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Cat and Coyote as Love

Cat and Coyote play a strange yet integral role in Jose Rivera's *References to Salvador Dali Make Me Hot*. Together they explore themes that are left unsaid by the human protagonist, Gabriella. Each is their own separate character, but, when analyzed from a closer view, they both represent Gabriella's different perspectives of love. Cat and Coyote are a deep analogy of many layers of Gabriella's inner conflict as the play progresses.

Cat represents the "domesticated" tamed, realistic perception of love whereas Coyote is analogous to Gabriella's passionate, "wild," primal desires. They are the first characters the audience first hears speak in the play. During the opening of the first scene, this dialogue between Cat and Coyote sets up the tone and the themes for the rest of the play. They seem to be in the middle of a fight, insulting different features of each other in distaste. "Coyote: You smell like soap. / Cat: You smell like shit" (Rivera 1). They only attack the parts that they themselves would be self-conscious towards if that trait was one of their own.

There are many ways in which this surrealist play can be interpreted and the ideas being presented in this essay are but a few of many. Cat as Gabriella's domestic side presents to the audience unsaid desires and thoughts of Gabriella as she tries to be an army housewife. Cat enjoys being domesticated as Coyote tries to get under her fur she proclaims, "Gabriella gives me everything" (3). Yet Coyote is practiced and cunning as wild coyotes are known for, he still finds a way to get into her head and offers her passion and sex which causes her to falter. Yet she

continues to reject his advances. This is the beginning in which we see the balance of Gabriella's inner desires fluctuate and bend. There are many moments like this throughout the play.

This balance of desires is very much reflected in Gabriella as she tries to fit in and be like all the other army housewives she calls the "Barbie Dolls" yet inevitably rejects them in favor of being alone (31). This situation reflects both animals in the internal struggle. Cat as the side that wants to be a housewife and mother is the part of Gabriella that tries to befriend the other housewives. Coyotes as her wild, natural self desired more enriching and intellectual conversation and connection which she simply did not receive from the other housewives. It drove her to completely ignore and reject the group as a whole so she wouldn't have to pretend to be someone she is not, so she could be her natural self. Gabriella behaves much like both animals in different respects in how she interacts with a social group. She tries to befriend the "Barbie Dolls" like a domesticated housewife would yet rejects them for her natural being.

Coyote also reflects the conflict within Gabriella as she struggles with her feelings for Benito, her husband. Coyote died from being stabbed through by moonlight. In one sense, this is interpreted as Gabriella's passion for Benito dying in the "moonlight" of his absence. The Coyote is later resurrected as a "memory" or "dream" only after Benito returns (61). Although, the passion resurfaces it is but a shadow of what it once was. This is easily seen in how Gabriella and Benito makeout passionately yet she resists further passion and Benito is confused as to why her sexual, wild self has gone, the side that he knew best of her while he was home.

To continue this stand alone metaphor, Cat mourns Coyote immediately after he passed. This is Gabriella's domesticated side mourning the life she had dreamed of having before the war: having a family; being a housewife; living her domesticated life with Benito. But the drive for this dream had died, revealing what would be left behind. The domesticated mourns the

balance of passion. In essence that is what Cat and Coyote really are. They are two opposing forces that struggle in a balance.

The end brings about a change in Gabriella and in the behavior of Cat and Coyote. Cat is unsure what to do with the Ghost of her dead lover, Coyote, and asks Gabriella what she should do. “Fuck him anyway, Cat.” Gabriella’s quick response elicited a reaction from both Cat and Coyote that is left up to production interpretation (73). In this line, Cat and Coyote finally allow themselves to reconcile, yet are still cautious of what comes ahead for them: “How long can we possibly last?” (73). In the end, the two animals dance together. In harmony. This reflects Gabriella’s decision to test Benito. She keeps the hope of passion and the domestic life she had long ago dreamed of in mind to decide what she should do in her relationship. The play leaves this unanswered, but it is clear that Gabriella has found a harmony within herself that is displayed in the reconciliation of Cat and the Ghost of Coyote. Cat describes how the new Coyote smells. “Transformation, hope, prayers, and whispers.” (73). This beautiful articulation describes Gabriella’s new resolve and perspective.

The function of Cat and Coyote is largely to clue the audience in to the internal conflict Gabriella is experiencing with her dreams and anxiety as Benito returns from the field. These two seemingly oppositional characters actually play an integral part in the psyche of Gabriella. Together they express the balance and imbalance of emotion, particularly of passion and love. The most important theme of the play.

Works Cited

Rivera José. References to Salvador dalí Make Me Hot. Broadway Play Publishing Inc., 2012.