

"The thing about cats as you might find, Is that no one knows what they have in mind."

- John Ciardi from My Cat, Mrs. Lick-a-chin

No other animal friend has inspired more devoted contemplation than the cat. This tail-curling truth is demonstrated most convincingly by the list of international literary kitty lovers collected in these pages. So snuggle up in your favorite reading chair and share the purrfect and the profound thoughts of T.S. Eliot, Paul Verlaine, J.R.R. Tolkien, Paul Gallico, Ogden Nash, Emily Dickinson, Sinclair Lewis, Don Marquis, John Ciardi, Pablo Neruda, William Carlos Williams, Jean Cocteau, and Alice Adams, among other fans of this furry critter.

Artist Martha Paulos has etched more than two dozen remarkably detailed and whimsical linocuts, each a tribute to the madness and mystery of a cat's universe. Her brilliant illustrations of notorious and cunning cats are the ideal companions to the poets' lines on felines. Following gracefully in the paw prints of the popular Doggerel: Great Poets on Remarkable Dogs, this delightful volume brings the glories of cat-hood within a whisker of heaven.







Felines



# Felines



great
poets
on
notorious
cats

WITH LINOCUTS BY MARTHA PAULOS

CHRONICLE BOOKS • SAN FRANCISCO

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## OGDEN NASH



## The Cat

You get a wife, you get a house,

Eventually you get a mouse.

You get some words regarding mice,

You get a kitty in a trice.

By two A.M. or thereabout,

The mouse is in, the cat is out.

It dawns upon you, in your cot,

The mouse is silent, the cat is not.

Instead of Pussy, says your spouse,

You should have bought another mouse.





## WILLIAM WORDSWORTH



#### Kitten and Fallen Leaves

See the kitten on the wall,

Sporting with the leaves that fall,

Withered leaves — one — two — and three —

From the lofty elder tree!

Through the calm and frosty air

Of this morning bright and fair,

Eddying round and round they sink

Softly, slowly: one might think

From the motions that are made,

Every little leaf conveyed

Sylph or fairy hither tending,

To this lower world descending,

Each invisible and mute,

In his wavering parachute. — But the kitten, how she starts, Crouches, stretches, paws and darts First at one, and then its fellow, Just as light and just as yellow! Where are many now — now one — Now they stop and there are none: What intenseness of desire In her upward eye of fire! With a tiger-leap half-way Now she meets the coming prey, Lets it go as fast, and then Has it in her power again: Now she works with three or four, Like an Indian conjuror; Quick as he in feats of art. Far beyond in joy of heart. When her antics played in the eye



Of a thousand standers-by,
Clapping hands with shout and stare,
What would little Tabby care
For the plaudits of the crowd?
Over-happy to be proud,
Over-wealthy in the treasure
Of her own exceeding pleasure.





#### DON MARQUIS



#### The Tom Cat

At midnight in the alley
A tomcat comes to wail,
And he chants the hate of a million years
As he swings his snaky tail.

Malevolent, bony, brindled,
Tiger and devil and bard,
His eyes are coals from middle of hell,
And his heart is black and hard.

He twists and crouches and capers

And bares his curved sharp claws,

And he sings to the stars of the jungle nights

Ere cities were, or laws.

Beast from a world primeval,

He and his leaping clan,

When the blotched red moon leers over the roofs

give voice to their scorn of man.

He will lie on a rug tomorrow

And lick his silky fur,

And veil the brute in his yellow eyes

And play he's tame, and purr.

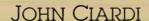
But at midnight in the alley

He will crouch again and wail,

And beat the time for demon's song

With the swing of his demon's tail.





# My Cat, Mrs. Lick-a-chin

Some of the cats I know about
Spend a little time in and a lot of time out.
Or a lot of time out and a little time in.
By my cat, Mrs. Lick-a-chin,
Never knows where she wants to be.
If I let her in she looks at me
And begins to sing that she wants to go out.
So I open the door and she looks about
And begins to sing, "Please let me in!"

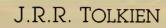
Poor silly Mrs. Lick-a-chin!

The thing about cats as you might find, Is that no one knows what they have in mind.

And I'll tell you something about that: No one knows it less than my cat.







## Cat on the Mat

The fat cat on the mat
may seem to dream
of nice mice that suffice
for him, or cream;
but he is free, maybe,
walks in thought
unbowed, proud, where loud
roared and fought
his kin, lean and slim,
or deep in den
in the East feasted on beasts
and tender men.

