



The Cat: Or, How I Lost Eternity

Jutta Richter, Rotraut Susanne Berner (Illustrations), Anna Brailovsky (Translation)

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Every day, eight-year-old Christine's walk to school takes her past a talking alley cat. Christine stops and feels its warm head beneath her hand, and the cat's insights invariably give her something to ponder. One day her teacher asks her why she's always late for school. Frightened, she reveals her secret. Her punishment: she must write 200 lines stating repeatedly, "There are no talking cats, and from now on I will arrive at school on time." However, the cat is real, no matter how many lines Christine writes... and she might just as well leave out the "no" — the headmaster won't even notice, says the clever cat. That's what the cat always says — that life is all about being clever and looking out for yourself, first and foremost. Christine isn't so sure, and she is a little scared of the cat, too. There must be more to life than self-interest, surely? Beautiful illustrations by Rotraut Susanne Berner and thoughtful, vivid prose by Jutta Richter, winner of the German Youth Literature Award and the Hermann Hesse Prize, bring Christine and the talking cat to life in this award-winning book.

The Cat: Or, How I Lost Eternity Details

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Author : Jutta Richter , Rotraut Susanne Berner (Illustrations) , Anna Brailovsky (Translation)

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From Reader Review The Cat: Or, How I Lost Eternity for online ebook

CaraMae says

An entertaining read in the Haruki Murakami kind of way...for kids. ;P

Evan says

Suckered in by the cat on the cover, and the cute concept...

What I found inside was a translated German fable that features a talking cat who questions the existence of God, the power of authority, and the will of humanity. Not exactly prime material for a "children's" book, but I found it interesting nonetheless...of course, it could just stem from a desire to converse with my cat!

I would compare this to the two Audrey Niffenegger graphic novels in terms of tenor and tone. And who can pass up cute cat drawings, I mean really? ;)

Krista the Krazy Kataloguer says

I just didn't get this one. I wanted to like it, but the story was just bizarre. What was the point? Maybe I missed something, but the whole thing didn't make sense. And this was a Batchelder Award honor book! Maybe someone else out there can read it and understand it and explain it to me.

Erin says

Audience: ages 6-10, children with fanciful imaginations, Christians (potentially), budding feminists?, philosophists.

Appeal: This book relies on a lot of metaphor and sometimes rambles on the side of being philosophical. It's an interesting narrative with a mystical, child-like wonder that reminds you of a fairy tale. Many plot points are understated, so this book needs a lot of reading between the lines. An enjoyable read, definitely.

Application: This is a book I'd give to an individual rather than teach to the class. I believe the lessons within this book are rather personal ("losing eternity," etc.), and it's a journey each student should partake on their own. There are Christian allegories, certainly, and that creates a sort of dissonance with the reader; the audience for this type of book is limited.

Award: Batchelder honor book award for 2008

School Library Journal Review:

Gr 5-8-Eight-year-old Christine is late for school every day because she is stopped by a white alley cat that insists on talking to her. They discuss math and loneliness and eternity. While at first Christine feels an affinity with the cat, it later repulses her. The conversations eventually come to an end once Christine stops believing that the feline has anything wise or useful to say to her. It acts the role of The Serpent, trying to

lure the Eve-like Christine into doing and being what she knows is not right. There is even a discussion about the Tree of Knowledge and Original Sin at the end to hammer home the point. There is an abundance of unpleasant food imagery (starting with the fish smell that the cat leaves on Christine's hand whenever she touches it), male characters who are either incompetent or unfeeling, and an eclipse that represents the end of the world. It is hard to imagine a broad audience for this book.-Kara Schaff Dean, Walpole Public Library, MA (c) Copyright 2010. Library Journals LLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of Media Source, Inc. No redistribution permitted.

(I know this is a 2007 book, but it's so odd, I just couldn't help bringing it up).

Rebecca says

Which came first, this cat or The Rabbi's Cat? Sounds like they'd have a lot to talk about...

Hmmm. Odd little book, but I liked it. Reads like a fable, with short, almost haiku-like chapters. I most liked hearing how Christine thinks. When I was 8, the world was a similarly surreal place. Many concepts did not make sense (willfulness, eternity, math, sin), while others took on a hyper-real nature (cats, teachers, strange classmates).

