Note: All translations are by the author unless otherwise acknowledged.

Narrative versus Poetic Film

If cinema could be classified, it would seem that two distinct types of film have evolved from the original silent cinema: popular film (the "movies") and its more controversial cousin, the "experimental" film. Many labels and epithets have been applied to these two brands of film by many experts through the years—that is, narrative versus poetic, novel versus lyric, dramatic versus epic. But before one can speak of such matters as the actual evolution of these two progeny of silent film and then Cocteau's respective place within this development, a working definition of the two cinematic subjects seems to be in order. The differences and similarities between these two rather ambiguous classifications of film can be, perhaps, best explained through the use of the following criteria: the essential *purpose* of each type, its inherent *structure*, and the *role of the audience* to its presentation.[1]

First, consider the more popular and abundant of the two: the narrative-film. The function of this type of cinema is, obviously, narration—its primary purpose is to tell a story and, thereby, to entertain. Its dramatic, often didactic, plot follows a linear progression with respect to time. In the words of Maya Deren, the narrative breed of film is essentially "horizontal" in its movement. She, for example, makes the following distinction:

> A "horizontal" development is more or less . . . a narrative development, such as occurs in drama, from action to action. . . . a "vertical" development, such as occurs in poetry, is a part plunging down, or a construction which is based on the intent of the moment.[2]

1. Frank Manchel, *Film Study: A Resource Guide* (Cranbury, New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1973), pp. 106–112.
2. Willard Maas, "Poetry and the Film: A Symposium," *Film Culture* 3, no. 27 (Winter 1962–3) :61.

The narrative-film has an appropriate beginning, a clearly delineated succession of events as a plot, and a climactic conclusion or denouement at the end. All the elements are usually very logically placed in time so that the spectator has no difficulty in following the flow of the story and "identifying" totally with the actors and their situations. Flashbacks and "mood" sequences are used sparingly and only when they can be directly linked to the central theme as an effective illustration of the plot. Typical examples of this form are such films as *Gone with the Wind, Love Story, Patton, Sound of Music,* and many others.

The role of the audience in the presentation of narrative-type film can perhaps be best illustrated in terms of the reason *why* people attend this brand of cinema. The large majority of audiences would most likely agree with Pauline Kael when she says:

> People go to the movies for the various ways in which movies express the experience of their lives, and as a means of avoiding and postponing the pressures they feel . . . (it) may be considered refreshment,[3]

or with Elizabeth Bowen:

> I go to the cinema for a number of different reasons. Put down roughly, they seem to fall under five headings: wish to escape, lassitude, sense of lack in my nature or my surroundings, loneliness (however passing), and natural frivolity.[4]

The craving for "entertainment," it seems, corresponds to a particular mental predisposition within the typical moviegoer. This predisposition toward relaxation, toward a deep yearning to "get away from it all," is satisfied by the essential properties of the narrative film. The film presents an impersonal story of intensified events and experiences into which the spectator can place his own identity for a short while.

It is in this sense, then, that film can be termed *entertainment.* And, further, it seems that the average movie-going public has, through the years, grown accustomed to judging *all* film according to these same standards of how well it "entertains" them. That is to

3. Pauline Kael, "Are Movies Going to Pieces?" in *Film: A Montage of Theories,* ed. R. MacCann (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1966), p. 353.
4. Elizabeth Bowen, "Why I Go to the Cinema," in *Film: A Montage of Theories,* ed. R. D. MacCann (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1966), p. 237.

say, a film is judged primarily according to how well it allows the spectator to remain relatively relaxed and anonymous, while providing for him an exciting and semicredible world of fiction into which he can project and lose himself (that is, an appealing identity substitute).

Hence, in the narrative-type film, questions concerning meaning that are *raised* in the story are usually *answered* in the story, so that the passive anonymity and "identity displacement" of the viewer may remain accordingly intact.

