



WELCOME TO

FELINE UTOPIA

ANTHOLOGY

EDITED BY

LOUISE MATHER

# *Feline Utopia*

## *Anthology*

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Edited by  
Louise Mather

## *Editor's Note*

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Thank you so much to everyone who has submitted and trusted me with their work, and not only that but for sharing in my excitement for this project. It has been such a pleasure to hear of all your stories and receive your beautiful writing, photographs and artwork from all over the world; to explore the history and mythology of our feline friends, to see their tenderness in contrast to wild nature brought to light in these works. This anthology unites us by our awe and outstanding love for cats, taking us on a journey to the heart of these magnificent creatures. A special thanks to every single one of them, past, present and future, for their companionship and inspiration - without them Feline Utopia would not be possible. I sincerely hope that you all enjoy reading these poems as much as I have.

Louise Mather



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◆ DEa ◆ JEM ◆ Laylah ◆ Louise Dallaire ◆

## *How the Pearl Became*

Sarah Wallis

### I

Fresh pearl sigh,  
released with lustre  
the shine we're all after

the sea purse looted  
with the grain stuck in,  
rolled and pressed many seasons.

### II

The magician's gin soaked promise,  
downed like resolve, when he pops a pristine  
specimen into a wine-glass and sends the mark

on his way, with a tall tale of how the pearl  
became, how it shone and gained its gleam, grit  
rolled home, layers close pressed,

and, like an onion, given to raise tears.

### III

I'd like to rub them against my teeth  
the treasure of the sea, feel them be real,  
feel them rattle tiny trains on tiny tracks

see them gleam like tears in eyes, unshed.

Companion cat rubs her teeth along my forearm,  
yawns, full of the hours, and knows it's time for tea.  
She gums up, presses close, testing the reality of me.



## *I, Dusty*

Janet Hawthorley

If she forgets to push the back door to,  
I streak in,

too fast for her to stop me—  
a dusky blur

matching her stair carpet.  
Each time I find a new hiding place.

The sofa?  
My tail flicks behind it.

Her room? She pulls out  
the heavy drawer under the bed.

Siamese, I know my place,  
sleek, regal, nestled in sheets.

I'm found!  
She scoops me into her arms,

holds tight as I squirm.  
A quick stroke,

a gentle throw,  
I'm in the garden—

a safe landing  
on my long legs.



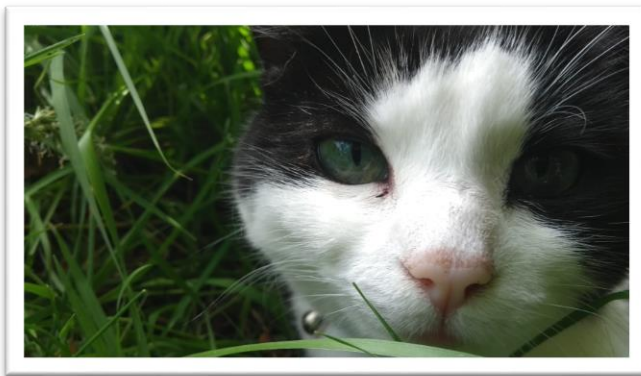
## *Aspects Of A Cat*

Maxine Rose Munro

From the back,  
when my cat sits,  
she wears a bustle -  
a most elegant lady of society.

At her fullest stretch  
she is the crescent moon,  
and with her white fur fluffed  
she is a ball of wool  
that chases and chases its tail, until  
time unwinds to kitten.

But when, affable, she asks  
for ingress, mouth red,  
a dismembered shrew beside her,  
she's all animal.



## Obeisance

Jeremy Cantor

*Archaeologists in Egypt have discovered a 2,000-year-old temple in Alexandria dedicated to a cat goddess. The temple was filled with statues of Bastet, a once fearsome lion-headed goddess whose image changed over time to a domesticated cat. — BBC News, 19 January 2010*

Above my head a spider's spinning for  
a living. Just past that I see the arbor's  
slats of graying wood, and in-between those  
I can glimpse the moving autumn clouds.  
Before I sat, I turned the cushion over —  
one side is for the cat and looks well-used,  
a bit more fur left on it every night.  
Her wariness suggests to me she's feral.  
She always keeps the whole yard's width between us  
otherwise ignoring me completely.  
I confess I do not know her sex  
so I'll say "she" and "her" from childhood habit.  
Since we'd rather look at leaves than fence boards  
we let the lowest branches of the *Pittosporum*  
grow dense, which must have fooled the house sparrow  
into thinking it was safe, though just  
a yard above the ground. At the apogee  
of a perfect feline launch, the cat grabbed it,  
returning to the ground with dinner firmly  
in her jaws. She walked away, not with  
a cheerful perky gait — still all business.  
Had it been an oriole or hummingbird  
she'd killed, why then I would have been enraged,  
but I remember thinking as I watched,  
*The house sparrow is an invasive import*

*that wrecks the bluebirds' nests to build its own,  
and they are many — we've sparrows to spare.*

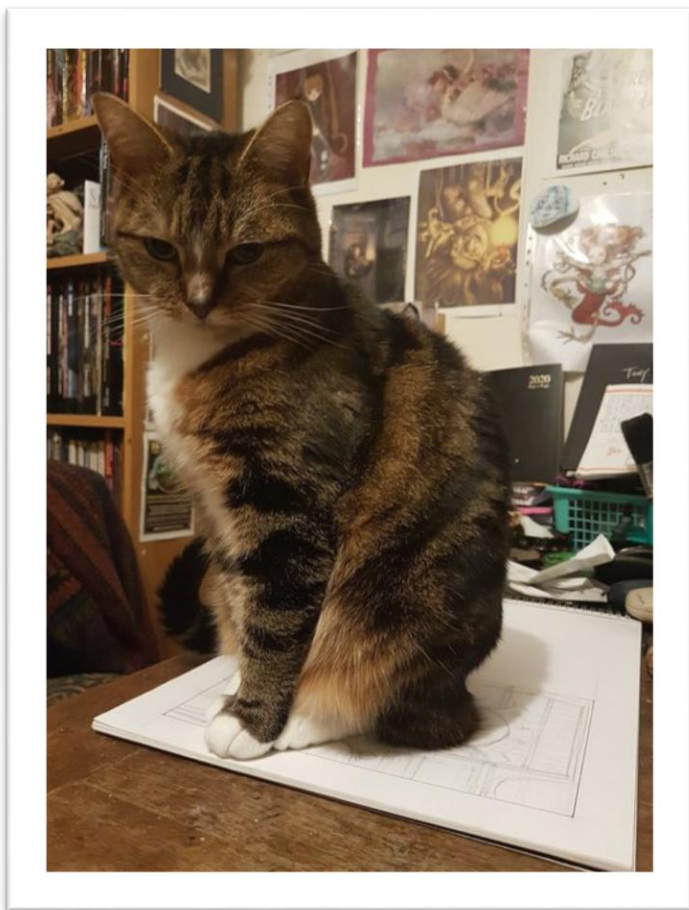
Since I first discovered evidence  
of her nighttime bivouacking on  
our now-familiar chair, I have been wondering  
if she's grateful, as she might be if  
we fed her (which we never do).

Today I found the answer to that question:  
mouse remains left at our front door.

