

Philozoe

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About Cat and Mice

Philozoe. An e-journal on image creation, mythologies and experiencing subjectivity. Arts and fragments by Farangis G. Yegane Arani and Gita Yegane Arani.

About Cat and Mice

موش و گربه



Farangis, linoleum print: header “Moosh o Gorbeh”.

ABOUT CAT AND MICE

BACKGROUND

It's the ancient fight for justice: the fight of the oppressors and the oppressed. In all societies of all civilizations it has played a role in traditions to depict this struggle in literature and arts. Despite a seeming hopelessness, people are unceasingly sacrificing their own lives and the lives of others.

In the cultural imagery of the Persian language, big and fat cats are metaphorically described as the oppressors, and the mice are the multitude of a suffering people. Typically for fable-like storytelling human attributes are being associated with specific animals. Certain animals come to embody good or bad characters and are epitomes for strengths and weaknesses, pride and humility, compassionateness and cruelty.

We know animal tales or fables especially from the Greek and the Roman antique as moral scripts that sought to foster character development. In a similar way animals often appeared as an embodiment of human attributes in the old Middle Eastern teachings of wisdom and enlightenment. These stories were also used to portrait the political conditions of a people or a state, and helped to politically educate and sometimes empower the citizen and individual.

The situation of the humiliated people (mice) is told in the Persian story “About Cat and Mice” which was originally written by ‘Obayd Zakani. The mice

experience the hypocrisy and brutality of their oppressors (the cats), and finally decide to declare war on the cats. The final stage of the battle between the sides is reached, and the mice heroically stand against their enemy. In the battle they even able to throw the leader of the of cats' troops from their horse to the ground and to bind him in chains. The triumphant mood does not last for long though, regretfully for the mice. The cat is able to tear the ties and to free him-/herself, and the troop of cats leaves the battlefield as the winners.

This story is not a prettily told Middle Eastern tale, it's no fairy tale either and no Hollywood plot with a happy ending. It is a story such as the blatant links work in the repetitive chains of human history.



ILLUSTRATIONS

A fable by the Persian writer 'Obayd-e Zakani (appr. 1300-1370), illustrated in ten first black and white and later 4- and 5-colored linoleum prints by Farangis.

The original black and white version of the illustrations for Zakani's story 'About Cat and Mice' has been exhibited 1985 at the School of Oriental and African

Studies, University of London / England and 1986 at the Library of the University of Chicago in Illinois, USA.

Also in the mid-eighties, the four- and five-colored edition was released in cooperation with the German hand printer the Harrisfeldwegpresse. The decision to turn the graphics into a multicolored version was led by a fascination with working out variations, and also a result of a synthesis in creative exchange between the Edition Farangis and the Harrisfeldwegpresse.

By displaying the illustrations here as an e-reader we want to primarily emphasize the aspect of the story that makes up the intersecting part between arts and politics. The story 'About Cat and Mice' still has just as much political relevance as it had in the past. Packed into a seemingly harmless sounding fable, the story conveys a strong moral message: The uphill battle of the weak against the strong; it mirrors the emotional dilemma of the 'eternal political loser'.



The initial black and white version of Farangis illustrations make the straightness and clearness of the applied technique in particular clear. Using the linoleum print as a method for creating an arts print has often been underestimated, perhaps since the material is a preferred medium for beginners. But it is exactly the 'simple'

black and white linoleum block print, that can – depending on the cutting technique – create such a strong dynamical expression.

But also the colored print does not lose the specialness of a linoleum print. Transferring the strictness of the clear black and white cuts into colors worked equally well by using an intense color scheme. The usage of copper printing paper, which has an unglued and rough surface, made an almost impressionistic coloring possible in the handprints.

THE STORYLINE

Be smart and mind the story of the cat and the mice. You'll be astonished about what the story might teach you. Even you, who are wise and prudent, listen to the tale and let it be like a jewel earring on your ear.



God had breathed life into the cat, and spoke His word: Be! And she was. Big as a dragon, round as a drum, wide as a shield, the tale like that of a lion, and the claws of a tiger she had, and when she roared even the wild panther shivered with fear of her, and the lions would escape wherever she appeared.

