

Puss-In-Translation, or The Master Cat Primer

A PHILOSOPHY

&

AN INTRODUCTION

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A PHILOSOPHY

AND INTRODUCTION

Translating The Translated

“Master Cat, or Puss in Boots” is a French literary fairy tale written by Charles Perrault. If you’d like a really solid understanding of what “pulling the ever-lovin’ stuffing out of it” looks like, getting yourself a copy of Jack Zipes’ translation into English (to compare side-by-side with this interpretation of the story) is your best bet. Zipes translated the story from French to English, and I’ve translated his translation from fairy tale to academia-speak.

My “translation” — for easier side-by-side referencing with Zipes’ work — gets its titles from the introduction of each character into the story:

- FIRST the miller is dead,
- THEN the youngest son gets stuck
- UNTIL the cat starts talking;
- IMPRESSING the reigning monarch,
- WOOING the most beautiful princess,
- SPREADING the word around hard, and
- RESPECTING the richest ogre.

Each section has a footnote that will help you to find your place in the story and connect the dots between the literary tale and the philosophy of living Happily Ever Out There; giving yourself permission to make and follow your own rules within the guidelines of Kindness, Intelligence, and Right Work.

You can learn more about my work providing fairy tales without the lame-isms at [The Golden Goose Eggs](#).

FIRST the miller is dead¹

Through the inevitable co-mingling of nature and nurture we are educated, imbued with our own singular work ethic, and - at some point - given the opportunity to stand on our own. Sometimes, those who fall under the jurisdiction of nurturer - family, teachers, friends of family, even our own friends - aren't wholly nurturing and drain the power of our agency without our even realizing it. After so many years of reciting facts and copying figures and following in others' footsteps, it can be difficult to know exactly what we should do when left to our own devices.

THEN the youngest son gets stuck²

As children being denied appetite-spoiling foods or made to take naps, we define freedom as being a grown-up and making our own rules. When we finally reach adulthood we find ourselves confined by larger, societal rules. Every day we see others who thrive within such conventions while we remain in our near-constant state of disbelief regarding our own adulthood.

This is made more difficult by our incessant need to compare ourselves to those peers who seem to glide effortlessly from schooldays into adulthood without skipping a beat. Our need to connect or fit in is a basic tenet of our humanity and the driving force behind why we try so hard to follow the exact steps to success walked by our peers. It's what we did as kids and so - because we survived childhood - we try to do it now.

However, when we who are aware that "something is not right" just try to continue on as we always have, the smallest fallback is immensely disheartening. It drives home this idea that we are completely unprepared for the world of adulthood and will be doomed forever if we cannot figure out how to do what everyone else manages to be able to do every day. Our only hope for redemption is to embrace failure as an option.

¹ Here's the first paragraph of Perrault's story — which sets up the story — translated sentence by sentence. No mention of any details of the fairy tale here. Instead every single element of the story has been given an *incredibly dry* equivalent.

² In the second paragraph of the story, our attention is turned to the youngest son of the recently-deceased miller. We are told through the narrator's voice that he is upset, and he himself has the first line of dialogue in the story in which he explains his difficulty and leaves an opening for the cat. Since actions speak louder than words, and speaking is a kind of dialogue, his speaking his thoughts aloud says more about him and his situation and the possibilities that surround him than anything a narrative voice might say about him; and, so *each of the three parts* of this second fairy tale paragraph has been translated into its own academic paragraph.

UNTIL the cat starts talking³

The key to viewing failure as an option is to bear in mind the difference between that which is possible and that which is probable; choices. A possible outcome is just one of one of any number of outcomes deriving from choices yet to be made.

A probable outcomes is an outcome toward which you are already headed due to choices already made.

When we embrace failure as an option we not only view it as a possibility that can be avoided, but we also lift its veil of grand finality by holding in our minds the knowledge that even after we “fail” there are more choices to be made and chances to be had. This brings us to the issue of decision fatigue - or ego depletion - wherein just thinking about the infinite puzzle pieces of possibility can so exhaust us that we are deterred from even trying. This, in turn, shows us that the probable makes for a great aid to the possible.

