

**The Semiotic Paradigm in T.S. Eliot's *Old Possum's Book of
Practical Cats***

By

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Abstract

This study aims at dissolving the semiotic paradigm which lies behind the interactive signs assembled in T.S. Eliot's *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats*. In the first view, the poems seem to reflect an ordinary subject-matter (Catkind) in an ordinary language, then gradually incongruities appear in the moment the poet trespasses the norms of ordinary logic due to the madness expressed in language and subject-matter (Catkind/Mankind). As a nonsense text, *Old Possum's Book* deviates from the normal semiosis of everyday life. Eliot's sign-vehicles or Cats function in impossible or nonsensical situations to encode messages hurdled by the linguistic and literary competence of the readers who decode the meaning of the signs of the text, and make sense of what is generally known as nonsense.

Key Words: Semiotics, nonsense, children's poetry, paradigm.

1.1. Semiotics and 'New' New Criticism

It is not avant-garde to view T.S. Eliot, the favorite icon of New Criticism, in the light of semiotic theories. From New Criticism, semiotics derived its technique of 'close reading', which means that the mere words on the page have priority in literary consideration but, in New Criticism, there is no question of author, reader, historical or political context. New Criticism preached against the author's intention, "The Intentional Fallacy" which may be echoed in Barthes' "The Death of the Author", and the reaction of the reader, "The Affective Fallacy". The New Critics emphasized the importance of the text, and paid no attention to the cultural and political contexts. It aims at reading the pure aesthetic form without bothering about the social situations that these forms are produced in or the ones created by the text itself. Nevertheless, present-day writings re-read in New Criticism implicit or marginalized political and cultural gestures the New Critics practically neglected whether intentionally or not. In *Rereading the New Criticism*, edited by Miranda B. Hickman and John D. McIntyre (2012, 2), there are several attempts to re-evaluate the relevance of New Criticism to "contemporary literary and cultural studies". The authors endeavored to resituate "the New Critical work in its original cultural contexts", and redirect the attention to "literary form" (Ibid., 3). This last point is the unitive dynamic of New Criticism, Formalism and Structuralism. They seek to "observe and enjoy a series of abstract, detailed, artificial patterns of words and images ..., which have their own significance in themselves" (Sewell, 1959, 69). However, the text, in the New Critical sense, is not a verbal icon of the world beyond it, or it concerns itself only with the uncommitted 'word on the page', it never goes beyond the word-prison to validate its meaning in the outside world.

T.S. Eliot's announcement that "there is no method [of literary criticism] except to be very intelligent" (Cited in Hawkes, 1977, 126), entails his lacking of a definite program. It seems that he wanted to break up with the romantic critical heritage, but he did not have a systematic theory of language that would let him. However, his special fashionable terms like 'tradition' and 'objective correlative' forefront the signifier over the signified, i.e. "words create experience rather than experience being

'communicated' through words" (Easthope, 2003, 134). His nominative 'set of objects', 'situation', and 'chain of events', which constitute a 'formula' to express a particular emotion mean that "an important role is accorded to the signifier in Eliot's theory of the 'objective correlative'" (Ibid., 136). As signifiers, these objects have "a weight and materiality of their own". In New Criticism, the signifiers lack the 'referential effect', or "the referential effect is not achieved" (Ibid., 137). The object (text) becomes itself a subject (speaker) without referring to external reality. But this is only superficial, in Eliot's case, "the poem still represents a speaker, an 'I' aware of itself and its feelings, even if these cannot be confidently assigned between external sensation and internal thought" (Ibid., 138). However, the speaker of *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats* is more coherent than the speaker; for example, of "The Waste Land", he rests in a firmer position between the internal world of the text and the external reality. His signifiers, objective correlatives, or the feline creatures he creates in his *Book* are given their own autonomy but only so they can be correlative to a spatial and/or temporal outside world, they produce signifieds and not things in themselves. So, they achieve the referential effect, or in Peirce's terms "what the sign stands for". The text does not close upon itself, rather it is open to external meanings.

