

The Arts

Cats (and Their Dykes) Review

by Miki Thomas

I once had a cat named Sinbad. He was a white, macho, sixteen pound angora cat, who, for the seven years of his life, kept both my grandfather's and mother's gardens bird and rodent free. Indeed, he was at his happiest prowling around for small game to torture and decapitate. Because of his wild nature, he did not associate with humans too much, except me.

At 5:30 every morning, he would serenade me at my bedroom window with his favorite song, "Feed me." After a day of hunting in the gardens across the street, he would meow to me to cross the street, pick him up, and carry him back to the house. For some reason, he trusted me as if I was the only one in my family worthy of his attentions. It is this bond between cats and women, specifically lesbian women, that is

the premise behind the new book, *Cats (and Their Dykes)*, an anthology of stories, poems, essays and photographs, edited by Irene Reti and Shoney Sien.

The book is a mixed bag. The non-fiction pieces are the most effective. They offer the reader a true sense of the dynamics of a cat-and-dyke relationship and how a cat or cats have affected those lesbians who cross their paths.

Mab Maher, in "Obedience to Being," writes of how her cats became her therapists in dealing with the issue of obedience in society (she found her cats to be cheerfully disobedient). Palouse the cat taught Betsy Brown a couple of lessons on clear communication in her story "Catechesis." M.B. Doane found her cat, Sunday, a "mirror of my inner/spiritual self, and of my relationship with myself," in "The Princess of 18th Street."

The most moving story is Pamela Gray's "Paw Prints." In it, Gray writes of a cat's death as similar to losing a child or a member of the family and wonders if there is a "Lesbian Cat Heaven" where "all the kitties that lesbians lost live, collectively, in a giant old run-down Victorian with political posters on the walls."

The essays, however, tend to be a bit preachy, although two do give some interesting information. In Irene Reti's essay, "Towards a Feminist History of the Cat," a comparison is drawn between the histories of both women and cats and how the oppression of one often leads to the oppression of the other.

Another essay by Kat Brown called "Sometimes I Wonder if You Want to Hear This: Life at an Animal Shelter" gives a picture of what happens to homeless cats and kittens who get sent to a shelter, and how a shelter worker deals with the demands of her work. However, some of the other essays interject politics into the issue of pet ownership in terms of humans having power over the animals. Apparently these women have gotten their impressions of cat behavior from a Sylvester and Tweety cartoon, for the real issue is that of *their* having power over *us*.

Cats (and Their Dykes) is an enjoyable and quick read for those who have ever been cat-owned. For those who have never had that privilege, it is a chance to explore how cats interact with their surroundings and their pet lesbians.

Dykes to Watch Out For by Alison Bechdel