Every move we make is a decision made is a little more of our creative fire spent. By simplifying certain parts of our daily routine we can free up headspace and mental energy for more important things. Having a life uniform and planning meals for the week are just two examples that can make a difference.

In mathematics, a proof is elegant when it is true and surprisingly simple; some proofs have been so elegant that people couldn't believe them, thinking the proofs “too good to be true.” There is plenty of research out there to support how certain instances of simplifying make life better, but there are bound to be experiences in your own past - or in the past of someone you know - who may have stumbled into it. Many a former carnivore, for instance, will tell you that giving up meat made going to eat at a restaurant less stressful because those giant menus suddenly had “underwhelming” - a.k.a. manageable - offerings.

³ This bit of translation from fairytale to academia is the Cat's first piece of dialogue which — delivered in a nonchalance manner *chosen* by the Cat — reveals (1) his desire *not* to die or experience any other kind of “finality,” (2) his compassion for his master in a time of fear and worry, and (3) the makings of a plan by getting the basics out of the way. The first three academic paragraphs begin with the cat, who has overheard his master talking about how he plans to eat the cat and then starve to death. Basically, the miller's son believes failure is final; but, the cat just knows better. He consoles his master and then asks for his famous wardrobe change. The cat's master, the miller's son, isn't convinced and yet he can't deny he's seen the cat do some pretty clever things. So the fourth paragraph of “translation” helps connect the dots between doubt and hope.

IMPRESSING the reigning monarch⁴

One less thing to worry about is one less thing to weigh you down is one less thing to suck the life out of you. Freeing up headspace frees up the most precious resource you have; energy. The best way to honor the energy your body houses is to put it to good use.

Do something every day (or week, just don't space it out too far or you'll risk losing momentum) that will bring you toward some goal. You'll want a specific goal, reasonably sized, with a deadline (or a means of tracking the estimated time of completion). Exact steps are nice, but use them as guidelines rather than steadfast rules; the only thing steadfast should be your commitment, your decision to live your life by your terms.

When you then make a measurable amount of progress toward your goal. share your progress. Call someone, start a hashtag, do something that makes your journey solid and real to the world around you. Somewhere out there someone else knows "something is not right" and just needs proof that they're not the only one.

Again, keep making steady efforts toward your goal. When you've made another measurable amount of progress, share it. You affirm your journey's importance when you give it the weight of your attention and are willing to let others journey with you if they are so inclined.

Continue to make progress and continue to share it. What means the world to you just might make someone's day.

As you continue toward your ultimate goal your intuition will also go to work trying to help you. If you've been going after your goal for a long time you will start to notice opportunities and resources that can help you along. This is how your intuition helps.

Your intuitions, or guts instincts, are just one way your subconscious mind communicates with your conscious mind. it will notice opportunities and resources before you are even aware of them. If you have a feeling that a certain action of thing

⁴ Here the cat gets to work hunting and impressing the king and talking up his master to the point of renaming him the Marquis of Carabas. He does it all because he wants to (he could have very easily run from his master and let the guy starve without getting eaten himself), and because — having gotten his boot in the castle door — the cat is able to see the reward for the work he is doing. Now in the original story, the cat does all of his hard work over the course of about three months; not too long, not too short, it's just the right amount of time his project needs. All the while, his work is bringing a spark to those he encounters along the way until the king and his daughter are on the move and the cat can see his big break, the perfect opportunity to get his master in front of the king without accidentally revealing his peasantry.

could help you toward your goal, that feeling is worth investigating (assuming you haven't already gone ahead and dived in without a second thought).

WOONG the most beautiful princess⁵

Some of the ideas your gut comes up with will be so small you might not think it worth your time to even try. Yet it is more important to follow these smaller ideas. For if they seem too small to do any good, chances are they are also too small to do any harm. And what's a little risk of a little time spent trying out something a little different?

