THE SUPERCATS. PORTRAYALS OF CATS IN TEXTS OF CELTIC ORIGIN

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Abstract

Cats have been featured in various cultural texts, teaching and setting examples to or, on the contrary, opposing humans. Not only would the reality without the presence of a cat in the text be less unpredictable, but specific plot changes could also not occur. Despite being present in the world's literature for centuries, cats are one of the most underappreciated and misunderstood species, often used and abused by writers portraying complex, challenging, and forbidden aspects of people's lives, the Celts being no exception. Felines portrayed in texts of Celtic origin are, in most stories, treacherous creatures prone to deception and mischief and need to be eradicated. Stories covering cats with bad reputations have been retold throughout the centuries, validating their ill-treatment in the non-fictional world. The analysis of the character of Grimalkin provides a fascinating insight into the early symbolic and disturbing world of the most ambiguous and volatile relationships the animal world and humankind have ever known: cats and people.

Keywords: Grimalkin, Iruscan, Ireland, Wales, Scotland, Cat Sith, Cath Palug.

LOS SUPERGATOS: REPRESENTACIONES DE LOS GATOS EN TEXTOS DE ORIGEN CELTA

Resumen

Los gatos han sido representados en diversos textos culturales, enseñando, dando ejemplo o, por el contrario, oponiéndose a los humanos. No solo la realidad sin la presencia de un gato en el texto sería menos impredecible, sino que ciertos giros narrativos tampoco podrían ocurrir. A pesar de estar presentes en la literatura mundial durante siglos, los gatos son una de las especies menos valoradas y más incomprendidas, frecuentemente utilizados y explotados por escritores para representar aspectos complejos, desafiantes y prohibidos de la vida humana, sin que los celtas fueran una excepción. Los felinos retratados en textos de origen céltico son, en la mayoría de las historias, criaturas traicioneras, propensas al engaño y la travesura, que deben ser erradicadas. Las narraciones sobre gatos con mala reputación han sido repetidas a lo largo de los siglos, justificando su maltrato en el mundo no ficticio. El análisis del personaje de Grimalkin ofrece una visión fascinante del temprano y simbólico mundo inquietante de una de las relaciones más ambiguas y volátiles que han existido entre el mundo animal y la humanidad: los gatos y las personas.

Palabras clave: Grimalkin, Iruscan, Irlanda, Gales, Escocia, Cat Sith, Cath Palug.

DOI: https://doi.org/10.25145/j.recaesin.2025.90.02
Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses, 90; abril 2025, pp. 17-28; ISSN: e-2530-8335

Embedded in nature, the Celts respected the sanctity of all living creatures. Wild and domesticated animals were the focus of intricate ceremonies and the heart of belief systems of profound significance. The intimate relationship between human and non-human animals and the mutual dependence stimulated the concept of the beast as sacred and numinous, "[t]o the Celts, animals were special and central to all aspects of their world" (Green 1992, 4). Non-human animals possessed divine status in their own right or had powers to mediate between humans and gods. As Green states, the secular and ritual aspects of the life of the Celts should not be separated, as it was "[...] a world where heroes straddle the realms of the mundane and the supernatural, where animals can speak to people and where divine beings can change at will between human and animal forms" (Green 1992, 4). Non-human animals, felines included, were often seen as sacred to various deities and, as such, had to be connoted with the unfamiliar, the uncanny, and the powerful. In later centuries, the defamiliarisation of the domestic cat created the grounds for the concept of a witch's familiar, the Devil's associate, a shapeshifter, a nocturnal beast dangerous to soul and body. People ascribed so many harmful qualities to cats that it is hardly surprising that, in time, they were charged with causing (deliberate) harm to humans: stealing breath and souls and bringing death about by simply looking at a human. Similarly, the circulating stories fuelled and rooted the perception of felines as untameable, dangerous and supernatural beings that could and should be eradicated. The analysis of the place of domestic cats in texts provides a fascinating insight into the symbolic and disturbing world of the most ambiguous and volatile relationships the animal world and humankind have ever known: cats and people.