That's familiar to people who keep cats  
(or are kept by cats, if you ask cats)  
but unlike other feline gifts that I  
have seen, this one was like a sacrifice  
made on an altar, not killed first  
then carried there — it was killed right there  
on the concrete, to one side of the door.

I could tell because the puddle told me  
that the mouse had bled out on that spot,  
where the head and entrails had been left  
in the usual dainty feline fashion.

But, in the center of the welcome mat,  
her greatest gift: the mouse's pelt, one foot  
still attached. I felt not only thanked  
but honored, almost worshipped, as if her  
ancestral memory reminded her  
that in the distant past *we* worshipped *them*  
and after these millennia the time  
had come, at last, to return the favor.



*Photograph by Laylah*

## *Sinking Line and a Small Lure*

Carl Griffin

At the fishery, on a rowboat,  
a man is scratching his head  
at the mechanical winch.  
A cat on the embankment  
wonders too, by the look of her,  
if the fish are gone  
or if the lift net's merely faulty.

I wonder, as I enter  
her owners' house, how many hours  
the cat must dream away.  
We assemble in the foyer  
on arrival, members of the book club,  
ourselves like suspects  
in a murder mystery.

The front sitting room,  
out of sight of the Stillwater,  
boasts wooden beams,  
an in-full-flow log fire.  
*So much better to watch,*  
the owners say, *than television.*  
Then in it comes, prowling,

the stocky Shorthair,  
her coat grey-blueish  
with a crisp pile breaking  
as she moves. She stretches  
by the fire, already an element  
of flames breathing

in her coppery eyes.

I lower myself to join,  
sitting cross-legged,  
stroking her triangular ears  
as we take in the smoke  
and gentle embers, together  
imagining carp, Mirror and Grass,  
on the crackling logs.

And I imagine a road-worn tyre  
dumped in the Stillwater,  
the disturbance of needle palms  
and their leaves, of duckweeds  
and their microbes.  
If this cat could take a lift net  
to the fishery...

## *Portrait of cat trying to catch feather through glass*

Lilia Marie Ellis

Reclining the wood. Seen through the world  
and therefore inside it, all within a pounce's reach, distance  
altogether vanished; awning shade as a feather descends;  
and another; while waiting, no matter how far; cloud  
endured, simple pass at totality, nearly fragile right before  
the nose; prepared to tip; to chance or leap at the other  
side, gathering, whole; and to stay upright;



*Artwork: Sleeping Cat by Caroline McPherson*

## *Haibun for an Ownerless Cat*

Stuart McPherson

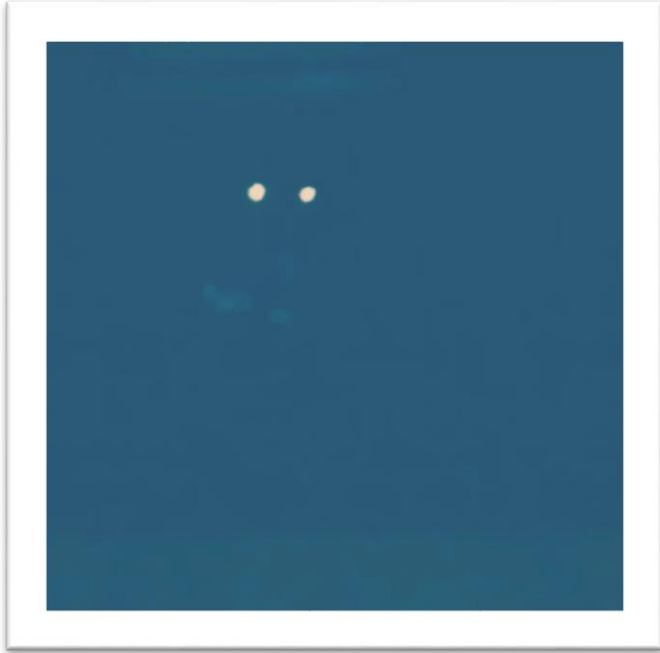
A bird rushes to roost. A fading light. Something we're unable to feel or taste. Incomparable. Not like his ninth attempt at life. No flight from it, no delight in loss. This is why he loves. His voice calling out in quiet hours. Why he came back at night. To see the blue garden. A lawn sliced by a blue moon. Full of the flowers of spring. They agreed to mourn, at least while she folded up the worn shirts. Put things away. Placed the shoes in a bag like cracked glass. She was folding up *him*. Nudging inside, he stopped. In the corner a weft of string bitten through that used to snake. A lace lying still in a blue lagoon. Thick with the sluice of silence. A noose. Those glasses absent from the worktop. Gold plated by summer bees. The bees. *Remember when I was young, and you'd have to swat them away from me?* Gone, the warmth on the stairs. Memories of bare legs at breakfast, a running through of fur. His stung heart now stings. His purrs nothing more than a breath. The blue in the window. Blue from afar. His eyes as far away as rain clouds from the sea. Facing the adieus of the door. When the clock struck ten, he wondered if he'd hear him running back. To pause, just by his feet. Settling slowly down. His slippers on the floor.

Our love only dies

When the flowers dressed for spring

Open without rain





## *After Dark*

Rachael Crosbie

Your orange tabby sauntered across pavement,  
his paws catching reflections in the half-glazed pool—

ripples from moonlight fragmenting  
by curious claws, wind

and he dreamed of jumping  
the wooden fence wreathed with quiet marigolds

when you snuck in before the dawn  
that would turn your skin to wool.

*i wonder if Jólakötturinn doesn't tire of  
greed, too*

Linda M. Cratz

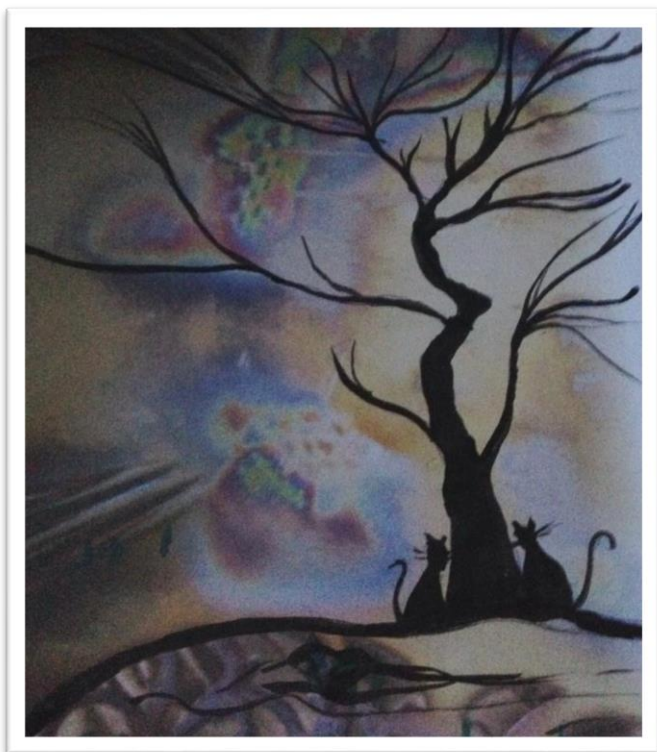
i think sometimes of the Jólakötturinn  
of iceland,  
and i wonder how many  
have faced destruction beneath  
those massive paws;

and are those who are poor  
safe from the wrath of the cat?  
if they cannot help themselves  
surely the cat must punish those who  
could've helped them and didn't?

that's what i like to believe because  
contrary to popular belief it is no moral  
failing or crime to be poor,

and i grow weary of the narrative  
that this is truth;

i wonder if the Jólakötturinn doesn't share  
this weariness when it comes to all the  
evils and corruption of the world.



