



## **The Characteristic Features Of The Work “Beware The Cat”**

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### **Introduction**

Born in Wales around 1515, William Baldwin's literary career began in earnest in 1547 when he worked with printer Edward Whitchurch, whose writings strongly supported the Church of England during King Edward's reign.

Baldwin is most known for his seminal work \*A Treatise of Morall Phylosophie in 1547, which stressed the value of ancient knowledge and self-education, and his "Beware the Cat" in 1552, which is widely regarded as the first English novel and creatively explores themes of religion and humanism through a debate among humanists regarding the ability of animals to speak. Throughout his career, Baldwin was a vocal opponent of Catholicism and interacted with the humanist ideas of his time.

This book called Beware the Cat was one of the titles, I saw classics. I looked at it because I had never heard of it. It turns out that William Ringler and Michael Flachmann's book was a modern spelling update of Baldwin's original. Any Bakersfield theater enthusiast is familiar with the name Flachmann.

For many years, he was a well-liked professor at California State University Bakersfield. Additionally, he was the Utah Shakespeare Festival's dramaturge. He was one of those individuals that everyone adored, thus his unexpected death in 2013 came as a huge shock. I personally recall his post-play conversations, and I know a lot of people who attended his lectures.

He apparently collaborated with William Ringler on this book in the 1980s, finishing it after Ringler passed away. I had to buy this book, of course. A vast quantity of background material is included in addition to the text, including a biography of Baldwin and his life story, an examination of the book's topics, a history of early English fiction, and synopses of current novels' plots.



## **Main body**

They undoubtedly believed Beware the Cat was strange at the time.

The first known response to Beware the Cat is a poem written in 1570 by an unidentified author criticizing the book's "staunge fashions" and its author, William Baldwin, for disseminating false information. "Everything practically in that booke is astrue as that his nose to my dock [ass] is joyned fast with glu," the poet insists.

This makes sense given that the book Beware the Cat tells the story of a man who learns to understand cats through alchemy.

Beware the Cat is a type of science fiction where strange events and scenarios are based on 16th-century theories about how the world functions.

Overall, I believe it is worthwhile to apply the odd moniker to a work that veers between science fiction, fantasy, and horror.

William Baldwin, a writer, proofer, and later cleric, was a prominent member

of the printing and literary circles in the middle of the 16th century and the creator of be-ware the Cat.

Cat is only one of his pieces that have courted controversy.

The book was written in 1553, but it was never published for years because of its anti-Catholic content and the possibility of retaliation under Mary I.

After Baldwin's passing, it was finally printed in 1570 and again in 1584.

The 1584 text, with its wild premodern grammar and spelling, is available in a lovely paperback edition from Gray Area Press. There is also a more approach-

able version for contemporary readers that has been updated to include techniques like quotation marks and the main character's name being spelled the same way in every sentence. Baldwin himself acts as the narrator of the frame story, where he and several other men are guests of Master of the Revels, George Ferrers, during the Christmas celebrations at Court. As the companions settle in, they engage in a discussion regarding the question of whether "Birds and beasts ha[ve] reason." One participant, a "divine" (a churchman or theologian) with the charming name of Master Gregory Streamer, argues that not only do animals have reason, but he has personally heard them speak through his own "experimenting." Part of the enjoyment of Beware the Cat lies in how Streamer is portrayed as a genuine individual: the dedication (to the



courtier John Young) describes him as a mutual acquaintance, and Baldwin confirms that Streamer himself has endorsed the text prior to its publication. In fact, I am nearly convinced that the scathing poem I referenced at the outset is merely another facet of the meta-meme: it criticizes Baldwin for misrepresenting the fictional Streamer, a "good man" who would never recount "such false fabels." Like many early modern novels, *Beware the Cat* functions on various (even circular) levels of narration, with different nested narrators sharing stories within the broader framework. (In the 1570 version, Streamer's speech is further annotated with Baldwin's glosses in the margins.) Many of the narratives ultimately interconnect; the investigative effort to piece them together is one of the delights of *Beware the Cat*. I have attempted to illustrate a few below, simply to express the recursive nature of the narrative. The gossipy nature of the different stories also works in well with the atmosphere of witchcraft: we receive news of the supernatural as it would have been spread in early modern Europe, through hearsay, wives' tales, rumors heard second- or third- or fourthhand from a village far away. As a satirist, Baldwin draws comparisons between far-fetched "beleefs" in witchcraft and the credulity of Catholics (especially in Part 3). But he's also up to something more uncanny, using the scrambled narratives to build a sense of mystery and obfuscation, especially surrounding the true power of the cats and who their leader is. (More on this shortly.)