The giant lion with iron claw in paw, and huge ruthless tooth in gory jaw; the pard dark-starred fleet upon feet, that oft soft from aloft leaps on his meet where words loom in gloom far now they be fierce and free. and tamed is he; but fat cat on the mat kept as pet he does not forget.



#### ALICE ADAMS

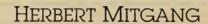


# As You Were Saying

Telling me about Rosebud
(But not saying, 'put to sleep')
"A beautiful cat, so beautiful,
Even as she died,"
You say, on the phone,
And that was true, I had met her:
A lithe lovely shy tabby cat,
Hiding under the bedclothes, darting out.

But at that moment
As I listen, from California,
In the Truckee River I see two fat brown ducks,
Serene and elegant, and vastly silly.
How I wish you were here to come and look!
As they veer away from rocks
And sail downstream,
Like gamblers, headed for Reno.

for Richard Poirier



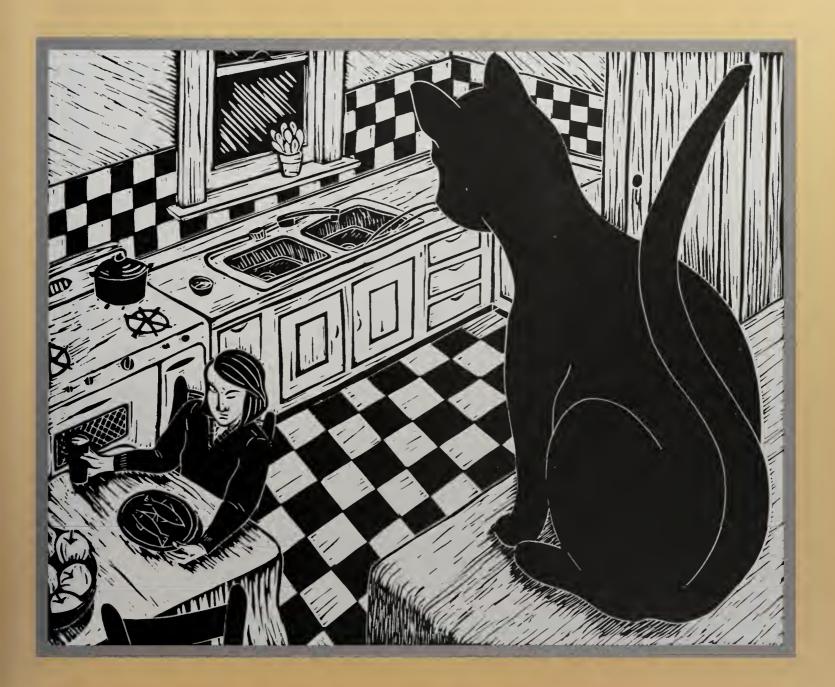
# Nine Fat Cats in Little Italy

Say buon giorn to fatso Toni She likes to gorge on peperoni. Ignazio gatto feels so lucky When he's stuffed with molti gnocchi. Our favorite kitty Carolina Mangia bene on pastina. Caruso cat sings for salami With parmesan and vermicelli. The bandit tomcat Lee Gumba'ro Steals the sausage of San Gennaro. Padrone cat Marloni Brando Prays last rites for cannellono. The royal feline Medici Drinks champagne with biscotti. When it comes to frutt' di mari A cat called Est chews calamari. Laura loves her antipasta

Prosciutto, pesce and polenta,

And Yankee Doodle macaroni!

Risotto, ragu, rigatoni







#### Untitled

She sights a bird, she chuckles, She flattens, then she crawls, She runs without the look of feet, Her eyes increase to balls,

Her jaws stir, twitching, hungry,
Her teeth can hardly stand.
She leaps — but robin leaps the first!
Ah, pussy of the sand,

The hopes so juicy ripening,
You almost bathed your tongue
When bliss dissolved a hundred wings
And fled with every one!





## WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS



# The Cat and the Moon

The cat went here and there

And the moon spun round like a top,

And the nearest kin of the moon.

The creeping cat, looked up.

Black Minnaloushe stared at the moon,

For, wander and wail as he would,

The pure cold light in the sky

Troubled his animal blood.

Minnaloushe runs in the grass

Lifting his delicate feet.

Do you dance, Minnaloushe, do you dance?