*Artwork by JEM*

## *Yoda: A Remembrance*

Sandra Anfang

Archimage  
dreadlocks formed where you stopped grooming  
shriveled beneath our vigilance  
only fur and bones remained.

As the muscle, flesh departed  
your appetite and cry grew stouter  
you would caterwaul for food  
hounding us to the can opener.

In a single day  
you made your contemplated leap—  
down from some garden wall—  
from world to underworld.

I shut my eyes  
bleed tears into pillows  
but frames of you keep floating by  
like seaweed tendrils.

You won't settle in your bed  
the essence of your three-pound body  
wafting up through musty earth  
refuses to succumb.

I try again for sleep  
but poems convene  
like hummingbirds in purple bushes

spreading twenty-three-year gossip.

These last few months  
you'd hunker near me on the couch  
an elfin shadow miming me  
a maiden aunt awaiting tea.

You'd not be caught dead there  
in your youth  
canvassing the hood  
cat boys at your side.

But lately, sweet remembrance,  
we held hands shyly  
like the roots of old redwoods  
twining underground.



*Artwork by Sandra Anfang*

## *Food Chain*

*Sandra Anfang*

Each night coyote takes  
a bigger bite of the neighborhood.  
Tonight he leaps the fence.

The cats stalk the back door  
fur coats loosening  
like meat shaking off a bone.

*Everybody in*, I call;  
for once they obey.

You can read worry like lightning  
in their agate eyes.

Their bodies twitch and ripple as  
a fresh howl passes through their skulls  
rings the twin bells of their amygdalae.

I usher them to safety  
though just before lunch  
a fantail of charcoal feathers blooms under the maple tree.

Cats and coyotes don't take no prisoners.

## *Soju the Mechanic's Cat*

Jenny Wong

meets a motorcycle for the first time,  
a mewling roar summoned  
beneath narrow metal shell,  
fading paint the tint of old sky.

She prefers colors closer to claw, blood, dust,  
stares at the stones and  
calligraphies of distance  
between tire treads.

Her paws pace and pity  
each scrape -  
a summation of minor surgeries,  
the garage quiet with submission.

But when the engine stirs again,  
she scoffs  
at another failed attempt  
to tame a beast.

The headlight of round moon jitters and glows  
ready to trace the white string  
that stitches empty road  
across prairie fields.

She has no words  
for *chase*  
or *freedom*  
though they twitch beneath her skin,



at night, her eyes -  
twin stars  
fixed  
behind living room glass.

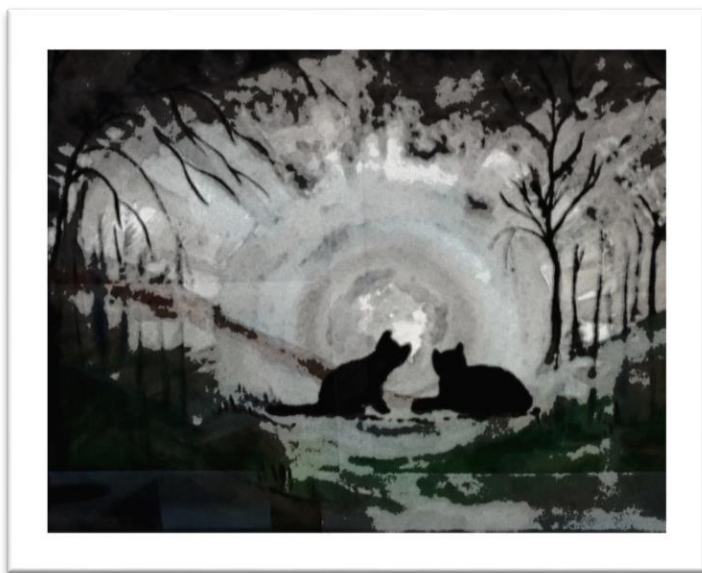


## *Taking out the garbage on a Sunday night*

Lindsay Heatherly

Frogs bellow  
their grievances  
and crickets chirp  
their dues.  
My shirt hangs  
from my shoulder,  
less elegant  
than the spider  
building his web,  
rising and falling  
in the shadows  
nearest the rain gutter  
that leads  
to the sidewalk  
where I carry  
the trash to prepare  
for the week, anew.  
Two flashes catch  
my eye as I approach  
the dumpster,  
and I pause.  
She stands her ground  
and I nod my head,  
accepting her territory.  
For feral cannot  
exist without fear.  
White whiskers  
catch moonlight  
and black fur blends  
into asphalt.

I toss the garbage,  
walk back and wonder  
if frogs and crickets  
fear things  
they cannot know  
and if cats ever long  
to sing their songs  
to the dark.



*Artwork by JEM*

## *To Leos*

Paul Vcracka

Not one Leo in my life lives with a cat  
Perhaps because they themselves are the subtle,  
Autonomous beings of dignity whose pictures  
Get etched into the walls  
They just love being cared for,  
The affection and luxury of a life touching all that is  
beautiful  
How could another feline play into that economy  
Noblesse oblige, they all say  
Whose life is not better with a Leo  
Whose sunset is not better seen from the mountain top  
Where they prefer to reside  
Closer to Regulus high and shining  
Illuminating the mighty hearts of its kin



## *Concealed*

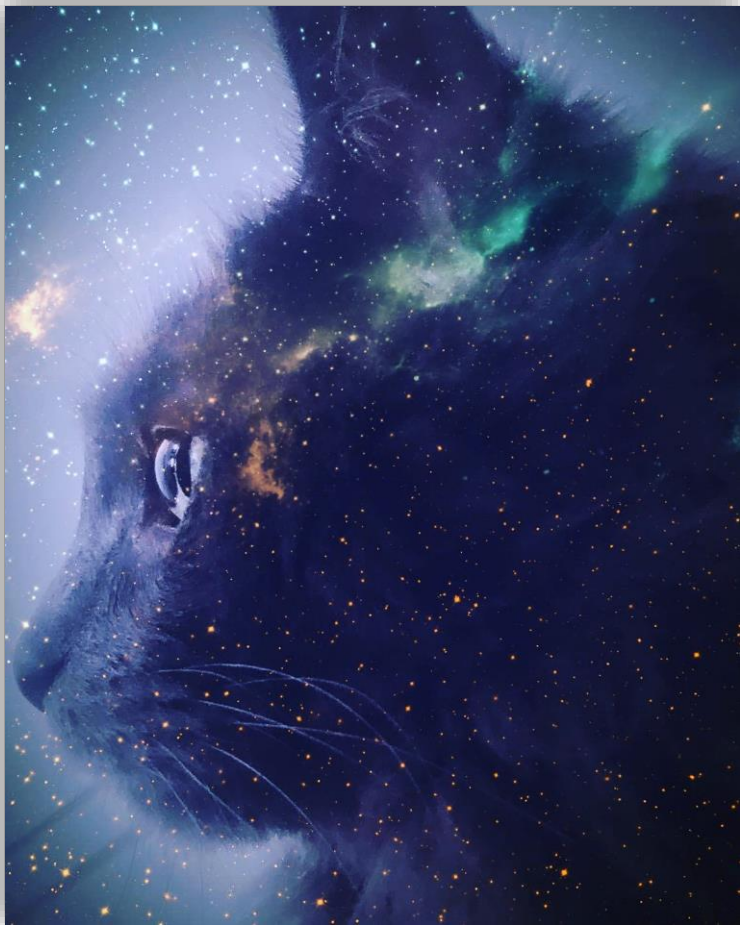
*Michèle Mèkél*

The old calico sits motionless  
in front of the window  
flooded with sunbeams  
and dust motes.