Communicating meaning in film is effected through the use of sight and sound. It is through these two elements that the audience is carried into the almost trancelike state described above. The strength of the spoken word in film seems to be invested with many of the same characteristics as the written word in literature. Essentially, the spoken word needs no pictorial representation for its numerous meanings and applications to emerge successfully within the mind of the viewer. Professor Arnheim explains it this way:

> The [spoken] word refers directly to the meaning, the character, the structure of things; hence, the spiritual quality of its vision, the acuteness and succinctness of its descriptions. The writer is not tied to the physical concreteness of a given setting . . . and since he uses as his material not the actual percept but its conceptual name, he can compose his images of elements that are taken from disparate sensory sources. He does not have to worry whether the combinations are possible or even imaginable in the physical world.[5]

The strength of the visual image upon the screen as a primary conveyor of communication is, of course, unquestioned. "A picture is worth a thousand words" only approximates the communicative, hypnotic possibilities of the cinematic image. Its powers of suggestion are almost unlimited—its very nature defies the normal laws of space and time. And, in the words of V. I. Pudovkin:

> the scenariowriter must always bear in mind the fact that every sentence he writes must appear plastically upon the screen in some visible form. Consequently, it is not the words he writes that are important, but the externally expressed images that he describes in these words. . . . The lens of the camera is the eye

5. Rudolf Arnheim, *Film as Art* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1966), p. 206.

> of the spectator. He sees and remarks only that which the director wishes to show him, or, more correctly put, that which the director himself sees in the action concerned.[6]

However, what seems to differentiate one brand of film from another is the *interaction* of these two elements of sight and sound. The methodology of narrative-type cinema seems oftentimes to *separate* and *accentuate* these two aspects of film. To "entertain" the *eye,* handsome and pleasing actors and actress are cast in title roles. It would be, thus, unthinkable to portray the heroine of a film like *One Million Years B.C.* as anything less than a Raquel Welch. Oftentimes entire scenes are cast simply to fit the stars involved, much like the solo performance of a coloratura soprano singing an operatic aria. Meaningful communication to the eye is also established through such universally apparent shots as sunset scenes, dark alleyways, foggy decks, and speeding black sedans. The public has grown accustomed to always seeing the "good guys" wear the white hats, and they often feel uncomfortable if, as it was in the case of *A Clockwork Orange,* the roles are somehow reversed, or even undefined. Meaningful dialogue, as the public expects to hear it, usually comes in the form of, "There's something I've been meaning to say to you, darling. . . ." or, "Sometimes a man's gotta' do what he's gotta' do. . . ." Inevitably, the scene of spoken dialogue will show close-up shots of the faces of the speakers, weighing their words laboriously.

It should perhaps be noted that, in the tradition of "all answers provided" of the narrative-film, *emotional* states are "answered" by the film as well. This function is further satisfied through the extensive use of *background music.* During the scenes of no dialogue, the background music "tells the story"—for example action music, suspicion music, apprehension music, peace music, fear music, love music.

The movie-going public has, through the years, come to adjust its cinematic experience to this set standard of symbols—and it is through these traditionally accepted images and dialogues that most narrative-films communicate their respective plots. Accustomed to this pabulum of familiar and easily recognizable film vocabulary, the public becomes understandably perplexed and sceptical when confronted with a film that does not express itself via the same symbols. Due to a lack of spontaneous comprehension and, accordingly, a lack

6. V. I. Pudovkin, "The Plastic Material," in *Film: A Montage of Theories,* ed. R. D. MacCann (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1966), pp. 24, 31.

of immediate applicability as an identity substitute, the film ceases to be "entertaining." The communicative and psychotherapeutic functions of the film are lost.

The final scenes of Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* seem to aptly clarify these two differing vocabularies of film. Essentially narrative for the most part, the plot followed a "horizontal" portrayal of the evolution of man versus his world, beginning with apes and making the rapid transition to spacemen. The plot then very logically continued with detailed excerpts of man's systematic penetration of his immediate universe. However, as the climax of the film approaches and the final dénouement is at hand, the elaborate vocabulary of the film changes drastically. The obviously chronological plot-progression stops. The entire imagery changes. The symbol-codes of meaning, established throughout the length of the film, take on a new and seemingly opaque aspect. Bursts of colors flash upon the screen, strange and transformed bedchambers are momentarily shown, a man ages an entire lifetime in a matter of seconds and, finally, the film ends with a close-up of a human embryo that seems almost to float in space. The only really familiar (though wholly indecipherable) symbol is a massive obelisk of black stone that, ironically, has been inscrutably present throughout the film.

