

Where Our Presence Lives

(with apologies to Les Murray)

Lawrence Pettener

A feline is some stardust streamed on instinct far down time; no other living is like it. Cathood itself is my expression.

It murmurs through purring, in jaw-tooth presentation, rabid running and a fierce good sleep. With no words to obfuscate my fur!

We tabbies got the tiger franchise, and milked it; kings of the concrete jungle, we please ourselves alone; good that they happen to patronise it, we blithely suppose if while washing, we consider the matter at all.

We peered out living room windows, night and day till they saw our captivity next their own, and the revolution came in through low doors.

One man spoke of our namelessness and our secret names; my minion said his was an anagram of 'toilets', nothing more, and that seemed to wash for him. I translate into fabrics, carpet, the sofa, window display. But I am always the true meme of my kind.

Do Not Rage

Lawrence Pettener

Do not rage against the dying of the light –
go gentle, gently go into the middle of the dark
and endear the whole thing to you, to fully take it

in your belly and chest – so that you listen it,
gradually, shades and degrees, and stay
here, feeling, as long as it takes. In-the-body

experience – that would be radical –
then you can tell the media, with their crafty
broken art, there never was a hero

who didn't feel fear and move slowly through –
before they dub more brave men dullards
when they've nothing else to say.

Getting it Straight

Lawrence Pettener

They were there because they were there
anyway; something to get up to. Me too.
Brownie points were also available
for those still playing the parole game.

Backs weren't touching chairs
except at the top; arms folded,
slant dissent. The challenge was
to give them my worst: literacy, yoga,
poetry. Life review forms from Her Majesty's.
As each session ended, they clambered
for work-sheets for the stretch till next week.

I suggested a prison dictionary:
minger on the wing, and a word for a battery in a sock.
They filled it with rhyming slang and Romany
and anything to fool me, to fill the time.

When the massive, heavy door
doomed shut on us,
the main voice shouted:
"Let's get Lawrence!" –
the steelish smile searing his jaw.
It was at least a smile.

There had been procedures
to prevent this sort of thing;
we were all in there
by some sort of accident.

A sense of humour? Scouse background.
Looking down, I managed to listen it out:
Drug barons were always clean.
Even the prison pies were bent (misshapen rejects).
Nonces (45ers) will get it if they're moved with others:
hot water and sugar, a quick slash to stir it in.

Other things we don't all want to hear
(“We only raped him ‘cause he was queer.”)
It seemed like minutes,
eliding in to a longer stretch
till the warders got it open;
no sense of urgency, even then.
Tactics, perhaps. I never asked,
not even when it happened the second time.

The Pattern in the Carpet

Lawrence Pettener

Saw a cat convoluting, translating a tree;
she was high falutin'; she turned tail on me.

I've seen a cat turn turkey to stay alive
and watched a fork-lift truck turn into a drive.

I saw milk float, I've seen butter fly
and when it all spilled I didn't cry

'cause I've seen the signs, they don't mean zilch
since cats are suddenly all off milk.

I've seen a white rabbit pulled from a hat
but I've not seen the habits pulled from the rat.

I've struggled to manage to beg your pardon
and never been able to peg your burden.

I've been around, I've been a square
I've been right here and I've been out there.

Seen the pattern in the carpet,
watched the cat turn in the parapet.

I've seen the pattern in the carpet.

Fair Cop

Lawrence Pettener

Truck drivers steered their artic rigs
under our direction, onto the waste-ground
we called the 'field'. They gave us chewing gum,
half-full bottles of lemonade; some coins.

They paid us to protect them from other gangs,
and up on that rig's bare back stage
we were the kings of the castle. All sorts
of dramas took place there, including

one cop shouting 'Freeze!' with her glove gripped
in both hands, pointing the finger; loaded
with trouble for us, surrounded
as we were by filthy rascals.