One day the cat went to an inn where they served wine, to go hunt for mice there. Like a thief behind a shrub, she hid behind a wine barrel waiting for her prey. There, suddenly a mouse climbed out of the wall and jumped with an eager shriek onto the margin of the barrel. It bent its head deep down, and took a swallow of the red wine, drank, and almost wouldn't want to stop drinking again. Being drunk it felt its courage, and boasted like a lion: "If the cat would dare to show up now, I'd pull its head off and hang it up high, for all enemies to see – as a warning. She would be cowardish like a dog, if she had to fight with me now!"

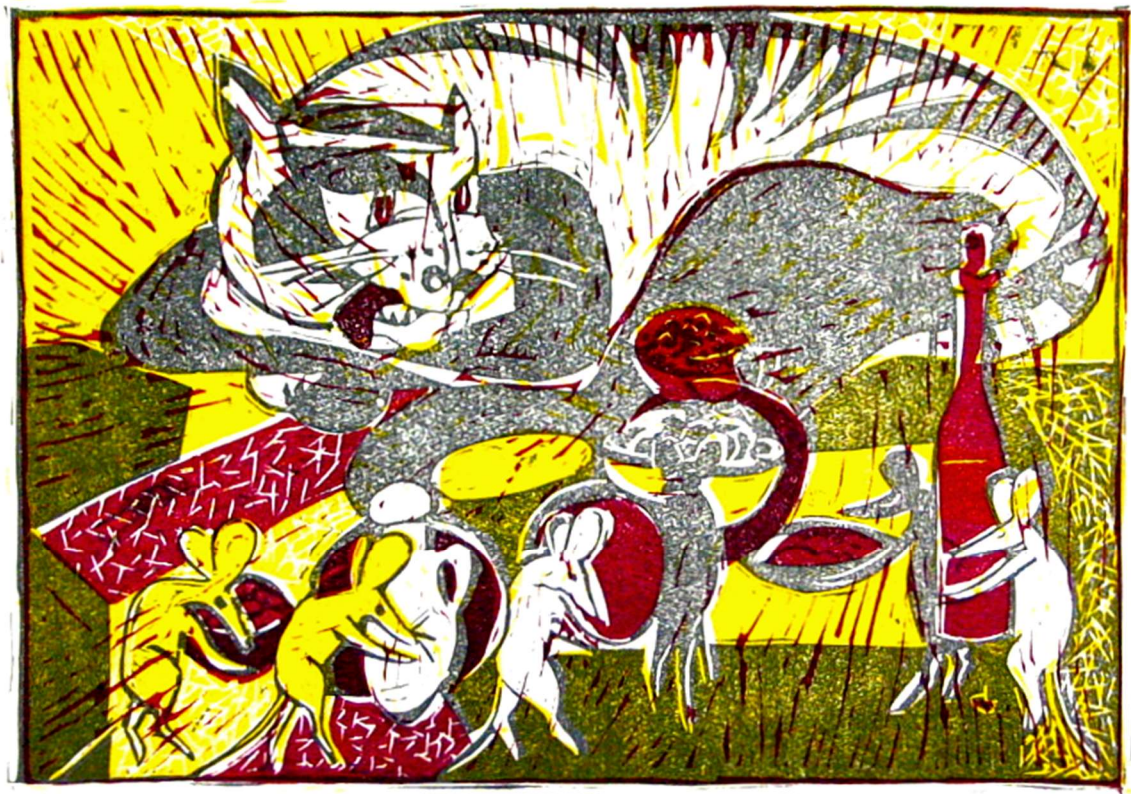


Silently the cat listened und sharpened her claws and teeth. Then she prepared for the jump, no panther could have caught his prey safer and with lesser resistance. “I will be your obedient servant” the mouse screamed, “forgive me once more and blame it on my drunkenness if I called you a beast, drunkards are without measure!” “Stop excusing yourself!” the cat tarted back at her, “you can’t get away with lying to me. I heard exactly what you said. First of all learn to love God and the truth!” and with these words she had gorged down the mouse.