It is evident that the interpretive vocabulary needed to translate these last few scenes of Kubrick's film into a meaningful personal application is an entirely different one than seems to suffice for the average viewer in following the plot up to that point. The images and sounds seem to be *implying* important meanings rather than trying to state them outright. Kubrick clothes his visions in a garb wholly untraditional in nature and, by so doing, removes this portion of his film from what could be called *normal narrative communication.* The audience and critical reception of this final portion of the film, as could be expected, was initially very dubious. *Newsweek* illustrates this point in saying of the film:

> Kubrick spent four years and $11 million making the visionary *2001,* which was attacked by the critics for its ambiguous ending . . . but which has since been acknowltdged as one of the great feats of cinematic imagination. . . .[7]

7. "Kubrick's Brilliant Vision," *Newsweek,* 3 January 1972, pp. 28–29.

However, firmly justifying himself and the film's ending, Kubrick states:

> When you are implying that godlike chief entities are at work in the universe, you can't hit something like that head-on without looking like instant crackpot speculation. You've got to work through dramatic suggestion. I'm quite satisfied that *2001* had the correct ending.[8]

Now consider this second, more controversial classification of film that has evolved from the silent cinema. This particular type has been labeled as *experimental, lyric,* or *poetic,* and seems identifiable primarily as a vehicle for the portrayal of what could, perhaps, be called the artist's *interior reality.* This interior reality incorporates into its definition many diversified elements: for example, ideas, thoughts, feelings, moods, emotions, and visions. The role of film as a transmitter of these realms has never been very successfully defined. This brand of film is usually portrayed in contrast to what has been discussed as narrative-type film. Its primary purpose stems from the fact that it addresses itself to the substrata of a viewer's consciousness, rather than to his surface reasoning and "action-oriented" mentality. Some primary examples exhibiting these characteristics of film are such works as Resnais's *Last Year at Marienbad,* Buñuel's *Un Chien Andalou,* Strick's portrayal of Joyce's *Ulysses,* and, of course, the final few scenes of Kubrick's *2001.*

Depiction of "states of being," often illogical yet entirely real, seems to be the keynote for this brand of film. It is intrinsically an attempt by the filmmaker and/or director to express and communicate the abstract world of his inner, personal, lyrical visions. The film, perhaps more than any other art form, seems to be the most adaptable to this purpose. Hans Richter explains the use of cinema toward this end in saying:

> I have always been especially fascinated by the possibilities of the film to make the *invisible visible.* That relates to the abstract as it does to "fantasy" and the "inner self"—the functioning of the invisible "subconscious," which no other art can express as completely, and as drastically, as film.[9]

8. Ibid.
9. Jonas Mekas, "Hans Richter on the Nature of Film Poetry," *Film Culture* 3, no. 1 (Spring 1957) :6.

Carl Dreyer, the noted Danish director, summed up his feelings concerning this question of "abstraction" in an essay entitled, "Thoughts on My Craft."[10] In this essay, Dreyer recognizes the necessity for cinema to break away from the normal "reproduction of relaity" and the curse of simple "photography." But he also recognizes the extreme difficulty of such an eventual evolution in film. He states:

> Human beings dislike being taken off the beaten track. They have got used by now to the correct photographic reproduction of reality, they enjoy recognizing what they already know . . . so far this capacity has been the strength of the film, but for works of art it is becoming a weakness that must be fought.[11]

Thus outlining the artistic plight of modern film, defined in terms of the public's needs and desires, Dreyer goes on to say that new creative principles must be established so that film-art may become a "pure product of the human imagination" and cease to be an "imitation of nature." One such principle, he suggests, is abstraction:

> Where is the possibility of artistic renewal in the cinema? I can only answer for myself, and I can see only one way: abstraction . . . . The artist must describe inner, not outer life. . . . Abstraction allows the director to get outside the fence with which naturalism has surrounded his medium. It allows his films to be not merely visual, but spiritual. . . . Abstraction gives him a chance of . . . replacing objective reality with his own subjective interpretation.[12]

For the purposes of this study and in the absence of a more precise term, I shall call this type of film *film-poetry,* as opposed to the previously discussed narrative-film. Of course, these facile demarcations of film are very rarely mutually exclusive. Oftentimes, as it was in the case of *2001,* one finds many instances of film-poetry within the plot of a narrative-type film. However, what characteristically divides a film into one classification or another is its *primary purpose of expression,* its raison d'être, and it is through this perspective that one must approach each film.

The essential task of the film-poem is to *externalize inner hap-*

10. Carl Dreyer, "Thoughts on My Craft," in *Film: A Montage of Theories,* ed. R. D. MacCann (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1966) ,p. 313.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.

penings. The raw material of the exterior reality may or may not be used in this presentation. If not, in the manner of some contemporary "purists" who manipulate abstract geometric patterns, the visual equivalents for the internal state seem oftentimes shallow or inadequate, and even seem to exist for their plastic values alone, like graphic art-film. If, on the other hand, the elements of exterior reality are employed to create the film-poem, then these elements must undergo a transfiguration. Ken Kelman, for example, explains it this way:

> When the film-poem utilizes "real" characters and situations, it must transform them into symbols of the filmmaker's thoughts and feelings. If they retain more than a shadow of their identities, they will live too much on their own, too much as narrative, "realism," etc., and too little as sheer lyric expressions. . . . The total transformation of forms and materials into mere manifestations of the artist's state of mind is what is required. . . . The actual characters in a narrative situation take on mythical significance. They are absolutely charged with the vision of the filmmaker.[13]

A very prominent element, then, of the film-poem, in its externalization of the inner self, is that it must make manifest a "mythical significance," a symbolic language of sorts, so that the individual episodes transcend their literal sense and enter into the realm of archetype and of collective meaningfulness. Communication is, then, the most important function of the film-poem, as opposed to the entertainment function of narrative-film. Thus, the film-poem initiates a cycle that begins as subjective experience, is then transposed into an objectified presentation, and is finally "translated" back into subjective association by the viewer. An excellent example of this cycle happens in such a film as *Un Chien Andalou* of Luis Buñuel. In one scene of turbulent action where a woman seems to be discouraging the desperate attempts of a man to gain entrance to her bedroom, she slams the door on his arm. The camera then zooms in for a close-up of the hand trapped in the door and one sees hundreds of ants crawling about on the palm of this writhing hand. The author of the film desired to portray, in one very powerful image, the extreme itching hunger of this man driven mad by his craving. The simple sight of ants crawling over human flesh connotes to the viewer this rather complicated "inner reality," and the effect is much more immediate

13. Ken Kelman, "Film as Poetry," *Film Culture*, 3, no. 29 (Summer 1963) :24.

and effective than trying to accomplish the same purpose through an interchange of dialogue.

The role of the audience, then, in film-poetry differs highly from its role in narrative-film. Rather than relaxed absorption of unequivocal plot action, the spectator finds himself having ceaselessly to interact, interpret, and oftentimes ponder. Rather than entertainment, where the viewer would recognize instantly the film's vocabulary and apply it to himself, the film-poem seems almost a challenge, and to respond to the challenge the viewer must decode the artist's visionary presentation and *adapt* its multiple meanings to his own self. Thus, the question is not, "What did the artist mean by. . . ?", but rather, "What happens to *me* and what do *I* see when. . . ?"