1. THE (UN)DOMESTICATED FELINE

One of the mysteries of cat history is connected with the fact that the domesticated cat is supposed to have arrived in Northern Europe as late as the 11th century, yet images of the cat, securely domesticated, are found in 8th or 9th-century Celtic crosses (Gettings 1989, 60), which would suggest that the domesticated cat had arrived in Northern Europe much earlier than is generally believed. The monks who travelled northwards to establish their monastic systems in the British Isles from the late 4th century imported the domestic cat —Gettings notices that a series of related "Christian" cats are present at the base of the Muiredach Celtic cross of Monasterboice in Ireland. One of the felines appears to be licking a kitten, while the other is teasing or eating a captured bird. Both images are representative of the perception of cats having a dual nature: simultaneously being devoted mothers and ruthless hunters. That dichotomy of the cat's nature is perhaps why people often see the species as uncivilised and almost feral. Many texts on cat care, treatment, and socialisation have been widely approved and appreciated in the twenty-first century.

The inability to categorise cats in human culture causes a "semantic discomfort" dealt with using domestication or destruction[1] (Michalski 2011, 109). Michalski warns that the particular instability of the meaning concerning cats may be, on the one hand, considered a wealth of diversity; on the other hand, however, it could be risky for the feline itself (2011, 112). On the one hand, the intricacy of cats' traits, their elusiveness and dexterity have amounted to feline popularity, "[t]heir independence, cunning evil and patient intelligence" (Morris 1967, 22) mesmerised humans for centuries. On the other, as people "project onto [...] animals the physical appetites that they [do] not want to recognise in themselves –dogs are dirty, pigs are greedy, goats are lustful […], donkeys are stubborn and stupid" (Rogers 1998, 4) cats became the treacherous ones. Not surprisingly, the human / cat relationship has been full of inconsistencies and contradictions. Felines represent most uncanny abilities, self-contained aloofness, and superior strength, making them a perfect symbol of unreliability. At the same time, people admire cats for their cleanliness, independence, and devoted motherhood. In *Cult of the Cat*, Patricia Dale-Green proposes a division into "The White Cat" and "The Black Cat" archetypes, referring to the "light and dark aspects of the cat's reputation rather than its natural colouring" (Dale-Green 1962, XVI). The author classifies attitudes towards cats based on the positive or negative powers aligned to the felines, "The White Cat" being associated with goddess Bastet, whereas "The Black Cat" holds occult, demonic, and deadly connotations. The two sides of felines, seen as opposites nowadays, were considered complementary in Ancient Egypt. The Egyptian goddess Bastet ruled the heart and protected the household. Sekhmet, her sister, was a symbol of feline strength and cunning. Hathor, another Egyptian deity in the *Myth of the Eye,* is described as the one who "rages like Sekhmet and is friendly like Bastet." (qtd Malek 2007, 144). Isis, a mistress of magic, the goddess of the night and one of Ra's daughters, a goddess of fertility, motherhood and femininity, was naturally connected to cats (Malek 2007, 144). As a result, cats became associated with both solar (Ra) and lunar (Isis) deities, and the domestic cat served as a vessel carrying connotations that supplemented, rather than contradicted, each other.

Fuelled with ascribed bipolar superpowers, the cat is a perfect example of how symbolism ascribed to one species may diverge into powerful contradictory meanings. The difficulty in domesticating felines, who "carrying the immense symbolic responsibility with which our culture has always charged the feline race" (Derrida 2008, 378), has amounted to various attempts of categorising and entrapping them in the fictional and non-fictional worlds equally. The cat denotes the commonplace as often as she does the mystic realm. Felines can be a farmer's and a monk's friends, just as a philosopher's and a witch's apprentices, without causing unnatural incongruity; the discrepancy is intense and conflicting. In some literary texts, felines appear as an accessory, a necessity of the hearth, an inseparable element of domesticity; in others, they take an active part in the story, transgress

[1] Destruction meaning either eradicating or banishing from the society.

human, authentic, and imaginary boundaries, have their own life and biography, in all cases never entirely losing their association with spirituality and superpower. Hence, the status of a feline as a symbol is ambiguous and complex to define; one cat can be, at the same time, beautiful and demonic, a defender of the hearth and a devil's accomplice.

