

REVIEW

JAN ERIK HOLST & PAWEŁ URBANIK (eds.): *Kino Norwegii*. Warszawa-Kraków: MFF Nowe Horyzonty, 2011. 350 pp.

“The present book is the first in Poland and one of the few in the whole world to deal with the subject of Norwegian cinematography. The authors view the historical changes of Norwegian cinema from different perspectives and attempt to describe the reasons for its present success” (my translation, PH). These are the words written on the back cover of the book. In this review I will argue that the content does not match the expectations raised by them.

The publication followed the 11th New Horizons International Film Festival in Wrocław in 2011, which was devoted to Norwegian cinematography. The project *Norway Expanded* included “a review of the newest Norwegian cinema complemented by Anja Breien retrospective, children's films and shorts” (webpage of New Horizons IFF). It is extraordinary that one should publish a monograph on the cinematography of a small country, in terms of influence on international culture, in another relatively small country, Poland. Even more so, such a publication is worth noting, and its initiators deserve praise. In a classic publication on the topic (Evensmo 1967), the author views Norwegian cinematography as not being studied nor described very much. The very same statement appears three decades later, in a short Norwegian film history by Hanche (1997, 2nd edition 2004). In view of these words it is not surprising that the contributors to the present publication feel overwhelmed by the vastness of the material that needs to be covered. Unfortunately, many of them attempt to fit the whole history of Norwegian cinema into a single paper, which results in a relatively superficial and at times chaotic presentation, lacking analytical strength and insight.

The organisation of the book is quite logical – three chapters, collecting papers according to their topic, follow an introduction. The first part deals with classical Norwegian film creators, such as Tancred Ibsen, Arne Skouen or Liv Ullmann. The second chapter, devoted to adaptations of classical Norwegian literature works of Henrik Ibsen, Knut Hamsun and Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, is practically a review of all the adaptations with a commentary on how successful they have been. The third chapter assembles analytical (at least in intention) papers, studying certain phenomena in Norwegian film art, as well as papers presenting the policy of Norwegian authorities towards cinematography and the technical development of cinemas in Norway. The chapter is concluded by a historical overview of the shared cinema history in Poland and Norway and a list of Polish-Norwegian co-productions in the last 50 years.

The first two chapters list the facts: names, titles and dates, and comment shortly on them. Due to their topic, it is not surprising and even to a certain degree expected. What is however striking is a lack of truly analytical papers in the third chapter, which is devoted – as the reader could assume – to looking at the Norwegian cinema from different perspectives and attempting to grasp its main features and peculiarities (if there are any). Instead, the vast majority of contributions follow the same path as the papers from the first two chapters – presenting a list of films taking up a certain topic (e.g. the role of nature), without giving an in-depth analysis of the phenomenon in question. Furthermore, some papers attempt to describe so many film productions, that in the end it is impossible to guess what the main topic is. That is the case with Per Heddal's contribution (pp.165-214), entitled "Young and fearless", which ranges from the latest productions to Thor Heyerdahl's *Kon-Tiki* from 1950, and is in fact a short history of Norwegian cinema, in addition not especially critical nor objective. It is thus rather disconcerting that the paper ends rather abruptly, with a sentence referring to one of the latest films that became popular in Norway: "*Max Manus*, more than any other film convinced the audience that Norwegian cinema can be interesting" (p. 214, my translation, PH). It can be said of many of the papers in the publication at hand that they do not leave the reader with any general conclusion to ponder upon, thus magnifying the impression of being a list of film productions with a short commentary. In truth, the only contribution that attempts to answer the question of the characteristics of the modern Norwegian cinema in both form and content is Paweł Urbanik's paper (pp. 267-77). The author states several features that may be considered typical of Norwegian cinema, such as a non-linear and fragmentary plot, consisting of seemingly unconnected scenes, and the main character being an outsider, not fitting well into the society or reality. It is here interesting to note that this is one of two papers written by Polish authors. One can therefore put forward a cautious claim that the publication would profit from allowing for a stronger outside voice.

In addition, a critical reader will often come across statements that immediately attract his or her attention, and these are unjustified praise given to the described film productions. One example may be a part of the final sentence of Jan Erik Holst's paper on nature and landscape as dramatic means, referring to "two remarkable Norwegian films, *Nord* and *Fjellet*" (p. 144). Why those productions are to be considered remarkable, the reader will have to find out on his own, as the author fails to justify his opinion.

The concluding papers, dealing with the organisation of the Norwegian cinematographic network and the system of subsidies, present a useful insight for various participants of the film world, such as film producers or directors. Their impact on the development of the Polish film industry is rather difficult to judge at the moment, but at least they may be used as a reference.

To sum up, the publication at hand is the first of that kind on the Polish market. Despite the flaws discussed here, it constitutes a very useful tool for all interested in Norwegian cinema. It covers – even though somewhat chaotic – a vast deal of film material and is a good starting point to more detailed studies.

REFERENCES

- Evensmo, Sigurd. 1967. *Det store tivoli*. Oslo: Gyldendal.
Hanche, Øivind (et al.). 2004. *Bedre enn sitt rykte. En liten norsk filmhistorie*. Oslo: Norsk filminstitutt.

INTERNET SOURCES

- New Horizons IFF webpage <http://www.nowehoryzonty.pl/artykul.do?lang=en&id=867> (accessed 07.12.2012)

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