In the conclusion to his *Structuralism and Semiotics* (1977, rep. 2003, 130-3), Terence Hawkes suggests a 'New' New Criticism which proposes two hypotheses: the rejection of the critic's passive role and recommending the notion of 'literary competence'. According to Hawkes, 'New' New Criticism "offers a new role and status to the critic. It makes him a participant in the work he reads". "Thus", Hawkes concluded, "the critic need not humbly efface himself before the work and submit to its demands: on the contrary, he actively constructs its meaning: he makes the work exist" (130). This is one of the essential premises that comprise semiotics in which the text is not only "freely interpreted" by the reader, said Umberto Eco (1979, vii), but even "cooperatively generated" by him. So, through his specific way of cognition, the reader sets the poetic strategy or the paradigm of the text.

In the same way, Hawkes advocates certain 'poetics', or "an abstract system of conventions", which generates the concrete literary texts making a 'poetics' of writing

and reading shared, like linguistic competence, by members of the culture involved. This means that meaning does not impart unconditionally from writer to reader, but instead it is mediated through and filtered by 'codes' stored up in the literary competence of both writer and reader. The source of these 'codes', according to Julia Kridteva, is intertextuality, affirming that meaning is not restricted within the text, but it is shaped by the reader in relation not only to the text in question, but also the complex network of texts summoned in the reading process. Thus, Eliot, who had long expressed his early admiration of *Uncle Remus Stories*, *Huckleberry Finn* and *Alice in the Wonderland*, tried his hand at children's poetry in *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats* (1939). These tales gradually become part of folklore heritage, and children's conventional culture that codified certain self-evident rules the poet obeyed unconsciously in his texts. The semiotician's task is to read these rules.

The Old Master borrowed his mask-name from a childhood's obsession with *Uncle Remus Stories* in which he identified himself with Possum. Although Possum is known in folklore tales as a scapegoat outwitted by the cunning Brer Rabbit, Pound's favorite nickname, there is much brilliance in this animal figure which can 'play possum' to win by craftiness and deception. In old age, Eliot revisited the world of childhood again, making a complex network of inter texts summoned in the reading process. He lets the name of his binding character act as a sign recalling to the mind an equivalent sign or a more developed sign. In Bakhtin's terminology, it is a 'dialogical thought' in which the meaning of a representation leads to another representation, a process created by codes imparted to the poet and the reader by prior texts. Thus, *Old Possum* results in 'unlimited semiosis', referring to "a series of successive interpretants" (Chandler, 1997, n.p.). Generated from *Uncle Remus* stories, Possum wants to survive the inner hunger of childhood and the instinctive adventures of boyhood. As an 'outsider', he turns "inward to a world of truth that he feels resides in his own depths" (Wilson, 1980, 14). Thus, he is modeled on Eliot's bard, Mark Twain who, Eliot said: "We might even say that the adult side of him [Twain] was boyish, and that only the boy in him, that was Huck Finn, was adult". Like Huck too, he is an objective observer of the symmetrical world he creates in his *Book of*

Practical Cats. "He does not interfere", said Eliot, "he does not judge". He presents London as he experiences it and as he is aware of it, questioning whimsically the moral values of the white English-speaking bourgeois. Yet, like a cold kind of God, without intervening, he believes that things must merely happen here and there even if this involves tragedies and calamities.

1.2. The Semiosis of Nonsense:

The principles of nonsense poetry make it a logical game or mathematical puzzle whose playground is the mind of the reader. "The genre or game of Nonsense", said Elizabeth Sewell (65), "has strict rules. The aim is to construct with words a logical universe of discourse meticulously selected and controlled". In the course of speaking about Dante, Eliot recommends his readers to pass metamorphically, like an Alice, through the looking-glass "into a world which is just as reasonable as our own" (Ibid., 67). For him, nonsense is a dream play as well as "a pure systematic art form of mind and language" (Ibid). In nonsense, the mimetic representation of reality is distorted altogether, i.e. the one-way semantic relationship of words (signifier) with mental or physical things (signified) is converted to seek a higher level of discursive perception deviant from the normal semiosis of everyday life. "Sense is a social gestalt", assumed Marcel Danesi (1990, 310), and its counterpart is nonsense in which the senesical rules of language are deviated to create nonsensical patterns of behavior that evoke laughter. Through analyzing nonsense poetry, one can understand the nature of meaning by showing, in Eliot's case, how human and animal semiotics are embedded. He juxtaposed the feline and the human behaviors together, creating a grammar of nonsense instead of the sensical grammar of serious discourse. His model of nonsense results from unexpectedness, incongruity and indirection of the situations he created in his *Possum's Book*. Thus, by means of 'indirection', said Michael Riffaterre (1978, 1), "a poem says one thing and means another", and the purpose of semiotic analysis is to depict "the structure of meaning in a poem". The deconstruction of the text into its elementary semantic units presents the code that generates meaning and communicates this meaning to the reader. In this case,