Especially when you consider how that little thing, on top of all your previous efforts, could result in something pretty great.

Should your more intuitive moves not pan out, share that news with a hearty, "Ah, well, on to the next thing!" because failure is optional not final. However, should the move prove fruitful, celebrate it! Let whoever you've been sharing your progress with — in whatever way you've been sharing your progress — know all about the little risk you took and how it paid off and how excited you are to keep moving toward your goal.

While you take a moment to feel good about not losing heart and or re-affirming your commitment, as the case may be, remember the task at hand; remember the goal you are still moving toward so your subconscious will continue to look for opportunities and resources even as you are enjoying your downtime (which should not be so long as to impair your project's momentum).

SPREADING the word around hard⁶

There's any number of reasons why it's good to share your progress as you go. The first is accountability. Chances are your education instilled in you a heightened sense of accountability, to get it done no matter how long you may have procrastinated in the first place.

⁵ This is where we see "Marquis of Carabas" in quotes for the last time in the fairy tale. When the miller's son jumps into the river in accordance with the cat's plan, there's a baptismal effect I'll get into in a later draft. Right now, we're all about executing the plan. Here the king's men have pulled the marquis out of the river and he and the princess have fallen in love and the three of them (king, princess, marquis) are all going for a lovely ride while the cat keeps working ... and working).

⁶ While the king and princess and marquis all enjoy following the path made by the cat, the cat runs ahead of the king's coach through the countryside to tell people they now work for the Marquis de Carabas. But for us it all goes back to sharing your progress because he doesn't just stop at one field full of workers, he keeps it up with the next field of workers, and it's all leading up to his idea of a grand finale; powering through to the end and winding up face-to-face with the most misunderstood "villain" of any creative's life, fear.

Part of making accountability - and any habitual procrastination - work for you is how you set your deadlines. Your specific goal should have an overall deadline determined by your work-pace and estimated time of completion (ETC), but those measurable bits of progress should have similarly determined deadlines. Measurable progress within stepping-stone guidelines, not exact steps.

Exact steps are for when you say to yourself “What needs to be done that I can do right now while I’m in the headspace to work toward my goal?” They’re not for setting weekly progress deadlines. Progress deadlines are there to motivate you to act upon whatever exact steps you think of while you are working (much the same way as waiting till the last minute to get a school paper done suddenly lights a fire under your butt to sit down and actually do the friggin’ writing).

Another reason to share your progress is to use the momentum of working and sharing the project to build up the habit of continuing to work on it in whatever small way you can even when you are not in the flow of the work. Little acts build up and any little progress that gets you to a measurable bit of progress is all your project is asking of you. Your ideas are an extension of yourself, they want what you want; execution.

All you have to do for the world to know that you are real, is to get out of your house and interact with someone in some way. The same goes for your ideas. On some level, you can’t truly accept them as real until you put it “out there” where it can interact with other people, each their own thoughts and ideas in need of enlivening. This goes back to the idea of giving your project weight by allowing it the importance of being share-worthy, in whatever way you feel most comfortable sharing.

A third reason to share your progress takes the question of momentum and kicks it up a notch. When you share your progress again and again (consistent sharing of consistent progress of measurable amounts) those with whom you are sharing will grow in confidence and comfort with your project and feel increasingly inclined to talk to you/interact with you in some way regarding your project and its progress. Their interest and interaction adds to your momentum which adds to your output and sharing which adds to their interactivity which all equals one thing, feedback loops.

Feedback loops, in this regard, are great. You’re getting work done, people (even if they are family and friends) are rooting for you to succeed/finish/keep going, and all this helps your brain to commit even harder to your project. You see, it’s kind of hard to doubt yourself when you’re not the only one who believes in what it is you’re doing.