Translated from German. Favorite quote:

"And I was special. A whole world unfolded before me on the street, a world with glimmering, rainbow-streaked gasoline puddles. With red, slimy, naked snails. With pebbles and raspberry bonbons. With bent, rusty nails. With marigolds and caterpillars and this old white cat, who was just as immortal as I was.

Eternity belonged to us."

Good gift book for philosophical types; not sure whether it really hits the target child audience, but I liked it!

Hedwidge says

Un joli livre mignon, très adapté pour les enfants et agréable pour les plus grands mais qui reste assez pessimiste, de mon point de vue. J'imagine que l'on peut y trouver beaucoup de messages d'espoir, c'est un livre très philosophique. Mais j'attendais plus de joie et de bonheur dans ces petites pages, j'ai été assez déçue.

Lisa says

The illustrator of this book also illustrated one of my favorite children's books: In the Town, All Year 'Round.

Strange book! You turn a page, and have to check to make sure that two pages didn't stick together because the plot doesn't seem to follow naturally. Or, two pages do stick together and you don't notice because there wasn't much continuity in the first place.

Miriam says

Don't be fooled by the shortness and cute cat pictures; this sad, funny, philosophical little book is not for children(or at least not especially for them). I would have understood it as a child, but I would have hated it. You can't unknown things once you've learned them, yet you can lose the understandings you once possessed. You can't stop yourself from growing up.

Ghazaal B. says

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Marlee says

Interesting, engaging, different. I loved it at first but was disappointed in the end.

Cheryl says

I enjoyed this concise poetic fable, but would have been even more enchanted when I was a 'tween reading things like "The Little Prince" and "Mister God This is Anna." This girl sees things that adults don't, like the fact that the abused dog belongs to a man who deserves even more sympathy, and that teachers don't notice a missing "not" when they assign 200 lines.

The cat is wise, but also judgemental... it reminds me of some of the teachers of martial arts, cooking, or related, in which the apprentice has to spend years scrubbing floors before being allowed to touch the pots and pans... is that a good way to pass down wisdom? Are most victims to blame? Is the ability to count important? Is Pug a good boy or a bad boy? Is it so bad to grow up? Or to eat the apple?

Do not underestimate children. Not all of them are satisfied with stories of just adventure and humor.

Ellee says

Enh. For one of the 1001 Children's Books to Read Before You Grow Up, I can think of a lot of others that I'd choose before this one. However, if that editor needed a certain number of books from countries other than the US or UK, then I can understand why they might be included. I just don't see that book (the 1001.... book) being translated into German anytime soon (and if it *were*, then the editor should have chosen better fare than this - e.g. Cornelia Funke or others).

I *might* have enjoyed it more as a kid, but I kind of doubt it. Too surreal without the charm of most fairy tales.

Deb (Readerbuzz) Nance says

A 1001 CBYMRBYGU. This is a children's book? If a kid could read this book and get what the author was trying to say, then that kid is a wiser soul than I am. Here's the plot, as best I can figure it: A girl walks to school each day and sees a cat. The cat talks to her. The cat is quite the philosopher. She tells the girl what she knows about the world. The cat makes the girl late for school and that causes the girl problems. There is also a mailman who is trying to find a wife and the Pug, a boy who lives in the apartment below the girl.

I have no idea what this book is really about. If anyone knows, then please send a cat over my way to share it with me.

“Eternity felt very big and very slow, especially when I couldn’t share it with the cat. The only thing that helped was the chain saw that Waldemar Buck used to carve up the afternoon. It wailed over the rooftops, and I imagined that with each wail a little piece of eternity fell from heaven.”

Negar says

* ?/?

Adrienne Mathiowetz says

Even before I realized that this was translated from the German (apparently I am not very observant, when it comes to information conveyed on a cover), it struck me as a very German book. *The Cat: Or, How I Lost Eternity* captures the surreal nature of a child's reality, and the gradual emergence from that surreal mindset. Not your typical children's story, which is a shame: more children's books should be more odd, and less sugary-simple-sweet.

I love that the cat is this sage/fool character -- and kind of a jerk in the way that cats are kind of jerks.

Also, the illustrations are awesome.
