I Heard the Tree Scream and I Hated the Sound

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I Heard the Tree Scream and I Hated the Sound

Dakota Lopes

Submitted in Partial Completion of the Requirements for Departmental Honors in Theatre

Bridgewater State University

May 2, 2022

Prof. Miranda Giurleo, Thesis Advisor Date: 5/4/22

Prof. Sarah Bedard, Committee Member Date: 5/5/22

Prof. Emmett Buhmann, Committee Member Date: 5/8/22
I Finally Heard the Tree Scream and I Hated the Sound

A Play by Dakota Lopes
NOTE FOR THE DIRECTOR:

This play can have as many actors as you would like, but at minimum there must be at least 4. The only requirement for casting is there must be at least one male or male presenting performer, as for some pieces it is an examination of gender that is specific to the male. Other than this, there are no requirements for casting demographics.

It is important to the play that whatever your vision for the aesthetics it must reside within the realm of contemporary life and realism.

NOTE FOR THE READER:

This play is a series of monologues and short scenes, disconnected in their narrative but strung together with a common theme: The experience of being seen. Social Media, for all of its effects on the human psyche is particularly peculiar to me in this way: It allows a person to be both the actor and the audience in their own life. Not only does one have to be cognizant of what they are doing but also how they look while they are doing it. It is not enough for one to buy a house or go out for dinner with friends, you also must do these things while you observe yourself from outside your own body. It is the act of putting yourself in someone else’s shoes not for the purpose of empathy, but of examination and critique. You are the watcher, the censor, the critic. Life is not just about content anymore, it is about form and composition, it’s about performance. That is what brought me to this play. During my studies at Bridgewater State University, I was enamored by a theatre practitioner that goes by the name of Bertolt Brecht. A German theatrical theorist and playwright who wrote plays under his theories of “Alienation.” Alienation is the act or distancing your audience from the play, so that instead of being swept up in the drama and the
stakes of the piece, you can think critically of what you are observing on stage. It was
categorized by the relationship that the performers had with the audience. Often interacting and
coming out of the narrative, all for the purpose of reminding the observer that they are watching
a play, something that is meant to be analyzed. I thought this was an intriguing theory to apply to
social media. The way that we interact with an audience through social media is bizarre, it’s
performative, and sometimes even dehumanizing. It is within this thesis that I wanted to examine
the para-social relationships that people experience with others when a layer of alienation is
thrust between their true selves.
Introduction

This is a play. A performance. The actors in this play will be playing different characters. We are all different. We appreciate your watchful eye. The role of the audience is crucial to the performer. And at the end of this play we will all take your eyes home with us. We will fill a glass jar with all of the eyes that have ever made their mark on us, so that they can watch us when we’re home, too. So, keep watching, and remember that we are also watching you.

Mama Watch Me.

Outside my house, there is a large tree, and in the spring every year a flock of birds decides to nest on its branches. I don’t know if “decides” is the right word. I’m sure it’s some sort of generational thing. My mother loves to watch them. She sets up cameras all over the yard so that she can watch the tree and the birds whenever she wants to. Sometimes, I watch them too. But I feel guilty when I do it. I watch the mother bird build her nest out of scraps of fur and twigs. I can watch her do this for hours, she works and works without rest. Later, I will watch her lay her eggs in the nest. I watch them hatch. The eggs get eaten sometimes, but that isn’t something I like to watch, so I’ll always flip to another camera, another nest. I’ll watch baby birds take flight for the first time. It is a beautiful moment to watch from the comfort of my living room. Sometimes they do not make it, the baby birds. Their wings cannot support them as they launch from the branches. Their tiny flightless bodies crumple as they impact the ground. I change the channel then too.

Do you ever feel like there is too much known?

That’s why I feel guilty. I feel like, maybe I wasn’t supposed to see the birds that live in the tree. And yah, maybe I make sure to never watch the bad parts, but maybe I shouldn’t watch the good
parts either. Maybe the eggs would not have been eaten if I hadn’t watched them. Then they would all fly. What if I never looked away? What if instead of looking somewhere else when those baby birds fell to the ground, I kept watching and they learned to fly at the last second, just before they reached the earth.