Not a care,  
as the world revolves  
:: unsteady ::  
on its axis.

She watches  
with disinterested gaze,  
the way only cats can do—  
staring sleepily at what isn't there.

But pinprick ears  
:: ever alert ::  
belie the practiced veneer  
of disaffection.



*Artwork by Michele Mekel*

## *My Cat is Prettier than Me*

Alzah Dye

Mostly I just think  
she's beautiful.

But the thing is,  
Rosebud loves herself  
and knows she is stunning  
and never thinks  
about any other option.

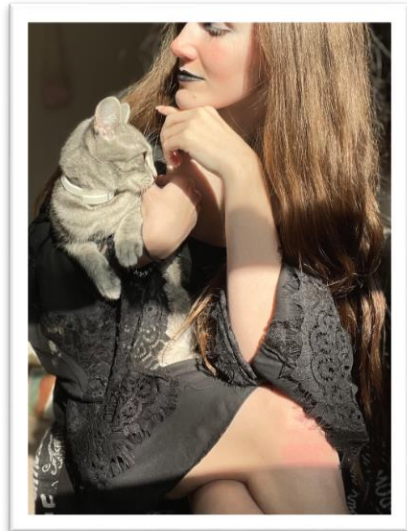
I think about every other option  
for myself.

I think about my yellow teeth and flat hair and wide face  
and crows' feet and eye bags and almost-broken-five-times  
nose.

I think about how no one looks at me  
and says

*She's stunning!*

I think about how no one looks at me,  
and I think about how everyone looks  
  
at her.



*Photographs by Aleah Dye*



*Looking down disdainfully  
from our thrones*

Seth Crook

The cat's back, but not for long.  
Some food, some warmth,  
then she won't be.

The mysteries of the night  
must be examined.  
She enjoys her work.

As if we're brutal monarchs,  
she brings us tributes of corpses.  
And all we can do is tut.

*Cubist Cat, in 2021*

Shawna L. Swetech

Cat yeeecowwls himself  
into cubism—slings stark lined blocks  
of shaped color onto the page:  
a bright mirror, an orange-yellow  
walled sky: Cat fuses with the drip of blue  
                    makes him forget

what's next, the broken bits  
the everywhere wrongs—  
abstracts everything to distract  
all meaning.

I mean, look at his green eyes!  
Those roundly slitted moons,  
that jet black just-licked,  
slicked-back fur!

Watching me watch him, Cubist Cat  
does what all cool cats do:  
sniffs the scene, turns tail and  
silently  
pads  
away.



*Artwork by Shawna L. Swetech*

## *It was a wild Tuesday night*

Alison Campbell

the brambles coursed over the wall  
from the neighbour's garden  
ivy crept along the brickwork

pried its way through gaps in the door hinges –  
suckers stuck fast to the window frame  
yellow leaves spit-spatted at the glass

as the wind mewled. The fairy lights  
in the yard opposite spun out in a line.  
Across the fence I saw a large shape

leap the height of it, balance,  
scramble into the undergrowth  
emerging at the fire-escape steps

its great blunt paws snaked up the spiral stairway.  
Huge-jawed, it waved its sickle-shaped tail  
stirring the metal railings as it came.

It shouldered through the broken cat-flap  
already scenting the kitchen –  
the sauces, the curry, the sweet naan bread

gently heating on the *tawa*. It paced the floor  
jumped on to the table, knocking over  
the blue jug full of winter twigs

and the bag of iced biscuits, ready to take to Yorkshire.  
Sitting there, it eyed the oven, licking its muzzle.  
What could we do but set a place.

### *Cat's garden*

Alison Campbell

The cat pads  
through clumps of snowdrops.

She pats each  
delicate petal.

The garden  
is a forest.  
Wintry brambles – bare.

Catkins bunch against the wall –  
not yet with tassels of spring.

She waits, darts a paw,  
again and again – whips  
the trembling pods.

Her eyes blink.  
With that throaty trill  
of a successful stalk,  
she purrs joy.

## *She*

Ellen Symons

“Is She there?” The sound was like the squeak of a rubber sole on linoleum, but so small I could barely hear it. A black dot of a nose poked from the woodpile at the hearth, followed by six twitching whiskers. Finally, I saw the wary, tremulous eye.

I put my finger to my lips, shook my head. “Hunting,” I replied, the barest whisper.

The whiskers shivered and the head snapped back, into the recess.

“That word!” squeaked the tiny voice, as the nose darted toward me again. “Don’t use that word!”

“Sorry. *Provisioning*, then.”

I left my spot in the big chair and tiptoed to the kitchen, scooping five dried nuggets from the bowl on the floor. They scratched against each other, making a small, rough sound. I froze. But no. We’re okay. She’s *provisioning*. Still, I swept a cautious look around the room, then crept back to the hearth, tucking the nuggets just inside the gap in the woodpile.

“Provisions for you and the little ones,” I said. “She’ll notice if I take more than that.”

“Thank you.” I heard the scuttle of claws as the nuggets were hoisted and carried one by one into the secret dark

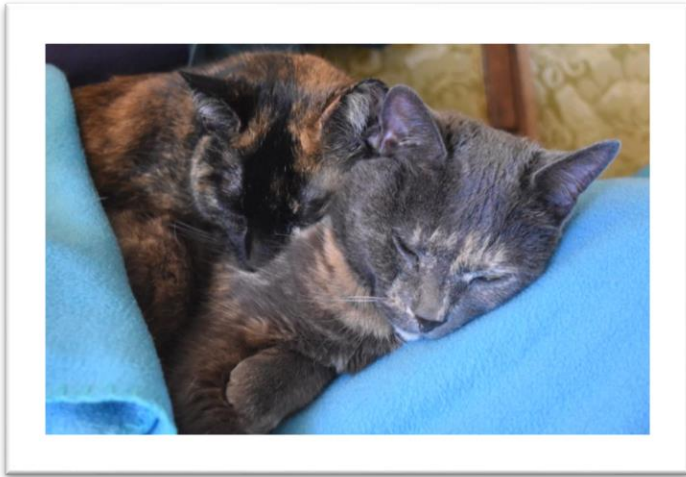
at the back of the pile. The dot of a nose poked out again, and the hint of a voice started to speak.

I never heard what it wanted to say: a clap of thunder shook us both, and my companion was gone. But it wasn't thunder. It was the flap in the door, banging open and shut as She shouldered Her way through.

