

Screening Room

by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for Departmental Honors in
the Department of English
Texas Christian University
Fort Worth, Texas

May 09, 2018

SCREENING ROOM

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Abstract

Screening room is the poetic exploration of viewing as a value in culture. Through poems that document both the experience on watching and being watched, I hope to highlight how these phenomena creates identity and surveillance. Through relationships, films, music, and art, *Screening Room* offers a window into a facet of the culturally collaborative society we live in.

FIND ME IN THE ART

If I Were a Painting

There is something freeing
In being immobile,
In being fixed to a place,
In being shackled to a point of view.

There is something
I would like to say,
but my mouth is painted
closed, layers of red

and pink matted on top
are holding it shut. You
can see the strain
in my cheeks, pulling

against the flaking color. Patrons
love this about me, the woman
struggling to speak—*what would
she say if she could open her mouth?*

1969-1975

The last great
years for film:
when chaos bred
masterpiece, war
and Watergate
divided the public,

leaving film school
Brats a hole to fill,
with stories driven by villains
made immortal
by their faults, gruesome
classics I analyze

in half-filled theater
classrooms. I fell
for DeNiro sitting
on my father's
lap as he recounted the time
he stood in for Charlie

so Scorsese could douse
more blood on his wrist.
His buddies swore
Jaws would flop
while the mechanical
shark floated above

his eyes,
reflecting the dark
haired-men, remorseful
for their wrongdoings
bopping along
to the morose score.

Mrs. Robinson
was his Cathy Seldon.
It is all so clear,
he would mumble.
That was the last
time you could shine

a light through your heart
and project it to the world,
one picture after
another, echoing
a hearty beat.

If I Were a Painting

I am
maintained
by the strength

of a nail
haphazardly beat
into a pale

peeling wall.
When they hung
me, a man stood

from a distance
head tilted right,
eyes squinting,

pointer finger
resting beneath
a slightly open

mouth--
that looks
straight enough,

let's move on.

Lyrics and Ballads

The first poem I read
was on the inside sleeve
of my grandmother's
favorite record. She later
taught me to play
the *Rainbow Connection*
on the worn keys of her mother's

piano, veined hands rested
over mine, slowly numbed
to anything beyond the
rainbows, and lovers
and dreamers. I sang those words
at her funeral, don't remember

the way they felt against
my lips, momentarily filling
something empty,
the way music
from the strings of a guitar
always will. A chord can fill.
No melody will heal as fully

traveling through the speakers
of my aging truck
or tangled headphones.
I am whole when it bounces
off countless people
packed together focused

on the same experience. Nodding,
singing and dancing in unison,
the heart changing,
when each chord
hums
a harmony.

Side Effects of Antihistamines

I dreamed I was reading a Eulogy
for a man wearing a rainbow tie.
While sleeping, the mind cannot
form a clear picture of letters. I could
see the black worm of lines on the paper
shaking in my wrinkled hands
but I stood breathless, unable
to make out any of the words.

I dreamed the round-faced boy
John wrote me poems
I lay in wooden- floored room
from *Dirty Dancing*. He wore only a lime
sweater. There were flamingoes
on my underwear. I started wheezing
after he kissed my neck. He fell asleep
while I coughed in to my elbow pit.

I dreamed that I was hung,
an oil painting, exactly as I lay-
a handful of cough drops, pupils
so enlarged I couldn't see, tangled
in a pile of stained sheets. I could hear
the patrons commenting:
*what a portrait of anonymity, of human
stagnation. What an image.*

In the Flesh

You have your mother's smile
is not what I would say
to someone at a funeral.

It is only the second
celebration of someone's life
that has been held at this church.

The chapel is meant for weddings.
The bathroom door has an engraved
sign that read "Women's Restroom,

Bride's Dressing Room."
An ornate rocking chair swayed
in the corner, so that the mother

of the bride could sit and watch
her daughter get ready to leave.
Someone remind me to avoid

sitting behind the children of the deceased.
The Holy Son hung over us all
and I could see his ribs, his body

was a straight line downward,
Funerals alone are enough

to make me believe in some
kind of god. The worst part
of growing up, the part no one

ever told me, is watching
the people you loved die
with no end in sight.

If I Were a Painting

My torso
is transparent
toes pointed in
gaze angled
downward

to obscure
the moths
making home
in my diaphragm.

I see
the trees that grow
through the veins
on my legs,

my fingers bloom fruit,
bursting with juice,
staining the white
ground below

My Dear Charlie Parker

The lights are blacked out
in this underground theater
a high school friend dragged
me to in Dallas. It is easy

to become still when listening
to jazz because the
notes fill your veins,
driving them to the floor.