semiotics is not only a theory of literary analysis turning the text into sign-based compound, but an epistemic theory of cognition (how it takes place).

The discursive world consists of sounds, words, and images connected to each other by the syntagmatic relations convenient in a specific genre, but in a nonsensical text, the coherence of the 'syntagmatic chain' is distorted by various dislocations and deviations from the ordinary logic of meaning-making. Pure structural semiotics engages in a survey for subterranean structures of the surface asymmetry in the nonsense texts. Present-day 'social semiotics' seeks even a further aim of investigating the use of signs in specific social situations allied sometimes with notions of Marxist ideology. Signs in this sense are not studied in vacuums, but as parts of more comprehensive sign-systems, or 'semiospheres' as Yuri Lotman called them referring to "the whole semiotic space of the culture in question" (Chandler, n.p.). The pioneer semioticians distinguished between *langue* and *parole*, competence and performance as far as structural linguistics is concerned, literary semiotics has widened the scope of study to include even the distinction between "code and message, structure and event or system and usage" (Ibid.). Social semiotics prioritizes usage over system to account for changes that happen to the system itself in the course of historicity and social context. Meaning does not impart suddenly from writer to reader, but it is produced through culturally shared codes. In his *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats*, Eliot composed this collection of whimsical poems as gifts and epistles to his godchildren, then he published them, in 1939 and 1940 after long discussions with the children themselves as well as their parents. The dedication to *Old Possum's Book*, is fair enough to prove his dependence on a specific kind of audience who participated in the creation of the *Book* "by their encouragement, criticism and suggestions", said Eliot. "When Eliot writes for children", wrote Marion G. Hodge (1978, 129), "some things are different", "in *Prufrock*, in *The Waste Land*, in *Four Quartets*, he preaches to adults. In *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats*, he preaches to children (and adults)".

Children's nonsense poetry has two groups of readership. It is originally aimed at children and young people as a target group, but in major cases, it is also

read by another group of adults who are called 'the mediators circle' (Ewers, 2009, 25). This group has an essential role in decoding children's nonsense poetry and modifying its communicative functions because here "twofold communication takes place" (Ibid.). The original reading group lacks sufficient education and sophistry so they may miss the significance of the literary message implied in the text. Hence, another group of adult mediators seize the initiative of literary communication for having, more than children and young people, "the cognitive, social and cultural competences required in order to adopt the role of independent literary consumers" (Ibid., 26). Since children's literary communication involves mediation, the mediator becomes a re-sender of the literary message. In this way, a new component can be added to Roman Jakobson's six elements of any act of verbal communication:

sender (poet)---- re-sender (mediator)---- message + context + code---- contact
(children)

The mediators, as teachers, publishers and the like people, intervene in the process of literary communication. They "become sure that the target group decode or understand the message, that it offers them sufficiently useful, educative, interesting or entertaining material, and provides them with aesthetic pleasure, artistic enjoyment within the bounds of what is possible and proper" (Ibid., 27). The immediate outcome of their interference is that they develop competence on the children's behalf, so the children are obliged to see what they see. The sender and re-sender direct the use of sign-production with its underlying system of codes in a specific way in order to produce a deliberately intended perception on the children's part. They participate in the creation of a unifying paradigm which is intricate but not impossible for their intended readers to comprehend.