The Baby Blues

Today I got a reminder for the anniversary of my baby’s very first post. I remember how we dressed him up in this absolutely adorable baby blue onesie to go with his eyes. They weren’t as blue as his daddy’s though; my husband has these incredible turquoise eyes. I wanted my baby boy to have eyes like his daddy, so I gave him a teeny, little filter to make them just the right shade, that way it matched up just right. Sometimes even babies need a little help, just like you and me. I mean I wish that my baby pictures looked as beautiful as my baby’s did. In mine, my face was so pudgy, and I was wearing this dreadful little outfit. My mother wasn’t nearly as concerned with my appearance. And I know what you’re thinking. But don’t worry, I saved the filter, so his eyes can look the same, perfect, perfect shade in every picture he takes, even when he’s older.

GoFundUs

A: Hi, Hello. Um. I don’t know how to say this. My mom. Passed away last week. Stage 4 cancer. She didn’t catch until it was too late. She didn’t have health insurance, so when she started hurting, she just bore through it. She’s always been stubborn like that. But now we have her hospital and funeral bills to pay and I don’t know how we’re going to do it. So I’m posting this GOFundMe... I’m sorry, If you have anything at all to give -
An influencer surrounds a homeless individual, like a vulture to a dead corpse, he talks to the audience.

B: OK. Come over here. How do I look? Good? How’s this angle?

He gets uncomfortably close

B: Hey everyone, it’s Mr.Feast with another vlog where we give back to our beautiful community by feeding the homeless. I... Hold on cut the video. Let me just take this, can’t have you being too comfortable, it doesn’t help with empathy.

He removes the homeless man’s coat

B: Look what we have here guys. A homeless person, alone on the streets, hungry, cold, without even a coat to keep himself warm. I want you all to put a frowny face down in the comment section if you hate seeing homeless people. Now, we’re gonna make this person’s day, aren’t we guys. What we have here is a juicy, premium cut steak, grilled to perfection. Don’t worry, you guys are gonna watch them eat the whole thing.

C: I just need money, please

B: Aren’t you hungry?

C: Please

B: Eat the steak! Why don’t you eat it?!

While the two become involved in a physical struggle, the child becomes desperate to gain your attention.
A: Please, I don’t need any thoughts and prayers, I appreciate them, but what I really need is your money. We spent every dime we had trying to keep her alive that we didn’t even think about what we would do if she didn’t make it.

_Influencer, bloodthirsty_

B: If you want to help more people like I am, make sure you donate to my channel. I can use all the help I can get.

A: Please.

_Are Dream’s Memories if I Never Wake Up?_

Sometimes I wish I could forget everything. I’ll even settle for forgetting something at this point. I’m sick of taking pictures and getting reminded that I took them, remembering them later. I know I should want to save the good moments, to capture things that make me happy. But every happy memory reminds me of something terrible. Photos of ex-lovers and friends that I don’t see anymore flood my phone and my memories. I was so happy in those pictures, but now when I see them all I’m reminded of is loss and regret. Things that were so real to me have been reduced to pixels and reimagined within me as a hollow pit in my stomach. I don’t want to remember the anniversary of my dog’s death. He doesn’t even have Instagram.

_Suicide Looks Horrifying in Sepia Tone_

I saw a grown man decapitated on the internet at the age of 13. I don’t mean in a movie or on tv or something. I mean a video of a real person having all of his memories, dreams, and thoughts separated from the rest of his body. It was like having a power cord unplugged from a computer. It was horrifying and mesmerizing and also oddly familiar. I found it on a website that my friend
had shown me. Parental lock wasn’t big back then, it was easier for me to lock my parents out of things than it was for them to stop me from seeing what I wanted to. I remember sitting in my computer room for hours after I got home from school. I was a latch key kid, I was basically raised on the internet. People might think that’s a bad thing, but I don’t think so. Seeing the most disgusting parts of people has it’s perks. Nothing surprises me anymore. I’m numb to it all. And I’m glad that I got it out of the way early, it saved me a lot of disappointment in life.

So whenever someone in my life close to me dies. I don’t think much of it. It’s nothing I haven’t experienced before. In fact I’d argue that it’s more tame than the things I’ve seen on the internet. My brother didn’t get hit by a car going 90, his limbs strewn across the street like spaghetti. He died of a terminal illness. That’s so... painfully... boring. Where’s the romance in it? The gravitas. Here’s a message to all of you. If you plan on dying, at least make it memorable enough to put on the internet.

**The Story of the Very Real Girl**

*A man sits with across from a sex doll*

This is my girlfriend, say hello.