Doubt is the self-critic is the seemingly anti-creative manifestation of your lizard brain/fear trying to stop you from getting mauled by a bobcat. Very often we are told to fight this part of ourselves, forgetting that sometimes the most important battles can only be won by logic. You win-over your doubt when you show your fear that

continually working on your project isn't killing you, and you drive that fact home when you open the conversation to "outsiders" who believe enough in what you're doing to pick up the rallying cry.

RESPECTING the richest ogre⁷

Fear is the ogre, a part of our story. It's job — in real life — is to stop us dead in our tracks before we actually wind up dead, and I think we can all admit it does a fantastic job of making every little thing we come up against into a ferocious lion. It's a kind of super-power really.

Because of this super-power we should have respect and gratitude for our fear. When it comes to our creative endeavours, however, we need to learn to address the presence of our fear — let it shake us unexpectedly, as it is wont to do — and then remember that creating is not a death sentence. Creating is creation is living.

Once you know what your fear and doubt are trying to do (protect you) you can then curb that need to protect the time and space you set aside for working on your project. Let your fear act as a guardian of whatever little corner or tools you have set aside to complete your goal, let your fear protect you in a way that is constructive. Your fear will not know the difference.

There is of course the risk that your fear can become a little overzealous with this new mission orientation. A sacred space can be made less "sterile" by having a cup of coffee or light snack at your side, your precious tools need simply a special resting place where they will always go when you are done using them (whether you were using them toward your ultimate goal or for some other purpose).

It is not you who are meant to be consumed by fear, but your fear by you. Shift the focus of your fear and then syphon off some of that energy to invigorate the work you are doing. It takes some practice, persistence really, but the results are pretty fantastic.

⁷ Once you've built up your trifecta of accountability, momentum, and community, it's all about getting past that last little bit of fear. Because fear is tricky and can change into lions and elephants. This transformative power fear has can work in your favor, as the cat knows well and shows by tricking the ogre into becoming a little, tiny mouse.

Happily Ever Out There⁸

We are surrounded by rules. Some necessary, some arbitrarily followed. Many people are so comfortable with the rules that they cannot imagine their lives without them.

When we learn to make our fear work for us, those who live the most strictly by the rules will be the most surprised. It is our work, the work of those who know “something is not right” to forge the new paths; the paths are necessary to us so that we do not lose our minds our souls in this crazy world. It is the forging of these paths which reassures the part of us that follows the rules in order to fit in that we are on to something.

What would a path be, after all, if it did not lead somewhere worth arriving?

The “original” fairy tales do not have sequels or prequels, just versions. When the characters live “happily ever after” we are being told that there are no more stories, no more adventures for them. Happily ever after means never doing anything worthy of mention ever again.

That’s what I’m going against when I say that I want to live happily ever out there. I want an adventure today and today and today, the way life is meant to be lived; with new stories starting whenever an old story is ending, sometimes even in the middle of another story so that various stories or our lives are happening simultaneously.

This is fairy tale living is what Master Cat teaches by example: a miller’s son is a marquis is worthy of the most beautiful princess in the world; a miller’s cat is a gentleman is a trickster is a hero is a lord in his own right; a king is a rule-enforcer and rule-bender; a princess is the thrill of knowing in our bones that we are on the right track to our happily ever out there; field-hands are the proof we have laid out for ourselves that there is something to this thing we are building; and an ogre is doubt and fear and our survival instincts in need a little re-direction.

We are each of us the whole story with its characters the different aspects of ourselves. We have only to look to ourselves to see what story we are playing out, and to use that to our advantage. The cat saw and made it work, why not us?

⁸ When all the pieces are in place, the coach rounds the corner and we see the beautiful castle (that used to belong to the ogre) and the cat who has proved himself to and beyond the rule-makers by following his own rules. The story ends in true “happily ever after” fashion, and yet — with the note that the cat never hunted mice again except when it pleased him to do so — I have to wonder if the allowance was made to suggest that the cat just won’t sit and put up with the standard charms for very long.