1.3. The Basic Paradigm of T.S. Eliot's *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats*:

The text of T.S. Eliot's *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats* is well-organized. The introductory poem, "The Naming of Cats", can be regarded as a prologue to the rest of the lyrics as "The Ad-dressing of Cats" is meant to be their epilogue. Between

these two, twelve other lyrics are systematically correlated by an underlying code which sustains bourgeois awareness and ridicules bourgeois morality. The twelve lyrics present some individual Cats, each one of them can be considered as a sign. The assemblage of these signs makes *Old Possum's Book* a complex network of feline creatures whose semiotic interpretation evokes, according to Riffaterre (4), a "metamorphosis of what was a signifying complex at a lower level of the text into a signifying unit, now a member of a more developed system". All the poems of *Possum's Book* are built on 'an original word or sentence', 'the matrix', which is "hypothetical, being only the grammatical and lexical actualization of a structure"(Ibid., 19). It is one word or sentence that all the other particles of the text are its alternatives, and the key 'generator of significance', or the underlying matrix on which the whole *Book* of Possum is built, comes in the epilogue, saying: "Cats are much like you and me", which "dispels any doubts about [Eliot's] intentions, any doubts that the cats he describes are not symbols for human beings", (Hodge, 129). Eliot creates a perfect and self-sufficient world of Catkind, but he does not intend to talk about Cats or when the feline signs are explicated, one finds that the cats are only an overt 'object' of its 'representamen', which needs a further 'interpretant' to draw a phenomenological distinction between catkind and mankind. In Pearce's terms, Possum produces 'iconic signs', in which the signifier (catkind) resemble or imitate the signified (mankind).

Old Possum said: "Cats are much like you and me", making heroes out of cats to communicate encoded messages to human beings. The poet recommended these messages for white, middle-class, and English-speaking children and young people to discipline their constitutive knowledge and behavior according to an adult's criterion. Thus, the point of view of the narrator is that of an adult observing the world, the children see the world through his eyes. The Cats in *Old Possum's Book* are part and parcel from the conventional respectable society to which Eliot and his targeted group of addressees belongs and to which the children and young people he addressed will become eminently conventional and respectable members one day. Except the Jellicles, Old Possum's Cats are not children, nor does he show the relationship

between cats and children in everyday life. Old Possum's narration of the feline adult duties and their relationships to adult humans creates a semantic gap or 'ungrammaticality' of how can it be a book for children if it lacks children characters, but the breach will soon disappear because the book does not lack children's imagination. Possum shows interactive feline characters who function as sign-vehicles with specific sense and referent. He presents the felines as symbol-using animals that are made of elemental shape or as image-making objects to reflect on the conceptual schemes employed by both human and feline creatures. Thus, the feline-characters denote a level of meaning (Catkind) and connote another level (Mankind). In this sense the structure of meaning is dynamic, depending on a theory of reading that takes its essential understanding of poetic discourse from 'the finite, closed entity of the text', which makes *Old Possum's Book* an open text in Eco's terms. Thus, these poems "need no interpreter", said Eliot, "to understand their character". The reading of this text passes automatically from a 'heuristic' level of interpretation to a 'retroactive' or 'hermeneutic' level, which is "a new reading" (Culler, 1981, 90).

Nothing in *Old Possum's Book* characterizes its narrator in particular, yet the readers synthesize his characterization from the way in which he characterizes his Cats. He intends his Book to be a contribution to the Western textual tradition, parodying the Biblical Books as well as the classical Books of serious knowledge. He makes a humorous sacred book for practical cats who act as practical jokers. Like the hero of the Book of Genesis, Old Possum starts his creation process with the act of 'Naming'. He proclaims in the opening line: "The Naming of Cats is a difficult matter" (The uppercase is Eliot's). In the matter of naming the cats, Eliot established a coding convention that every cat "must have THREE DIFFERENT NAMES"; i.e., a cat should have three different names or signifiers, hence it oscillates between three different layers of signification. The correspondence between the cat's name and its significance can be seen appropriately in the light of Hjelmslevian model of the correspondence between expression and its content. This correspondence makes a functive sign out of the name itself. On the primary level, the cats carry "sensible everyday names", "the name that the families use daily". Names like Peter, Augustus,

Alonzo, James, Victor, Jonathan, George, or Bill Bailey, although correspond with monarchical, ecclesiastical, or outlaws celebrities, are "sensible everyday names" even if they signify 'sweeter' and fancier' denotation as Plato, Adametus, Electra, and Demeter. They function on the surface mimetic level of meaning, an imitation of reality rather than its expression.

