

## **Catworld**

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## *Catworld*

Penny McCarthy

*Catworld* is a visual response to William Baldwin's *Beware the Cat*. This two-page spread uses the form of a graphic novel sequence to consider the topography of Baldwin's novel through pen-and-ink drawings aiming to capture and animate the cat world.

Seeking a critical apparatus suitable to address the hybridity that has been central to our research process, I explore the 'storyworld' of *Beware the Cat* as a graphic re-contextualisation of fragments of the narrative. This approach aims to reflect the hybrid nature of our *Beware the Cat* research as the original novel gives way to other forms such as theatre and art practice. The intention of this approach and format is to think specifically about *Beware the Cat* in a contemporary context to offer a certain kind of consideration that might be speculative or 'para-literary'<sup>1</sup>. The image sequence aims to consider the affective and aesthetic reception of the 'image intensity'<sup>2</sup> conjured by Baldwin's visualisation of a cat world.

The work builds on a history of animal illustration and also graphic fictions such as Alfred Bestall's *Rupert Bear* (1935 to 1965), Hergé's *The Adventures of Tintin* (1942-1976) and more recent works such as Art Spiegelman's *Maus* and Chris Ware's *Acme Novelty Library*. In these works, animals are often central, acting as the 'knowing other'<sup>3</sup>, triggering an allegorical impulse as the normal relationships between people and animals are altered. I sought to reframe Derrida's notion of the 'autobiographical cat' through drawings that are largely based on observations of the cats in my life.

For me, one of the joys of Baldwin's work has been finding an era I knew little about and losing myself in his depiction of it. *Beware the Cat* presents itself less through linear

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<sup>1</sup> Krauss, Rosalind. "Poststructuralism and the "Paraliterary"." *October* 13 (1980): 36-40. Accessed August 31, 2021. doi:10.2307/3397700.

<sup>2</sup> Massumi, Brian. "The Autonomy of Affect." *Cultural Critique*, no. 31 (1995): 83-109. Accessed August 31, 2021. doi:10.2307/1354446.

<sup>3</sup> Derrida, Jacques, and David Wills. "The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)." *Critical Inquiry* 28, no. 2 (2002): 369-418. Accessed August 31, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1344276>.

narrative than through comedy and pictures. It is the images he conjured, the feeling of a fully realised feline world that stayed with me long after reading.

Of course this is a personal response, not a strict adherence to historical facts or chronology, but a way to understand Baldwin's story-telling through images. I did not set out to illustrate the text, rather I went ahead and invented – or maybe I should call it an imaginative reconstruction rooted in Baldwin's work. I feel that there is so much more material to be mined – imagine a graphic novel set in the early modern period describing the comings and goings of a full cast of articulate, politically engaged cats.

Here it is night and not all the cats are black. A potion. Cats. A place that looks like London. The moon illuminating dark streets. A man sits at a table writing.