*Cue the audience*

She gets nervous in front of crowds. She’s usually so chatty when we’re alone. Go on, introduce yourself.

*Person reacts to what the doll is saying*

Stop! You are such a joker! She’s kidding, don’t worry. *A hearty laugh*. That’s why I fell for you, always so funny. I love you.
The actor then gets into a conversation with the doll, who they very much believe is a real person. They mime having dinner. This should be very uncomfortable for the viewer. They make small talk.

Yah, work was awful today. It’s just hard finding common ground with all of them. It seems like everyone wants the project to go in a different direction. What do you think I should do?

*They wait.*

No see why do you always say that? I’m not a pussy, it’s just hard.

*They wait*

Really? Are we gonna do this right here? Look it’s not like you know what work is like, you just sit at home the whole day. What do you do? The house is always a mess, and you never cook me anything.

*Again*

Don’t bring my dad into this.

*Again*

You know you can be such a bitch sometimes. I invite you to have dinner with my friends and this is how you act?

*Yah*

What do you mean you wanna break up? You can’t do that. That... That doesn’t make any sense.

*Again*
You know what? Fine. I can find another bitch like you, you’re all the same anyway. And you know what? I know you fucked Tommy. That’s right. I didn’t wanna bring it up because I love you. I love you so much and I knew that it was just a mistake, a one time thing.

Again

How many times? You’ve done it how many times?

He lunges at the doll and pins it to the ground, grabbing it by the neck.

HOW COULD YOU! AFTER EVERYTHING I’VE DONE FOR YOU! YOU WERE THE BEST PART OF ME. EVERY DAY I WAS APART FROM YOU I DREAMED OF SEEING YOU AGAIN AND THIS IS WHAT YOU DO TO ME?

He deflates the doll

No... Rebecca? Rebecca I’m sorry. Wake up. This isn’t funny. I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have... I shouldn’t have.

He sits and ponders for a moment. Then, he takes another sex doll out and begins to inflate it.

No Hands

An actor comes out and speaks to the audience

For this next speaker, I’d ask that you all refuse this person validation. Under any circumstances, do not give this person your approval.

They leave, two new actors come on, a speaker and a non-speaker

As the speaker is giving his monologue, the other actor is holding them
My mother loved to tell me stories about when I was a baby. I always find it funny when people tell you baby stories about yourself. It’s like they’re describing a you that you don’t know. A version of yourself that you locked away in the recesses of your brain like a bad night out. She always told me this one story to embarrass me. She talked about how she could never get rid of me because any time that she put me down to do anything that she needed to do, I would start holding my breath. Out of protest, I would hold my breath until she picked me up and started paying attention to me again. She would go to the bathroom for two minutes and come back to my face turning ugly shades of blue. I guess I never really grew out of that. But it’s not that I can’t be alone, it’s just that I have no reason to want to be alone. So, after my mother died, I started hiring people to hold me and tell me I’m doing a great job.

Could you all tell me I’m doing a great job?

They wait for a response. They are very uncomfortable without one.

What? Am I not doing a great job? I’ve been trying so hard!

The actor that is holding them leaves, the speaker collapses.

NO! Please come back!

To the audience

Tell them to come back. Now.

They start hyperventilating

Hold me please! Tell me I’m a good little (boy/girl/person).

They wait. They get into the audience.
I will suffocate myself. I swear it. My blood will be on your hands.

*They “hold their breath” at this point the audience will either tell them they’re doing a good job or they will allow the actor to suffocate themselves. React accordingly.*

**Attack of the Clones**

I personally think I am very unique. What do you think? I dress the way that I want to. I thrift all of my clothing. I only read classics. I use big words in discussion board posts. I don’t post selfies and I use really funny captions that only my friends understand. Doing these things helped me to feel uniquely myself. It helped me to feel like I had a place in this world. Then the other day I came across someone else who does all of those things. In fact, they do all of those things way better than me. They’re better at being me than I am. So, what does that have to say about me? I’m a half-rate version of myself. And if there is one more me out there, then there must be even more me’s. Is there only two of us? Is there an infinite amount of me’s? People who talk like me and look like me. What if they’re all better at me than me. What then? What if I am at the bottom of the me totem pole, what if I am the least like myself out of all the other me’s. Is that any way to live? I guess I need to be someone else.