On the second level, the same cat is personified and alleged with a higher meaning. The cat "needs a name that's particular", or "a name that's peculiar, and more dignified", so that he would "cherish his pride". All the names that Old Possum uses to the cats in his *Book* belong to this category. They are names "that never belong to more than one cat": Jennyanydot, the motherly cat; Growltiger, the patriarchal cat; Rum Tum Tugger, the rebel cat; Mangojerrie and Rumpelteazer, duo specialized in burglary and mischief; Old Deuteronomy, the reverent cat; Mistofffeles, the magician cat; Gus, the theatre cat; Bustopher Jones, the fashionable cat; Skimbleshanks, the railway cat; Macavity, the Napoleon of crime; and GREAT RUMPUSCAT, the God-like cat. These are individual names that make sign-vehicles out of the cats, connoting the correspondence between the signifier (name) and it's signified to draw an appropriate message.

On the third level, there is no straightforward signifier (no name), or there is a zero-sign, but still it is a sign of an important signification. According to Old Possum, for every cat "above and beyond there's still one name left over, / And that is the name that you never will guess". He involves the reader in an atmosphere of mystery, wondering about a "name that no human research can discover- / But THE CAT HIMSELF knows, and will never confess". This mysterious mood is connected with "profound meditation", and "rapt contemplation". Sometimes it is hard to know what the cat exactly thinks of when he is engaged with "the thought of his name". It is not his everyday name, nor his peculiar name that belongs only to him, rather it is beatific and highly mysterious:

His ineffable effable

Effanineffable

Deep and inscrutable singular name.

(29-31)

The poet played on the stem "effable" to say indirectly that the mysterious name is too great or beautiful to describe in words. This highly speculative and mystifying mood can be considered as one of the "sly theological eddies" that Elizabeth Sewell noticed in *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats*.

The poems of *Old Possum's Book* adhere into two simultaneous layers of structural relations. They belong to the general paradigm of the *Book* as a whole, and each individual poem constructs an organic unit or a complete sub-paradigm by itself. Each poem has an individual title and exclusive subject-matter with a specific conceptual message. The general mood of every poem or the kind of humor it expresses varies due to the various degrees of order and/or disorder the cats produced in the outside world. Thus, like human beings in general, the Cats assemble in two different categories: some Cats seek quests for order and law like Jennyanydots, the Great Rumpuscat, Gus, Bustopher Jones and Skimbleshanks, while the other Cats are violent criminals and outlaws in nature like Growltiger, The Rum Tum Tugger, Mongojerrie and Rumpelteazer, Mistoffelees and Macavity. Between these two categories, there are some neutral nonaligned Cats like the Jellicles who dance like angels in heaven and Old Deuteronomy who is a passive and dispassionate vicarage Cat.

The maternal queen of the order-seekers party is Jennyanydots who "sits and sits and sits--and that's what makes a Gumbie Cat" out of her. She has two different roles in two different worlds: the world of human beings and the world of the basement. On the ground, she lives a carefree life of luxury where she "likes the warm and sunny spots" sitting only where it is "smooth and flat", and does only silly things like winding the curtain-cord and tying it "into sailor-knots". Her idle nature makes her, according to Hodge (130), an indictment of the "idle rich type". However, her idle life stops at night, "when all the family's in bed and asleep / She slips down the stairs to the basement to creep". Her aim is to reform the behavioral habits of the basement-dwellers, teaching the mice "music, crocheting and tating" and making out of the

wanton destroying cockroaches "a troop of well-disciplined helpful boy-scouts". She keeps visiting the basement night after night to fulfill her process of rehabilitation which seems to be endless and useless.