2. THE CAT'S WORTH

Cats have never had widespread economic or status-affirming significance or provided well-established services to humans; hence, they rarely have had any social value. Unlike other domesticated animals, people usually left them to their own devices. Consequently, as late as the fourth century CE, a term referring to the species *catus* first appeared (Palladius 1807, 162). The typical Greek name for a cat was *ailouros*, meaning "the one that twitches its tail" (Engels 1999, 57). The lack of one specific and established species name has not discouraged scholars from studying cats and making "mostly accurate observations;" however, no ancient records of inquiries devoted solely to cats survived (Engels 1999, 73). The available resources demonstrate that domestic cats must have been a common sight and living amongst humans; moreover, the observations provide proof of an active interest in felids, however mysterious and misunderstood their behaviour must have appeared.

When the illuminated manuscript of the Book of Kells was created, as the numbers of domestic cats were limited, they were owned mainly by the elite. Such was their value in Ireland that legal material relating to cats, the *Catslechtae* ('cat-sections'), was created, outlining the fines attached to stealing, injuring or killing a person's cat. Unlike other sources, the laws refer to cats' names, including Méone ('little meow') and Cruibne ('little paws'). Apart from focusing on the compensation owed for the killing of a cat, the mediaeval legal material seems to be primarily concerned with sorting cats into different categories, i.e. cats for women, cats for children (playful things), pantry cats or barn cats (Murray 2007, 143-159). The price stated in the document for a successful purring mouse catcher is three cows. If it only purrs, however, it is worth half the price (Murray 2007, 146). The value ascribed to cats in Ireland does not seem exceptional, as "the status of the cat had never been higher than in early mediaeval Western Europe" (Engels 1999, 17). However, due to cats' lesser value than the horse and the hound, there is much less documentary evidence for the mediaeval feline. It seems that cats played a pragmatic role in human households. This role, however, was not unnoticed or underappreciated, which is probably why King Hywel Dda of Wales also clarified the value of a cat in his legal codes: "[a]t birth she is worth a penny, two pence after she has opened her eyes, and a goat if she has caught a mouse" (qtd Vocelle 2016, 82). If a cat was killed, Hywel ordered the owner to be compensated with enough grain to cover the dead animal from the tip of the tail to the head. The Laws of Hywel Dda state, among the other attributes of a good cat, that it should not be "caterwauling every new moon" (qtd Vocelle 2016, 82).

On the other hand, mousers were probably not fed much to keep them hungry for their work: cat bones from archaeological sites indicate that the typical mediaeval Scottish animal was smaller than the modern domestic feline, with altogether slimmer mid-shaft dimensions. This size difference may be due to the better nutrition of cats today (Smith 1998, 859-885). Similarly, Finbar McCormick found that mediaeval urban cats in Ireland were smaller than those from Early Christian period rural sites, perhaps indicating that town cats were left to fend for themselves regarding food and shelter (McCormick 1988, 24). Mediaeval cats' existence in the proximity of human settlements was hazardous, as indicated by cat bones showing evidence of fracture or other lesions caused by trauma; it was not uncommon for cats to be treated with the highest levels of cruelty (Smith 1998). The fact that cats breed freely and, when left to their own devices and not socialised with humans at an early age, tend to shy from people only added to the perception of the species as being fierce and untameable; their nocturnal habits, hunting and sexual behaviours facilitate attributing felines with superpowers. Only a real superhero can deal with such a powerful creature.

