Book Review: Cinema Verite' a book of poems by Sam Rasnake

by Gary Hardaway

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Cinema Verite'
a book of poems by Sam Rasnake
published by A Minor Press

I don't know much about movies, much less film. So, I entered this collection with trepidation, knowing that the poems were ekphrastic, prompted by movies. My trepidation slipped away quickly, replaced with admiration and delight.

No ticket stubs are required to fully enjoy these poems. I'm sure familiarity with the films attributed to a variety of directors, domestic and imported, would amplify the poetry, make the references to visual and thematic content borrowed from the screen deeper and richer. But, even in my ignorance of all but one of the cited films, I was comfortably at home with the ageless material of human experience made vivid by Sam Rasnake's pitch-perfect language.

Film, really, is the elected representative of all art in this collection. The art of the poems transcends any singular medium, just as a great film transcends the flicker of 24 frames per second. The dominant themes are sorrow, loss, disappointment, the stinging pain of missed opportunities to love and be loved, and, inescapably, death. But there is humor, too, the splendid humor that can only stem from the deeply serious—read "Poem to Read Aloud While

Positioning a Framed Sketch of Frankenstein's Monster on a Table"
and "The Dead," as excellent examples.

It is good to overcome trepidation. It is better to do so and discover
a rich and musical immersion in the power of language. ***Cinema
Verite'*** is the best book of poems I have encountered since Matthea
Harvey's ***Modern Life*** from 2008. It renews my faith in the
possibilities for an enduring poetry in this otherwise dispiriting new
century.