The patriarch of the *Practical Cats* is Growltiger who is short of an eye and has "somewhat missing ear"; i.e., perceiving the outside world from one angry side. The poem is a dramatic description of the last minutes in Growltiger's life without forgetting to recall his violent history. His song makes use of the names of a dozen of villages and places along the Thames to give the poem a realistic flavor. No matter how much he hated his natives who celebrated and danced to the news of his murder, his hatred to "Cats of Foreign race" is even further; so "the Persians and Siamese regarded him with fear". The poem raises offensive remarks to the Asians. Gilbert, the Siamese and his "fierce Mongolian horde" did not seek Growltiger in a heroic battle, on the contrary, they "came creeping in their sampans and their junks" when he least expected their coming with all his allies busy somewhere else and he was singing and enjoying a summer love-night. Both the English and Asians celebrate his untimely death with no pride or self-respect.

The closest Cat to children's general behavior is the Rum Tum Tugger who is a "curious beast", a "terrible bore", and unsatisfied with anything. As a naughty child, "his disobeying ways are a matter of habit", he is "artful and knowing". He "doesn't care for a cuddle", but "he'll leap on your lap in the middle of your sewing" because he likes nothing as making mess and disorder. Nevertheless, in the refrain, the speaker is very much pessimistic that "there's no doing anything about it".

Mungojerrie and Rumpelteazer are a couple of cats who are very close to the character of the practical joker: similar to "knockabout clowns, quick-change comedians, tight-rope walkers and acrobats". They have a wonderful way of working together as "highly efficient cat-burglars" without giving the family any chance to distinguish which one of them is the real thief. They rush into the house "like a hurricane", smashing, stealing and grabbing. The human helplessness is repeated once more when the family informs that "there's nothing at all to be done about that".

The structure of meaning in Possum's "Old Deuteronomy" and "Mr. Mistoffelees" can be derived from intertextual knowledge, the names of these two Practical Cats refer the reader to other texts: Biblical and Marlovian. According to Lefkowitz (1989, 61), "communities that share a textual history reach a consensus about meaning because they share codes and conventions of expression.... A text's meaning derives from its place within a system of texts". The whimsical names of these Cats are themselves mimetic signs or expressions that refer into an underlying Biblical Deuteronomic law-code and a classical code of the demonological Mephistopheles. However, the poet did not use these signs synchronically, they are not mere imitations of well-known names of specific connotations frozen in the original texts. Their meanings changed in the course of modern age as the social context changed. Thus, new messages are communicated through these signs. Old Deuteronomy represents what religion is reduced to in the modern age: merely "placid and bland" personages eating, sitting or lying uselessly while the world is very active changing in business around them. This Cat is part of the village goings on, but Mr. Mistoffelees is more urban. He is conjuring, cunning and deceitful in cards and dice. He also plays very clever tricks with his black color, letting "seven kittens right out of a hat!"

A more up to date criminal Cat is represented in the modern figure of Macavity, the "Mystery Cat". Eliot had produced this character from a realistic observation of his contemporary detective novels and movies, he is the product of 20th-century current mass media heroes who outwitted law. He is "the bafflement of Scotland Yard, the Flying Squad's despair" because when the police inspectors "reach the scene of crime -- Macavity's not there!" Like Mungojerrie and Rumpelteazer, he is a thief and like Growltiger, he is a murderer, but he is worst criminal of them all. His crimes are sometimes military operations making a spy out of Macavity:

And when the Foreign Office find a Treaty's gone astray,
Or the Admiralty lose some plans and drawings by the way,
There may be a scrap of paper in the hall or on the stair-

But it's useless to investigate - Macavity's not there!

(27-30)

The world of *Old Possum's Book* is not inhabited by criminals and outlaws only, there are other types of respectable Cats whose major roles is to re-establish order in their chaotic life. One of them is Asparagus, or Gus, "the Cat at the Theatre Door". Although he is now an old, thin and shaking Cat, he used to be "the smartest of Cats" in his youth. He was famous, generous to his friends, "a Star of the highest degree". Eliot uses superlatives with Gus to draw the attention to the stark contrast between his past and present age. He complains that the theatre these days is "certainly not what it was" because "now these kittens, they do not get trained / As we did in the days when Victoria reigned".

There is another contrast drawn between Gus's "very shabby coat" and Bustopher Jones's "coat of fastidious black" to evoke the variety in their living trends. Gus is a devastated old star, but Bustopher Jones is a sociable Cat who dresses fashionably to be superior to his peers and enjoy their admiration. Although he is the "stoutest of Cats" and over weighted, he thinks that he is in a good shape and will last out his time to live a long life. He lives the well-ordered life of routine. There is an implied irony in the narrator's agreement with this view.

