

TOMMY GUSTAFSSON AND PIETARI KÄÄPÄ (eds.):

Nordic Genre Film:

Small Nation Film Cultures in the Global Marketplace

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While the ‘Nordic noir’ and so-called ‘art house’ categories continue to dominate contemporary scholarly conversations on Nordic film and television, it is easy to forget that the region’s screen industries actually offer far more diverse genre productions than most expect. As the editors note in their introductory chapter of *Nordic Genre Film*, since the 1960s the output of genre films in the Nordic countries has always surpassed that of art house films while at the same time performing more successfully at domestic box offices every year. The early 2000s has also seen a flourishing of Nordic genre film production, enabled by shifts in national film politics across the region. Still, many outside the region tend to associate Nordic film with auteur-driven fare.

Gustafsson and Kääpä’s timely volume thus challenges the long-standing tendency in film scholarship to focus only on historical art house or ‘valuable’ films when it comes to Nordic cinema. *Nordic Genre Film* is a wide-ranging collection of critical essays that shifts

the focus to contemporary popular genres, and indeed holds claim to being the first English-language collection to do so.

The book is divided into five parts, each covering a particular genre group. The volume moves from the more familiar narrative genres such as heritage cinema and crime and detective films, to those perhaps less well known by international audiences such as 'optimistic' genres (road movies, comedies, and musicals), horror, and what the authors call 'genre benders' that include pornography and Nordic-Hollywood crossovers.

The first part addresses heritage and national narratives, including Kimmo Laine's chapter on a Finnish 'great man' biopic (on the composer Jean Sibelius), and Erik Hedling's analysis of the Swedish reception of Norwegian and Danish 'occupation dramas' of the Second World War. Gunnar Iversen rounds off this section with a cogent discussion of the blending of fiction and history in recent Nordic historical films such as *Arn: Tempelriddaren* (*Arn: The Knight Templar*, 2008) and *En kongelig affære* (*A Royal Affair*, 2012).

Part II delves into the crime and detective narratives that are currently *en vogue* (and show no signs of abating). Accordingly, this is the heftiest part of the book, with five chapters. Björn Ægir Norðfjörð eschews the more dominant Swedish and Danish noir in the opening chapter, focusing instead on crime narratives from Norway, Finland, and Iceland. The manhunt movie, a subgenre of the thriller, is outlined by Rikke Schubart in the next chapter that analyses the Norwegian *Headhunters* (2011) and Danish *The Hunt* (2012), amongst others. Anders Wilhelm Åberg discusses how the national and transnational are negotiated in the popular television series *Bron/Broen* (*The Bridge*, 2011–), while Michael Tapper follows on with a study on neoliberalism and gangsterism in the Swedish film *Easy Money* (2010). The next chapter by Anneli Lehtisalo analyses the docudrama and documentary genres via *Pääministeri* (2009) and *Palme* (2012), which both represent the figure of the Prime Minister in the Nordic context.

In Part III, the book shifts to somewhat a more uplifting tone as we encounter chapters addressing what the editors call 'Nordic optimism'. Tommi Röpötti explores generational continuity through the road movie genre. Ellen Rees' chapter outlines the 'quirky feel-good' as

a specific Nordic genre, one that has gained some popularity in film studies but remains ambiguous in definition. She argues that its Nordic version has its roots in films from the 1980s such as *Babettes gæstebud* (*Babette's Feast*, 1987) and continuing with *Á köldum klaka* (*Cold Fever*, 1995) and *Italiensk for begyndere* (*Italian for Beginners*, 2000). Jakko Seppälä presents us with a short analysis of Finnish *unromantic* comedies (a curious twist on conventional romantic genres) that have emerged in the past decade. Finally, Ann-Kristin Wallengren discusses Nordic music-driven films that, while related to the American forebear, retain a unique emphasis on sociopolitical themes and empowering marginal characters.

Two chapters on the horror genre form Part IV. After pornographic films, horror seems to be 'the most frowned upon film genre' as Tommy Gustafsson notes in his chapter on low-budget Nordic slasher films. As it stands today, the genre is slowly emerging from its marginal position in the Nordic region, and as Gustafsson charts, directors' interpretations of gore and torture porn are increasingly gaining international recognition. Nordic vampires are the focus of the next chapter by Outi Hakola, who links the emergence of the genre with crises in the welfare state. Interestingly, Hakola notes that the figure of the vampire has not been popular in Norway nor in Iceland, perhaps undermining the possibility of claiming the vampire film as a pan-Nordic genre.

The final part explores experimental, genre-bending texts, all of which share the characteristic of transcending aesthetic and national borders. Mariah Larsson discusses (narrative) pornography as a transnational genre, intersecting with tourism and feminism in its circulation amongst domestic and global markets. In 'Going Hollywood', an aesthetic and physical journey that Nordic directors have been taking since the 1920s, Arne Lunde explores the historical and contemporary transnational connections between the Nordic region and Hollywood. Readers will be familiar with the likes of Susanne Bier, Nicolas Winding Refn, and Thomas Vinterberg who have established high-profile identities within the Hollywood system while at the same time challenging conventional Hollywood genre constructions. Pietari Kääpä's chapter on the politics and dynamics of cultural exchange in

an age of global cultural flow is the final chapter of the book, featuring interviews with film practitioners whose productions have engaged with the changing landscape of genre film production in the small Nordic countries vis-à-vis concerns about globalisation and the challenges of protecting national cinema.

Precisely because there is such a vast quantity of genre films emerging from the Nordic region, it would not be possible to capture the wide variety of texts within one volume. Most of the texts analysed by the authors would be genuinely 'new' (that is, emerging from the periphery of high film scholarship) to readers, yet there still seems to be some attention on films or television series that have already been discussed at length elsewhere – *Dancer in the Dark* (2000), *Bron/Broen, Flammen og citronen* (*Flame & Citron*, 2008) are examples. Nevertheless, the volume stands out in its breadth of critical discussion and detailed examination of contemporary, post-2000 films and television series. What is indeed refreshing is that the chapters in this book pay particular attention to the transnational production, distribution, and reception of contemporary genre films – in part following the 'institutional turn' in film studies today, and in part an effort to expand our understanding of *genre* and its connections to regional and transnational dynamics.

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