Into the living room She strutted, all haunch and heft and head, cold air and aggression radiating from Her thick white coat, flecks of blood on Her chin and ruff, Her green eyes throwing daggered looks into the corners and along the shelves. She stopped, appraised me from the centre of the floor, pinned me with those green daggers until I gasped. I had forgotten myself.

“Hello.” I bowed, stepped backward, away from the big chair, walked myself against the wall. “Welcome.” She raked me again with Her eyes, then flicked Her tail dismissively. From a standing start, She leapt the four feet into the chair's velvety, enfolding seat, landing smoothly, turning on Her haunches. From this angle, I saw the feathers trailing from the other side of Her mouth, and the way She smirked, knowing how this bothered me.

“Mistress,” I said. “Have you eaten well?” She ignored me, as She should, as She always would, setting Herself to cleaning Her feet and face, displaying Her rapier claws for a moment longer than necessary, swinging and flicking the heavy chain of Her tail along the cushions, just hard enough that I would not forget myself, not make the mistake I used to make, when we were new together, when I first brought Her home, of thinking I was more. Than She.



*Photograph by Louise Dallaire*



## *4am in Coalbrookdale*

Kathryn Anna Marshall

Wait at the top; you know I might trip,  
then scurry, who says we can't train?  
Upturn of face,  
chirrup and bump,

I zip open the pouch  
and pour. Busy myself,  
wipe down sides  
wonder on tea,

ask if you're ready?  
Turn the key, press the handle,  
chill of April tips round our toes —  
milky blue light creeps

over the trees.  
A few steps to the bench,  
we sit  
immerse in birds' choir.



## *Cat Asleep*

Beth Brooke

Cat

wants to be a kitten again, kneads my lap,  
looking for the comfort of her mother's milk;  
curls herself into me until her purrs subside.  
She makes a dream sigh of her outward breath,  
long, slow and I know that in that otherworld  
of sleep, she has found her mother.



## *Aftermath*

KC Bailcy

The bodies on the stairs  
you left them there  
for all to see and trip  
as if no one should care

The carnage of ripped  
and torn carcasses; their insides  
outside – degutted  
and decapitated

Tiny forms punctured  
littered with holes  
like machinegun fire  
making perfect craters

A pitiful sight, your victims  
slashed open; gaping  
wounds leaking catnip  
across the carpet

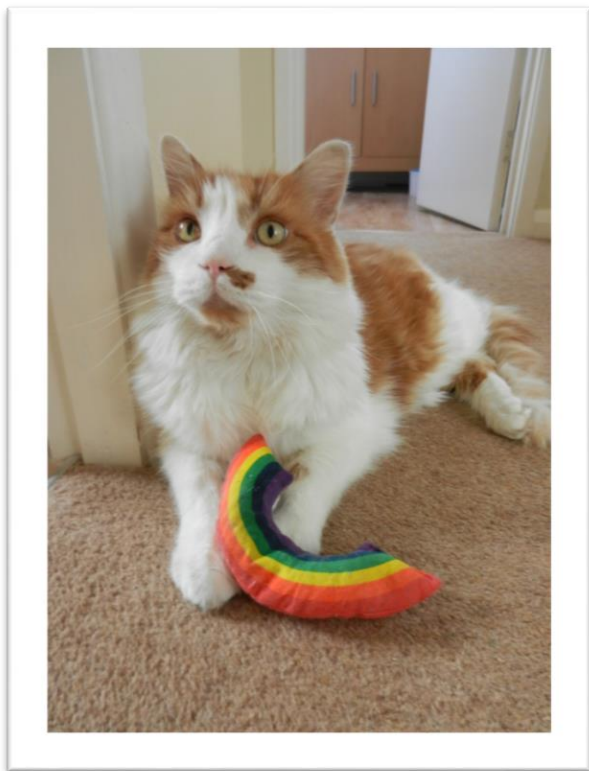
Your battlefield  
over spilling  
into my bedroom –  
no longer a sanctuary

Proud, victorious,  
reposed nonchalant  
in the armchair –

post-war preen in progress

I place an order  
for more playthings  
whilst you dream  
of meatier prey.





*Photographs by KC Bailey*

## *The Shadow Prince*

Tessa Foley

When I was young I dreamt about him,  
the good-looking gargoyle  
who would hang from the door,  
regard me and my brothers  
with wealthy green eyes and then  
climb to the top where  
the crow's nest was waiting.

A pause on four paws  
when he listened for scares,  
all the finest silk hairs  
on the back of his ears,  
standing like reeds in a duck pond  
where all of the ducks  
were afraid for their lives.

The shadow prince left his prints  
down the hallway along with  
a mouse ear or two.  
He's never forgotten a slight or a lie,  
he can buy every wonderful morning  
by just stepping outside and inhaling  
the world with a dirty great yawn,

As his teeth points glare, all it takes  
is the stare from the shadow prince  
walking towards you,  
he moulds all your nightmares

in to one simple look,  
he tells you

he's already written your book,  
you're just puppeted blobs,  
distasteful in shape,  
the ape not the feline....  
And he washes his feet.



*Artwork by Broken Spanner*

NEVER TOUCH  
ME



*Artwork by Broken Spanner*



## *Catwoman*

Jane Agres

once a dog (his)  
she spent years  
secretly  
shedding  
skin

sharpening  
feline claws  
testing tiger shapes  
(never a cheetah)

emerging  
furformed  
ravenous for

an exposed  
jugular (his)

## *Wanderers*

Clairz Taylor

At one point there were as many as six. First Jade with her piercing green eyes and miniature pharaoh's beard. Then Killer, a cute little tortoise-shell who treated her name like a destiny. Ace was scrunch-faced and angry. His tail a warning, whipping the air. Slim cried beneath the porch for a week. We coaxed him out with hot dogs and pretzels, shooping away the others before they could chase him back into the dark. Shorty had the crooked teeth and battered face of a retired boxer. Gray as an ashtray, with a severed ear and a perpetual purr to heal his aching heart. Bubba had a personality as big as his head. Wide and welcoming. He would lick our hands. Stroke his large body against our legs, a whirl of white and orange between our calves. He would mew and roll onto his back, kick his feet in the air until we scratched his belly. And he would leave. Sometimes for days. Or weeks. They all did. Coming and going as they pleased, straying from here to there. My sister and I would cry when they disappeared. Our brother would say, nobody likes to stay in one place. At one point we had as many as six, and at other times, zero. The food bowl sitting full for days until the dog snuck up while no one was watching and scarfed it all down. We'd put out more, pouring from the heavy bag, and pray for someone to return.



## *Ta-Miaut*

Shakira Christodoulou

She was *Ta-Miaut*, the cat. She needed no other name  
from her earliest taming, swaggering in,  
a whisper of dappled spots between grasses,  
a killer for hire. Grain-raiders taken care of,  
sparrows, mice, the snakes on their tail;  
only she was quick enough.

Deal done, for bones tossed aside  
from temple-offerings, for tidbits in palace gardens  
beside pools where malachite eyes traced  
dragonflies over the lotus.

She was *Ta-Miaut*, she always had been.

But now she was his.

Ever since he lumped her about with him,  
gangly arms warm bands around her chest.

Her legs stretched ungainly, splay-toed,  
almost reaching to his sandals.

Body long and languorous,  
a fall of dry sand through his childish embrace.

