Introduction: 'Baldewins Straunge Faschions'

Frances Babbage and Rachel Stenner

Abstract This introduction gives a brief overview of William Baldwin's life and work, locating him in the context of mid-Tudor London and particularly describing the effects of religious upheaval on the publishing world in which he was immersed. We situate his novel, *Beware the Cat* (c. 1552), in the history of prose fiction in English before describing the theatrical adaptation of the text that generated the research behind this special edition. Finally, we consider the practice-based methodology that informs the project as a whole, before summarising the contributions that follow.

Keywords William Baldwin; *Beware the Cat*; Tudor; novel; prose fiction; adaptation; practice-based research.

The earliest surviving printed critique of *Beware the Cat* (c. 1552) describes William Baldwin's (1526/7-1563) efforts as 'straunge fascions', before more pointedly calling the novel a 'bagagical boke', and then resorting to outright scaotology: 'a t.o.r.d.'.[1] Cloaking their invective in anonymity, the poet behind this 1561 broadside, 'A Short Answer to the Book Called: *Beware the Cat*', is writing in defence of one 'Stremer'. This figure, the broadside demurs, was absolutely not the source of the 'false fabels' (94) that *Beware the Cat* contains, despite the fact that his loquacious, pedantic namesake, Gregory Streamer - a man not above eating 'a cat's turd' – is *Beware the Cat*'s narrator.[2] The author's riposte to Baldwin is comical in its indignation: 'a warm a.r.s. you may kys. / Or els a payre of stockes' (94). But it was also prophetic in its injunction to Baldwin to 'put up' his 'pipes' (94). In two years Baldwin would be dead, without publishing any further new works. Notwithstanding this inauspicious critical

start, readers from the early modern period to the present day have found much to enjoy in Baldwin's novel and many reasons to appreciate his other writings. This special edition, *Animality, Performance, and Voice: William Baldwin's 'Beware the Cat'*, focuses on Baldwin's landmark text, and its theatrical adaptation in 2018 by artists and academics. Here we situate *Beware the Cat* within Baldwin's works and position it in the history of the novel, before going on to explore the creative process informing the theatrical adaptation and production.

Approaching Baldwin

With its interest in animal sentience, scientific knowledge, the verifiability of report, and religious difference, *Beware the Cat* speaks eloquently to twenty-first-century audiences. Had the religious persuasions of mid-Tudor England, however, not altered dramatically with the death of Mary I and the ascension of her sister Elizabeth I, not only *Beware the Cat* but another of Baldwin's most successful works might have remained hidden away. Like *A Mirror For Magistrates* (1559), the collection of gory historical poetry that he edited and partially wrote, *Beware the Cat* was unsafe to publish when it was first composed. The dating of Baldwin's scatological anti-Catholic satire is imperfect, though he fictionalises it originating from the 1552 Christmas revels. The first record is an entry in the Stationers' Register for 1561, early in the reign of Elizabeth I, and this gap of several years has given rise to the theory that Baldwin censored his own publication during the turbulent spell between the death of the teenage King Edward VI, and the end of Mary I's reign.[3] Where the Edwardian Protectorate had significantly advanced the English Protestant Reformation, Mary I returned the realm to Catholicism – in notoriously bloody fashion. For a young intellectual like Baldwin, who had worked over several years for one of the leading anti-Catholic printers of the Protestant regime - Edward Whitchurch - this was a risky time. Whitchurch himself suffered from the regime change, being specifically excluded from the general pardon issued by Mary I and having to retreat into hiding.

At this point another printer, the conservative Catholic John Wayland, took over Whitchurch's presses and employees. Wayland's arrival certainly signalled a confessional change in Baldwin's intellectual and professional home but, creatively, Wayland provided him with an opportunity. Baldwin was commissioned to organise a continuation of a new edition of John Lydgate's *The Fall of Princes* (c. 1431-7) - the collection that would become *A Mirror For Magistrates*. Thus Baldwin seems to have successfully navigated the choppy waters of the early 1550s. His first attempt at his new project, however, *A Memorial of Such Princes as Since the Time of King Richard the Second Have Been Unfortunate in the Realm of England* (1554), was curbed by the external censorship of Stephen Gardiner (Mary I's lord chancellor) in response to its critical political content.[4] Reworked as *A Mirror for Magistrates*, the collection was finally licensed in 1559, following Mary I's death the year before. With its 1563 'Second Part', and its numerous reprints and continuations, the multi-author *Mirror* would go on to become the most significant collection of Tudor poetry, rivalled only by Tottel's Miscellany (the 1557 anthology that popularised English Petrarchism). The *Mirror* strongly influenced Shakespeare's history plays, for example, and Sir Philip Sidney praised it in *The Defence of Poesy* (1581) as 'meetly furnished of beautiful parts'.[5] Baldwin would not live to enjoy this success. Having spent some fourteen years amongst the London literati, in 1561 he became a chaplain. Though he moved quickly in this new realm, preaching at the prestigious site of St Paul's Cross in 1563, shortly thereafter he died of the plague at the age of 37.[6]

Despite his relatively short life, Baldwin produced an extraordinary body of work characteristic for its radical formal richness and invention. His abilities have provoked critical claims that he was the 'preeminent imaginative author of the English reformation', a literary voice thoroughly representative of the Edwardian reign and, indeed, of the entire Tudor period.[7] Though he still does not have the recognition he deserves, his output is sprinkled with landmark literary moments.[8] His earliest known publication is a commendatory sonnet entitled 'Whoso

