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Introduction

In his diary on the making of the film *Beauty and the Beast*, Jean Cocteau wrote: "My method is simple: not to aim at poetry. That must come of its own account.... I shall try to build a table. It will be up to you then to eat at it, to examine it or to chop it up for firewood (Cocteau, *Beauty and the Beast: Diary of a film*: 6).

Cinematic Reveries is a collection of original writings about things we cannot see but which alter our lives. These 29 poetic writings of varied lengths offer points of entry into a select group of films. Rather humble objects, these examples of film criticism in a new form are distillations of years of viewing and writing about the cinema. They make no claims for sweeping structures, and even the longer ones merely suggest. Each of the writings highlights one scene, or an underlying tone, in films from Europe, Asia, South America, the Pacific, North America, and the Middle East.

While a few of the films that inspired these poetic writings are products of the Hollywood studio system or of established studios in other countries, the majority originated in small studios, independent productions, and new waves of experimentation with cinematic style. In many cases, they are records of rapidly disappearing traditions preserved on film. They are the kinds of films Raul Ruiz noted in his *Poetics of Cinema 2*: those that recognize us "as an old relative" (110).

Overall inspiration for the writings came from a wide range of readings, including the work of geographer Yi-fu Tuan, art historians Norman Bryson and Ernst Gombrich, French philosopher Gaston Bachelard, and the philosophies of movement on screen by Gilles Deleuze. I look back to theorists of the cinema like Rudolf Arnheim and André Bazin in their desire to find in the cinema an aesthetic object that somehow overcomes the mechanical aspects of the medium. I am instructed by the writings of film scholar David Bordwell, essayist John Berger, and filmmaker Pier Paolo Pasolini. I am also profoundly inspired by the essay "Cinema as an Instrument of Poetry" by Spanish filmmaker Luis Buñuel, who wrote that poetry holds "a sense of liberation, subversion of reality, a passage into the marvelous world of the subconscious, and nonconformity to the restrictive world that surrounds us" (136).

Many of the prose poems explore the narrow margin between documentary and fiction. They draw on what film historian and curator Jordi Balló has pointed out so beautifully in his *Imágenes del silencio (Images of Silence)*: the way knowledge of visual motifs allows the viewer of cinema to

appreciate them as “already known” rather than just as “already seen” (15). In other words, the evocative power of repeated visual motifs is inexhaustible and deeply rooted in our iconographic history. Balló refers to visual motifs that are at once immediately comprehensible and yet serve as moments of “inner suspension” to incite contemplation.

The writings in *Cinematic Reveries* point towards the films, not towards the author, in a tone that is at once exploratory, familiar, and elegiac. Many of the prose poems focus on (to cite Yvette Bíró) the ways “we constantly encounter the unexpected masked by the routines of daily existence” (196-197). Some of the writings linger over gentle contemplations while others insist more forcefully that injustices be addressed. After years of hesitation about publishing these prose poems, I finally found them complete enough to release to the light.

Each of the three sections of *Cinematic Reveries* begins with an introductory note, followed by a series of prose poems that may be read sequentially or in a non-linear fashion. (Their order reflects careful choice in terms of variations in tone rather than any chronological listing.) The concluding piece in each section is a short poetic (non-prose) interlude. In this way, one section of the book speaks to the next one through intersecting themes of: gestures that linger in the mind, a paradoxical stillness on screen, and evocative images of water. “Lorca/Keaton,” the concluding long piece, returns us to the magic of cinema’s origin and to the expansive nature of poetry. A section entitled “Expansions” at the end offers a few notes of explanation about individual films, but there is no attempt to provide plot summaries. These short writings will hold meaning for readers even if they have not seen the films to which the prose poems refer.

The inset images on the cover suggest the flow of images that have inspired these written reveries. Because each person can identify his or her own resonant cinematic moments, it is my hope that *Cinematic Reveries* will inspire in each reader the desire to explore beloved films in a poetic manner. In this sense, this small collection might have a centrifugal effect.