When two close kindred meet,

What better than call a dance? Maybe the moon may learn, Tired of that courtly fashion, A new dance turn. Minnaloushe creeps through the grass From moonlit place to place, The sacred moon overhead Has taken a new phase. Does Minnaloushe know that his pupils Will pass from change to change, And that from round to crescent. From crescent to round they range? Minnaloushe creeps through the grass Alone, important and wise, And lifts to the changing moon His changing eyes.

## CHRISTOPHER MORLEY

# In Honor of Taffy Topaz

Taffy, the topaz-colored cat,
Thinks now of this and now of that,
But chiefly of his meals.
Asparagus, and cream, and fish,
Are objects of his Freudian wish;
What you don't give, he steals.

His gallant heart is strongly stirred
By the clink of plate or flight of bird,
He has a plurny tail;
At night he treads on stealthy pad
As merry as Sir Galahad
A-seeking of the Grail.

His amiable amber eyes
Are very friendly, very wise;
Like Buddha, grave and fat,
He sits, regardless of applause,
And thinking, as he kneads his paws,
What fun to be a cat!









#### CHARLES BAUDELAIRE



# My Cat

My pretty cat to my heart I hold, My heart ever warm to her; Let me look thine eyes of agate and gold; Thy claws keep sheathed in fur.

My finger strokes thy head, and thrills Thy back that arches higher; My touch with quivering rapture fills Thy veins electric fire.

I dream of my love; her eyes like thine, Profound and cold, sweet cat of mine, My Soul dart-wounds fret.

A subtle air, a deadly sweet Breathes round her, and from head to feet Envelopes my brunette.









## MARIANNE MOORE

## Peter

Strong and slippery,
built for the midnight grass-party
confronted by four cats he sleeps his time away —
the detached first claw on the foreleg corresponding
to the thumb, retracted to its tip; the small tuft of fronds
or katydid-legs above each eye numbering all units
in each group; the shadbones regularly set about the mouth
to droop or rise in unison like porcupine-quills.
He lets himself be flattened out by gravity,
as seaweed is tamed and weakened by the sun,
compelled when extended, to lie stationary.
Sleep is the result of his delusion that one must



do as well as one can for oneself. sleep — epitome of what is to him the end of life. Demonstrate on him how the lady placed a forked stick on the innocuous neck-sides of the dangerous southern snake. One need not try to stir him up; his prune-shaped head and alligator-eyes are not party to the joke. Lifted and handled, he may be dangled like an eel or set up on the forearm like a mouse; his eyes bisected by pupils of a pin's width, are flickeringly exhibited, then covered up. May be? I should have said might have been: when he has been got the better of in a dream as in a fight with nature of with cats, we all know it. Profound sleep is not with him a fixed illusion. Springing about with frog-like accuracy, with jerky cries when taken in hand, he is himself again; to sit caged by the rungs of a domestic chair

would be unprofitable — human. What is the good of hypocrisy? It is permissible to choose one's employment, to abandon the nail, or roly-poly, when it shows signs of being no longer a pleasure. to score the nearby magazine with a double line of strokes. He can talk but insolently says nothing. What of it? When one is frank, one's very presence is a compliment. It is clear that he can see the virtue of naturalness. that he does not regard the published fact as a surrender. As for the disposition invariably to affront, an animal with claws should have an opportunity to use them. The eel-like extension of the trunk into tail is not an accident. To leap, to lengthen out, divide the air, to purloin, to pursue. To tell the hen: fly over the fence, go in the wrong way in your perturbation — this is life;

to do less would be nothing but dishonesty.



#### OSCAR WILDE



# The Sphinx

In a dim corner of my room for longer than my fancy thinks,

A beautiful and silent Sphinx has watched me through the shifting gloom.

Inviolate and immobile she does not rise, she does not stir

For silver moons are naught to her and naught to her the suns that reel.

Red follows grey across the air, the waves of moonlight ebb and flow, But with the Dawn she does not go and in the night-time she is there.

Dawn follows Dawn and Nights grow old and all the while this curious cat Lies crouching on the Chinese mat with eyes of satin rimmed with gold. Upon the mat she lies and leers and on the tawny throat of her Flutters the soft and silky fur ripples to her pointed ears.

Come forth, my lovely seneschal! so somnolent, so statuesque!

Come forth you exquisite grotesque! half woman and half animal!

Come forth my lovely languorous Sphinx! and put your head upon my knee!

And let me stroke your throat and see your body spotted like the Lynx!

