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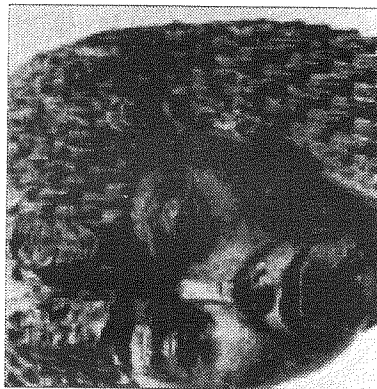
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EARLY GREECE

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cats has been unusually broad. Before she moved to Londoner, she had lived on a Rhodesian farm where the family's many cats had to deal with the special dangers and opportunities of nearby wilderness, as well as the ordinary ambiguities of agricultural life—whether one was a barn cat or a house cat, for example. Yet despite the alarming presence of snakes and eagles and other exotic predators, the greatest threat to these rural African cats, as to the housecats of Europe and North America, was posed by human beings. Lessing makes this point by means of a very sobering anecdote. Controlling the numbers of various animals, domestic and wild, was the responsibility of Lessing's mother, and she routinely drowned superfluous kittens. But after years of slaughter, she wearied of these duties and refused to perform them, ultimately leaving Lessing and her father alone with an exploding feline population. In what Lessing describes as "the holocaust of cats," they shot as many as they could find.

Despite this strong language and the quietly conveyed horror of the experience, Lessing claims that she did not grieve for the dead animals. An earlier trauma—abandoning a cherished kitten when her family had moved from Persia to southern Africa—had forced her to harden her heart against the emotional claims of cats. Thus she becomes a memoir of a traumatic experience.

the depth and the pleasures of the relationship between humans and cats, in which Lessing describes a series of feline companions, each distinct, each admired, and each beloved. Her account is intensely personal and particular. She makes no claims to objectivity or to any authority besides that of the eyewitness. She portrays herself simply as a committed cat lover, and even offers occasional, slightly uncomfortable, specimens of the language in which she addresses her pets: for example, "beeeeeautiful, delicious puss." Nevertheless, Lessing presents as powerful an argument in her way as Thomas does in hers, and to much the same effect. For both a degree of identification with animal feelings—anthropomorphism—offers direct insight into the minds and characters of domestic animals, an enlightenment not available by any other means. And both therefore raise the question—Thomas explicitly and Lessing implicitly—of why many of those who study animal behavior should automatically treat anthropomorphism as a weakness that distinguishes the soft-headed and the simple-minded among humans. Perhaps the people who minimize the possibility of communication and understanding between humans and other animals are the ones who should have to defend their assumptions.

Cats: *Ancient and Modern*, by Juliet Clutton-Brock, is more concerned