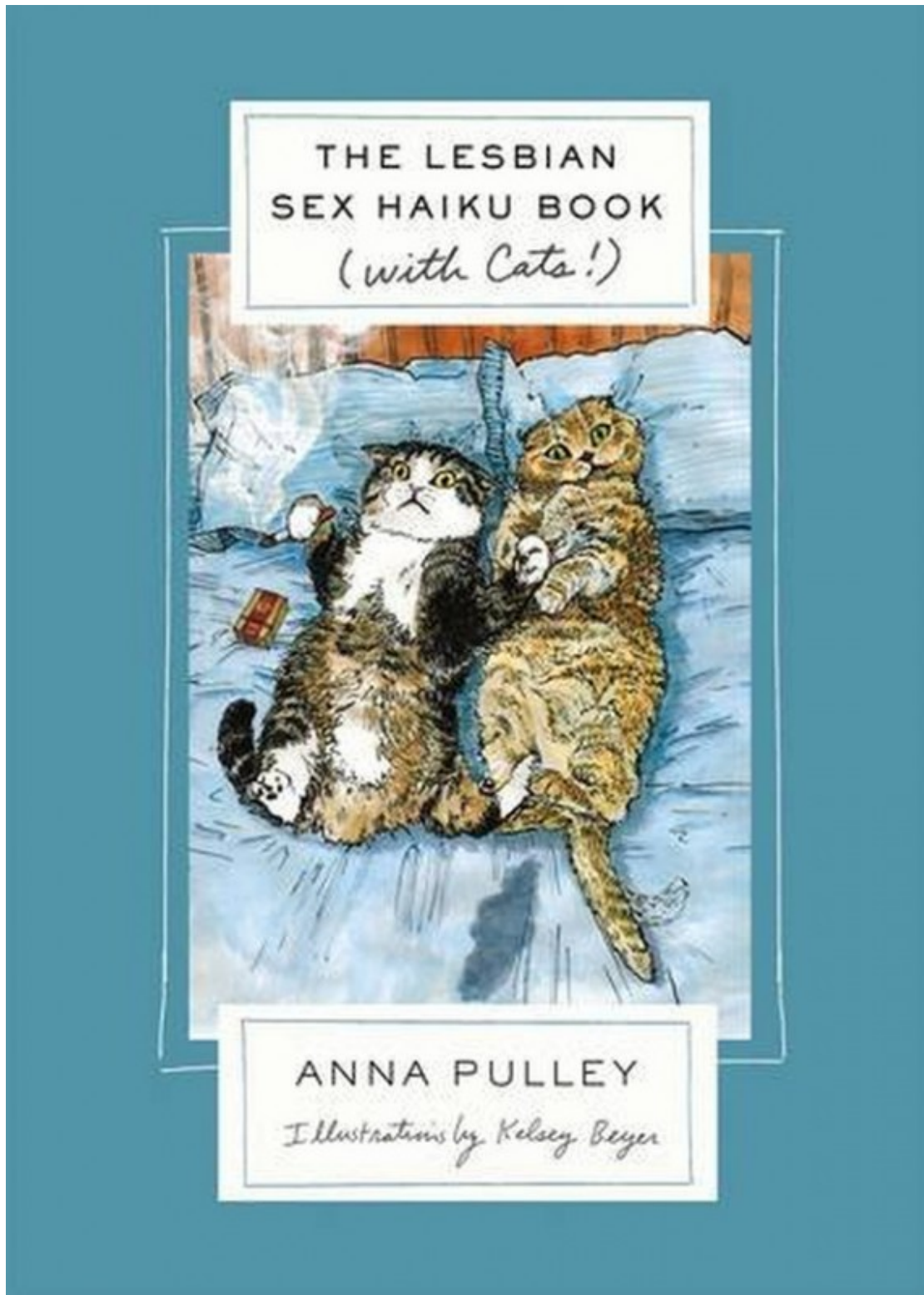


Cats, Haiku, and Sex: We Talk With Anna Pulley and Kelsey Beyer About Their New Book

Pulley started writing haiku after a bad breakup; it led to an adorable book of illustrated poetry.