3. THE MIGHTY CAT

We have never fully domesticated cats; as John Bradshaw states, they remain semi-domestic, partly wild, and partly domesticated (Bradshaw 2013, 5). Thus, it is not surprising that, more often than not, it is the cat rather than any other animal that is considered a beastly and unpredictable but powerful creature. In the past, it was not uncommon for people to believe that parts of the felines' bodies carry magical powers. The Celts considered cats' tails very precious and potent, for they thought that if one were disrespectful enough to tread on a cat's tail, a serpent would come out and sting the perpetrator (Dale-Green 1962, 31). Cats' body parts were used to cure human ailments, with the eyes, tails, and head being the most powerful. To see into the future, the Druidic priests in Ireland performed a ritual known as *Imbas Forosnai*, consisting of chewing the raw flesh of a cat (Davies 1998, 110).

Simultaneously, the Celts believed cats to be mystic, 'druidic' beings, and Celtic heroes often had callous cats to contend with (Dale-Green 1962). It is not easy to fight a feline (a divine or a demon), even for a superhero. When Cúchulainn, the Hound of Ulster, a fierce semi-divine character, and two other heroes of Irish heroic legend and sagas of the Ulster Cycle were attacked in a cave by three magic cats, it was not without difficulty that they killed the felines. When one of the cats stretched its neck for food, Cúchulainn, encouraged by his comrades, attempted to slaughter the feline. The hero gave its head a blow with its sword, but "the sword skidded off the cat's neck and struck the stone floor, ringing a high, clear note like a golden bell" (Eickhoff 2001, 321). However, the human heroes had to win against the magical creatures to retain their status. As the stories at the time circulated fairly quickly, Cúchulainn features similar stories in Scottish and Manx (Isle of Man) folklore, which share identical roots (Eason 2008).

The Irish legend *Voyage of Maelduin* tells the story of a cat possessing many treasures, with a moral showing what happens if treasures are stolen instead of received as a gift. A young man called Maeldune, the adopted son of an Irish queen, set out in a boat one day with his three foster brothers to avenge the death of his father. They arrive on an island with a stronghold with white walls surrounded by white houses, all of which were open and deserted. In the best home, the young man finds a small cat. The house was filled with treasure; in the middle of the house, they found an ox roasting on fire. The young man asked the cat whether it was all for them, and the cat "looked at him for a minute." Reassured, the man ate, drank and slept. Unfortunately, the next day, one of the brothers could not resist and took one of the necklaces. At the stronghold, the cat leapt through the thief "like a fiery arrow, leaped through the thief like a fiery arrow, and burned him to ashes" (Jacobs 1919, 104).

It is not uncommon for cats to be associated with snakes (serpents); the glowing eyes with vertical slits, the hiss and the apparent aloofness all amount to the fear they are still able to instil in humans. A legend concerning St Brendan tells a story of the time when the Celtic saint arrived at the Island of Promise and met an old man who warned him: "[o] holy man of God, make haste to flee from this island. For there is a sea cat here, of old time, inveterate in wiles, that hath grown huge through eating excessively of fish" (qtd Bryant 1997, 250). The sea cat is "as big as a young ox or a 3-year-old horse, which has thrived on the fish of the sea and of this island [...] each of its two eyes was as big as a cauldron, [with] tusks like a boar, sharp-pointed bristles, the maw of a leopard, the strength of a lion, and the rage of a mad dog" (Bryant 1997, 250). Unlike in the previous legend, here, a Christian motif is added: the saint conquers the sea feline with the help of God. In many folk tales, demons are described as ferocious, mighty black cats with blazing eyes. Cats' eyes are more intense than humans' because they enable non-human animals to see into the higher and lower realms. In classical Greek mythology, for example, the lynx is said to have the ability to see through stone walls (Gettings 1989, 23). According to some mythologists, the eye of the cat is supposed to be one of the eyes of the Egyptian god Horus, looking down from the skies. The magical books of the late Middle Ages claim that cats not only can see in the dark, but they also can see ghosts and demons invisible to man (Gettings 1989, 26). Not surprisingly, Celts believed cats were on intimate terms with all inhabitants of the invisible world and that cats' eyes were the windows of the fairy king's palace. Through them, human beings could see in, and fairies could see out, and they illuminated the fairies' abode with a strange light (Dale-Green 1962, 132).