Desireth Health', which prefaces a medical work by Christopher Langton, *A Very Brief Treatise, Orderly Declaring the Principle Parts of Physic* (1547).[9] Like many other Tudor humanists, with this poem Baldwin signals in print his intellectual community by urging readers to thank and praise the author of the *Treatise* for producing such an edifying book. 'Whoso Desireth Health' is, though, remarkable for being the earliest known printing of an English sonnet.[10] A couple of years later, Baldwin published a poetic paraphrase of the highly erotic biblical Song of Songs (also known as the Song of Solomon). *The Canticles or Ballads of Solomon, Phraselike Declared in English Metres* (1549) spins out the eight biblical chapters into seventy-two lyrics.[11] Embracing an impressive variety of metrical forms, this work is in part an allegory of the English Reformation, in part a meditation on the workings of love and desire. More importantly, though, the volume is the earliest extant single-authored printed book of English lyric poetry. Not only that, it prominently features a Black woman as the central speaker – something virtually unprecedented in English poetry at the time.

Between these poetic works, Baldwin produced the first edition of *A Treatise of Moral Philosophy Containing the Sayings of the Wise. Gathered and Englished by William Baldwin* (1547).[12] This is a compendium of moral philosophy that the Tudors devoured and that was one of the most frequently-printed English books in the sixteenth century: it ran to 24 editions by 1651, not escaping piracy by a rival printer.[13] The *Treatise* is comprised of biographies of ancient Greek and Roman philosophers with their notable sayings that Baldwin claims, in his subtitle, to have gathered from various sources and himself translated. Translation was a skill he would put to use again in the early 1550s, producing 'one of the most scandalous literary works of the early English Reformation', his *Wonderful News of the Death of Paul the Third, Last Bishop of Rome* (1552).[14] Originally written anonymously in Latin, *Wonderful News* is a sexually explicit translation of a fictional anti-papal satire, *Epistola de Morte Pauli Tertii* (1549), that shows in carnivalesque style the deceased Paul III descending to hell clad in 'an

whores attyre and garnishment' and 'placed vpon a great beast' (image 5).[15] Bristling topical allusion and salacious papal gossip interweave with the text's deliberate links to the Book of Revelation; it graphically figures, for example, Paul's 'most notable mischieues, as manslaughter, poysonynges, treasons, incest, and abhominable aduoutries [adulteries]' (image 5). With its 'weird fantasy' and 'manipulation of fictional discourse', this is a piece that Michael Pincombe sees as a pivot in Baldwin's writings from his early works of compilation and translation to his later experiments in prose fiction.[16]

The early 1550s were an exceptionally productive time for Baldwin. In 1552 he was involved, with the poet Thomas Churchyard, in the pamphlet controversy (or 'flyting') known as 'Davey Dikers Dream'. The declared cause of the flyting was a satirical poem by Churchyard which imagines a better future for the realm but in so doing gained him the disfavourable attentions of the privy council. When Thomas Camell castigated Churchyard in print for over-reaching by criticising his betters, Churchyard defended himself in print, sparking a debate that would spiral to thirteen poems and several prose interventions. That is the conceit of the work, at least: readers have noted that the debate, whilst it makes serious points about the propriety and exclusivity of print, was also an opportunity for the various participants to publicly 'flaunt' their learning.[17] The contribution thought to be by Baldwin appeared under the pseudonym 'Westerne Wyll'.[18] This poem features three illiterate sailors conversing with a printer who first reads aloud and then sells them the pamphlet collection of the Dream itself: 'a rolle of Rithimes, wher of the fyrst, the Dickers Dreame it hight'.[19] Characteristic of this literary controversy are a series of false identities, playful fictionality, obsessive metatextuality, all swirling around the central figure of the humble and plain-speaking man. Several of these interests return in *Beware the Cat*, just as the fantastical strain that Pincombe notes in *Wonderful News* returns in *The Funerals of King Edward the Sixth Wherein are Declared the Causers and Causes of his Death* (first printed 1560).[20] An elegy that Baldwin composed upon the death of Edward VI in 1553

(but like *Beware the Cat* and the *Mirror* did not publish at the time), *The Funerals* comprises three poems of social and ecological critique: its antagonist is an icy giant striding across the kingdom on a divine mission to punish the sins of the English populace.

Two further texts offer tantalising but less certain insight into Baldwin's interests and technique. *A Little Treatise Called the Image of Idleness Containing Certain Matters Moved Between Walter Wedlock and Bawdin Bachelor* (1555) was published anonymously but has been persuasively ascribed to Baldwin.[21] It is an epistolary prose fiction, in which 'Bawdin Bachelor' writes to Walter Wedlock describing his attempts to find a wife. As the title's proper nouns suggest, the work blends allegory with its personalising epistolary mode. Allegory is also central to one final text, a morality play called *Love and Live* of which only a fragmentary remnant survives, in the form of a letter. The letter contains a summary of Baldwin's 'comodie' and a list of dramatis personae whose names, strikingly, all start with the letter 'L'.[22] The list contains, for example, 'Layies Lechery a sumtuous hore', 'Laughing' and 'Lokyng her maydens' as well as 'Lothyng' and 'Lowting her men'.[23] The play's title, *Love and Live*, replicates Baldwin's personal motto which appears in several of his books including at the top of *Beware the Cat*'s dedication.[24]