And let me touch those curving claws of yellow ivory, and grasp The tail that like a monstrous Asp coils round your heavy velvet paws!















#### PAUL GALLICO



# This Is My Chair

This is my chair.

Go away and sit somewhere else.

This one is all my own.

It is the only thing in your house that I possess

And insist upon possessing.

Everything else therein is yours.

My dish,

My toys,

My basket,

My scratching post and my Ping-Pong ball;

You provided them for me.

This chair I selected for myself.

I like it.

It suits me.

You have the sofa.

The stuffed chair

And the footstool.

I don't go and sit on them do I?

Then why cannot you leave me mine,

And let us have no further argument?



#### JEAN COCTEAU



## Cat

By the fire, like drifting reddish goldfish, the cat dozed, within itself.

If, by mischance, I were to stir, the cat might change to something else.

The spinning-wheel of ancient magic must never be allowed to stick: and changing itself into a princess is, for the cat, a minor trick.







#### T. S. Eliot



# Cat Morgan Introduces Himself

I once was a Pirate what sailed the 'igh seas — But now I've retired as a com-mission-aire: And that's how you find me a-takin' my ease And keepin' the door in a Bloomsbury Square.

I'm partial to partridges, likewise to grouse,
And I favour that Devonshire cream in a bowl;
But I'm allus content with a drink on the 'ouse
And a bit o'cold fish when I done me patrol.

I ain't got much polish, me manners is gruff, but I've got a good coat, and keep myself smart; And everyone says, and I guess that's enough: 'You can't but like Morgan, 'e's got a kind 'art.' I got knocked about on the Barbary Coast,
And me voice it ain't no sich melliferous horgan;
But yet I can state, and I'm not one to boast,
That some of the gals is dead keen on old Morgan.

So if you 'ave business with Faber — or Faber —
I'll give you this tip, and it's worth a lot more:
You'll save yourself time, and you'll spare yourself labour
If jist you make friends with the Cat at the door.

MORGAN.





## PABLO NERUDA



## Cat's Dream

How neatly a cat sleeps,
sleeps with its paws and its substance,
sleeps with its wicked claws,
and with its ruthless blood,
sleeps with all the rings —
a series of burnt circles —
which form the odd geology
of its sand-colored tail.

I should sleep like a cat, with all the fur of time, with a tongue rough as flint,



with the dry sex of fire; and after speaking to no one, stretch myself over the world, over the roofs and landscapes, with a passionate desire to hunt the rats in my dreams.

I have seen how the cat asleep would undulate, how the night flowed through it like dark water; and at times, it was going to fall or possibly plunge into the bare deserted snowdrifts.

Sometimes it grew so much in sleep like a tiger's great-grandfather, and would leap in the darkness over rooftops, clouds and volcances.

Sleep, sleep, cat of the night, with episcopal ceremony and your stone-hewn mustache. Take care of all our dreams; control the obscurity of our slumbering prowess with your relentless heart and the great ruff of your tail.







# WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS

## Poem

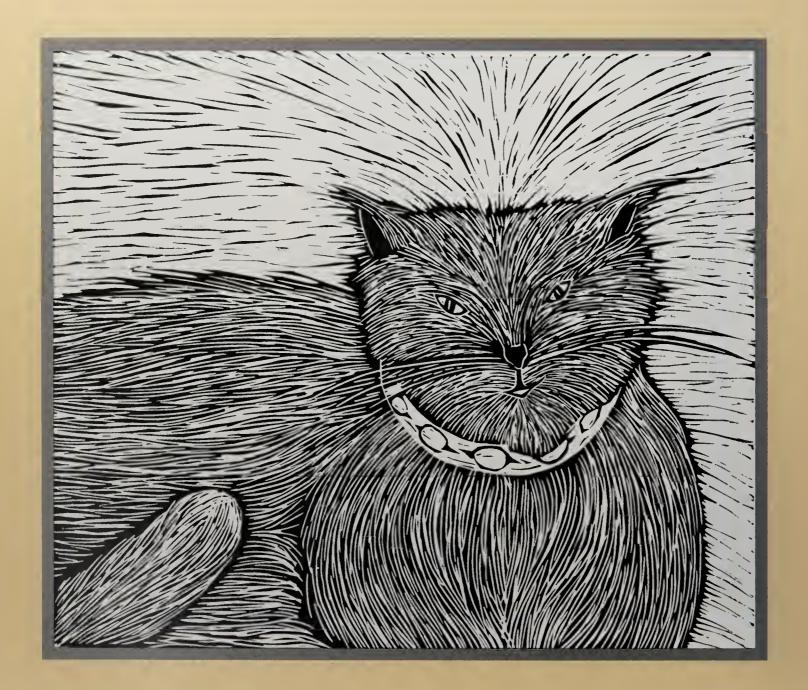
As the cat climbed over the top of

the jamcloset first the right forefoot

carefully then the hind stepped down

into the pit of the empty flower pot







#### PAUL VERLAINE



#### Woman and Cat

They were at play, she and her cat, And it was marvelous to mark The white paw and the white hand pat Each other in the deepening dark.