That heavy, flighty noise is
echoing as we waited for the light
to rise. Once the three actors began
to speak, the melodic hymn

silenced their voices.
A young woman
only seen in the glow of spotlight
was hanging photographs

on a stainless wall, a portrait
in a sequence of grays
a world without music.
Part of me wondered

what I would eat for dinner,
the other part wondered
what we are going
to do about the world,

all of me hoping the sax
would keep playing
so I could feel its weight
beneath my skin

Dramamine

Most sailing trips
cause me to dry
heave overboard
but this boat costs
more than I will ever
make.

My brother

once told me I hated
sailing because I can't
be stuck in the same
place for longer
than I can finish
a poem. I can be still. I hate
knowing that I am moving.

It is nature on solid ground
to forget the world
is spinning beneath
me to forget
that I am always
in motion, that even with
a conscious effort
to glue my feet to the ground
and hold my breath
to keep my chest

from swelling and falling,
my blood is still pulsing,
I still blink without
wanting to. Feeling
I have to move makes
it harder to pretend
to be still.
That knowledge
is easier to stomach

on this yacht. The rocking
like a lullaby, a hand
rubbing my back to quell
these aches in my stomach.
I wonder

if the owners ever think
about the direction
they are moving, victim
to the sun, rising and falling
with the rhythm of the waves.

If I Were a Painting

Most works
of art are not
seen for most
of their life.
they travel
trapped between
protective
planks to be
admired by
like-minded people.
If I
am lucky, the soul
will be on display
for years at a time
but I would sit
in a musky
storage room
surrounded
by others waiting
to be called
to view.

AS I WATCHED THE 2017 OSCAR NOMINATED BEST PICTURES

I Took a Break from Film

After Arrival

viewed February 12th, July 18th

I tried to decipher the lines
of reasoning,
but quickly cut moments
of tragedy became a burden.
I remember Will

left home three times this summer,
under the cover of night when Mom
and Dad couldn't applaud his exit
with worried eyes clouding their smiles.
I was up to see if the exploration

of language was more clear the second
time around. I will always link
a foggy glass window with uncertainty,
with a bag over the shoulder, the mark
of things changing without clear words.

Hide and Seek

After Fences
viewed February 12th

A collection of images, the spark,
This tale of rage. Anger
is universal, on screen, in book,

or on stage. Anger that is from
a predetermined life will pierce, there is no
control. Praise is showered down from the lofty
perspective of critics, who sit in the balcony,

the experience of that irreverent, moving,
disdain. They enjoy their viewing.
I am the product of this school of thought,
where distress in another's reality

makes for an easy escape from mine--
the ache of a too-quickly beating heart
and a frailty in uncertainty—I run
from discomfort in my world
and find solace in theirs.

Southern Pacifist in the 21st Century

After Hacksaw Ridge
viewed March 18th

Before the small golden man changes hands, more than half the country will not have seen an Oscar nominated best film. Sophie would see one before she went back to Alabama, to be her own kind of pacifist. There, it is easy to refrain from fighting the Confederate flag-clad or the inconsolably angry. There she might show them a smile in hopes they see the light behind it, the alternative to spewing hate. I wonder how altruists think of their altruistic acts. She doesn't believe in selflessness. She doesn't believe making a movie about selflessness accomplishes anything at all.

The Premium Movie-Going Experience

After *Lion*
viewed March 12th

Most movie theaters are palaces of comfort. They removed the old, stained chairs and replaced them with plush, reclining monsters. They removed

the spontaneity of three friends seeing a five-dollar movie on a Wednesday night. They could bitch about the little kid never getting

the acclaim he deserved, and laugh at their tear-cut faces, bonded through the shared experience of crying together in a dark room. That Wednesday was the last

night I feared to put my hand below the seat, for all the unknown gunk that would emerge. I could not recline, or order a gourmet meal, or exist a part

from my peers. It was the movie night I knew we would leave saying, *Wow, my back hurts. But did you see Dev? Give him the Oscar!*

A Wish is a Dream

After La La Land
Viewed December 26th, January 11th, January 23rd

Thoughtful writing spreads
like the flu. I would like
to see this picture

through my mother's eyes.
She knows half of the dancers
and chuckles as nostalgia

illuminates her face, a spotlight.
I see her twenty years ago
in a starfish costume tapping

next to Tommy Tune. After
she shed her crown and princess
smile for the night, my parents wandered

the tunnels under Disneyland,
sometimes catching the last
ride of Space Mountain,

sometimes reciting lines
for her next audition. She may
have hated memorizing

the words like a prayer she learned
in Sunday school, but every time
she tells the story of dancing

at the Hollywood Bowl I wonder
if I would be watching her next
to the stars if she had prayed harder.

