and is passed in the hall by one of its darling siblings (they are all from the same litter; I'm sure of it because the shelter said so) you can tell that their experience of each other, their lives together through thick and thin has created a bond that might be described as familial. So, as the brother or sister passes, any one of our cats can be observed thinking "hit that cat". And they do.

This immediacy that cats possess, this ability to be in the moment and only the moment, is the reason that they are so good at killing and eating things. Rodents, bugs, birds, furry cat toys, house plants and sticks of butter provide endless merriment to cats. Why they like to torture their prey before dispatching it is still a mystery to me. It might be that Egyptian thing again. For some reason royalty has always seemed to enjoy inflicting a little deliberate pain on their underlings even when the ultimate outcome is not in question. Go figure.

All this being said, I sure do enjoy having them around. I feel sorry for the millions of folks who suffer allergic reactions to cats. They will never know the joys of indefinite naps, incessant petting or litter box hygiene. I wish I could somehow insulate them from the dangers of dander. Billie, in typical cat fashion expressed her thoughts on the subject when one of our oldest and closest friends, a sufferer from cat allergies, recently came to visit. The cat walked directly over to her and looked up with those wide, knowing eyes and whispered "sneeze".