The stealthy little lady hid Under the mitten's silken sheath Her dainty agate nails that shred, The silk-like dagger-points of death.

The cat purred primly and drew in Her claws that were of steel filed thin: The devil was in it all the same.

And in the boudoir, while a shout Of laughter in the air rang out, Four sparks of phosphor shone like flame.



#### SINCLAIR LEWIS



# The Cat's Prayer

This is a cat that sleeps at night,

That takes delight

In visions bright,

And not a vagrant that creeps at night

On box-cars by the river.

This is a sleepy cat to purr

And rarely stir

Its shining fur;

This is a cat whose softest purr

Means salmon, steaks and liver.

That is a cat respectable,

Connectable

With selectable

Felines respectable,

Whose names would make you quiver.

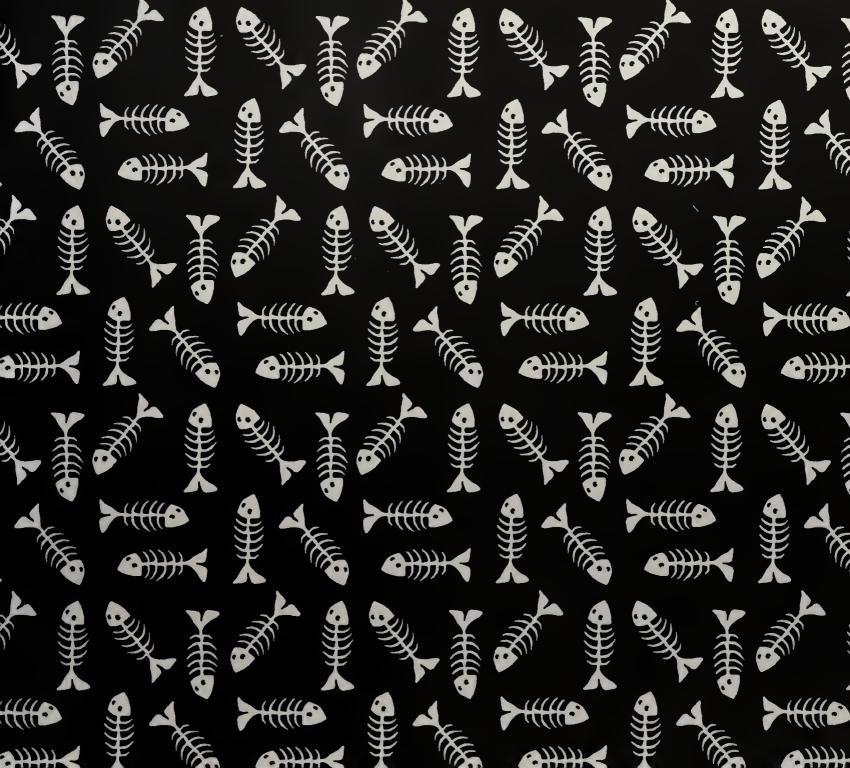
That is a cat of piety,

Not satiety,
But sobriety.
Its very purr is of piety
And thanks to its Feline Giver.

And this is how it prays:

'Ancient of days
With whiskers torrendous
Hark to our praise,
Lick and defend us.
Lo, how we bring to Thee,
Sweet breasts of mouses;
Hark how we sing to Thee,
Filling all houses
With ardent miaouses,
Until it arouses
All mankind to battery.
Thou of the golden paws,
Thou of the silver claws,
Thy tail is the comets' cause,
King of all cattery!'











MARTHA PAULOS is an award-winning sculptor, linocut artist, and painter who lives and works in Oakland, California. Her first book, Doggerel: Great Poets on Remarkable Dogs, won a 1990 American Institute of Graphic Arts award for being one of the fifty outstanding books of the year. FELINES is her second book.

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