Hidden History

After Hidden Figures
viewed January 23rd

Second wave feminists were blind
to the lives of African American
women until womanists decided
that white wasn't the only way
to be female. Praise be to Alice Walker.
I know that a white man was launched

into space. We stand on the shoulders
of the women whose narratives
were shoved behind a blackboard. Praise
be to Alice Walker The realization
of ignorance packs a 6G punch.
What to do when your own deities

shroud a story because it doesn't fit? Praise
be to Alice Walker. I ache to think
how far this plotline could reach. What if
the camera shot every story, those hidden
beneath the arbiters of history's hands,
extending past the same pale lament?

Exceptions

After Hell or High Water
viewed January 15th

Pan over a Texas oilrig
sprouting from the hills

like nightmare daisies.
Racial slurs are acceptable

if the actor has won
an Oscar, if it is a year

when the awards are diverse
or if the man who deflects

them perishes by the bullet
of a Byronic hero. I tried

to pay more attention
to the sprawling desert of home

but the crook of your elbow
around my neck proved

more interesting than vigilant
brothers in ski masks.

For the Sake of Art

After Manchester by the Sea
viewed December 29th

A film that is half filled with shots of a docile sea should have put my father and I to sleep the lead actor is accused of raping his production assistants but he seems to grieve and swell with guilt through the gaze of an expert's I want the world to forgive him my father once told me that if we expect every artist to be well behaved the universe will be drained of movement we are captivated by his stillness by the fired hair of his nephew reflecting in his eyes simmering and shouting *you will never escape this flame.*

Those Left Unseen

I shy away from all that brings
me discomfort, the images
that haunt my dreams
for weeks.

How can I create untainted by guilt
that I feel when I see proof
I am not doing enough. It is all
I see on a blank page now.

After *Moonlight*
Never Viewed

VIEWING PARTY

When Reading the Signs

My parents met because of dinosaur
earrings, with elongated bodies
and pink dots making

scales. My father was enthralled
by the coy way they dangled
near her chin. He slid

on to the sticky bar stool
next to her. He breathed
I like your earrings,

thumbed the dino tail,
watched the head bob back
and forth. I hear her response

every time he grabs her hand.
When he glances at her and thinks
I am not there, I hear *rawr*

You see, I am enthralled
by the dashboard of signs
the universe leaves

for interpretation
There are too many to ignore.
I believe that sticking my finger

in chewing gum stuck
to a table
means that I need to apologize

for something I have said,
that sunshine when it's raining
means I need to call my sister.

I believe that every time I see.
a butterfly, my grandmother
is blessing me.

I believe that the world
is speaking to me if only
I can learn to hear the quiet.

Now you sit across from me,
call my cheeks
beautiful, my voice kind.

You pull on a strand of my hair
and straighten out
the curl and my heart

stays in my chest.
I do not even flinch, but then you
point

out my dinosaur earrings,
and the world
says *rawr*.

Jerk Off: A Love Letter to Johnny Boy

Every man I have loved has you
to blame. You, who hid his eyes
below the brim of a pork pie hat,
hid numbness behind
the roar of that urban jungle.
You, who taught me to never expect
anyone to repay their debts.

You live asleep and beg others to awaken
from their hazy march. When you vanish,
there is nothing
left to see but the devil
in your grin urging sinfulness, aching
to place one more bet or borrow
another moment of my time.
You are just a shadowed
man, waving goodbye like a bullet

If I Were a Painting

Don't get too close
The blotted
pokes of the brush
will appear
frantic
from this near.
I create an image
from
the smattering
of colored dots,
parts that
resemble
a whole picture

Midnight

All great love stories feature
a diner like this one; the booths
will creak when we shift and our waitress
might abandon us when a growing puddle
from the leak in the patchwork ceiling
makes her slip. We can drink

coffee out of stained mugs until our hands
shake. You have already told me
I am not your type in the deep, raw
way that is addicting,

but you like *Taxi Driver* and collect
cactus pins on your jean jacket. We don't talk
when my eyes are fully open.

This is our spot.

You could love me if you touched
my hair or called me your Raven and closed
the empty by sitting on the same side of the table
as me. You can eat half of my pancakes.