Haiku is a deceptively complex form of poetry. Seventeen non-rhyming syllables in three lines: It sounds like the easiest thing in the world, and people who flinch at the idea of penning a sonnet or a villanelle will cheerfully try it.

Let's drop the pretext of the third person for a moment: I'm one of those people, or was once. Sometime in the late 1990s, I committed to trying to write a haiku a day as an exercise to get the creative juices flowing. It didn't work; I quickly got frustrated and dropped the habit. Haiku might be only 17 syllables, but that tiny space is extremely unforgiving; every syllable has to be exactly the right one.



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Like me, Anna Pulley wrote a haiku a day, but it turns out that she was lot better at it. She started writing haiku in 2010, in

part as a way of coping with the trauma of being dumped by her fiancé.

A couple of years ago, Pulley's poems started to gain a following on the much-loved literary website The Toast. Now she has brought those years of work together in a charming collection called *The Lesbian Sex Haiku Book (With Cats!)*. The poems are vivid snippets of lesbian life and culture that will be very familiar to anyone who's ever lived anyplace with a thriving queer community. How much is exaggeration and how much is just blunt reality is, of course, up to you.



Anna (right) and Kelsey signing books at a reading in Berkeley, California.

The cats are courtesy of Kelsey Beyer, Pulley's partner, who illustrated the book with elaborate watercolors of cats in mischievous, playful, and even scandalous positions that mirror the poetry's wry sense of humor. I talked with Pulley and Beyer about the book and everything that went into making it.

How did you use haiku to put yourself back together after your breakup? What brought you to haiku?

Anna: I started writing them in 2010, and it was very much a necessity — or it became that way, because my life really fell apart. My fiancée dumped me, and I was really struggling in San Francisco, working at this internship, trying to survive and then my dad got lung cancer twice. So because of all these things, I came to this point where I was really depressed and I had a terrible case of writer's block, which was never something I had struggled with too much in the past, so how I got out of it was I told myself that anyone could write a haiku. It's 17 syllables, there's no time commitment, there's not a huge emotional commitment, and so I said that I would write one a day. And I did that for almost a year.

The original series was called "Haiku for Adulthood," which was basically because I was not a very functioning adult. So, that was sort of how I started to put myself back together. It really became this rock for me to sort of cling to and really

unexpected.