She'd have had anyone else's eye for it.

As she'd had the eye of Horus and blamed Seth,  
when she was a lioness not quite at Ra's command  
and only bloodied beer would pacify her.

But now she was his. Pouncing on his sidelock  
with every twitch of his laughter, sprawled over a cushion  
in the plumed palm-shade.

Claws and teeth in that oiled plait  
while the young prince laughed, and laughed,

and she smiled, belly stretched out and vulnerable,  
its paleness unbleached linen.

Tuthmose's cat, *the* cat, *Ta-Miaut*.

She couldn't stay like that, wrapped in love.

Not with the lioness still in her –

she must bristle at the sky,

great serpent-hunter in the barque of Ra.

There were other cats for her to be in other times.

In her own time, she slipped away from him.

Prince, priest, chief mourner, he did all he could for her,

suffused the small body she left behind

with priceless resins. Wrapped her, enshrined her,

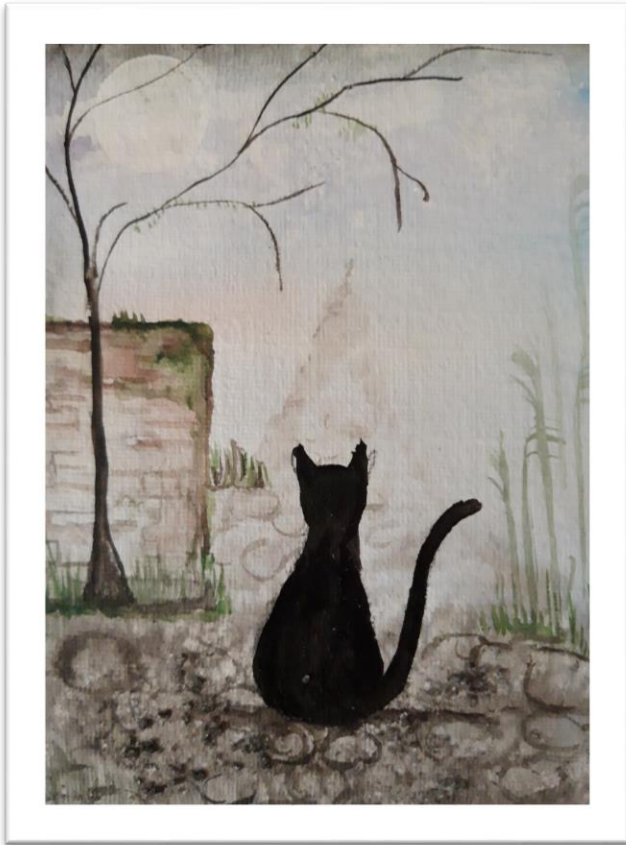
set her in stone, poised before a roasted duck and rib

to see her through eternity in the arms of other gods,

Her name immortal. *Ta-Miaut*. The cat.

She needs no other name and never did.

*Ta-Miaut 'The She-Cat' is the first named pet cat attested in human history. Dedicated by Prince Tuthmose, son of Pharaoh Amenhotep III of Dynasty XVIII, her sarcophagus is in the Cairo Museum.*



*Artwork by JEM*

## *The Cat I Don't Have*

Shakira Christodoulou

You are the cat-shaped hole at the heart of me,  
the wish unmet, the surfaces unscratched.  
The bowls I neither fill nor empty,  
the window I don't need to open  
at your leisure; your beck, your call  
undelivered, however long I would stand half-frozen,  
while you sniffed the air and deliberated.

You are the hairs I don't brush from the furniture,  
the lazy hours of connivance  
in your sheer propensity for ease;  
the pauses I do not take.

You are the sigh that would unpick the silence,  
the purr to rival the wind  
over the house's hollow mutter.  
A hundred varied chirps to interrupt,  
question, hearten, to greet or grumble or wake me  
demanding worship at ungodly times.

You are the sunbeam unoccupied,  
the door ajar with no side-winding shadow,  
the chocolates not liberated from the box,  
wrappers not batted all over the floor.

You are the litter tray I do not own  
and the poor feathered or furred things,  
presented wet and mauled, that I don't grieve over.  
The anxiety for your whereabouts and welfare  
that I don't suffer, the vet's bills

I can't afford but would do, somehow.

You are everything I miss and more.  
Your absence takes up all the love  
that you do not.



*Artwork by Broken Spanner*



## *The Cat Kingdom*

Meg Smith

*Glanworth, Co. Cork, Ireland, October 2014*

I came for the castle  
but they have kept me.  
Across the road from us, in a green island –  
a tower stands, in a sun of long fingers.  
They come to me, still,  
leaping up to my shoulder,  
curling like a nightless moon.  
My path was for leaving, but no longer.  
It was all, but for the soft feet  
and golden eyes, and whispers  
of warm fire, filling possession.

## *The Tiger Path*

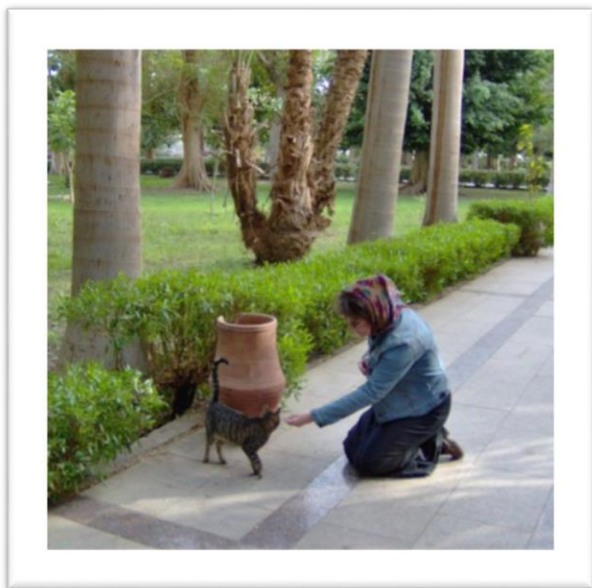
Meg Smith

Draw me out from fire and shadow,  
my tread is silent, my footfall dissolves  
in the night air. Grass parts for me,  
and dreams unravel.  
But my place is sure, and my moon  
is waking in the purest copper flames.

## *Mama Miacís*

Meg Smith

The trumpets of ancestors  
sound their anthem –  
hunters, catchers, healers –  
and draw us into their warm space.  
So, too, do the glory of gold eyes,  
retractable claws,  
ringed tails – and the quiet of drama.  
This is how we know. This is how we  
create ourselves, whole in the sleep of time.



*Photograph of Meg Smith, El Nabatat Island, Egypt*

## *Tiny Tiger*

*Elizabeth M. Castillo*

Tiny tiger.  
Choo-choo train.  
Soft he rests,  
against my breast,  
on a quiet morning, full of rain.



*Photograph by DEa*

## *Cat's Eye Nebula*

Jason de Koff

You lie surrounded  
by the dust of space,  
the once fanciful feast  
of an earlier era,  
with emission trails betraying  
the maelstrom in your heart.  
Those ancient atmospheric carvings  
are the haloed iris  
of a shining pupil  
that belabors as the birthplace  
of new and curious wonders.  
Fantastic waves of light  
secure your place  
among the vaunted holes  
and bright-eyed wonders  
that feature in our nightly visions.  
A sole watcher  
of our hot tin home  
where we teeter endlessly  
with such dexterity  
it's still difficult to determine  
our place among the stars.