Playlist for Broken Hearts

With You- Chris Brown

My fingers
laced around his neck

trying to ignore
the squeak

of his New Balance
sneakers on the

cafeteria floor
his hands

circle my waist
how long

is the wait
to be touched

at all even lightly
even without

meaning
as we swayed

to the beat
of a song

we would both
forget in a year

Tom Sawyer- Rush

Bradley is not a song, just the act of finding something to listen to.
On summer days I would find Bradley throwing rocks at tailless
platypuses called nutrients near a dirty pond on the corner
of our street. A palm tree framed his front door. The first
time I saw snow was on the tips of his eyelashes. We rode
the bus together until he could drive. In the bed of his pale truck
we named our children after his best friend and my younger

sister. I wrote him a letter once: *You broke me, Thumper*.
I threw it away because it was a lie and he would know it.
He moved to Louisiana to find bigger rodents to torment and left
me breathless for as long as it takes for the next song on shuffle to play.

Ain't No Mountain High- Marvin Gaye and Tammi Terrell

He was every man I saw
in a movie who I could
fix, keep from exploding.
Not every bomb has a green
wire. He wrote
his own music but none
of it was good.
Being with him
was like listening to a Top 40 hit
when all I wanted was to hear
a lyric flooded melody. Loving someone
for ten years writes them in your skin,
John loving me
knowing all of the lyrics
to a song you don't
remember learning.

La Vie en Rose – Louis Armstrong

Ryan is the song that has outstayed its welcome. The melody loses all sense of timing that it begins to have no space to comfortably exist. He is the clap from a crowd that starts together and falls off beat. It is too easy to listen to songs you sing along with perfectly, songs you measure your heart beat too. Listening, the temptation to hum along was too alluring. I spent so long seeing if I could turn right on red that I didn't see the light turn green.

ISpy- Kyle Feat. Lil Yachty

You call all songs prophecy.
You call me your curly-haired
cutie. We spend Fridays

tracing the edge of the river
in our matching purple tennis
shoes. You play

with my hands, hum a Christmas song
that you don't know the words to. You
are the song that plays every time I turn

on my car. My teeth ache
when I think of you tiring of it,
the melodies frequency redundant.

The urge to switch the session
will become too strong, that overplayed
memory linked to a too short time.

From a Hammock

I will catch your first sunken breath
and watch your chest.

The weight of your arm against
my numbed waist,

the world unhinged behind
my locked eyes.

Puffs billow from your glazed glass,
each mildewed

blast stalled my heartbeat. Finally
I could count

how slowly it echoed an even one
two three

the wind blew flame onto my finger,
scorching my skin,

your chest billowing and hollowing.
I could hear

my chest billowing and hollowing.
Darling, look

you wove your fingers through mine,
you can breathe.

If You Were a Painting

You never liked works of art until you met me. You always loved to look at them when across the sea, away from the bed where we did most of our talking. You would be a sculpture, you said, because the world makes you hardened. You would not be a painting, you would stand on the replicas of your feet, gaze pointed upward, fingers woven behind your back. People would stop in awe. You would never move.

What These Words Are For

I don't want to be a female poet
for the same reason no verse can capture
the nature of God. These verses are for me.
I have always been less of a woman

than I should be, despite plenty of practice.
I became a woman at nine, publicly
staining the water at my next-door neighbor's
pool party, ruining my favorite rose-colored

swimsuit. That uncontrollable effect of my nature
granted the smooth chested boys an assumed right
to linger their gaze in a way that still fills my lungs
with water, a sensation as familiar as hunger.

I was failing at womanhood long before that; before
I knew I was failing, I refused to play House or School
with my sister—a child hard-wired for motherhood—
refused to pretend to teach her things she already knew

for a game. She would fake nurse her dolls, plastic
mouths puckering at her flat chest, I sat scowling.
Failing before Confirmation class taught that I was doomed
by the Virgin for leaning in to desire,

defying the thought that pleasure should incite guilt,
that knowledge of how my own body functions
should somehow damn me. It is glaring now.

Distaste an omen for every ache that plagues
my stomach, filling it with empty echoes
of "nothing will grow here"
my whole life equipping me with the knowledge

that I will never be able to succeed at the things
I was born to do. My body always faulting.
Still, I refuse to treat it as social currency
a piece of capital, a reward earned with an unwarranted

compliment or ten dollar meal. I am breathless
from the weight, and my burdens are light.
It is easy to hide in hollow hopes,
to burrow in the word change

but no matter if I simply work to embody my own
constantly failing home, or write a book to detail
every time my uterus was prodded, already in pain,
searching for answers from people who don't hear the question

or scream so that someone might turn their head
or march across the country for the right to decide
how my own self gets to exist
until I am face to face with the sea, no matter any movements

we are standing still.
Rather than succumb to the sand swallowing my ankles,
just for now, I am running.
I am running until I can catch my breath.