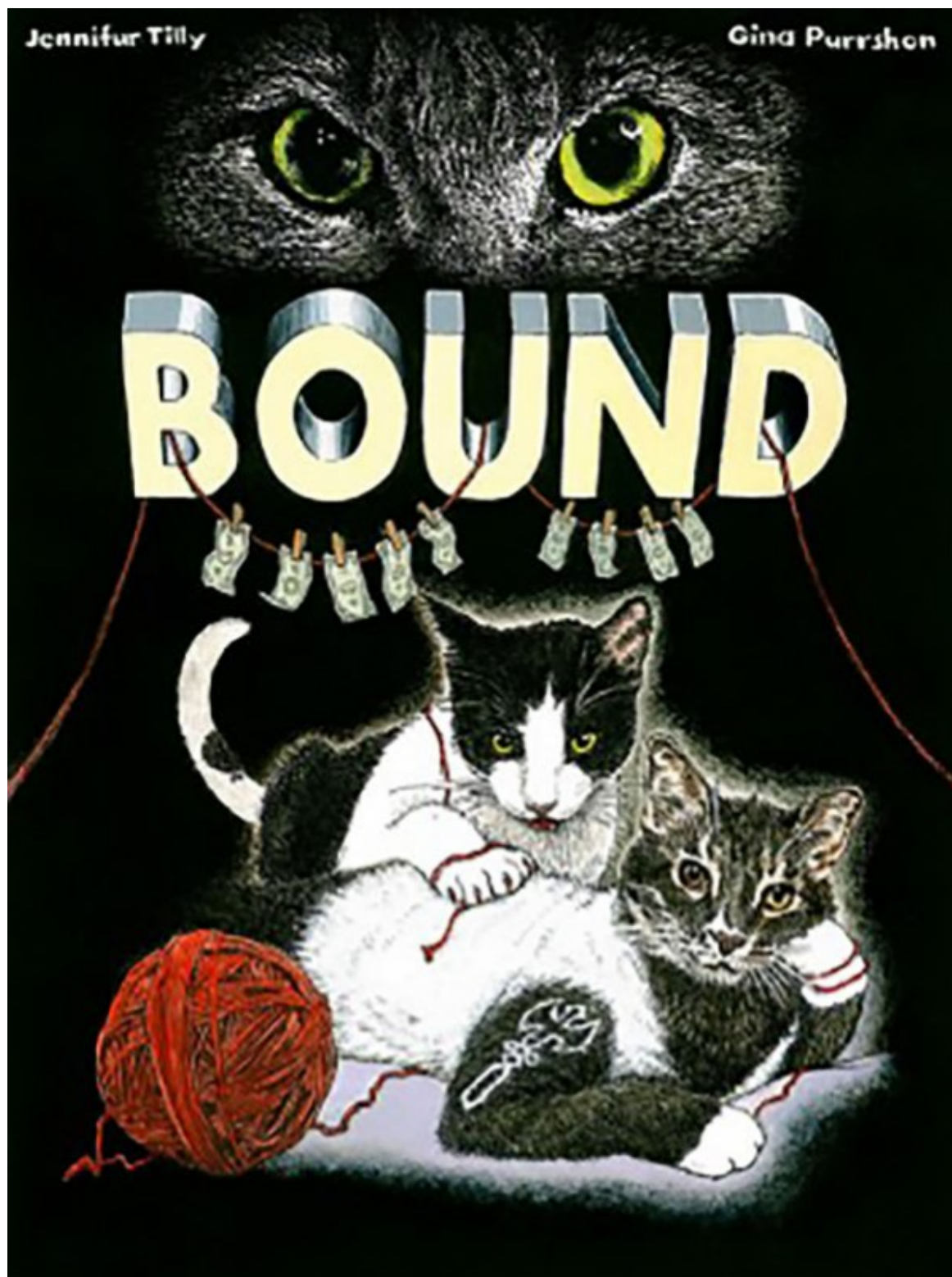
Kelsey (left) and Anna (right)

Kelsey, you did the art, which is beautiful and a lot of fun.

How long have you been an artist?

Kelsey: Since I was a little kid. My dad taught me to do watercolors of trout when I was very young; there are pictures of me when I was three or four, painting at my Fisher-Price easel, so I think it was pretty much as soon as I could pick up a marker I wanted to draw stuff. It was always my favorite activity.