*Thank you*

## Biographies

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Sandra Anfang is a Northern California poet, poetry teacher, and visual artist. She is the author of three poetry collections—two chapbooks and a full-length book. She is the founder and host of Rivertown Poets, a semi-monthly poetry series that's been hosting fine poets since 2013. Sandra has lived with cats since 1982 when a red-headed black cat first crossed her path and she began believing in luck. She has been fortunate to share her space with four black cats (and several others) since then. She wrote “Yoda: A Remembrance” after the death of her 23.8-year-old feline companion.

UK based neurodivergent writer Jane Ayres re-discovered poetry studying for a part-time Creative Writing MA at the University of Kent, which she completed in 2019 at the age of 57. She enjoys Open Mic events, is fascinated by hybrid poetry/prose experimental forms and has work published/accepted in *Confluence*, *Postscript*, *Dissonance*, *The Agonist*, *Lighthouse*, *Viscaria*, *The Sock Drawer*, *Streetcake*, *The North*, *The Poetry Village*, *Scrittura*, *Door is a Jar*, *Marble*, *Crow & Cross Keys*, *Agapanthus*, *Conflingo*, *Kissing Dynamite* and *The Forge*. All royalties from her ebook COMING HOME (about 2 amazing Norwegian Forest cats) are donated to Cats Protection. <https://www.amazon.co.uk/gp/product/B00AGZV9WM>

KC Bailey is a writer/poet from the UK. Publication credits include *The Ekphrastic Review*, *The Hellebore*, *Black Bough Poetry*, *The Tide Rises*, *Black Flowers*, *The Failure Baler*, *Idle Ink*, *Eye Flash Poetry*, *Fevers of the Mind Poetry: Poets of 2020 Anthology*, *50/50 Lit & CaféLit*, amongst others. She practices Tai Chi and drinks Earl Grey tea, though hasn't yet mastered the art of doing both simultaneously (Twitter: @KCBailey\_Writer).

Beth Brooke is a retired teacher. She loves the Middle East, where she was born and she loves the awesome Jurassic Coast, where she now lives. She has always kept a goddess, whose current incarnation is a black short hair called Minerva Minipin. She has poetry in a variety of journals and can be found on Twitter as @BethBrooke8

Jeremy Cantor's debut poetry collection, *Wisteria From Seed*, with a foreword by former *Boston Globe* arts critic Michael Manning, was published in 2015 by Kelsey Books. His work has been performed at the Boston Conservatory (set to music by composer Robert Gross) and elsewhere. His poems have appeared in *ISLE (Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and the Environment)*, published in conjunction with Oxford University Press), *Ithaca Lit*, *The Naugatuck River Review*, *Glassworks*, *Prelude*, *The Bicycle Review*, *Pirene's Fountain*, *Poetalk*, and other journals and anthologies. He is an alumnus of The University of Michigan (1975) and of the Community of Writers at Squaw Valley (2018). Jeremy began writing after retiring from a career in laboratory chemistry. He has made and tested engine oil additives, detergents and pharmaceuticals, driven a forklift, worked in a full-body acid-proof hazmat suit, tried to keep his fingers working in a walk-in freezer at -40°F and worked behind radiation shielding. He prefers writing.

Alison Campbell is from Aberdeen and now lives in London. She is a counsellor in a secondary school. Her poems are published in various magazines including *Obsessed with Pipework*, *The Curlew*, *The Poetry Village*, *Dunlin PORT* anthology, *Artemis*, *Indigo Dreams (Reach, Sarasvati and Dawntreader)*, *London Grip* and *Pennine Platform*. She was commended in the Barnet Poetry competition 2017, 2018, and shortlisted in the 2020 *Candlestick Press* International poetry competition, *Getting Older*. She is one of ten longlisted finalists in the *Paper Swans* competition 2020. *Rattlecast* Poetry station, California, chose a poem of hers, which she read on air (1.12.20) She was one of ten finalists in Poet & Players competition 2020. She has a poem forthcoming in *Locked Down: poems, diaries and art from the 2020 pandemic*.

Elizabeth M. Castillo is a British-Mauritian poet, writer and language teacher. She lives in Paris with her family and two cats, Thomas "tiny tiger" O'Malley and Marie. When not writing poetry, she can be found working on her podcast or webcomic, pottering about her garden, or writing a variety of different things under a variety of pen names. She has words in, or upcoming in *Selcouth Station Press*, *Pollux Journal*, *Authylem Magazine*, *Fevers of the Mind Press*, and *Tuna Fish Journal*, among others.

Shakira Christodoulou is an Egyptologist and emerging writer living on the Isle of Sark. She has written two fantasy novels and the first chapter of a hybrid fiction-non-fiction on Egyptian Temples that she'd really love to take further. She is catless after a lifetime of servitude to felines.

Linda M. Crate's works have been published in numerous magazines and anthologies both online and in print. She is the author of six poetry chapbooks, the latest of which is: *the samurai* (Yellow Arrow Publishing, October 2020). She's also the author of the novel *Phoenix Tears* (Czykmate Books, June 2018). Recently she has published two full-length poetry collections *Vampire Daughter* (Dark Gatekeeper Gaming, February 2020) and *The Sweetest Blood* (Cyberwit, February 2020).

Seth Crook lives on Mull and is transitioning into a seal. His poems have appeared in such places as *Northwords Now*, *Gutter*, *The Glasgow Review of Books*, *The Rialto*, *Magma*, *Poetry Scotland*, *The Interpreter's House*. And in recent anthologies such as *Port* (Dunlin Press), *Declarations* (Scotland Street), *The Centenary Collection* (Speculative Books), *Places of Poetry* (One World).

Rachael Crosbie is the Editor-in-Chief and founder of *the winnow magazine* and a poetry reader for *Persephone's Daughters*. She has a BA in English Literature, and she's working toward her MS in Publishing at NYUSPS. Her poetry can be found in *Emerge Literary Journal*, *Re-Side*, *Cobra Milk*, *Lucky Pierre Zine*, *Pussy Magic*, and others. She has two chapbooks: *swerve* and *MIXTAPES*. Above all, she loves dissecting horror films with her fiancé, reading poetry, and hugging cats.

Jason de Koff is an associate professor of agronomy and soil science at Tennessee State University. He lives in Nashville, TN with his wife, Jaclyn, and his two daughters, Tegan and Maizie. He has published in a number of scientific journals, and has over 60 poems published or forthcoming in literary journals over the last year. His present and past feline friends include Nova, Luna, Moxie, Princess, Sunshine, and Shadow.



Aleah Dye (she/her) primarily writes poetry, tending towards topics of morbidity, love, mental illness, social justice, and philosophy. She is dreadfully afraid of imperfection and spiders, in no particular order. She has a one-eyed cat named Ivy and a one-track-minded (food!) cat named Rosebud. Aleah hopes to make hearts grow three sizes with her words. She is a 2020 Sundress Publications Best of the Net nominee and the graphic designer for *perhappened*. Read her latest work via *perhappened*, *Collective Realms Magazine*, and *Dust Poetry Magazine*. Follow her @bearsbeetspoet on Twitter.