Beware the Cat itself, by far the most well-known of Baldwin's single-author works, originates from his busy spell in the early 1550s. Like 'Whoso Desireth Health', the *Canticles*, and the *Image of Idleness* (which has been described as the first English epistolary novel), it is a text about which scholars have made some ambitious claims.[25] Beloved by Tudorists, the most famous remark about this text is that it is the 'first English novel', as stated in the subtitle to William A. Ringler and Michael Flachmann's 1988 edited version. In this way, Ringler and Flachmann backdate the emergence of the novel as a form some 150 years, overturning its canonical point of nativity with the eighteenth-century writings of Samuel Richardson and Henry Fielding. The key critical statement of the form's genetic footprint is Ian Watt's

argument that the novel conveys 'immediate imitation of individual experience set in its temporal and spatial environment', foregrounding psychological depth via the mode of formal realism.[26] Following Watt, the novel has been held to initiate a type of psychological interiority indicative of a shift in the self-conception of people and nations, which in turn, the critical narrative goes, is a marker of modernity. This account is less of an orthodoxy than it once was, with revisionary analyses by critics including Margaret Anne Doody revealing the continuities between formal realism and ancient Greek prose fictions, and other accounts pointing out the Eurocentricity of the idea of one cultural form being a defining factor of modernity.[27] Often eschewing the 'novel' label, early modern scholarship typically views the period's prose fiction as a genre that though it has its 'own unique characteristics', manifests continuities with the medieval prose romances that preceded it and the often historically referential Restoration versions that followed.[28] In terms of historical development, prose fiction not only interlaces with romance, such as in Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia* (composed from the 1570s), but with the carefully-cultivated market for printed books.[29] The stylistic pyrotechnics of Thomas Nashe, in works such as *The Unfortunate Traveller* (1594), and the metatextual swagger of George Gasgoigne's *The Adventures of Master F.J.* (1573) loom large in discussions of this context.

Surveying in detail the history of English prose narratives to 1558, Ringler and Flachmann conclude that 'no original work of English fiction' better deserves the crown of 'first English novel' than *Beware the Cat*.[30] They bring four criteria to their argument: Baldwin's presentation of a 'long fictional narrative in prose'; the fact that the work is written in English; its 'consistent character portrayal'; and the 'sequence of events that form a coherent plot'.[31] Central to Baldwin's text are the characters of Streamer, the verbose, pompous priest and scholar, and the cat Mouse-slayer, a lively, adventurous, female informer on human wrongdoings. Mouse-slayer's story nests alongside several other inset narratives within an account by Streamer of his successful scientific experiments. By mixing natural philosophy and

alchemy he creates sense-altering substances that give him access to the language of cats, taking him fully into their world before he eventually returns to the reality of his central London residence. Ringler and Flachmann also rightly emphasise the way in which Baldwin 'made his fiction a vehicle for important ideas', most pertinently for Baldwin's readers (to date) his critique of hearsay and Catholicism, and his engagement of humanist textual practices as a prompt for the reader's own analytical processes.[32]

Where more recent analyses of the novel might diverge from Ringler and Flachmann is in their treatment of Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* (1518) as a precursor for Baldwin. Ringler and Flachmann, and Baldwin's earlier editor William P. Holden, minimise this influence.[33] Peter Boxall, however, in a major recent history of the novel, posits *Utopia* itself as the crucible of a 'new relation […] between the language of reality and the self-declared language of fiction'.[34] He continues, 'as the early novel develops […] from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, […] it is built on that collapsing ground that More stakes out between words and things, between the imagination and its material extensions. It demonstrates that fiction is woven into truth'.[35] As Boxall argues, Baldwin is one of several early modern authors who take this 'unstable alloy' and fashion it in rewarding acts of world-making that dance on the line between fact and fiction.[36] Baldwin, for instance, locates his fantastical tale of speaking cats at the printing house of John Day, pins its later narration to the court revels and the company of George Ferrers (a *Mirror* author, and Master of the Revels in 1551-53), and fictionalises himself as 'G.B.', the editor of the text. And this is not to mention the deeper truths about human cruelty and corruption that the text discloses.

Beware the Cat: a Project in Practice-based Research

In 2018, a small group of academics and artists came together to adapt *Beware the Cat*, a novel never (to our knowledge) previously presented on the stage. The project was initiated by Rachel

Stenner and Frances Babbage, specialists in Tudor literature and contemporary theatre respectively, in collaboration with Terry O'Connor, freelance dramaturg and core member of Sheffield-based theatre company Forced Entertainment; the creative team also included the distinctive contribution of the artist Penny McCarthy. Baldwin's dense and seemingly rambling work of sixteenth-century English prose, thick with authorial interjections, is perhaps an unlikely starting point for adaptation. Admittedly, the theatre has taken on equally improbable sources in recent years: Robert Burton's encyclopaedic treatise *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) was adapted by the British group Stan's Cafe in 2013; and beyond the early modern period, texts as diverse as Aristotle's *Poetics* (c. 335 BCE) and Karl Marx's *Das Kapital* (from 1867) have found new expressive form on the stage.[37] Notwithstanding the particular difficulties *Beware the Cat* presented, the project spoke strongly to all the collaborators' interests. Stenner as period expert was motivated in part by the conviction that Baldwin deserved to be better known and that theatre could be a means of achieving this. Beyond this she recognised, as we all did, that the novel's emphasis on storytelling, as well as the comic, grotesque, and fantastical scenes that it narrates, made it potentially suited for translation into a medium that is live, sociable, and immediate.