To further complicate matters for the average viewer, the creative process of the film-poem is highly different from that of narrative-film. Whereas the narrative-film, or any commercial film, must follow an ironclad script from beginning to end (to properly convey the meaning of the plot in clear-cut terms), the film-poem "grows" in the actual shooting. The director "feels" his way through the shots and sequences, and the finished product may or may not resemble the conscious blueprint constructed for it at the beginning. In the words of director Richter:

> There is a kind of script, there is a general direction, there is an aim, a meaning, a mood in the process of production. But all that grows is not foreseen. It is a result of the creative process itself. It is not so much planning as it is feeling along the path which the theme takes. In other words, the material you accumulate during the shooting is more or less raw material; though it has been planned to contribute to a specific scene, plan, or aim, it might, in the end, assume a different meaning altogether. This I would call "sensitive improvisation." This listening to oneself as well as to the material which you accumulate is essential to a film-poem. . . .
>
> One has to count upon spontaneous inspiration, urges, the often quoted "subconscious." In having the ear open to them, the conscious plans, made in advance, might suddenly—and will often —hamper the work one really has in mind. . . .[14]

Thus, one can truly pity the plight of the "uninitiated" viewer who, trying his utmost to "understand," wishes to discover the symbols

14. Mekas, p. 7.

and secrets of "what the author meant"—that is, demanding of his conscious mind a deciphering of the language of his unconscious.

Communication of these inner realities through the film-poem is established through the imaginative *marriage* of the elements of sight and sound. The image is of particular importance, for it is through the imagery that the film-poem tries to visually construct and communicate its essentials. If the art of the film, in general terms, consists of starting with individual shots and building first into scenes and then sequences, then the "film-poet" applies a different set of criteria from the "film-narrator" in constructing his imagery. Shots are often taken for their *singular, individual* beauty or symbolism and, when added to a series of other such shots, the sequence that develops may suggest a strange but meaningful continuity, oftentimes previously unforeseen (*see* note 14 above). What is important to the poetic film construct, then, is its communicative and evocative powers through *visual suggestion.*

The tools of manipulating imagery—montage, superimposition, and the like—become, thus, paramount to the filmmaker's intentions, for they rule the manner in which the film is going to "talk" to and interact with its audience. An example of this visual communication is listed by Kelman in the following excerpt from his essay concerning film-poetry:

> An early, rudimentary, and very famous example of internal impressionism, and a constructed (not free) association, occurs in Pudovkin's *Mother*. Here the young imprisoned revolutionary receives a note informing him of plans for imminent escape. His emotions on reading this are conveyed to us by a close-up of his smiling mouth, and then a rapid succession of shots blending into each other: a laughing child, water sparkling in the sun, and so forth, all meant to render the prisoner's surge of joy. The attempt here is to find direct visual equivalents for an internal state; thereby to suggest exactly the same feeling to the spectator. The fact that the images are detached entirely from the situation, and even the character—but rather, represent universally valid associations of joy, applied to a specific circumstance—makes this a fair sample of fragmentary film-poem.[15]

Further, the film of all possible art forms, bears the closest affini-

15. Kelman, p. 22.

ties to the unconscious and the state of dream. Outlining these similarities, Anais Nin states:

> It is impressionistic, it takes place on several levels at once, it is composed of montages, intrusions from the past, composite pictures and memories. The camera more exactly than words is capable of reflecting our inner life and revealing the metamorphosis which takes place between a realistic scene and the way our moods color, distort, alter, or heighten that scene as through a prism.[16]

And Arthur Miller, participating in a symposium dedicated to the discussion of poetry and film, contributed a further dimension to this idea of film and dreams when he observed:

> I think that the film is the closest mechanical aesthetic device that man has ever made to the structure of a dream. In a dream, montage is of the essence, as a superimposition of images in a dream is quite ordinary. The cutting is from symbolic point to symbolic point. No time wasted.[17]

And the meaning or significance of a particular dream, its very power as it unleashes itself against the eye of the consciousness, comes directly from its suggestive imagery. It seems perfectly appropriate, therefore, that the film-poem, having as its raison d'être the externalization of the inner life, should coordinate its manner of presentation to what Susanne Langer calls the *dream mode*:

> Drama is "like" action in its being causal, creating a total imminent experience, a personal "future" or destiny. Cinema is "like" dream in the mode of its presentation; it creates a virtual present, an order of direct apparition. That is the mode of dream.[18]

