

## MOVIEHOUSE POEMS (3)

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### IN THE PROJECTION ROOM

the platter spins  
and light floats  
above us; submerged  
in our seats, quiet  
washing around us  
as we slouch  
and the undertow  
of soundtrack starts.  
We're suddenly sprung  
from daylight, the boredom  
of brightness, the film  
an unguent  
as it enters our bodies  
and settles, stored  
like a calm  
we never thought  
would stay with us.



### THEY MET IN BOMBAY

The plot: Clark Gable's a jewel thief;  
Rosalind Russell's a liar in his league.  
While they fall in love there's comic relief  
and then a stolen diamond provides intrigue.  
The setting's international—a brief  
trip on a steamer with the unique  
Peter Lorre (eyes taped, as Captain Chang)—  
and then in Hong Kong: the next sturm and drang.  
I'm not the audience of 1941  
but when Gable stumbles into war  
(impersonating an officer) he's won  
the Victoria Cross. There's bloody scores  
of soldiers dead, yet Gable's lauded.  
(Deceit has always been applauded.)





*ONE MINUTE TO ZERO*

Sunlight breaks through layers  
Of clouds. Robert Mitchum, American  
colonel, loves war widow Ann Blyth.  
Turkey vultures soar over the hillside.  
Mitchum's deployed to South Korea  
to evacuate refugees. Tops of trees  
sway slightly. Separately, Blyth  
travels to Korea to aid civilians.  
They reunite after Blyth witnesses  
the shelling of evacuees ordered  
by Mitchum. Petals from a dogwood  
float on the pond. The rub?  
Blyth's unaware guerilla fighters  
Held guns in evacuees' backs.  
The pond water, flat as a patio, reflects  
vultures weaving through the petals.



*MARATHON MAN: RHYME ROYAL*

The sight of Roy Scheider, stuck in the hard-  
pack of his belly, face a pre-ghost white,  
shocks every watcher. We disregard  
what's on our minds as we start the white-  
hot hate for Olivier—and despite  
the pain we feel for Dustin Hoffman's pain—  
this Nazi's death is nicely inhumane.



*A COURSE IN BEING A SPECTATOR*

Watching is not a function of sight  
as much as a feeling of mind—  
an endeavor to take the touch of light

and twist it into meaning. A sight  
might be decades past in time  
but flash back freshly as morning light.

From a revival of *House of Wax* one night  
 at the Sam Eric, what survives  
 is not the gimmicks of 3D but the fright

of Vincent Price's face crumbling, the sight  
 scary as the Phantom. A shock of this kind  
 is a body blow, knocking the wind out of the light.

Our eyes are tied to our guts, the sights  
 Cemented into beliefs we find  
 by watching not the objects of sight  
 but the subjects darkened by light.



### CARY GRANT'S CO-STARS

Though there was a spark  
     when they first met  
 through most of the movies  
     Cary's character's hard to get.

While Ingrid's eyeing Nazi spies  
     she falls headlong for Cary.  
 He doesn't show his love for her  
     until things get hairy.

Eve/Eva's not who she says,  
     and Cary's identity's a frame.  
 After the save on replica Rushmore  
     they are no strangers on the train.

Cary lies to Audrey who thinks,  
     off and on, he's a scamp.  
 By the end she's decoded his heart  
     and placed her stamp.



### CINEMA AS REDEMPTION

The crowd ducks under the marquee  
 to avoid the downpour of July heat:  
 the cooled air makes them purr.  
 Newsreel says war is raging—  
 or is it the people? Not even

Spy Smasher's victories can satisfy  
The crowd's craving for innocence.  
Veins on their foreheads engorge  
With tension. Heavy cigarette  
smoke mingles with the light stream  
high in the house, so  
motion on the 40-foot screen  
is slightly blurred. Early  
in the feature a man brandishes  
his wit, but then she enters—  
object of dreams in the dead of day,  
every hair and stare in place—  
and the crowd coos  
at Rita Hayworth!



*NOW, VOYAGER: A WATCHER'S PATHWAY*

The world's black and white  
as she holds her hand open  
so the long cigarette looks like a finger  
on fire, smoke separating her face  
from her lover's, a hazy ablution.  
From a back row a collision of sound:  
a man coughs or cackles and we  
are shocked back into the auditorium  
with its cathedral ceiling, until seconds later  
the echelons of light above our heads carry us  
back to the cadence of their talking,  
the burnished bass of Claude Rains  
overlapping Bette Davis' staccato rejoinders,  
the tension stacking against our collective  
body while the soundtrack shakes us down  
like a pickpocket, and we depart the theater  
wondering if any ending can be happy.