Felines prove to be powerful supernatural creatures in a variety of texts. In early Welsh poems known as the "Welsh Triad," *Cath Palug*, 'the clawing cat' (also interpreted as a personal name "Palug's Cat"), the feline is to be offspring of the sow Henwen[2] and born "at Llanfair in Arfon under the Black Rock... and the Powerful

[2] According to the late Welsh Triad, Cath Palug was born to the enchanted pig Hen Wen, sometimes the offspring of Ceridwen, a white witch/goddess, mother of the 6th century famous Welsh bard Taliesin.

Swineherd threw it from the Rock into the sea" (Bromwich 1964, 52). Having been chased to the sea's edge, Henwen dropped a kitten, who swam to the isle of Anglesey and was adopted by the sons of Palug. The cat grew to an enormous size and devoured at least 180 warriors. In France, the author of the *Vulgate Merlin* recalls the tale of Chapalu, the cat, when King Arthur's battle with a hellish feline on the Hill of the Cat, near Lake Bourget in the French Alps, is discussed. The struggle remains commemorated in the local names of places: Col du Chat (cat's neck), Dent du Chat (cat's tooth) and Mont du Chat (cat's mountain), to name but a few. In one variety of the French Chapalu tale, King Arthur fought the cat in a swamp and was said to have been slain by the creature, who then conquered England and became king. What counted in earlier thought was the multitude of transitory implications, only dimly noticeable and therefore interchangeable. Thus, similar stories live in various versions and regions. A legend of "King Arthur's Fight with the Great Cat" from the fifteenth-century prose romance *Merlin, or The Early Life of King Arthur,* focuses on a creature that "repaireth a devil that destroyeth the country. It is a cat so great and ugly that it is horrible to look on" (Wilde 1919, 167). The "black as coal" cat was caught as a kitten by a fisherman and drawn from the lake; later, the nourished cat slays the man and his family, flees to a high mountain, lives in a cave and destroys all living creatures. Upon hearing the story, the King rides to the desolate Lac de Lausanne with Sir Gawain and Merlin, and after a lengthy fight, King Arthur wins.

Similarly, the cat's killing was of utmost importance in other stories. Ireland had darker cats before the monks sought refuge in that land (and wrote the magnificent poem "Pangur Ban"), as can be witnessed in accounts of *The Cat of Finn*. Old tales tell of Iruscan, "The King of Cats", who was as big as an ox and lived in a cave at Knowth in Meath (Jacobs 1894, 293-295). Blessed with acute hearing, the cat overhears the great bard, Senchan Torpeist, who satirises both mice and cats. Infuriated, Iruscan decides to devour the bard. However, St. Ciaran saves the poet by hurling a red-hot bar at the cat, killing it. Irish folklore often tells a slightly altered version of the tale.

Driven by misunderstanding and superstition, a countryman decides to kill an ordinary cat who happens to appear on his way. Before the feline dies, it urges the man to tell his wife he killed the King of Cats. The man does as he is told. Upon hearing the story, the resident house cat lying idly by the fire leaps up and tears out the man's throat. The tale has been retold and changed numerous times, varying from region to region. In a story in the south of Lancashire, a man sitting quietly by his fire is surprised to see a cat coming down the chimney saying, "[t]ell Dildrum, Doldrum's dead!". Upon hearing the story, the man's wife's cat concludes: "Is Doldrum dead? Then I am the King of the Cats!". He leaps from his mistress's arms and disappears up the chimney. In Northumberland, a similar narrative has been recorded, set in the Newcastle area, the cat belonging to Johnny Reed; in Durham, the same thing happened to John Bonner. There is also a Shropshire tale featuring the death of "old Peter," news of which causes a family cat to disappear up the chimney, shrieking "By Jove! Old Peter's dead! And I am King of the cats!" (Burne 1884, 23). The "King of the Cats" story was skilfully interwoven in *Beware the Cat*, the first original prose fiction (Ringler 1995, ix) written in 1553 by William