**Adam and Eve not Adam and Adam**

*This is a man*

I don’t have sex in my apartment anymore. Let me explain. I hear my neighbors going at it all the time. It’s ridiculous. And that means if I can hear them then they can most definitely hear me. Isn’t it embarrassing to be perceived like that? Like they’re not here in the room but they know how it’s going, you know what I mean. They just sound a lot better than me. Because I’m worried that if they only hear the bed creaking for 5 minutes followed by a rather abrupt end,
then they have to look at me in the hallway and know that about me. About my performance. To
top it all off my neighbors are some hot porn couple that put their videos on the internet. So, I
know that they don’t care if I can hear them. But I’m not them. So, no more sex. Now I have
reserved myself for very silent masturbation. That way no one can hear me and my performance
can’t be critiqued. I think that’s the best thing about self-pleasure, there is no one there to judge
you. No chick in your ear saying “oh when will I get to finish first.” The best and only important
critic of my sex life is me, so it only makes sense that I should just be doing it for myself.

Feel

I can’t tell. I can’t tell anymore. If you are looking at me or if you’re looking through me. Every
time I get up here, I feel like a fraud. Like you can hear my little telltale heart through the
floorboards. I can feel your eyes pierce through my skin like a brand. And I have to live the rest
of my life knowing that you own me. And I feel like I’m the only one bleeding. Everything is
covered in blood, it soaks through the ground until it becomes mud. But blood is so hard to see
when everyone is wearing rose-colored glasses. Does anyone else realize how fucked up
everything is? I feel so terribly alone in this pain, and I just need to know that other people feel it
too. Do you feel it too?

I need someone to touch me.

Eyes

Your eyeballs can distinguish 500 different shades of grey. We probably have a name for every
single one, yet, unless you're buying a car, you probably don’t care about the difference between
“Smoke” and “Porpoise” do you? Some things are so frivolous, and yet we tax ourselves with the
task anyway. Someone had to name all 500 of those shades of grey, and you don’t even care
about the painstaking work they put into it. That’s the problem with caring about something. No one else cares about something as much as you do. And if they do? No they don’t. No one cares about the shades of grey. You can care about some of them, sure. Everyone loves a good charcoal. But you can’t care about all of them, not the way that one guy did.

**Need Me**

*A person is “scrolling” through a dating app. Actors sit in a circle of chair and rotate while the primary speaker shoos them away to rotate again. Eventually they stop.*

You. You are so beautiful. People! Do you see this? This enchanting, bewitching, enduring human being. I can imagine our children. Can’t you? And they would be perfect. You. Are. Perfect. We both love the office. We both love dogs.

What do I say? This is my future spouse. It has to be something endlessly romantic. Something memorable. Something that makes them say: “I do.”

Any suggestions from the crowd?

*They listen to suggestions, improv a lil.*

None of that is any good. I need something timeless. Something that you can rely on.

*They begin to type, whatever that means.*

Hey. With two y’s. So they know that I’m extra interested. Never fails.

*They wait.*

*And wait.*
The potential date stands up. Looks like they are about to say something. They don’t. They walk away.

Heartbroken, perhaps they fall to their knees. That was the one. I believe it.

I don’t think God intended for one person to see so many attractive people in our lifetime. It’s unnatural. Every day I see another person that is the most beautiful person in the world. And every day they don’t want me.

**A Mirror to the Soul**

When I look someone in the face, I don’t see them. I try my best to make eye contact, but even then, I don’t see anything other than my reflection. I thought that eyes were supposed to be a window to the soul, but all I see is a mirror. And I hate the way I look in it. Even now, as I look into all of your beady little eyes, the pools of black within your retinas, I don’t see you. I see myself. But I look hideous. I don’t really look like that. Do I? It’s like some sort of warped funhouse mirror. Is that what I am to you? A clown? Someone who stands on a stage and entertains you? I don’t like it when you look at me like that. Could you all at least smile? It makes me feel less lonely... That’s not any better. You don’t really see me up here, do you?

**Look At Me**

*A person takes the stage. The audience is a mirror to them. They use the mirror as any person would. They check themselves out, they admire their outfit. They lose interest. They come back. Do they like what they see? They do, at first. The longer that the charade goes on the more they become displeased with their appearance. They begin to crumble under the weight of comparison and self-critique. They break down. This is a long and violent display, and it should*
make the audience uncomfortable as they never break eye contact. Look at specific people in the crowd, make them feel seen. The black mirror is a window.