

## 京大過去問 1996年 第2問

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The domestic cat, that sits purring so tamely in front of the fire, has a secret wild life outside. It will walk out into the garden to stalk its prey, seizing it with sharp claws before giving a death bite with its dagger-like front teeth. The instinct of the cat is to hunt — whether its prey is an expensive cat toy in the house or a defenceless little shrew in the garden. This ability was highly valued in the past. Cats were natural pesticides, keeping down the numbers of mice and rats in farmyards, barns and mills. But, alas, it is not only mice that are caught. A study of what the cat brought home in an English village showed that they also caught sparrows, song thrushes, robins and blackbirds.

(1)There is something devilish in the way a well-fed cat will play with a terrified mouse, batting it up in the air, pouncing again on it, then setting it free again so that the chase can go on. Like man, they will kill for sheer pleasure, not for hunger. Above all, the cat can survive without man's help. It is truly independent. The cat as the ethologist Konrad Lorenz puts it, 'remains an independent, wild, little panther'. It is a paradoxical pet — a tame animal with all the skills of a wild being.

In both town and country there are two cat populations — the plump pet moggies, fed to the brim with expensive cat food, and the wild or half-wild strays which live off the mice in the fields and barns or plunder the town's dustbins at night. Some cats move between these two worlds with ease and the angel in the home becomes the devil outside on the streets. (2)This way cats have the best of both worlds — regular meals and warm naps under the radiator inside, and the excitement of exploring the rooftops, hunting, and perhaps fighting outside. We often do not know much about the private lives of our own cats. From inside the house we hear the unearthly caterwauls of a mating ritual or mysterious spitting stand-offs for territory.

This wildness at the heart of a cat is a great attraction to the true cat lover. (3)Animal lovers though we are, we may feel a pang of pride, when we see our cat proudly bringing home a large mouse or even, maybe, a rabbit. Perhaps the cat's hunter heart speaks to the savage instinct, that is still alive in women and men despite thousands of years of suppression.

Three or four generations ago, the cat's hunting instinct was taken for granted. Poets and writers saw it merely as part of its usefulness to man. But as civilization imposes its pretty rules and regulations on us all, it becomes a thing to marvel at.