Baldwin. In the narrative, a man is confronted by a cat who orders him: "Commend me unto Titton Tatton and to Puss the Catton, and tell her that Grimalkin is dead" (Baldwin 1553, 11). The man returns home and shares the cat's words with his wife, upon which his cat "hearkened unto the tale," sadly looks upon the human and says, "And is Grimalkin dead? Then farewell dame" (Baldwin 1553, 11). So many versions of the same story are characteristic of migratory traditions, and it attests to the fact that the tale has survived for more than four hundred years, altered slightly from region to region. However popular the stories must have been, they do not seem to have a clear point or conclusion, apart from the fact that cats have a king and are truly supernatural beings who can understand human language and disappear when in need.

According to the *Old English Dictionary* (*OED*), a grimalkin is an old or evil-looking she-cat; it stems from 'grey' and 'malkin', an obsolete term for a cat, derived from the hypocoristic form of the female name Maud (*OED*), who, as with virtually all cats, became associated with the devil and witchcraft in the Early Modern period. In Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, the witches summon the devil with the words "I, come Graymalkin" (Shakespeare, 1.1.10), which is clear evidence that the cat's place in witchcraft has been long-established. Grimalkin is a mighty cat. Henry Fielding, in *Tom Jones* (1749), recounts a story of Grimalkin, "a feline inferior in strength, [...] equal in fierceness to the noble tiger himself" (Fielding 1749 [1904], 31) with whom the owner falls passionately in love. The man manages to persuade Venus into changing "Grimalkin into a fine woman;" however, the woman retains "her pristine nature," and when one evening she spots a mouse, she immediately leaps up after it (Fielding 1904, 298). The author explains the story: "If we shut Nature out at the door, she will come in at the window; and that puss, though a madam, will be a mouser still" (Fielding 1904, 298). One of Aesop's fables, *Venus and the Cat,* might have inspired the story, further indicating the depth and influence of cats on folklore and later narratives. In *The House of Seven Gables,* Nathaniel Hawthorne mentions that "…a strange grimalkin…was seen by Hepizibah while looking into Clifford's back-yard garden." According to the narrator, a grimalkin is a cat that seems "…to have more than ordinary mischief in his thoughts…" and should be avoided at all costs as " [t]his grimalkin has a very ugly look. Is it a cat watching for a mouse, or the devil for a human soul?" (Hawthorne 1851, 7)

In a Scottish legend, a Grimalkin (or Cat Sith) is a fairy cat from the Highlands (Matthews & Matthews 2005, 91). It is depicted as having the size of a dog and tends to present itself with its back arched and its bristles raised. There are also stories of Elfin Cats, described as large black beasts with arched backs and white spots over their chests (a spitting image of Iruscan). These disturbing cats are also said to have lived in the Scottish Highlands. The Scottish wildcat or Kellas cats may have inspired the Cat Sìth (Cat Sidhe), a unique hybrid of Scottish wildcats and domestic cats found exclusively in Scotland. In the Highlands, it was highly unlucky if a cat passed over a corpse, for it might be a Cat Sith coming to steal the soul before the Gods claimed it. The soul lingered close to the body after death, so it had to be watched day and night until the burial. These watches were called "Late Wake." The Cat Sith was such a powerful creature that people performed

