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The Importance of House Pets in Emotional Development

Sinan Caya^{a*}

^a*Dr., Marmara University, Faculty of Engineering, Instructor of Social Electives*

Abstract

Pets are useful to people in the psychological sense. Livestock, poultry and working animals can not be surrogates for pets. In the modern society pets are gaining more and more importance. In Turkey, too, pet-keeping is getting to be a widespread practice in recent times. Pets represent animal love and they especially contribute to children's healthy emotional development.

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1. Introduction

House pets are kept merely for pleasure and personal company; and this fact renders them different from farm animals, poultry or load-carrying horses, donkeys, mules, camels or elephants. What appeals to a pet-keeper is not an economic value or material use or facilitating work. Instead it is the amiable traits of the animal like its eagerness to play around, its loyalty or some scenes worth of watching.

In today's society pets' variety and numbers have increased. Their food and other needs have come to represent a large industrial sector. One reason to keep animals despite the cost, the toil —looking after a cat is easier than looking after a dog, since the latter must be walked around regularly — and the time required; appears to be the fact that for the modern man; it is difficult to find pure, unselfish love in other human beings. As a defense mechanism (or coping mechanism) one tends to substitute the object of love-exchange with a simpler and more stable being.

Based on a recent research; in Canada there are roughly eight million cats and six million dogs; 35 % of the houses have dogs while 38 % of the houses have cats (from the internet).

* Sinan Caya. Tel.: +0-548-067-5442.

E-mail address: sinan.caya@gmail.com

A paradoxical situation also lies in the fact that a hunter kills many animals while he is fond of his hound. The hound is his helper and is fed in the yard.

2. The Changing Situation in Turkey

Turkey resembles western societies more and more in the sense that dog-keeping in houses (*) is becoming more of a common practice. Formerly a conspicuous consumption “object” (of prestige) {using a concept by Veblen (1857;1929), a giant of Economic Sociology}; nowadays; some middle-class families are also engaging in dog-keeping in their homes.

Until recent years Turkish veterinary surgeons were solely professionals providing health services pertaining to cattle, horses and poultry. Nowadays animal clinics for pets are spreading around.

3. Pet Cemeteries

In a recent episode of a travel program on TV a pet cemetery in Finland came to attention. Pets’ owners get so emotionally involved with the animals that they want to commemorate their reminiscences.

Since the life span of a cat or dog comprises about one and a half decades; their owners are bound to witness their demise (It is said that a cat usually leaves the house at such a moment, to spare the bitter scene for his owner).

In Turkey institutionalized pet cemeteries are non-existing yet. But some children bury them in compliance with some rituals of their own and bestow the appearance of a grave onto the chosen spot.

Durbaş (2005) mentions his crowded childhood-home and the house cats, in İzmir. His young uncle’s cat, Smoke, goes with him when he gets married. The author’s mother takes the remaining elderly cat, Yellow, in a basket to a far-away district, furtively. The children get curious. One evening she appears in the neighborhood again. But she refuses to acknowledge anybody from the household despite insistent approaches. In a week they find her corpse; they make a tiny grave and cover it with yellow flowers.

(The issue of pet cemetery will re-appear in another subtitle concerning an American novel).

3. A Psychological Support for Man

It is an aspect of modern life whereby trained dogs help out disabled people. But it is essentially the stress-relieving and mental-hygiene providing quality of pet-keeping which is worthwhile.

This is even more of a significant occupation if the living circumstances are hard. A former Guantanamo-prisoner asserted that he used to feed an iguana, once he realized the presence of those creatures, around. He would conceal some of the given food given by the guards, for this purpose.

In the movie *The Birdman of Alcatraz* starring Burt Lancaster, a prisoner eventually becomes a self-educated bird-doctor.

In the movie *the Green Mile* (based on a work by Stephen King) a Cajun [an ethnic group speaking French in Louisiana] domesticates a mouse in his death-cell. He teaches it to trundle a stitching-roller and baptizes it Mr. Jingles. He entrusts the mouse to his comrades when he heads for the electrical chair, a very moving scene of the movie!