Drawing its technique from intrinsic similarities to its subject matter, the film-poem's images are timeless. That is to say, the viewer of a film-poem is plunged into the incorporeal dimension of "virtual present" and loses his worldly sense of linear direction. Then, through a sense of spontaneous and intuitive discovery, the viewer may see, portrayed in a montage of suggestive images, strangely significant

16. Anais Nin, "Poetics of the Film," *Film Culture* 31 (Winter 1963–64) :14.
17. Maas, p. 58.
18. Susanne Langer, *Feeling and Form* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), p. 412.

counterparts to what he feels inside. Communication has then been effected, at least in part, and the ultimate purpose of the film-poem has been achieved.

The communicative power of the word (spoken or written) versus the image has been a topic of much debate through the ages. There have been these who have praised the development of the "talkie" as an important breakthrough in art. There have been those who considered the intrusion of spoken dialogue into film a disaster.

It seems, however, that within the film-world of today a "leveling" effect is taking place. Commercial narrative-type films seem to be becoming more "poetic" in their cinematic methodology (particularly in terms of image constructs and elements of montage). Similarly, "experimental" films seem to be incorporating into their structure more dialogue and a greater continuity of design. Thus, the polarization that has affected the film industry since the early years of cinema seems now to be entering a period of compromise and coalescence. The effect of this current attitude change upon the "word versus image" controversy has been foreseeable—*balance* is now the key. Both modes of the communication of meaning must operate together within the film to transmit fully the totality of the cinematic experience to the spectator. The innate power of this balanced coordination of word and image, each supplementing the other's strength, can be seen in the works of such contemporary filmmakers as Bergman, Fellini, Antonioni, Resnais, Truffaut, Kubrick, and a host of others.

It is through this framework of contrasting narrative-film and poetic-film that one must approach the cinematographic works of Jean Cocteau. As seems to be becoming increasingly clear to many literary and film scholars, Cocteau stands as a forefather to many "contemporary" developments in cinematic art. W. Maas, during a symposium on poetry and film, made the following observation:

> Now, Ezra Pound said in a definition of the image that it is an emotional and intellectual complex caught in an instant of time. It's a very direct and quick way of saying things, a lyric way of saying things, while the way a dramatist says things is by putting the characters that speak back and forth into conflict. We know that you can't have any sort of situation, poetic or otherwise, without dramatic conflict. I agree with that, but it's quite different in developing a narrative action than presenting it imagistically and quickly, and I think in film you can do that. You can do it by word; you can do it by visual image, and by the combination of the two, which is a very complicated thing. Though mentioned, no one here tonight has talked very extensively about Jean Cocteau's *Blood of a Poet*. Anybody that sees that, sees the perfect welding of the two. It can be done. Though he is the father of [illegible]e poetic film, Jean Cocteau does not have many forebears.[19]

[illegible]eau, since the early 1930s, has been using cinematic themes [illegible]iques usually associated only with the modern poetry of [illegible]rtisan of no literary or cinematic "school," Cocteau was [illegible]dependent who learned the science of film on his own —trial [illegible] error. A playwright and poet, Cocteau applied his literary talents to the screen, and many of his films are directly identifiable, in terms of technique, to his poetic works. The balance between his use of word and image on the screen is unmistakable. Recognizing Cocteau as a forebear to many of the contemporary tendencies in film, Robert Richardson, in his study *Literature and Film,* states the following opinion with regard to this balance:

> It was also Cocteau who referred to his films as studies of "the frontier incidents between one world and another." The frontier he meant is that between the real and the apparent, between the actual world and the camera's world, between dreams and art, and between death and life. His descriptions may be given another meaning, whether he intended it or not, for his films and those of a number of other gifted men are "frontier incidents" also in the sense that they take place between the world of words and the world of images.[20]

However, what seems to be of primary importance to this study was the incessant rejection of Cocteau's poetic films during the time when they were first presented. Particularly within the United States, where Americans seem to rely heavily upon what the "authorities" say about any given work of art (especially foreign art) before they can establish for themselves its essential value, Cocteau's films of poetry have (until recently) generally received a most unjustified condemnation.