Grimalkin's supernatural abilities are puzzling to the Streamer and the other humans, who theorize that she may be a human witch who took cat form and (like the Roman pope) fooled them into worshipping her; several decades later, her worship has become a kind of cargo cult. Though this explanation feels too easy — what do we make of her son, the ominous Cammoloch? Or the uncanny way that cats in England learn about her death so quickly? Not everything adds up, and we're meant to wonder and speculate ourselves. "*Beware the Cat*" is a prose English work which was written by William Baldwin, considered the first English novel, that describes themes of storytelling, truth, and deception through fantastical tales of talking cats. The work intentionally blends fact and fiction, ultimately depicting any straightforward message and motivating readers to question the reliability of stories, whether oral or written. It is recognized as the earliest example of long prose fiction in English works and old prose.



The text itself is as a factual history but simultaneously highlights its own fictionality through fantastical elements, including stories of talking cats and witches. The "dramaturgical text" "Beware the Cat" explores how story and performance are used to establish and negotiate human and animal identities.

The story, which was written during the Reformation, contains anti-Catholic propaganda elements, but its whimsical and ornate style ultimately subverts didacticism by casting doubt on religious confession and the truth. Adaptations that imitate the original's use of marginalia and annotations, examining opposing expressive languages and the potency of storytelling as a live event, emphasize the text's emphasis on live performance. With its examination of talking animals and shaky narration, *Beware the Cat* is a sophisticated and multidimensional work that experiments with the concepts of reality and fiction. It invites readers to question the nature of storytelling and the construction of reality, which makes it a philosophically difficult and historically significant work that defies simple categorization.

First off, even though it's a little difficult to tell this book apart from a story, many people believe it to be the first novel written in the English language.

What exactly qualifies as a novel is another ambiguity. Although *Morte d'Arthur* was written before *Beware the Cat*, it is regarded as a legend and a reworking of earlier works rather than a work with an entirely original plot.

Especially when compared to the lengthier books that would be published in later decades, the text is somewhat brief. However, given that it was composed in 1553, before Shakespeare's works, it does have sophisticated speech for its period. It also has a complex. The book contains risqué parts and some of-the-time gags that make fun of women, but it mostly satirizes Catholic ceremony. Naturally, during this time, England's religious identity was still up for debate. Naturally, Henry VIII was at the head of his own church, which he founded after breaking with Rome. Even with a different pope, it was still highly Catholic. Following his passing, the country had a number of reversals, with the Catholic Mary and then the Protestant Elizabeth succeeding Edward VI's brief rule.



Actually, these modifications had a big impact on the book's development.

Although it was composed during Edward's rule, Mary's accession to the throne prevented its publication.

According to popular belief, it was initially published in 1570 and then in 1584. In the fundamental frame plot, certain people—mostly academics—discuss whether or not monsters can speak their own language.

The death of Grimalkin, an Irish cat who might or might not have been a witch in feline form, follows.

Then, using a magic concoction that allows him to comprehend feline language, Master Streamer claims to have heard cats converse.

The majority of the book consists of what he heard.

A large deal of parody of Catholic ceremonies is made possible by the cats' type of trial of one of their number for allegedly breaking promiscuity regulations in the final section. Here's a tasty line along those lines.[ ]

Although the Pope has lavished all people with enormous riches through exactions and other baggigical trumpery, he eats and wears as little as any other man, albeit perhaps more lavishly and expensively, and in greater abundance." In that way, the book is a little strange because it appears to be more of a collection of intricate frames that hold the satirical elements together than a story arc. However, it is also quite creative.

The author's "exhortation" to be cautious around cats concludes the text.

They pose a threat specifically because they see covert transgressions and inform their fellow felines about them.

For all we know, this might actually be the case. To avoid embarrassment, I would advise everyone to be aware of immorality, refrain from secret sins, and refrain from giving out naughty advice. However, if a man puts his cat away out of uncertainty, it will be a testament to his secret life of mischievous behavior, which he is more ashamed of his cat seeing than God and His angels, who observe, record, and witness all human behavior.

Conclusion

It's also fascinating to hear the backstory and how I came to find it. As frequent blog readers are aware, my wife has long been an avid supporter of the Utah Shakespeare Festival. Although she didn't make it this year due to a job change,



she used to go with friends and occasionally with the kids and myself. So, we all went together in 2021. We frequently have some free time between the afternoon and evening performances, so we spend at least one trip reading at Main Street Books, where we typically come away with a ton of used books. Used literature:

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<https://www.rsc.org.uk/beware-the-cat>

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[%20Babbage%20and%20O%27Connor%20-](https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/id/eprint/209660/11/9%20-%20Babbage%20and%20O%27Connor%20-%20Beware%20the%20Cat%20script.pdf)

[%20Beware%20the%20Cat%20script.pdf](https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/id/eprint/209660/11/9%20-%20Babbage%20and%20O%27Connor%20-%20Beware%20the%20Cat%20script.pdf)

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