Now the cat went to the church, to take penance for the murder she committed. “Oh God” she wholeheartedly prayed, “how much repentance I feel for that what I did. Never again, and this I swear, a mouse should suffer from my hands. As a sign of repentance I will give two pounds of bread to the needy.” And so it

happened that a mouse who coincidentally sat behind the pulpit, overheard the cat's remorseful lamentation and her oath to better herself. Quickly this mouse ran to its fellows, to tell of what it had witnessed: That the cat would be regretful about her deed, and that she had sworn to live in peace with the mice.



You can imagine how happy the mice were. Seven of the most dignified officials of theirs decided to go bring the cat presents, as a sign of their thankfulness for her prudent decision. One brought a glass of wine, one a large platter with saffron-rice, one an elegant bowl filled with walnuts and raisins, one brought a basket with sweet golden-brown dates, one brought cheese, one yoghurt, butter and bread and, finally, one brought lemon ice. With great respect they bowed in front of the cat: “Please, honorable cat” the seven mice entreated her “take these presents from us, your most unworthy servants.”

“Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart.” (Psalm 37.4) was the thought running through the cats mind and she said to herself, “I have long suffered from hunger and fasted for Gods sake, today He grants me everything in abundancy. Because ‘But you, O God, will bring down the wicked into the pit of corruption; bloodthirsty and deceitful men will not live out half their days. But as for me, I trust in you.’» (Psalm 55.23) but turning

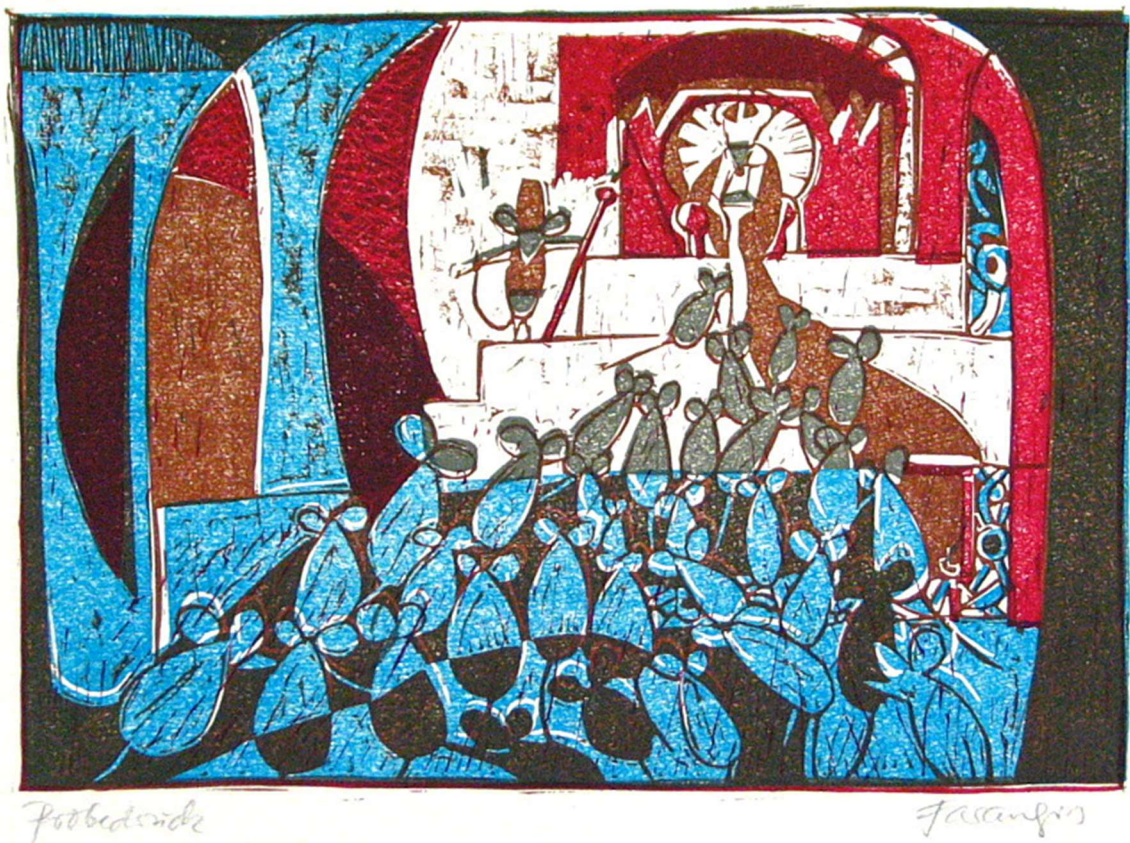
towards the mice she said: “Come closer my friends!” The courageous mice did so, even though they were shivering with fear. There, the cat, like a warrior in the battle, threw itself amongst the mice, grabbed two of them with her right claw, two with her left, and a fifth one with her teeth. Only the other two could escape and they breathlessly returned to their flock. “How could you let this happen? You should be cursed! Five of the best of our people fell victim to the evil claws of the evil cat!”



