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ENG 333 – Advanced Composition

5 November 2013

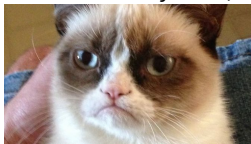
YOU CAN HAZ ART ESSAY BOUT KATZ, K?

So yesterday, I totally saw the best, most awesome cat shirt on *Etsy* or at *Urban*¹ or something. Or was it the other day? So, at *Urban*, there's this shirt? It had Grumpy Cat—all.over.it. GRUMPY CAT! You know Grumpy Cat?² Everyone knows Grumpy Cat.

Even Anderson Cooper knows Grumpy Cat³, and I only know Anderson Cooper because he's gorgeous⁴ and he had that video on *YouTube* where he giggled uncontrollably for like two, whole minutes. I mean, he also just *finally* came out. Like, we all knew anyway already; for the love of Gaga, he wears Armani suits. Hello?

So, Grumpy Cat's actual name is Tardar Sauce: she always looks like she's pouting but it's really just because she has feline dwarfism and an under bite, and is actually super friendly and loving.⁵ So, don't judge the cat by its frown, people.

¹ AKA *Urban Outfitters*, obv.



² CUTE! AND SOOOOO GRUMPYYYY LOOKING!!!



³ The Silver Fox himself, holding the smallest of the small cats. *dies*

⁴ Yes, he's a newscaster. He has gravitas. I know it and I've seen it—on clips from *The Daily Show* and *Colbert Report*. But who actually watches cable for news and/or reporting? Squares, the illiterate, and grandparents: that's who. I digest my information via the internet, like any other citizen of the 21st century. C'mon!

⁵ Says the Grumpy Cat *Wikipedia* entry, but I totally followed the footnotes and read the source articles JUST TO MAKE SURE, ok?

She's A-DAWR-able! Also, she's a she. People assume that because the cat looks so grumpy, it must be a boy. Wrong, so wrong. Girls can be grumpy too, you know? All people can be grumpy. But as we know, she's not actually grumpy, anyway. And as we also know, she's a cat! And probably spayed. But most importantly, Grumpy Cat is a cat, so who cares? Boy? Girl? NOPE! Just Grumpy Cat. Speaks for itself! Stop trying to force needless gender troubles onto memes, internet!⁶

But we're digressing, there's a butt-ton of memes out there that are driven by images of this cat.⁷

So! This shirt, this effing shirt is at *Urban* and it's great. WHY? Why is it great? Because it is just objectively great—I think; therefore it's indisputable. But if you need specifics, check it out.⁸

⁶ *shakes fist*



⁷

Dementors from *Harry Potter* and Ygritte from *Games of Thrones*: meet grumpy cat. Nerd and Meme cultures collide! AS IF THEY'RE MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE!!! AMIRITE???

But yeah, anyway this is Grumpy Cat in all of its glory. Fuck, this cat is so awesome. It's stuck in a permanent scowl. A cute, sweet, sympathetic scowl. It's so indignant-looking all of the time. I just want to kiss it! It's so small! It probably just likes to hang out on laps all day! and snuggle! and pout! and clean itself!



⁸

This image is printed on the aforementioned shirt. Yeah, soak it in for a minute. It's THAT glorious.

RECOGNIZE THE SHIRT?⁹ (*wink*nudge*) —→

So obviously, it's totally a reference to the Three-Wolf-Moon T-shirt: one of Amazon's most popular items ever, a total internet sensation.¹⁰ And there have been plenty of other shirts that follow in Three-Wolf Moon's pawprints but, this: this is THE best. No contest. Well, except for maybe "Three Keyboard-Cat Moon".¹¹



After seeing the "Three Grump Moon" shirt: I HAD TO HAVE IT. It nuzzles into my (already sizable) collection of other cat shirts really well. I have at least a half-dozen now? I mean, that's only six

⁹ You better bet your ass you do! —you've *fingers crossed* encountered some variation of it, right?

¹⁰ The *BBC* claims that the shirt's sales went up 2,300% after "going viral". Word of advice *BBC*: no self-respecting person says that anything "goes viral" anymore. Only someone who is stuck in a pre-*Snakes on a Plane* mindset uses "going viral" in any serious way (since we all know how well "going viral" worked out for that film. As in, it "went viral" since the film gave us stomach cramps and a severe fever for a week after we watched it). But anyway, Daniel Emery talks more about this in the *BBC*'s article "Joke review boosts T-shirt sales"—I used another source that I was directed to from the *Wikipedia* page, so SUE me. ANYWAY, besides using antiquated nonsense words like, "going viral," and an immodest amount of British colloquialisms, Emery reports that, "The first review gave the shirt five stars, saying it 'Fits my girthy frame, has wolves on it, attracts women' but "cannot see wolves with arms crossed.'" So from here, you can understand the tone that was set for the rest of reviews that this shirt garnered.



