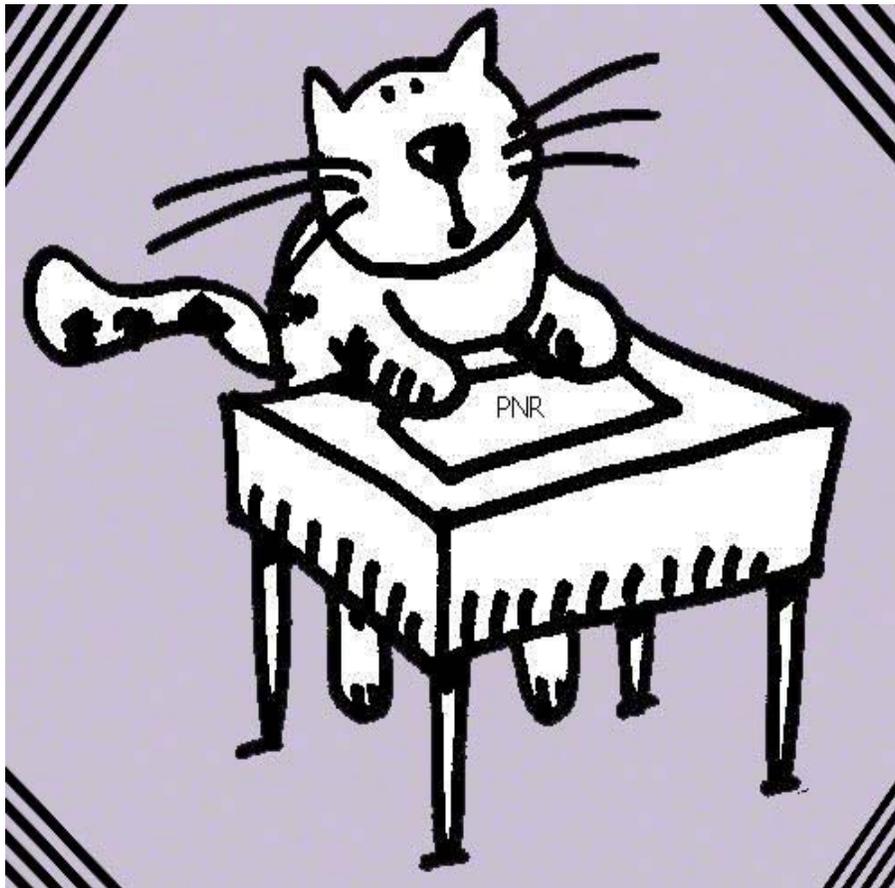


Hamlet's Cat's Soliloquy



"To go outside, and there perchance to stay
Or to remain within: that is the question:
Whether 'tis better for a cat to suffer
The cuffs and buffets of inclement weather
That Nature rains on those who roam abroad,
Or take a nap upon a scrap of carpet,
And so by dozing melt the solid hours
That clog the clock's bright gears with sullen time
And stall the dinner bell. To sit, to stare
Outdoors, and by a stare to seem to state
A wish to venture forth without delay,

Then when the portal's opened up, to stand
As if transfixed by doubt. To prowl; to sleep;
To choose not knowing when we may once more
Our readmittance gain: aye, there's the hairball;
For if a paw were shaped to turn a knob,
Or work a lock or slip a window-catch,
And going out and coming in were made
As simple as the breaking of a bowl,
What cat would bear the household's petty plagues,
The cook's well-practiced kicks, the butler's broom,
The infant's careless pokes, the tickled ears,
The trampled tail, and all the daily shocks
That fur is heir to, when, of his own will,
He might his exodus or entrance make
With a mere mitten? Who would spaniels fear,
Or strays trespassing from a neighbor's yard,
But that the dread of our unheeded cries
And scraches at a barricaded door
No claw can open up, dispels our nerve
And makes us rather bear our humans' faults
Than run away to unguessed miseries?
Thus caution doth make house cats of us all;
And thus the bristling hair of resolution
Is softened up with the pale brush of thought,
And since our choices hinge on weighty things,
We pause upon the threshold of decision."

*Henry N. Beard, Poetry for Cats: The Definitive Anthology of Distinguished
Feline Verse*