

INTRODUCTION

Speaking of Cats— A Very Weighty Subject

There is an affinity between writers and cats and perhaps there always has been. Doctor Johnson's concern (expressed in his will) about that well-developed household despot Hodge (who greatly favored oysters for tea) is quoted to this day in most of the biographical material dealing with that sage, critic and author of the eighteenth century.

Having been declared divine in Egypt and in the legends of the north (as witness that the chariot of the Goddess Freya was drawn by cats), fortune favored and then abruptly failed the feline species. Still they survived both the worship in temples and the obscene tortures they were later subjected to as the familiars of witches.

The tales and legends dealing with cats always present them as being not only mysterious but also superior in good sense and understanding to our own species. There was Dick Whittington's cat who made his master's fortune as surely as Puss-In-Boots wrought favorably for the somewhat stupid and feckless young man who inherited his services.

Perhaps it is because cats do not live by human patterns, do not fit themselves into prescribed behavior, that they are so united to creative people. Always the cat remains a little beyond the limits we try to set for him in our blind folly. A cat does not live with one; rather, one lives with a cat.

Each season in the publishing world brings a crop of feline studies both in pictures and words. There are Garfield and Heathcliff to hammer home independence and the pitying attitude of cat for person, as

well as such heartwarming stories as those written by such authors as James Herriot.

Herein are neither Heathcliff nor Garfield but some others who have as definite personalities to make forceful impressions within their territories. The matter of magic familiars (much more practical than the wizards they company with) is competently dealt with. For cats have been linked to magic, the more intricate the better, from time immemorial.

These fifteen histories deal not only with spells but also with diplomatic relations on other planets, with forbidden research, engineering on a grand scale, and with guardians who know their duty and expertly do it.

Cats are presented in all shapes, colors, sizes, alike in self-confidence and general ingenuity. There seems never to have been a cat who was not entirely equal to the situation which confronts him or her. In other words, there are no extraordinary cats, merely ones to whom unusual opportunities present themselves.

—*Andre Norton*