¹¹

The Internet is SO fucking EPIC.THERE IS INFINITE POTENTIAL FOR AWESOME. And if you're not aware that Keyboard cat is another awesome *YouTube* phenomenon, then your life is OVER until you look it up right now. Because every other human being in America knows about this gem.

shirts but there's only seven days in the week. So, that's only one day without wearing a cat shirt on an average week. I mean, let's be honest, I don't wear them every day or even every week sometimes. But as I pull one down my arms and shoulders, squeeze my head in, and flatten it over myself, I can't help but squeal with giddy glee. I do a little cat shirt dance as I look in the mirror. Can you imagine what a cat shirt dance looks like?¹²

And it's pretty clear that as I pace the streets of Portland, or hang out on campus, or drink in the city's countless bars, I am well-received in my cat shirts. People here get it. The shower of compliments bathes me in a golden glow of happiness.¹³

But I've found that not everyone is as down with the cat shirts as I like to believe. Like, when I hit the bars in Seattle, I wasn't met with the same enthusiasm or shower of compliments that I normally am.¹⁴ And look, I'm as vainglorious¹⁵ as the next 20-something-gen-me(er) gay man. I like compliments.¹⁶ So when I don't receive them, when I don't get an eyebrow wag, or a prolonged stare, or the ol' one-up¹⁷—and instead get some tepid stares—I start to worry.¹⁸

¹² It looks kind of like an un-choreographed River Dance with some arm flailing and whimpers of joyful anticipation. Speaking from experience, it's one thing to look at these cat photos online; it's entirely another to wear a cat photo on your shirt. First thing in the morning, I just can't handle how awesome it is to be wreathed in printed cats. Also, I wish I could put animated GIFS into footnotes to better illustrate this dance. Moving images just literalize the whole picture better. Someday we'll have moving photos that you can print onto paper, like in *Harry Potter*. Society will then thank JK Rowling for her ingenious inventor's mind.

¹³ Seriously. It feels really nice to have people compliment you and revel with you in a mutual love of cats, or cat things, or pictures of cats, or internet culture, or nerd culture. I get the same feeling when I wear my Star Wars t-shirts.

¹⁴ I even went to a bar called "Pony" where there is vintage gay porn all over the walls, a glory hole in the bathroom and \$1.50 PBR tallboys. Having been there before, I thought, "Hey, this seems like a hip, celebratory space, cool with all sorts of semi-ironic, semi-hipster, semi-queer, gay expression" and decided to throw on the cat shirt to look sexy in. But no, not really anyone thought I looked sexy, as far as I could tell. I felt dissected and uncomfortable. I felt like a child in a room full of chiding fathers.

¹⁵ YES! I LIKE—OFTEN NEED—TO FEEL WANTED AND SEXY. SORRY, NOT SORRY!!!!

¹⁶ *holds out hand* gimme plz!!!

¹⁷ For the record, I will take salacious glances or stares from *literally* anyone (I'm not picky and not a bitch about where the compliment comes from) I'm just grateful for, and addicted to, the attention.

¹⁸ Uh OH!!! Time for my weekly twenty-something identity crisis

Worries find an easy cure in boilermakers.¹⁹ And while the rest of my night at Pony galloped by—full of dancing, hugging, and a stallion’s-worth of alcohol—doubt still nagged at me. I felt momentarily apologetic that night but immediately experienced a profound need to protect my feelings. Arguing very latently, back-and-forth, in my own head, over a long stretch of time, I remain confused.

Unmistakably, cat shirts are not art. They do not fit neatly into any of the usual philosophical taxonomies of art: they are not an extension of the natural (in the Aristotelian sense that a statue is an extension of marble’s natural beauty); they are not beautiful for beauty’s sake (a la Oscar Wilde); they are certainly not tasteful; they will never belong in an art gallery or museum²⁰; and at first glance, they apparently neither serve a political (or interpretive) purpose nor inspire a sense of the sublime, the transcendental, or the mystical. They’re consumerist to their core. Cat shirts are an attempt to satisfy the internet’s voracious hunger for all things cats—a brand extension if you will, to feed consumer demand.

And! AND!!! These shirts are something undeniably special! To me.²¹ I really like cats; I really like cat memes; I really like internet culture; I really like YouTube; and I really, really like wearing cat shirts. I sincerely, unironically, unapologetically love these things.²²

To spell it out folks: These shirts inspire a playful hermeneutics, a spiral of unending referentialism and interpretation. As I look at them, I tumble through exponential information and fumble through the internets’ boundless multiplicity. These things, these memes, these are singularities, they are a

¹⁹ Whiskey: neat and with a beer. Because whiskey and beer is tasty. Also, it felt appropriate, given the setting.

²⁰ But Tilda Swinton: she belongs in MoMA whenever she feels like it. (She’s on exhibit—seriously)

²¹ For whatever reason, Cat Shirts are affective. They inspire—in me—uncontrollable euphoria at times. And how can we judge art? It evokes something sensational within someone. I feel more subjective and introspective because I wear cat shirts. I feel like less of an adult but also more like me, who I do not consider an adult anyway. I feel like I’m less easy to coerce into a resigned adulthood of permanent acquiescence. I feel like this is how I was taught to dress and feel and yet I still feel uniquely and wholly myself.

²² This is a maddeningly necessary caveat nowadays about anything that appears outwardly flippant—about anything really. As if people haven’t loved stupid crap since the dawn of time.

paradoxical amalgam of meaning and unmeaning—matter and void—something beyond definitive explanation. If you aren't part of the conversation, or if it makes you confused, it's cool! Heaps of other conversations are blossoming all around you. This one isn't easy to contain, it's infantile and silly and it bears little meaning outside of itself—and that meaning has already changed now, shifted beyond this. Here it was; there it went.