At the same time, we acknowledged that while *Beware the Cat* contains entertaining and playful content, the idiosyncratic style and unfamiliar writerly conventions of the era make these qualities difficult to access for those unfamiliar with early modern prose. This recognition suggested two divergent routes for adaptation: the first, ruthlessly to excise all that was not conventionally 'dramatic' in the original; the second, to retain literary structure and style, including Baldwin's singular authorial quirks, and let those qualities proactively colour the performance. We chose the latter course, on the principle that the content of *Beware the Cat* was ultimately inseparable from its form: that this account of a marvellous feline world and the alchemical process that reveals it is framed by fussy, wordy, scholarly one-upmanship is

integral to Baldwin's satire. In fact, the stylistic components of the original were, perversely, part of its appeal for adaptation; it was not simply that such features characterise the text. As Babbage has discussed elsewhere on the adaptation of literary works for performance, where the source text seems to resist stage translation, this can in itself be the spur for creative innovation: for if the chosen material does not fit the shape of a conventional play, then the theatre must expand in unconventional directions in order to accommodate it.[38] From this perspective, the expressive style that makes Baldwin's novel distinctive - even to the point where that style threatens to impede its raucous comedy - became an opportunity: what order of theatricality might be found to embrace digressive narration, pedantry, and ironic meta-commentary whilst making those qualities engaging?[39]

O'Connor, co-author of the script and director of the production, brought to the project extensive experience of creating theatre that defies established conventions. Forced Entertainment, with whom she has worked continuously since their formation in 1984, are widely recognised for collaboratively created performances that blur the boundaries between disciplines and call into question the condition and expectations of theatre-going. This company's productions can be minimalist and calculatedly slow-paced, or seemingly chaotic; dialogue is frequently list-like, borrowed, poetic or fragmented, with texts sometimes displayed on signs instead of spoken; the performers play versions of themselves, or assume personae which seem partial and disposable; scenery, if any, is likewise limited and makeshift; and their many durational shows, lasting six, twelve, or even twenty-four hours, appear designed to test the stamina of actors and audiences.[40] Yet, while this approach rejects orthodox dramatic constructs of character, plot, dialogue, scene, and action, Forced Entertainment remain notably preoccupied with what is arguably a traditional form of storytelling. An insistence on telling instead of showing, on inviting audiences to join in conjuring a fictional world, runs through many of their shows. This quality is epitomised in *And On the Thousandth Night* (2000), which

has eight performers improvise an endlessly mutating tale, in collaboration and sometimes in competition with one another; here, narrative lines are introduced but not resolved, proliferating in a manner that, as director Tim Etchells observes, is characteristic of the company: 'never one story in our theatre; always two, three, four or many'.[41]

Certainly, it is a long way from the avant-garde performance O'Connor is known for to *Beware the Cat*, our sixteenth-century text for adaptation. However, these two worlds came together in an unexpectedly harmonious partnership. Principally, Baldwin's structure of nested stories – a tale about Master Streamer, which reveals tales Streamer himself heard, and tales within those tales – has an implicit parallel in Forced Entertainment's games of narrative deferral: in both contexts, the foregrounding of narration acknowledges and fosters the listener's curiosity, celebrating the potency of storytelling without necessarily resolving each, or any, individual thread. Additionally, *Beware the Cat*'s layered and sometimes internally competing narratives lent themselves well to a theatrical aesthetic that eschews self-contained, linear dramatization in favour of an (at times discordant) montage of text and image. For example, we discovered that the marginal observations from Baldwin's fictional editor, G.B., that we were determined to include – authoritative, satiric, and absurd by turns – proved jarring when spoken, becoming interruptions that exerted an unhelpfully decelerating effect on the whole. However, when this dry meta-commentary was incorporated visually – in the eventual production, transcribed on placards held aloft for spectators in a kind of subversive surtitling – it became a playful counterpoint to, rather than distraction from, the flow of storytelling.

As adapters we had agreed, then, that Baldwin's story, or stories, would be told rather than enacted; we also decided that the text would be read, not memorised and recited. These dual choices were in part dramaturgically motivated. We did not want actors to 'be' cats, preferring to foreground throughout that the novel's extraordinary feline world is only shown as it is perceived through the wondering gaze of humans; further, it felt important to keep

comedy harnessed to story content, rather than risk the playing style itself becoming absurd. But the decision to read aloud, making the paper text physically prominent in the performance, also sought to underline the historical context of literary production; this was a culture in which Baldwin himself was immersed not just as writer but through his role as printer's assistant. *Beware the Cat* was published in an era where printed works were becoming far more available than hitherto. The technique of letterpress printing, introduced in Europe in the 1430s, and the invention of movable type, would prove, as Peter Kivy observes, significant 'landmarks in the development of a "reading public"', crucially increasing reading literacy.[42] In the long term, the press shaped the conception of reading as a silent, private practice by enabling the mass production of books that were relatively inexpensive, supporting the gradual but widespread advance of societal literacy. The nature of that literacy is, though, highly textured. Where the Orality-literacy School influentially described a transition from orality to text-based literacy, with what Walter Ong terms a 'heavy oral residue' marking literature's linguistic and narrative structures, recent approaches from the History of Reading find that the printed page actively aligns 'eye, tongue, and ear, allowing oral literacy to flourish'.[43] *Beware the Cat*, built around acts of storytelling, comes across as a narrative designed to be told as much as read, a 'talking book' as Jennifer Richards describes it.[44] Not just its nested tales, but its digressions and sententious sayings, phonetic spelling and punctuation (recently elucidated by Richards) all point towards literature's origins as an 'oral and auditory art'.[45] By making reading aloud the structural foundation of the performance, the adaptation aimed to exploit the frictions between telling and reading, and between conversational language and self-conscious writerly style.