Lilia Marie Ellis (she/they) is a trans writer from Houston. Her work has appeared in publications including *The Maine Review* and *perhappened*. Her chapbook *Love and Endless Love* was published this year by giallo lit. Follow her on Twitter/Instagram @LiliaMarieEllis

Tessa Foley is a poet whose work explores feminism, sexuality and the rejection of normalcy. Her debut poetry collection 'Chalet Between Thick Ears' was published and launched by Live Canon in November 2018 and has inspired a series of Live Canon films. The same year, Tessa also self-published 'Garden' illustrated by her sister, Anna Foley, to raise money for the Portsmouth Abuse and Rape Counselling Service where she volunteered for three years. She has recently been recognised in the Ware Poets Competition, the Charroux Poetry Prize and the Canterbury Literary Festival Poet of the Year Competition. Twitter: @unhelpable [www.TessaFoley.com](http://www.TessaFoley.com)

Carl Griffin is from Swansea, South Wales. His collection of poetry, *Throat of Hawthorn*, was published in 2019 by Indigo Dreams Publishing. In 2020, he headed a long-poem book called *Arrival at Elsewhere*, published by Against the Grain Press, a collaboration project enlisting the help of poets the world over which charted the emotional impact of Covid-19.

Janet Hatherley is from London. She has had poems published in several magazines including *The Interpreter's House*, *Under the Radar*, *Stand*, *Coast to coast to coast*, *The Poetry Village*, *Brittle Star*. Commended in Indigo Dreams Collection Competition, 2019, she was shortlisted in Coast to Coast to Coast's portfolio competition, 2020.

Lindsey Heatherly is a Pushcart nominated writer with work in *X-R-A-Y*, *Pithead Chapel*, *Emrys Journal* and more. She is a nonfiction editor for RED FEZ and lives with her daughter in Upstate South Carolina. Find her online at <https://r3dwillow.wixsite.com/rydanmardsey> or on Twitter: @rydanmardsey.

Kathryn Anna Marshall is a poet based in Coalbrookdale. She returned to writing following diagnosis with M.E. several years ago. Kathryn has work in magazines like *Mslexia* and *Popshot Quarterly*, as well as online at *Words for the Wild* and *Riggwelter Press*. She was longlisted for Paper Swans Press single poem competition in 2020 and has recently published *Yes to Tigers*, an illustrated poetry zine inspired by her time as poet in residence for Secret Severn Art Trail.

Caroline McPherson is an abstract artist from Leicestershire in the U.K. Her work focuses on the Anthropocene, and uses nature as a vehicle for expression. Her favourite medium is acrylic paint, although she does sometimes use mixed media. You can find her online at [www.carolinemcpherson.com](http://www.carolinemcpherson.com) or on Twitter @cmcphersonart

Stuart McPherson is a poet from Leicester in the United Kingdom. His work has appeared in online journals and anthologies, including *Beir Bua Journal*, *After the Pause* and *Selcouth Station*. His debut pamphlet 'Water Bearer' will be published in December 2021 by Broken Sleep Books ([www.brokensleepbooks.com](http://www.brokensleepbooks.com)) His work explores the impact of family dysfunction and trauma upon 'norms' of masculinity and encourages a more open dialogue and openness around this subject. You can find him via twitter @theecabsentee or via his website [www.theecabsentee.com](http://www.theecabsentee.com)

Living in Happy Valley, Michele Mekel wears many hats of her choosing: writer and editor; educator and bioethicist; poetess and creatrix; cat herder and chief can opener; witch and woman; and, above all, human. Her work has appeared in various academic and creative publications, including having her poetry featured on Garrison Keillor's *The Writer's Almanac*. She is also a co-principal investigator for the *Viral Imaginations: COVID-19* project ([viralimagination.psu.edu](http://viralimagination.psu.edu)).

Maxine Rose Munro is a Shetlander adrift on the outskirts of Glasgow. She writes in both English and Shetlandic Scots, and is widely published in the UK and beyond. She lives with two cats – a white tom-cat who thinks he’s a dog, and a white/black female who is more cat than cat. She runs First Steps in Poetry, offering free feedback and advice to beginner poets. [www.maxinerosemunro.com](http://www.maxinerosemunro.com)

Meg Smith is a writer, journalist, dancer and events producer living in Lowell, Mass., USA. Her poetry and fiction have most recently appeared in *The Cafe Review*, *Muddy River Poetry Review*, *Sirens Call*, *Raven Cage*, and many more. She is author of five poetry books and a short fiction collection, *The Plague Confessor*. She welcomes visits to Twitter [@MegSmith\\_Writer](https://twitter.com/MegSmith_Writer), [Facebook.com/megsmithwriter](https://Facebook.com/megsmithwriter), and [megsmithwriter.com](http://megsmithwriter.com).

Broken Spanner makes illustrations inspired by nature, and angry, noxious cartoons inspired by everything else. See the latter on Instagram, [@brokenspanner](https://www.instagram.com/brokenspanner)

Shawna L. Swetech, a retired hospital medical/surgical nurse, is a poet and visual artist, drawing inspiration from the deep wells of human nature and the natural world. Shawna’s poems range from the personal to the political. She often writes about her experience in the intense, emotional field of bedside nursing. Her poetry appears in *The Permanente Journal*, *Rattle*, *The Healing Muse*, *Marin Poetry Anthology*, *California Quarterly*, and *the American Journal of Nursing*. She was a finalist for the 2019 Discovered: Emerging Artists in Sonoma County award. She has been married for more than four decades to the same man—proving that miracles do, indeed, happen. She has two wonderful adult children, both with fantastic spouses, two granddaughters, three cats, one dog and twelve chickens. Shawna uses art and journaling in her integrative Reiki and Flower Essence practice. She has an enormous garden, and grows various vegetables, flowers and a wide variety of weeds. She believes poetry and art are important healing medicines for the ills of our modern world. She also believes cats are magical beings directly descended from the gods.

Ellen Symons writes poetry and fiction—cat on lap—from a corner of the sofa, or while walking through the trees and fields of Lanark

County, Ontario, Canada. Ellen's published work includes a poetry collection, *Economies of Gratitude*. Ellen is working on a first novel.

Claire Taylor is a writer in Baltimore, Maryland where she lives with her husband, young son, and a bossy old cat who wants the couch all to himself and demands to be fed at three in the morning. Claire's work has appeared in a variety of publications. You can find much of it online at [clairemtaylor.com](http://clairemtaylor.com).

Paul Veracka (he/him) writes poems in D.C. When he is not running a classroom with very young people, he may be watching old concert footage online.

Sarah Wallis is a poet and playwright based on the East Coast of Scotland and lives with a husband from Liverpool and a cat from Yorkshire. Moxie is a rescue, a tabby with a white waistcoat and one white ear. She was once told she looks regal and has never forgotten it.

Jenny Wong is a writer, traveler, and occasional business analyst. Lately, her writings have been more about indoor things, but she still dreams about evening wanderings around Tokyo alleys, Singapore hawkers centres, and Parisian cemeteries. Recent publications include *Truffle Magazine*, *Split Rock Review*, *Burnt Breakfast Magazine*, *Parentheses Journal* and *Crow & Cross Keys*. She resides in the foothills of Alberta, Canada and tweets @jenwithwords.