

# Focus on Nordic Cinema

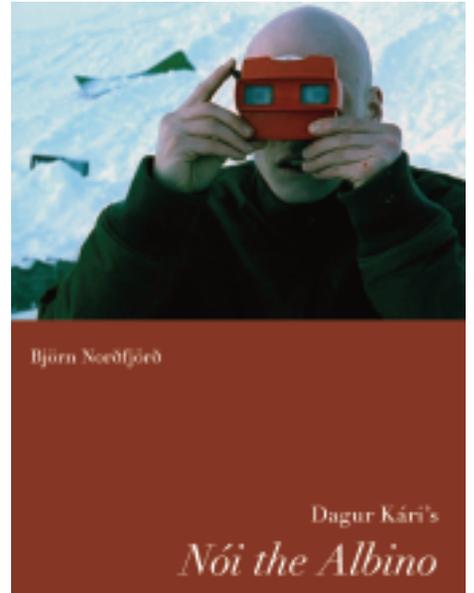
A new range of books aims to look in detail at key films from Scandinavia.

**Dr Edward Gallafent,**

Reader in Film Studies at the University of Warwick, provides an overview.

These are the first three volumes of *Nordic Film Classics*, a new series of studies of individual films looking at significant work in Danish, Finnish, Icelandic, Norwegian and Swedish cinema. Published by University of Washington Press / Museum Tusulanum Press, they are available in paperback at a recommended price of £25 each.

Björn Nordfjörð's study of Dagur Kári's first full-length feature, *NÓI THE ALBINO* (2003), is a helpful, lucid account of both text and context. Noting that few Icelandic films have any kind of international profile, Nordfjörð looks at the production history and the successful distribution of the film, and locates it within the production context of Nordic film more generally. The historical contextualisation includes both a brief sketch of the debates concerning national cinemas, and a useful survey of Icelandic cinema. When dealing with the text of the film



and happiness to be in a confined space'.

Mette Hjort's study of Lone Scherfig's *ITALIAN FOR BEGINNERS* (2000) does not reprint interview material at length, but makes use of her discussions with a

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itself, Nordfjörð considers its generic aspects, considering its kinship with teen movies as a study of a disaffected and isolated schoolboy. The study is most illuminating when dealing with the aesthetics and recurrent images of the film: its use of colour, its place in a cinema that is concerned with Islands, and with maps. Elements of the film that register differently for an Icelandic and for an international audience (such as the significance of an avalanche) are located, capturing without prejudice the different contexts that audiences will bring to the film. The book, which includes an interview with Kári, is an happy example of what can be done within the confines of a short study, which seems appropriate to a director who has said: 'it gives me joy

number of the principal actors and crew of the film, including Scherfig herself, cinematographer Jorgen Johanssen, and actors Anders W. Bethelsen and Peter Gantzler among others. This informs the whole of the study, but it is perhaps most helpful in the discussion of the film's relation to the Dogme 95 manifesto. Under the title 'Practitioners' Agency: The Impact of the Dogme Framework', Hjort looks at the film in terms of how the framework affects the group dynamics of filmmaking. The discussion is very illuminating, laying out the considerable gains of Dogme for both actors and crew, but not denying the difficulties and stresses that adherence to the rules produces. Although this is a discussion of a specific and in some respects unusual variant

## DAGUR KÁRI'S NÓI THE ALBINO

By Björn Nor fjor

ISBN: 978-0295990095, 165 pages

## LONE SCHERFIG'S ITALIAN FOR BEGINNERS

By Mette Hjort

ISBN: 978-0295990446, 277 pages

## INGMAR BERGMAN'S THE SILENCE

By Maaret Koskinen

ISBN: 978-0295989433, 208 pages

Recommended price £25 each,  
www.gazellebooks.co.uk.