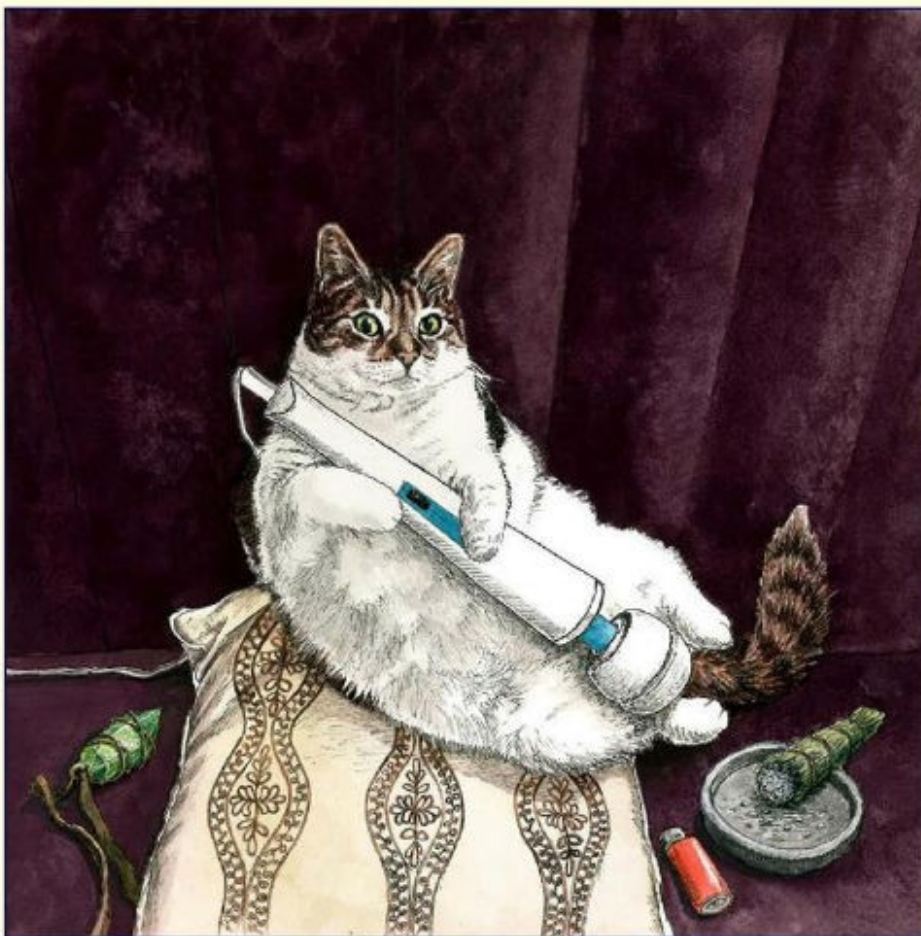
Weirdly, dogs and cats were my favorite things to draw. I was much more of a dog person to be honest. But my best friend was really obsessed with cats, so we balanced it out between the dogs and the cats, I think.



Anna: The reason she started doing the cats in general is because she was making lesbian cat birthday cards for her friends. So that's the origin of the "with cats" part of *The Lesbian Sex Haiku Book*.

Kelsey: Yeah, I have just one specific friend. I had made a couple of birthday cards for her where I had drawn these lesbian cats. A long-haired butch — so like a long-haired cat wearing a tie, and a short-haired femme who had earrings and lipstick on or something. I had done that about a year prior to when I met Anna and then the next year, I was doing the follow-up version of that birthday card, so yeah that kind of dovetailed with her looking for an illustrator and a visual concept to tie the book together as well.

THE LESBIAN SEX HAIKU BOOK (WITH CATS!)



Hitachi Magic
Wands have two settings: “low” and
“immersion blender.”

It’s like straight sex, but
first we have to consult our
lunar calendars.

When you put these up on the Toast, what was the reader response like?

Anna: It was very enthusiastic. Everyone was like, “What the hell?!? I never knew I needed this in my life.”



Even cats have to cruise Craigslist sometimes.

Kelsey: Yeah, the first couple especially got a really good response, and I think that's why it got picked up so fast.

Anna: Yeah, because it combined everyone's favorite things, which are lesbian sex, cats, funny illustrations, humor. If you don't like one of those things, then I don't want to talk to you.

A lot of this plays on broad stereotypes of lesbian love. How do you walk the line between a stereotype and the reality?

I think that stereotypes have a lot of subversive potential, actually. I think that it's really fascinating to think and to learn why we believe these things about certain subsets of people. I also happen to embody a lot of lesbian stereotypes myself, so I feel perfectly fine making fun of those aspects. Like I was a P.E. teacher for a while, and I drive a truck, and I was a vegetarian for eight years, and I wear a lot of flannel.

Do you plan to keep writing lesbian sex haikus with cats?

Anna: I hope so. I hope we continue to do this, long into the future. I don't know if Kelsey wants to keep doing the illustrations, but I definitely want to keep writing the haiku.

Kelsey: I feel like at the pace we've been releasing them, it's a manageable thing. Certainly it would be lovely to have a sequel to *The Lesbian Sex Haiku Book (With Cats!)*. We already have more material. Since releasing the book, we've already kind of been continuing to do it. We've released a few more installments on The Toast that are either very much along the same lines as far as the same structure with an illustration and several of her haikus about lesbians.

The Lesbian Sex Haiku Book (With Cats!) is available online for \$14.99 at Powell's City of Books^[1], among other retailers and internet sellers.