Well-known Law-Professor Hüseyin Hatemi’s cat-love came into the attention of the audience in a TV program (April 19, 2014). An old cat resembling a lady with a walking-stick, used to stroll around the campus; and he called her Sultan. A special cat in his house was Ebu Mırmır (the Arabic phrase means the father of Mırmır, while the latter word itself is sheer onomatopoeia imitating the feline murmuring), which had a series of other beautiful names. The professor used to pat him while recounting those names one by one in his slow and distinct speech style and the cat gave the impression that he enjoyed all his names.

Having read about the re-creation of animals at the Day of Judgment in a book by an authority on Islam, the professor had gained a lot of relief. Indeed; he confidently asserted that he will encounter his dead cats again.

4. Animal Sub-themes in an American Novel

In a novel of Wambaugh taking place in California in 1978, as a hidden transcript one can see the significance of pets in American society.

4.1 *An Affectionate Dog-owner & a Dog-sitter*

A fifty-year old, underweight dog-sitter; Philo; has his own dog caring center. He is merciful towards dogs and he has never afflicted pain on an animal, yet. He is now adorning a few entrusted Terriers; with the help of his apprentice, a teenager girl.

Nearby in the open area, another dog-sitter is busy with the preparation of Vickie; a cute doggy with black silky hair. The owner is Madeline, divorcee who e comes from a noble and proud family. Her fortune wore out when her mother got terminally sick. Her left-overs bring some interest barely enough to keep over the surface of water, in a decent manner. The dog fills in her entire world. If the dog becomes a champion in the coming competition and their pictures in all sizes fill the journals, maybe the chance of a good re-marriage may emerge. Who knows?

4.2 *The Secret Plan of the Dog-sitter*

Philo, who regards himself as the king of the profession, is revealing some fine tricks of the job to the apprentice-girl. He says that Terriers used to be raised to catch rats. He is showing her how to crop the animals delicately with the electric-shaver. The girl is watching, fascinated.

Among the two-dozen dogs confined to his care center, there is another similar-looking Terry, named Tutu, which had been trained here two years ago. The owner is a rich, indifferent, aging and nymphomaniac widow, who delegates the dog's care to servants. Tutu used to like his trainer, here. The body scent of the skinny, mucus-spitting man got embedded in the animal's olfactory memory as a pleasant experience. Philo's feelings were only reciprocal. This was the only being paying him admiration, in his world.

Last night Philo was silently approaching a parked car with Tutu left at the front seat. At the sight of him; the dog simply leaped out of the ajar front-window onto his idol's lap. (The investigating detective would also confirm this finding in his preliminary report). All Tutu's owner's purpose was a reimbursing by the insurance company. The dog's price had been amounting to thousands of dollars.

Philo sends his apprentice to fetch beers from his pick-up and while alone; he runs to his center, gets Tutu out of the cage and gives her an injection, regretting the necessity. The poor animal soon passes out. With the numb dog in his arms, he returns to his colleague's stand, who is watching a baseball match on a portable television set. His apprentice-boy is thumbing through a porno magazine, at the same time; a wonderful opportunity for Philo to replace Vickie with Tutu. Vickie, sensing the bad intentions of this intruder, bites his hand on the way.

The girl, upon return with beer bottles; notices a difference among the Terrier group but ignores it. Meanwhile hell breaks out in the colleague's corner. The apprentice-boy must give the account of his carelessness. How come he could not prevent an envious drug-giver from making "Vickie" torpid?

The colleague, many excuses in his mouth, returns the sick dog to Madeleine; who senses that it looks different from Vickie. Nevertheless; she is not sure. At this moment the phone rings and a certain Richard — Philo is a fan of Richard Burton— notifies him about the capture of Vickie, demanding eighty thousand as ransom. He does not neglect it to warn about the good care of the other dog at hand, either. He would call again.

The numb dog soon kicks off. Madeline calls the colleague, gives him money and orders the burial. She says she is too tired to go there herself. Intermittent calls follow up. She pulls herself together and manages to negotiate the situation. The required lump sum is not available but maybe can be rolled up by selling some decorative possessions. "Richard" is incredulous but he is open to a discount-bargain, anyway.