In the production, the visibility of scripts and activity of reading combine to hold Baldwin's work at a distance, even while the performers' animated delivery works to bring its content to life. This is a delicate balancing act, with the paper page as mediator between unlike perspectives and modes of expression. Moreover, the centrality of reading aloud simultaneously

authorises the textual content and undermines it: the four people seated behind the table look like – and in fact, are – scholars, presenting their research findings; yet they equally have the air of – and in fact, are – awkward actors who do not quite 'own' their material, striving to negotiate the gap between page and performance. To an extent, the reader-performers appear at a disadvantage: Baldwin's language makes up almost all the text of the adaptation, giving them the formidable challenge of ventriloquizing his words. On one level, this subservience to the source encapsulates the question the performance poses: how readily, as speakers or as listeners, can we submit to and access this archaic, even alien voice? The same question was inbuilt in the adaptation process, not least given the challenge for some of us of grappling with Tudor prose. For those who came to the source text in blithe ignorance of the period language, it was necessary to mimic Streamer's own leap of faith: where he believes that feline sounds once deciphered will be revealed as rational communication, we trusted that - with sufficiently patient listening - Baldwin's words and wit would, in the end, lucidly translate.

While we wanted Baldwin to 'speak' in his own voice as far as possible, that voice necessarily came to negotiate and jostle with our own. His words comprised the text but we, his adapters, selected, cut, and shaped them. Moreover, in the live moment of stage presentation, the reader-performers are physically *there*, whereas the author is absent: seen in that light, Baldwin becomes wholly reliant on his contemporary interpreters rather than the other way around. The action of reading aloud allows endless possibilities to explore this tussle of voices: the reader can all but disappear into the text, letting the evocation of the fictional world take over; conversely, they can pull back from the words, for example through a 'cooler' delivery, sidelong glance or raised eyebrow that inserts an unmistakable gap between the reader and the pages in front of them. It should also be remembered that in this performance there are four people seated behind the table: while certain lines are delivered in unison – chiefly, for phrases that extend key proposals about the nature of the animal world - only one of them speaks at a

time. Consequently, the audience are not the only listeners, nor are the performers always speakers; those at the table and *not* reading are equally part of the spectacle. In the production, no deliberate move was made to draw attention to the onstage listeners, nor to 'upstage' the speaker in the moment; nonetheless, as with any panel-like presentation, the exchanged looks, smiles, or sceptical frowns of others contribute another subtle commentary.

Beware the Cat onstage was thus a densely wordy affair, but through the creative process it also became strikingly pictorial. This visual dimension was not rooted in dramatic enactment, nor was it limited to the work of the performers and play of looks between them: instead, the adaptation wove in a different kind of illustrative thread. Baldwin's novel is vividly imagistic. The reader is invited to imagine, among much else, cats that eat cows (and people), ride horses, and grotesquely and graphically punish the misdeeds of humans. This quality was animated in the production through the contribution of Penny McCarthy, who created a quantity of original drawings that were projected continuously on screen. McCarthy's practice recurrently explores ideas of archive and the visual potential of manuscripts and literary works: she uses drawing as a form of close reading that both teases out the embedded meanings in a text and constitutes its own imaginative commentary. *Beware the Cat* was as interesting to McCarthy for the visual and paratextual elements of the material text – the decorative borders, woodcuts, and marginalia – as for the images it conjures fictionally. But ultimately, the material and the fantastical combine in her contribution, crystallised in a series of rapidly produced, black-and-white drawings which reflect and at times cheerfully deviate from Baldwin's novel. McCarthy's characteristic drawing style, displayed in her contribution to this special issue, *Catworld*, takes inspiration from techniques and sources pertinent to the period but is less concerned with 'authenticity' than vitality. For example, she has cited *Aesop's Fables*, in William Caxton's fifteenth-century edition with woodcut illustrations, as influential in its understated yet always playful depiction of an animal-led world. Responding to the material

text, the cut-down script, and the process of rehearsal, McCarthy offered drawing after drawing: at first, these were exclusively of cats, in all moods, clustered, paired or single; but later sketches captured other animals too, as well as forests, night skies, weather, streets, churches, houses, windows, rooftops, chambers. While these images sometimes address a specific moment in the text – for instance, illustrating the cat whose paws have been cruelly stuck with hardened 'pitch' (47) into nutshell shoes – the drawings as a body took on a freewheeling life of their own, functioning on stage as a visual narrative that unfolds in parallel with the spoken words. In the production, the performers take turns, over the three parts of 'Master Streamer's Oration', to place drawings on the glass plate of the overhead projector: in this way, at any moment three of the players will typically deliver the majority of spoken text while the fourth oversees this additional, pictorial story.