(described at one point as 'the first funny dogme film'), the chapter is an excellent introduction to the subject, and is not over dependent on the now considerable literature on it. There is also a detailed account of the reception of the film, and a defence of its happy ending, reading it in terms of kindness and moral learning. This may also be one of the first studies of its type to mount a substantial discussion of a deleted scene, although sadly there is no option to view this on the UK DVD.

and specific, as in some of the early deleted materials from the screenplay of *THE SILENCE*. Moving from Bergman's earlier writing through to his screenplay for *FANNY AND ALEXANDER* (1982), Koskinen considers the ambiguous significance of the written and the 'literary' for Bergman, and moves from this into an account of the film in which she emphasises the terms in which it is built around the senses, hearing and touch and smell as much as sight.

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Ingmar Bergman's 1963 *THE SILENCE*, although it has in common with the two modern films that it was a substantial international success, requires a different approach. Acknowledging that the film has already been extensively discussed in auteurist terms in the huge literature on the director, Maaret Koskinen begins by taking the moment of Bergman's death as a cue for new ways of thinking about his work. This is in part a matter of connecting Bergman strongly with his contemporary Swedish culture and seeing him as a canny manipulator of public opinion. The monograph also rests on the opening up of a new resource, the Bergman Archive – and Koskinen deserves our gratitude for her role here, in preserving this unique body of work for public access. The extensive quotation from the Archive is both general, as in a telling aside on Bach,

All three of these attractively produced books achieve the difficult task of offering both insightful reading of their films and useful introductions to surrounding debates, and will be valuable both to specialists and to those coming to the films for the first time.

#### SWEDISH FILM: AN INTRODUCTION AND READER

Edited by Mariah Larsson and Anders Marklund

(Nordic Academic Press, 2010)

ISBN: 978-9185509362 (hardback), 367 pages, £34.99

Anyone who has taught Swedish film in English will be aware of the need addressed by this book, to present critical writing that has not been previously available in translation. As its editors put it, 'considering how much literature there was on Swedish film in Swedish, the lack of such material in English was conspicuous' – with of course the exception of the mass of writing on Ingmar Bergman. So here Bergman has been largely left aside, and the editors have attempted to cover the historical and cultural range of Swedish cinema, both in terms of institutions, modes of production, and individual filmmakers and writers.

The organisation of the project is in part historical, with substantial sections on the silent era, genre cinema – which by and large concentrates on film making from the 1930s to the 1960s – 'Auteurs and Art Cinema' which includes

the move from the 1960s to the 1970s, and 'Before and After the New Millennium', looking at more contemporary film. Some of the essays offer useful introductions to important filmmakers, including Bo Florin on Victor Sjöström, Bengt Forslund on Gustaf Molander, and Lars Gustaf Andersson on Peter Weiss, as well as figures who are crucial for understanding Swedish culture, such as Leif Furhammar on Selma Lagerlöf, and Chris Holmlund on Astrid Lindgren. Other essays use a range of films to look at broader topics, such as Bengt Bengtsson on youth problem films in the post war years – a really useful essay for anyone teaching early Bergman – or Rochelle Wright's work on 'Immigrant Film'. There are also some valuable essays that focus on single films, among them Mia Krokstade on Hasse Ekman's *FLICKA OCH HYACINTER* (1950 – aka *GIRL WITH HYACINTHS*), Daniel Brodén on Bo Widerberg's *MANNEN PÅ TAKET* (1976, aka *THE MAN ON THE ROOF*), and a reassessment of Mai Zetterling's negatively received *FLICKORNA* (1968, aka *THE GIRLS*) by Mariah Larsson.

The book offers many illuminating pieces in addition to these, but it also points towards a problem: the large number of Swedish films, even ones acknowledged to be important, that are either unavailable in any subtitled form in English, or are expensive and difficult to source. While this is more true of earlier films (say, 30s comedies or 1950s melodramas) it is also surprisingly common to find even some recent films released on DVD subtitled only in other Scandinavian languages. The book is a valuable resource, and it needs to be complemented by appropriately subtitled DVD releases.

#### Dr Edward Gallafent

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Reader in Film Studies, University of Warwick, Dr Gallafent is co-editor of the first issue of the new online scholarly film journal *Movie: A Journal of Film Criticism* ([www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/film/movie](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/film/movie)), and has recently written on Ingmar Bergman in the collection *Film Moments* (edited by James Walters and Tom Brown, BFI/Palgrave, 2010).