4.3 Further Police Investigation

Meanwhile two plain-clothes officers (a man and a woman) take the issue under close scrutiny. The senior officer, having his own pets in the house; pays closer attention to the case (**) and eventually he connects the two incidents in his mind (Madeline finally makes up her mind about notifying the authorities, instead of dealing with the kidnapper all by herself).

The senior detective wants to get “Vickie” (in reality Tutu) exhumed and then diagnosed by Tutu’s owner. The rich lady scolds the policeman for his demand. Instead of fooling around with her gigolos, she was supposed to take the trouble to go all the way to a pet cemetery! Upon insistence, she contends to send her butler along with the law-enforcer.

The director of the pet-cemetery relies on red tape and makes the situation difficult. The policeman presses and he gives in. He finds the right spot among many graves belonging to dogs, cats, iguanas, parrots, pandas and monkeys. He exhumes the little coffin made of pine (he had charged walnut wood price). The animal’s face is spoiled and the butler can not be sure. He says that maybe dog-sitter Philo can do the right diagnose. The animal gets re-buried.

4.4 The Ransom Bargain Goes on

Madeline keeps silent about the death of the “double”. Philo had fired the girl (His wife may get suspicious about a flirtation and come to the center for a check). Vickie is put in a cage there. An oversized guest is also at the center: A big German shepherd dog named Walter. The “convicted” animal was given to a family’s care by court decision. The family brought it to the center on the verge of a holiday. Philo’s wife was present. She did not want to admit the big dog but an offer of extra fee did its effect.

Philo’s gambling debt exceeds ten thousand. The loan shark is impatient and merciless. The dog-sitter should grab the ransom so that he can pay the debt and then move on to Mexican coasts to have some fun with Hispanic chicks. During a nervous breakdown he calls from his own center and to make an impact on the woman; he actually cuts an ear of the dog, on the phone. The bargain reaches its climax. Finally he settles for twenty five thousand bucks, which is all she could roll together. The next day Madeline drops the money-bag from her car, on a bridge. The dog-sitter picks it up with his small lorry. Vickie will be released the following day, based on the agreement.

4.5 The Resolution Following the Tension

The next day the senior detective comes to the dog care center for an interview with Tutu’s former trainer and rings the bell. Philo takes the big man as the new executioner of the shark loan. He does not open the door. The detective, having heard footsteps, thinks that a robber is inside. He pulls his gun and rams the door with his foot. A fire extinguisher roars on his head as soon as he steps inside. He falls down, dropping his gun. Philo captures the official revolver and becomes the master of the situation.

German shepherd Walter hates the sight of a pistol. He used to be beaten heavily with gunned men. Walter attacks and bites Philo in his groins. The dog-sitter fires at the animal successively. Cages get tipped over. All the bow-wows start barking in chorus. One of them has his head bandaged. Philo escapes. The policeman stands up with difficulty and begins chasing the scrawny man, as if in slow motion.

Philo drives his small lorry to the airport. In a rest-room he wraps his wounded groins with new shirts from his baggage. Not a really bad harm, after all. He gets on the Mexico plane. The plane takes off. The stewardess takes notice of a sleepy and trembling male passenger. The man stinks blood and keeps snarling and swallowing his phlegm. She takes a quick glance at his valise. It is full of banknotes! Then a whispering communication in the cockpit with the control tower follows and when the plane lands Mexican security forces rush in.

Philo is taken into a Mexican hospital after being arrested. He mumbles that he is an evil man. He says he killed Tutu as well as Walter. He regrets having cut the ear of Vickie. He claims he deserves all possible penalties.

5. Abandoned Pets

It is a sad fact that many pets are later abandoned by their owners; even if this act obviously occurs as a bitter necessity. A female author talks about an abandoned cat: A female tiger cat with a white nose and collar just in the street. Se was trying to rub his body on passers-by. A good-natured cat, which sleeps a lot and eats a lot. We named her Cicoz (colored tiny glass ball). The veterinary surgeon estimated her to be two-years-old. She had been rendered infertile, a proof of her house-origins. For a time she lived with my defunct father. Then she got sick and despite all those serums, she passed away. I am sure she is still being embraced by my father (Igaz, 2012).