McCarthy's art practice operates as a mode of experiment and discovery: each seemingly swift, impressionistic sketch is in fact the product of laborious observation, drawing and re-drawing; and for *Beware the Cat*, the additional influences of textual engagement, rehearsals, and the back-and-forth of collective discussion. Such an approach epitomises the methodology of practice-based research at the heart of this adaptation project. In essence, practice-based research is a type of engagement which embeds practice centrally within the research process, typically in conjunction with other forms of knowledge production, and which generates findings that illuminate the practical method as well as the subject under investigation.[46] Practice-based research rests on the principle that 'doing' brings about new understanding which cannot be reached by other means. Thus, in this particular project, the practices of adaptive dramaturgy, drawing, and performance serve both as the means of conducting research into Baldwin's novel and its continuing expressive potential, and as the multi-layered language through which that research is shared. Several contributions within this

edition reflect on discoveries arising from *Beware the Cat*'s adaptation process and performance, but we will highlight a few of these here.

First, adaptation is inherently a kind of critical revisiting: the effort to comprehend, compress, and retell this unwieldy text exposes a simpler underlying shape at the same time as it prompts judgments about the pertinence or otherwise of surface detail. Second, speaking the author's words aloud, and as importantly listening to them, draws attention to oscillation in the narrative between a less formal spoken register and a more self-consciously literary one, thereby reinforcing the significant position of Baldwin's work in the historical context of textual production. Third, *who* speaks those words proves similarly enlightening. The same line when delivered by a male or female speaker, for instance, acquires a different meaning: exploring these shifts of voice as part of the creative and rehearsal process reveals gendered assumptions and power imbalances in the text, dynamics that the adaptation highlights within the original and seeks to subvert in the manner of the performance. Fourth, the wider project of situating *Beware the Cat* as stage production reveals the inherent theatricality within this text, which in turn serves to illuminate the interplay between forms. Fifth, the cats McCarthy drew are inspired by Baldwin's novel but were also usurpers within it, coming as they do from diverse illustrative traditions as well as her own intimate acquaintance; alongside this, the cats described or voiced by the performers gain a measure of solidity through their juxtaposition with these visual projections. In this way, image and word combine as a multiplicity of 'cats' whose heterogeneity suitably reflects the many and contested propositions about the feline realm the text itself extends. Finally, the collaboration between creative practice and academia that underpinned the project brought about a distinctive, hybrid performance style that marries and interrogates expectations on both sides. Four self-conscious storytellers explore the tension between the thrills of new knowledge and scholarly scepticism, the same hesitation that the text cultivates in the reader; and at the level of performance form, discordance between confidence

and doubt is echoed in the audience's willingness to 'believe' which goes hand-in-hand with a recognition, and enjoyment, of theatrical artifice.

While our account of the project has foregrounded an interaction of literary, dramaturgical, theatrical, and visual art perspectives, in practice the convocation of expertise has been still more varied than this suggests. The performers included scholars in linguistics (Robyn Orfitelli) and animal studies (Bob McKay), alongside those who work in literature and drama (Bill McDonnell, Adam Piette, Frances Babbage): certain questions that novel and adaptation pose, above all about communication and listening, and the ethics of human/non-human interaction, came under especial scrutiny through this assembly of sometimes dissonant voices. The pieces that follow in this edition continue to pursue this range of ideas.

First is McCarthy's *Catworld*, a contribution which seeks to marry period text with the contemporary form of the graphic novel spread. McCarthy experienced Baldwin's story as 'image-saturated' yet not always leading the reader fluidly from idea to idea, or place to place; to an extent, *Catworld*'s visuals intentionally mimic the 'jump cut' effect of the original, concerned less to trace Baldwin's narrative than to open up a series of 'worlds'. The graphic novel form strictly limits the number of frames the artist can work with, whilst granting freedom to utilise the 'wide lens' and 'close-up'. With these restrictions and opportunities in play, McCarthy zooms into and out of the animal realm, tracking the hubristic efforts of humans to fathom it.

The following two critical essays, Rebecca Bach's '*Beware the Cat* within a Short History of Human and Nonhuman Animal Voice', and Bruce Smith's 'Baldwin as Phonographer', both locate the text within its early modern soundscapes. Bach argues that prior to Descartes' now notorious beast-machine thesis, animals and birds of many kinds were considered to have voices that they used to communicate and to express emotions. Analysing a hubbub of voice-words, she demonstrates how early moderns conceptualised the chattering and

howling of non-human animals as communicative sounds. Smith, considering the whole range of Baldwin's writings, views him as an author acutely interested in 'phonography', the writing of sound. From the *Canticles*' biblical balladeering, to the spectral tones of the *Mirror for Magistrates*, Baldwin's texts create particular acoustic environments, within which readers are invited to sonically locate themselves.

Rachel Stenner's essay, 'Constructing the Human in the Works of William Baldwin: Coloniality and Animality', is the first of three pieces that turn specifically to the nature and significance of Baldwin's cats. Stenner reads *Beware the Cat* alongside the *Treatise of Moral Philosophy* as a test case for a broader point about the early modern period and its scholarship. She argues that in order to better understand the period's construction of the idea of the human, both animality and coloniality must be considered together. Where critics typically read for one or the other, few are yet to combine these ideas in their analysis of the period. Stenner demonstrates the ways in which Baldwin's text is acutely concerned with the cats' animality, and with constructing colonial Ireland as a subordinate space.