Throughout the last decade, however, many fine studies have been done on Cocteau as a *literary* figure, and the various scholars

19. Maas, p. 62.
20. Robert Richardson, *Literature and Film* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1969), p. 16.

of these words have, from time to time, extended their research into Cocteau's films. Thanks to such literary critics as Neal Oxenhandler, Robert Hammond, Roger Lannes, André Fraigneau, Wallace Fowlie, Margaret Crosland, Jean-Jacques Kihm, Elizabeth Sprigge, Frederick Brown, Francis Steegmuller, and a host of others, the path toward acceptable film criticism of Cocteau seems now well paved. Through such individuals the public is now offered a multitude of interpretations, analyses, clarifications, and comments on such film-poems as *Le Sang d'un Poète, Orphée,* and, though to a lesser degree, *Le Testament d'Orphée.*

Each of these aforementioned scholars chooses a *perspective* and, within its confines, constructs his respective "interpretation" of what the film-poem is suggesting and communicating. This perspective may be developed from the study of some fundamental characteristics of Cocteau's *themes* (his homosexuality, need to be admired, and so forth) or from some fundamental elements of Cocteau's *poetic ideas* ("Zones," "angel," "invisibility," and so forth) or, finally, from the point of view of Cocteau's *public* (how others saw him, reacted to him, and so on).

Each successive perspective of interpretation should be considered as equally valid. All recognize the necessity for "initiation" into Cocteau's personal visionary world in order to explain the many artistic outgrowths of this sphere. All have established common points of reference through which the film-poem may communicate to the viewer. These many attempts toward the construction of a framework of meaning for Cocteau's works aid intuitively in the comprehension of his film-poetry, although they do not and can never successfully *explain* the film-poems. But, then again, most were never originally meant to.

The author himself, when asked for a definitive statement concerning the correct meaning of his film *Le Sang d'un Poète,* replied after some thought:

> I search for only the relief and the detail of the images that came forth from the great night of the human body. I then immediately adopted them as the documentary scenes of another realm. That is why this film which possesses a single style . . . presents a multiple surface to exegesis. Its exegeses were innumerable. When asked about any one of them, I would always find it difficult to answer. . . .[21]

21. Jean Cocteau, *Two Screenplays: The Blood of a Poet, The Testament Of Orpheus,* trans. Carol Martin-Sperry (Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books, 1968), pp. 3–4.

The initial purpose of the remainder of this study is twofold. The vastly differing vocabulary of film-poetry as compared to film-narrative necessitates a lengthy investigation into the personal nomenclature of Cocteau as a poet. To what is the author alluding when he uses such seemingly significant symbols as angels, Zones, and mirrors? What are the specific characteristics of this "Marvelous" of which he speaks so often? What are the bonds linking Cocteau's visions, his "fantasized" works, and his self-proclaimed "discipline" of technique? And what interpretive stance is his audience expected to assume when "experiencing" a film such as *Le Sang d'un Poète, Orphée,* or *Le Testament d'Orphée*?

The answers to these and other such pertinent questions should facilitate the comprehension of Cocteau's fundamental vocabulary in his film-poetry. Having thus established a common point of reference, this study will seek further to construct and clarify one particular theme crucial to the consideration of the three films in question: the theme of "Orphic identity." Cocteau's affinity to the mythic, and especially to the Orpheus myth, was of a special importance to him and his identity as a poet. It is this preoccupation that seems to determine Cocteau's "communicative" purposes in *Le Sang d'un Poète, Orphée* and *Le Testament d'Orphée.* The origins of this strange and heretofore overlooked fixation by Cocteau, its characteristics, its influences, and its significance will be respectively investigated.

Having thus established a frame of reference through which the work of Cocteau may be approached, the final step of this study will be to construct a thematic interpretation of the three autobiographical films previously mentioned.

It is hoped that, as an ultimate result of this study, a heretofore "extrapolative" realm of Jean Cocteau's life and works will be rendered a bit more lucid and less prone to blind, unfounded denunciation.

JEAN COCTEAU and His Films of Orphic Identity

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