The longest lyric in *Old Possum's Book* is "Skimbleshanks: The Railway Cat", which begins with a four-minute suspense. The train of the Night Mail is ready to depart, so whisper raised "down the line at 11.39" because they could not find Skimbleshanks and without him "the train can't start". They searched for him "high and low", everybody was panic, the signal of the train's departure is nearly due at 11.42 when Skimbleshanks suddenly appears to start the journey and end all suspense. It seems that he was "busy in the luggage van". With a flash from his eyes, the journey starts at last, seeking "for the northern part / Of the Northern Hemisphere". Skimbleshanks is "in charge / Of the Sleeping Car Express". He supervises the driver, the guards and the bagmen who seem to be careless "playing cards". He examines the faces of the travelers in the First and Third Classes, he watches them without winking

and immediately knows what they are thinking to prevent "at once if anything occurred". When everybody is asleep, the "Railway Cat" would stay the whole night awake "keeping on the watch" and protecting the train. He behaves "like a father", said Hodge (142), "protects the passengers so completely that they need not worry at all. He provides everything. He is the complete guardian".

Most of the poems present individual Cats, but "Of the Awefull Battle of the Pekes and the Pollicles" and "The Song of the Jellicles" evoke the collective behavior of the Dogs and the Cats respectively. The contrast between the two types is set up in the purpose of their assemblage; while the Dogs are conjoined together to launch into an international "fray", the Cats are gathered under a Jellicle Moon to enjoy "the Jellicle Ball". The first group assembles to fight, but the second prefers to dance and sing. The Dogs are gathered to wage a multi-national War between the "Heathen Chinese" Pekes and the Yorkshire Pollicles similar to World War II which was initiated in 1939, the year of publishing this volume if not even earlier. Eliot said: "A CAT IS NOT A DOG". The Dog is a "simple soul", he does not have "much pride". He is "undignified" because "he's very easy to be taken in" just with a chuck underneath the chin, a slap on "his back or shake his paw". Since he is "an easy-going lout", he would definitely "answer any hail or shout". The Dog is ready all the time for violence. The Dogs are absolutely meant here to be sign-vehicles to connote the international situation which was on the verge of a World War, and the offensive references are not directed to Asians only but to the Europeans in general and the English in particular, saying: "The Pekes and the Pollicles, everyone knows, / Are proud and implacable passionate foes; / It is always the same, wherever one goes". Eliot refers to an occasion in which the big police dog was away from his night watch leaving for a drink. The street was all quite and empty when suddenly a Peke met a Pollicle. Neither of them made a move, nor did they retreat. They only start to:

Bark barkbarkbark

Bark barkBARKBARK

Until you could hear them all over the Park.

(20-22)

All the Pokes are gathered "when they heard the uproar" together with the Pollicles who were allied with their "Scottish cousins" who were also "snappers and biters". Hearing the barking of these great heroes, "the Pugs and the Poms" could not stay away from this battle of honor. Thus, ironically Eliot said: "The traffic all stopped, and the underground trembled, / And some of the neighbors were so much afraid". There is an announcement of war, they started to sing "the Fire Brigade". Suddenly, the mysterious "GREAT RUMPUSCAT" showed up from the basement. The description of his fiery eyes and the perfection of his physical texture recalls Blake's God-like image of the Tiger. The Pokes and the Pollicles were overwhelmed quickly by "the glare of his eyes and his yawning". "He looked at the sky and he gave a great leap", so all the Dogs were scattered in front of him like sheep in front of their controlling shepherd. The international situation of the Dogs is quite once again because the Great Rumpuscat is impatient with war, but it could not stop the human World War II.

Unlike the Dogs, the Cats' collective concern is far from conflict and violence. The Jellicle Cats are small, but systematic. They are "black and white", they are "merry and bright". They repose and make their usual daily activities waiting "for the Jellicle Moon to rise". The moon provides them with natural energy; they "have moonlit eyes". They "dance by the light of the Jellicle Moon" a mysterious dance, and make the violent world of the Pokes and Pollicles more peaceful and beautiful.

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