In 'Baldwin's Communicating Cats', Adam Piette focuses on the cats' ability to generate radical resistance to domestication and subservience. Considering them alongside the philosophical felines of Michel de Montaigne and Jacques Derrida, as well as later literary cats, Piette finds that Baldwin exploits their liminality: in Tudor England, cats were a domestic companion both wild and tamed, loved and feared. The essay that follows this, Zelda Hannay's 'Dramaturgical Boundary Crossings in William Baldwin's *Beware the Cat* as a Text for Theatrical Adaptation', explores the implications of transposing literary source into new stage context. Hannay unpicks the means by which animal, and likewise human, identities are constructed in source text and performance, seeing Baldwin's original as itself inherently theatrical owing to the forms of performance and spectatorship already embedded within it. Hannay's essay highlights the concept of boundary-crossing, revealing this as both the impulse

that drives Baldwin's human characters, and the formal challenge that adaptation must negotiate.

Finally, we include here the full text from the 2018 production of *Beware the Cat*, the adaptation considered by Hannay in her essay and whose inspiration gave rise to this edition. Adapted from Baldwin by Frances Babbage, Terry O'Connor, and Rachel Stenner, the script is introduced and edited by Babbage and O'Connor. The text is structured in two columns: the left-hand side of the page contains the production's spoken dialogue and song lyrics; on the right, a series of annotations attempt to expose the thinking behind the adaptation whilst simultaneously mimicking Baldwin's fondness for marginal commentary. The script as set out also seeks to reflect the distinctive theatricality of the event: the author's aphoristic pronouncements appear on the page, as in performance, as embedded signs; and the juxtaposition of word and visual image is continued through the reproduction in miniature by the inclusion of a limited number of McCarthy's drawings. Script and documentation together aim to construct a reading experience which, if not precisely analogous to that of the spectator, nevertheless acknowledges the multidimensionality of *Beware the Cat* as a text, and in performance.

[1] Anon., 'A Short Answer to the Book Called: *Beware the Cat*', in William Baldwin, *'Beware the Cat' and 'The Funerals of King Edward the Sixth'*, ed. William P. Holden (India: Pranava Books, 1963), 94-5 (94). All further references are to this edition.

[2] William A. Ringler, Jr., and Michael Flachmann eds, *Beware the Cat: the First English Novel* (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1988), 30. All further references are to this edition. On

Streamer's historical counterpart, see Marie Hause, 'Identifying John Young and Gregory Streamer in William Baldwin's *Beware the Cat*', *Notes and Queries* 68.4 (2021), 393-96.

[3] Trudy Ko, 'Backdating the First Edition of William Baldwin's *Beware The Cat* Nine Years', *Notes and Queries* 56.1 (2009), 33–34; Ringler and Flachmann, eds, xvi-xx.

[4] William Baldwin, *'A Mirror for Magistrates': a Modernized and Annotated Edition*, ed. Scott Lucas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), xix.

[5] Sir Philip Sidney, *The Defence of Poesy* in *Sidney's 'The Defence of Poesy' and Selected Renaissance Literary Criticism*, ed. Gavin Alexander (London: Penguin, 2004), 1-54 (44).

[6] The most recent account of his biography is Scott Lucas, 'The Birth and Later Career of the Author William Baldwin', *Huntington Library Quarterly* 79.1 (2016), 149-62.

[7] John King, *English Reformation Literature: the Tudor Origins of the Protestant Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 358; Stephen Gresham, 'William Baldwin: Literary Voice of the Reign of Edward VI', *Huntington Library Quarterly* 44.2 (1981), 101-16; Mike Pincombe and Cathy Shrank, eds, *The Oxford Handbook of Tudor Literature, 1485-1603* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 6.

[8] For example, the majority of his texts are unavailable to a general audience. This is set to change with the completion of Scott Lucas and Rachel Stenner's fully edited version of his writings, *'Beware the Cat' and Other Literary Works by William Baldwin*, in preparation for Boydell and Brewer.

[9] Christopher Langton, *A Very Brief Treatise, Orderly Declaring the Principle Parts of Physic* (London: Edward Whitchurch, 1547).

[10] King, 359; Lucas, 151.

[11] William Baldwin, *The Canticles or Ballads of Solomon, Phraselike Declared in English Metres* (London: William Baldwin, 1549).

[12] William Baldwin, *A Treatise of Moral Philosophy Containing the Sayings of the Wise. Gathered and Englished by William Baldwin* (London: Edward Whitchurch, 1547).

[13] Ringler and Flachmann, eds, xv; for detail on the piracy see Paul M. Gaudet, 'William Baldwin's *A Treatise of Moral Philosophy* (1564): A Variorum Edition with Introduction', PhD Dissertation (Princeton University, 1972), 1-87.

[14] William Baldwin and Matthias Flacius Illyricus, *Wonderful News of the Death of Paul the Third, Last Bishop of Rome* (London: Thomas Gaultier, 1552); quotations from this text are by EEBO page scan as the copy lacks pagination and signatures; Anne Overell and Scott C. Lucas, 'Whose Wonderful News?: Italian Satire and William Baldwin's *Wonderfull Newes of the Death of Paule the III*', *Renaissance Studies* 26.2 (2010), 180-96 (180).

[15] On the disputed authorship of the *Epistola*, see Overell and Lucas.

[16] Michael Pincombe, 'Truth, Lies, and Fiction in William Baldwin's *Wonderful News of the Death of Paul III*', *Reformation* 15.1 (2010), 3-22 (4).

[17] Cathy Shrank, 'Trollers and Dreamers: Defining the Citizen-Subject in Sixteenth-Century Cheap Print', *The Yearbook of English Studies* 38.1-2 (2008), 102–18 (112).

[18] Baldwin's authorship is generally but not universally accepted; cf. Mike Pincombe, 'Western Will alias William Waterman not William Baldwin', *Notes and Queries* 66.3 (2019), 388-90.

