Cinema as Method: Re-vision in Ramón Gómez de la Serna’s Film Script Cifras (1930)

Abstract: This article spotlights modernist screenwriting, an underrated textual form modernists failed to attend to both in Spain and elsewhere, dismissed as nonliterary or simply not acknowledged. In 1930, one of Spain’s most representative modernist authors, Ramón Gómez de la Serna, published a film script in the prestigious Parisian film magazine, La Revue du Cinéma. With each sequence of the script based on Gómez de la Serna’s short fiction, I propose to read his revisions—or re-visions—to his prose as creatively regenerated text (screenplay). Gómez de la Serna puts into practice his assertion that cinema was not a new, so-called “Seventh Art” but rather a new literary method, what he cleverly termed el séptimo procedimiento or the “seventh method.” Using cinema as a methodological, compositional tool to experiment with the narrative strategies of his prose, his re-visions interrogate practices of repetition (modification of content) and re-presentation (alteration of the manner in which that content is conveyed). Via the anxiety-inducing frame of bodily violence and the watching of it, Cifras critiques film spectatorship, and more generally, our forms of observing and engaging the world. Study of the script thus unearths a new vein of Gómez de la Serna’s literary work and highlights a telling example of how film was perceived by writers in Spain. Above all, by probing the intersection of literature and film, this modernist’s re-visioning sheds light on the multifaceted ways of telling a story while challenging assumptions about the nature of literary writing.