a series of activities to keep him away: games of leaping and wrestling (meant to keep the cat distracted since they loved to watch such events), and putting catnip all over the house (in every room but where the body rested) to lure them away. Riddles were asked but never answered to stop Cait Sidhe from puzzling the replies; music was to make the cat dance. They put out all the fires in the room where the body was lying, as the warmth could attract any cat, and a Cat Sith might slip in among them. On S*amhain* (All Hallow's Eve), "a saucer of milk was set out on the steps for them, for they would pass blessings on those houses for the gifts" (MacGillivray 2012). Such firm belief was in the cat's supernatural powers that people practised the calling of the dead, or *Taghairm*, requiring the practitioners to burn the cats' bodies over four days and nights. The feared cat was to grant wishes to those participating in the ceremony (Moffet 2018). Simultaneously, a belief in the Cat Sith being a witch capable of voluntarily transforming into a cat and back up to nine times was present. If the witch chose to return to their cat form for the ninth time, she would remain a cat for the rest of her life. Consequently, all cats seemed to be witches; it might be how the idea of a cat having nine lives originated (MacGillivray 2012). The association between cats and witches has deep historical roots. Cats, particularly black ones, were often viewed as supernatural entities or "familiars" —animal companions believed to assist witches in performing magic. This link was reinforced by cultural and religious narratives that demonized both women accused of witchcraft and the animals associated with them. Cats' elusive behaviours, nocturnal habits, and perceived independence made them fitting symbols for the mysterious and often feared world of sorcery. The cat's symbolic role as a witch's familiar was further cemented during the witch hunts and trials, where accusations frequently extended to the alleged involvement of animals in magical practices. Folkloric tales portrayed cats as shape-shifters or beings imbued with dark powers, capable of acting as intermediaries between witches and demonic forces. These narratives reflected broader anxieties about social control, gender, and religious orthodoxy.

Although the image of the cat has transformed in more contemporary contexts, with felines often reclaiming their role as a positive symbol of independence, intuition, and mystery, they still are readily used as liminal creatures existing on the borders of worlds in horror and sci-fi narratives. Nonetheless, the historical association between cats and witches continues to influence literature, film, and cultural imagination, serving as a potent metaphor for marginalized identities and esoteric knowledge.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Cats have occupied the minds of the greatest minds from the early days. Worshipped in Ancient Egypt, tormented in later centuries and brought back to conquer the real and virtual worlds, cats' history has been far from joyful. With such an enormous number of texts, with cats being bridges between the worlds, witches' familiars, or human saviours, it seems logical that they must have originated

from earlier oral or written stories. Given the divine element as early as Ancient Egypt (or even before), later misunderstood and transformed into an evil being, felines still enchant humans with the acute abilities a human being cannot enter or possess. It is that duality of cats that enables them to serve as a convenient means of connecting the most forceful powers, with Celtic beliefs being no exception. Cats must have been powerful mystique creatures; otherwise, they would not have been included in various cultural and religious activities. In most available texts, whether of Celtic origin or not, cats are the notorious evil creatures aiming to conquer humans. Usually, "black as coal" has a devilish origin and ferocious character, and they populate many legends, myths, folklore beliefs, and other stories. Notably, their dominance has not ceased. Several earlier beliefs are incorporated into today's world of literature, cinematography and current misconceptions about cats. It is a most enjoyable adventure to be able to trace them back to their origins, or at least to the roots available for us to find nowadays. Considering the early depictions of cats, it's no surprise that the most dangerous, complex, and unpredictable aspects of human life have often been associated with cats in various art forms, including paintings, literature, film, theatre, music, and video games. Thankfully, there appears to be a growing trend towards including non-humans in society rather than excluding them, suggesting hope for a more culturally sensitive approach towards non-human creatures.

The tumultuous history of felines and humans has profoundly impacted literature. The once-feared 'cattiness' has gradually become a more endearing and sought-after cuteness. Cats' behaviours have adapted to fit into human life, while human attitudes toward them have also evolved. This shift is reflected in the emergence of new literary genres focused on cats (such as pet memoirs), changes in how cats are portrayed (from sly, mysterious creatures to human heroes), and the increasing number of publications about them. The needs and rights of cats are now recognised, with felines seen as partners to humans, even though their traditional role as pest controllers is no longer necessary. They have become a global cultural phenomenon, equally influencing humans' real and fictional worlds. The rich symbolism ascribed to felines still influences their treatment in fictional and non-fictional worlds, enabling and fueling 'cat-literature' to flourish and mesmerise readers with an instant hint of the unknown and the unknowable.

Reviews sent to the authors: 06/02/2025
Revised paper accepted for publication: 24/02/2025

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