[19] Thomas Churchyard, *The Contention Betwixt Churchyard and Camell, upon Dauid Dikers Dream set out in such order that it is both witty and profitable for all degrees* (London: Owen Rogers for Mychell Loblee, 1560), C.iii.v. This publication is the collected controversy. Baldwin's poem first came out as *Westerne Wyll Upon the Debate Betwixt Churchyard and Camell* (London: William Powell, 1552).

[20] William Baldwin, *The Funerals of King Edward the Sixth Wherein are Declared the Causers and Causes of his Death* (London: Thomas Marsh, 1560).

[21] William Baldwin, *A Little Treatise Called the Image of Idleness Containing Certain Matters Moved Between Walter Wedlock and Bawdin Bachelor. Translated out of the Troyan or Cornish Tongue into Englysh, by Oliver Oldwanton and Dedicated to the Lady Lust* (London: William Seres, 1555). On authorship, see R.W. Maslen, 'William Baldwin and the Politics of Pseudo-Philosophy in Tudor Prose Fiction', *Studies in Philology* 97.1 (2000), 29-60.

[22] William Baldwin to Sir Thomas Cawerden, letter of 24th December 1555. Reprinted in Holden, ed., 86-9 (86).

[23] Holden, ed., 87.

[24] Ringler and Flachmann, eds, 57. The motto does not appear in the 1584 edition, only in the 1570 one: William Baldwin, *Beware the Cat* (London: Wylliam Gryffith, 1570), A.ij.

[25] Ringler and Flachmann, eds, xxv.

[26] Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1957), 31.

[27] Margaret Anne Doody, *The True Story of the Novel* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997). For an example of criticism that calls for less Eurocentric histories, see *Peripheral Realisms*, a special edition of *Modern Language Quarterly* edited by Joe Cleary, Jed Esty, and Colleen Lye, 73.3 (2012).

[28] See for example Paul Salzman, *English Prose Fiction 1558-1700: A Critical History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 1.

[29] Cf. Steve Mentz, *Romance for Sale in Early Modern England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006).

[30] Ringler and Flachmann, eds, xiv.

[31] Ringler and Flachmann, eds, xiii-xiv. Cf. Andrew Hadfield's views on the problems of formal and historical definitions of the novel: 'When was the First English Novel and What Does it Tell Us?', *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 10 (2007), 23-34 (28).

[32] Ringler and Flachmann, eds, xxi. See for example Nancy A. Gutierrez, '*Beware the Cat*: Mimesis in a Skin of Oratory', *Style* 23.1 (1989), 49-69; Terence N. Bowers, 'The Production and Communication of Knowledge in William Baldwin's *Beware the Cat*: Toward a Typographic Culture', *Criticism* 33.1 (1991), 1-29; Jane Griffiths, *Diverting Authorities: Experimental Glossing Practices in Manuscript and Print* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 123-48.

[33] Ringler and Flachmann, eds, xxi; Holden, ed. 20.

[34] Peter Boxall, *The Prosthetic Imagination: A History of the Novel as Artificial Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 52-53.

[35] Boxall, 53.

[36] Boxall, 52-53.

[37] Directed by James Yarker, Stan's Cafe's *The Anatomy of Melancholy* opened at Warwick Arts Centre, UK, in 2013. Aristotle's *Poetics* was adapted by American playwright and performer David Greenspan in his play *The Argument*, which premiered in New York City in 2007. *Das Kapital* was adapted by the German collective Rimini Protokoll, opening in Düsseldorf in 2006.

[38] Frances Babbage, 'Resisting Adaptation', in *Adaptation in Contemporary Theatre: Performing Literatures* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 165-211.

[39] Early modern playwrights did of course find much material in the prose fiction of their era, William Shakespeare's engagement of Robert Greene's *Pandosto: The Triumph of Time* (1588) as a source for *The Winter's Tale* (1611) being one example. For discussion, see Mary Ellen Lamb and Valerie Wayne, eds, *Staging Early Modern Romance: Prose Fiction, Dramatic Romance, and Shakespeare* (London: Routledge, 2008).

[40] Shows by Forced Entertainment that run for six hours or longer include *12 am: Awake and Looking Down* (1992), in which five performers repeatedly 'try on' a series of possible

identities, each time drawing on a jumble of costumes, props, and cardboard signs; and *Quizoola!* (2000), combining game and improvisation, where performers continually ask and attempt to answer questions selected seemingly at random from a vast computer print-out. List-like structures also feature in works like *Speak Bitterness* (1994), consisting of a catalogue of confessions, and *Marathon Lexicon* (2003), a lecture-performance that examines themes A to Z, from 'Accidents' and 'Anti-Climaxes' through to 'Zero'.

[41] Tim Etchells, *Certain Fragments: Contemporary Performance and Forced Entertainment* (London: Routledge, 1999), 96.

[42] Peter Kivy, *The Performance of Reading* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 18.

[43] Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: Technologizing the Word* (London: Routledge, 1982), 115; Jennifer Richards, *Voices and Books in the English Renaissance: a New History of Reading* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 10.

[44] Richards, 185.

[45] Kivy, 17; Richards, 227.

[46] For a usefully summative overview of practice-based research in a creative context, see Linda Candy and Ernest Edmonds, 'Practice-Based Research in the Creative Arts: Foundations and Futures from the Front Line', *Leonardo* 51:1 (2018), 63-69.