They were struck by terror and fell in mourning when the bad news reached them. They all dressed in black and cried bitterly. Finally they pulled themselves back together again, and stepped in front of their highest judge, the king of the mice, to tell him about their trouble:

“Injustice has happened to us, oh King, we prostrate at your feet and ask you to protect us of the cat. So far she would annually eat one of us, but now, ever since she decided to be pious, she kills five of us at once!” The king listened to them and spoke: “my dear people, justice shall be on your side, the revenge on the cat will be so horrendous, that history will take note of it.”

A week later some troops of 330 000 mice were armed with weapons: they carried lances and spears, arrows and bows, and the sound of their sharp swords made the air shiver. From all parts of the world they had come together, to follow one of the bravest, most prudent and most cunning commander into the battle. “One of us,” so he ordered “shall go into the town and declare war to the cat, lest she is willing to vow submittance to our Kings throne.”



One mouse, who had already been a messenger since her youth, got picked to do that job. As a negotiator she hurried to the cat, to deliver the kings message. Safe-passage would be ensured for the cat, if she would come along and in submittance offer her services to the king. Otherwise the preparations for a tough battle have already been made. “Rubbish,” the cat purred unruffled, “I don’t reckon to bow myself to the will of your king.”

In secrecy she also got armed for the war, and called together a huge army of cats wild as lions from all lands of the world. With them she then rushed down the mountains into the desert, towards the mice.



A fierce battle started. Both sides fought heroically and both sides brought down so many of their enemies that the casualties were uncountable. There the cat abruptly managed to get in the front of her army, but one mouse had been following her and hit the cats horse at its foot. The cat fell from her horse, and the army of mice yelled: “Stop the leader! Take him in custody! We have won!” Drums were beaten; the mice were triumphant. They tied the cats paws together and laid her in chains. “She should be hanged, the evil one!” the king remarked.



Tereza



Tereza

Tereza

Anger and inward rage seethed within the cat. With greatest determination she hauled herself to her legs, took the chains in between her lion-like fangs, and broke the chains apart, seized the first of the mice that would stand around and crushed them fiercely. Towards one side the troops of mice fled, towards the other side the king on his elephant fled: throne, crown and palace had to be abandoned humiliatingly.



Sad and remarkable is this story. 'Obayd of Zakan has dedicated it to you, that you may enjoy it and reflect about it in your hearts.