6. It is an Awful Act to Persecute Animals

Making some dialectic philosophy; the polar opposite of animal love is their persecution. Torturing an animal reflects a stony heart and a sickly soul.

In this context; we could say that some professions are not suitable for the majority of people. In a French movie, an adolescent started the family profession in a slaughter house. He was required to cut a cow, on the very first day. He succeeded with difficulty then went out to vomit. The hardened elderly employees laughed about the affair and celebrated it as an initiation (rite de passage) of the young one.

Maybe mistreating an animal could be a nostalgic return for certain criminals of some sort. Even though in fiction, the following lines by Stephen King could be revealing many things.

Dussander had been having nightmares, lately. He had been dreaming about Patin. Officially; it was claimed that war prisoners were working in the production of candle and clothing. For that matter; the neighbors of Auschwitz camp were told that this was a sausage factory. Dussander had been wearing his former SS uniform as pajamas, lately. Now; he allures the cat with a bowl of milk, patiently. The cat is cautious at first. But later succumbs into the trap. The old man hastily wears his plastic gloves; gets hold of the cat near the milk bowl; opens the door with his foot and throws the animal into the burning stove (Stephen King 1987).

7. Love Goes with Responsibility

One of my childhood friends had a white shepherd dog called Storm. One day after school the dog appeared on the street, near his master, with whom I had been walking side by side. Other familiar boys were walking behind us. While about to cross the railroads on the way home; a blue-uniformed municipality official squatting on the pavement rolled a ball of minced meat towards Storm. Before I could realize anything; my friend has already intercepted the poisonous food with his shoe and gently kicked it back (*) onto the official.

An immediate eye contact got established between the boy and the official, who mumbled with a humiliated voice, while putting the meat into a can: "You should designate your animal with a collar, then". My friend became a hero among us. (In former days the easy but cruel way of poisoning street dogs was resorted to by the municipal administrations; instead of treatment and care of them, which is accomplished nowadays).

8. A Scotch Veterinary Surgeon

James Herriot is the pen-name of a Scottish veterinary surgeon, who practiced his profession in 1930s and 1940s. One aspect of his job is to establish good relations with the farmers and their families. Among the animals he encounters, it is dogs who receive his special attention and compassion.

Mrs. Donovan is an old, lonely and curious woman, aware of everything going on around the town. After the death of his dog, Rex, she had vowed not to have another dog. She used to feed Rex with her special tonic and wash him with her special shampoo (the formulas of both preparation are her own strict secrets).

One day Herriot receives a complaint call from the head of the animal protection committee and they together go to a certain address. Mrs. Donovan included, some towns people have already gathered in front of the house. Inside they find a big dog in twilight. He is all skinny and in filth. His hair is all sticky. He had been tied to the wall and

left almost completely neglected for quite a long time period. The owner is a mentally retarded man, whose mother had lost control of the house, due to old age.

When Herriot pats the animal's head it looks up and touches the doctor with his front paws. Its look is full of trust, despite the horrible days he had gone through. The doctor listens to the lung and heart with his stethoscope. For all the lack of care, the poor animal is still in good health. Meanwhile the crowd outside gets bigger. Herriot talks with a loud voice, asserting that Roy (this is the name of the yellow Retriever) above all; needs a special wash with a special shampoo besides a good tonic, which gives strength!

Rising up to the bait; Mrs. Donovan has already begun to inspect the animal, thoroughly. Then she "adopts" the dog. She feeds and cures the animal. She is rescued from her loneliness! Soon; the dog and his new female-master begin to walk together on the town's main boulevard. Whenever Herriot meets them; she says to the animal-doctor that she had made an entirely different dog out of Roy and asks a tag question for a confirmation, eagerly: "Didn't I, Mr. Herriot, didn't I?" (Herriot, 1976).

9. Conclusion

Pets are nice creatures which sweeten life make it more meaningful to live on. They represent love and tenderness. It is a good hobby to keep them at home, if it is ever possible. Those domestic beings provide man with psychological support. A person who pats the puffy hair of a sympathetic cat gets "addicted" to this pleasure. Doing good to the animals sublimates man's soul. Especially in the emotional development of children, the role of love for animals is of undeniably scale and importance.

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