The Applied Technique

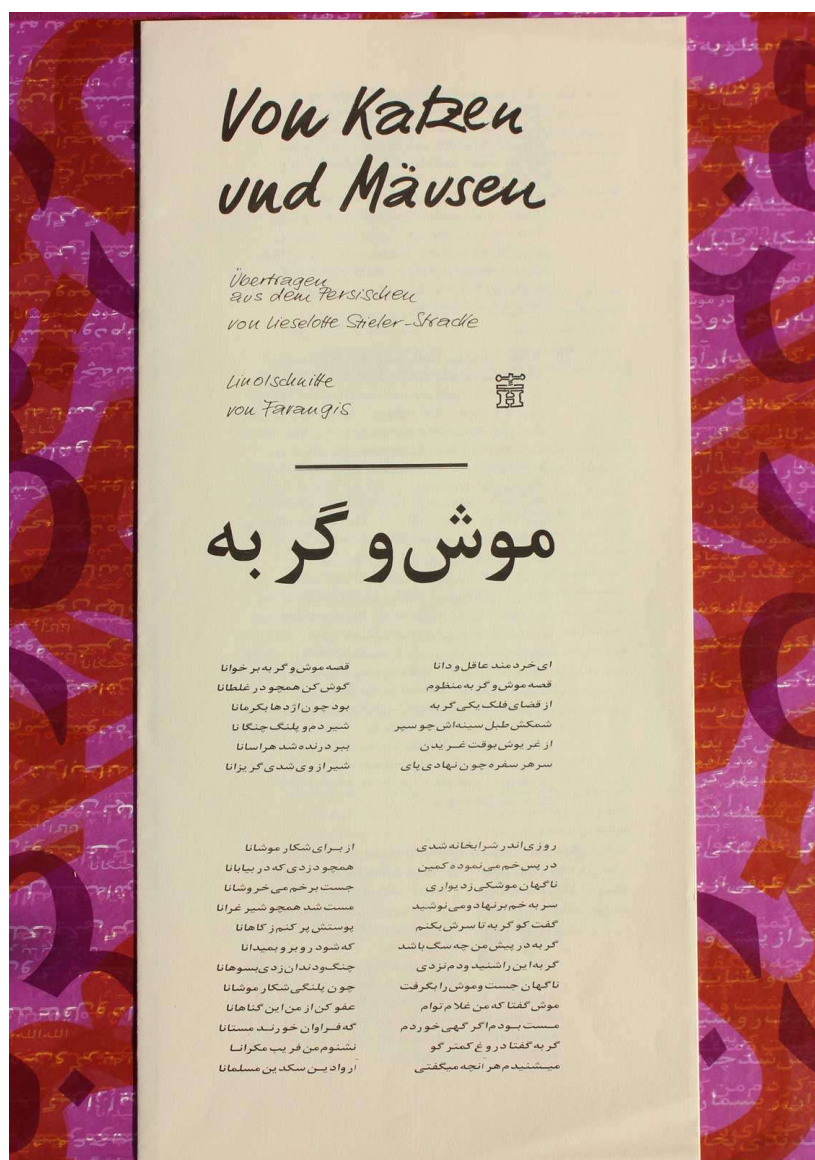
The illustrations by Farangis for Obayd-e Zakani's 'About Cat and Mice':

- The graphics (linoleum blocks) as handprints from the original linoleum cuts, initially black and white, later 4- and 5-colored
- The text in German/Farsi as an offset print

The 10 graphics were initially designed and crafted by Farangis as black and white prints, but the later edition that she worked out together with the German hand

printing press the Harrisfeldwegpresse, consists of the multicolored prints that you can see in this e-reader.

For each additional color Farangis had to create an exactly fitting extra linoleum block, to thus translate the originally black and white picture into a multicolored series of illustrations.



The multicolored edition, handprinted by the Harrisfeldwegpresse from the original linoleum cuts by Farangis, uses a card box as a container that holds the 10 separate handprints and the text of the fable both the original Farsi and a German translation. The paper size of the prints is 45 cm x 34 cm, and the edition had been limited to a number of 60. Each print is signed by Farangis.

The design of the card box consists of a typographical Farsi pattern and the colors are bright, ranging from a dark purple to a lilac and a pale 'orangish' tone. The

container boxes have been handcrafted by Helmut F. Binder. The text of the story is on a separate large folded sheet of paper, in Farsi and German. The translator of the German version is Lieselotte Stracke-Stieler.

The graphics and the typographical text elements were made in separate printing processes, to ensure a technically proper treatment of each printing medium. The paper which has been used for the graphics of the multicolored edition is a rather untypical copper printing paper, which produces an exceptional colorfulness of the linoleum prints.



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