

accessible style. If a featured item is recognizable to a modern reader, its entry is comprised of a short history and a few examples are described. Where an item may be obscure, the text offers a more intricate discussion of its manufacture, appearance, and purpose. The author shows a collector's fascination for "firsts." Occasionally, a prominent collection of artifacts is listed at the end of an entry, which is welcome. Unfortunately, not all entries include sources for further reading. The introduction suggests that such entries were informed by Rickards's extensive, personal network of informants, many of whom are now deceased. In their place, where authorities could not be cited, one might have wished for noteworthy literary references to the artifacts described — something that might have depicted the object in a representative context. Still, the general presentation is greatly aided by many well-selected illustrations. A two-page spread often has two or more photographs, and there are sixteen colour plates as well.

Although an attempt was made to appeal to an international audience, the volume is clearly geared to the British experience. Because the objects collected are by definition the common paper objects of daily life, their names are subject to local vernacular, and British slang serves as the bench throughout. Further, the compilers have not been consistent in their attempts to ameliorate this situation. An entry might include alternative names for an item, but these may not appear in the index or the list of entries printed on the book's end papers. One example is the entry for "dance programme," a device also known as a "dance card." A similar situation holds for paper dolls; they do not appear in the index, but enjoy a central role in the rather broad entry for "Cut-out Toys."

Other anomalies occur. For example, the entry for "Relief Printing for the Blind" mentions the

entry for Braille, but not vice versa. One wonders why the subject requires two entries. The many genres of "Comic" — or funnies (not indexed) — are mentioned in one brief entry, while "labels" are detailed in over forty separate entries for different products and package types.

Are these serious problems? To the casual reader, who will enjoy roaming through the encyclopedia's pages, perhaps not. But to the researcher, a minor difference in terminology may well prove maddening. An index which cross-listed even the most common alternative names for the items described would have been helpful.

Twyman notes in his introduction the possibilities that ephemera research may have within the fields of social and business history. This point is amply confirmed. One area that begs for further research, even after a random sampling of entries, is the extent to which advertising features among the most collectable ephemera. Here, it seems, is fertile ground to discover links between social and business history. Much scholarly work over the last twenty years has viewed the relationship between advertisers and consumers as a hostile one; what are we to make of the volumes of scrapbooks kept over the last two centuries, in which have been preserved advertising trade cards, package labels, and cigar rings? Rickards and Twyman's work as collectors and encyclopedists may help to place these private documents into the historian's field of vision.

Ultimately, this volume may not find a wide audience in Canadian and American Studies. Much of the state and commercial ephemera it describes is peculiar to Great Britain, and Canadian material is particularly rare. But, as the editor notes, this volume is a pioneering scholarly effort in the field of ephemera. For students and scholars of British social, cultural, and business history, this will be a valuable tool.

## **Kevin Mulroy, ed., *Western Amerykański: Polish Poster Art and the Western***

**ANNA ADAMEK**

Mulroy, Kevin, ed., *Western Amerykański: Polish Poster Art and the Western*. Los Angeles: Autry Museum of Western Heritage, and Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999. 229 pp., 167 illus., cloth, US\$60, ISBN 0-295-97812-0; paper, \$40, ISBN 0-295-97813-9.

Kevin Mulroy, the director of the research centre at the Autry Museum of Western Heritage recalls in his interesting preface to *Western Amerykański: Polish Poster Art and the Western* that anyone who heard about the book would instantly ask: "Why posters from Poland?" Certainly the

Western, as a film genre, has been more prominent in other European countries such as Italy, Germany or Great Britain. In his account of the selection of posters presented in the book, Mulroy describes the story behind the publication of *Western Amerykański*, the catalogue accompanying an exhibit presented under the same title in October 1999 at the Autry Museum of Western Heritage in Los Angeles. According to its mandate, the museum was created to explore the history of the American West and the presence of its myths in contemporary society. Although the museum had acquired a unique collection of artifacts, the influence of Western imagery on European culture needed some further research. The foreign film posters provided an extensive range of stereotypical images and symbols associated with the American West. Furthermore, a poster collection could have been built quite affordably and the only challenge that the Museum had to face was finding a good source of high quality examples of this genre of art. As it happened, Grant Underwood, a law student from Texas who, during his travels to Eastern Europe acquired a wonderful collection of posters, decided to sell it to support his studies, and offered it to the Autry Museum. Mulroy recalls that as consecutive shipments of posters from Underwood's collection arrived at the Museum, it became apparent to him that Polish poster art was extraordinary.

While American and Western European posters were only intended to advertise movies, Polish artists used visual effects to engage the viewer in a dialogue on historical and sociological events. In order to convey a hidden message and grab the audience's attention, a poster had to surprise, struggle against existing attitudes and force the viewer to confront stereotypes. Although the artists employed a vast range of individual artistic expressions, typography and techniques, they commonly aimed at creating a medium for a critique of modern society. Old motifs were given fresh meanings. A picture of a lone gunman, images of violence and death, decorated with bold, striking colours and large typography predominated the artists' vision. A poster created by Wojciech Wenzel for the 1953 classic *Shane*, provides an excellent example of this original approach. The *Man from Nowhere* — the Polish title of the movie, spread in large, black letters across the image — is a frightening figure. His face is grey and eyes psychotic; dressed in a red shirt, he stands out from a

black background, observant, unemotional, dangerous, and ready to kill. Kevin Mulroy sees this beautifully composed piece of graphic art as an unexpected commentary on the violence in the West as well as a statement on universal values and the Polish experience — an example of art worth collecting and promoting. "It is difficult to respond succinctly when asked 'Why Poland?' — says Mulroy — "but spend some time with the posters, and the answer will come quickly and easily" (p. x).

The catalogue is a solid example of Western scholarship and can be enjoyed by anyone interested in the cinematic genre, graphic arts or popular culture in general. Contrary to its title, the book does not focus exclusively on Polish poster art, but pieces together information on the origins and history of Western mythology and its presence in European culture, defined in the most comprehensive sense. Thus, it places the Polish poster art in a framework of the American West. Beautifully illustrated with 164 good quality colour images, the book benefits from the diversity of presented reproductions. Replicas of modern Polish posters are juxtaposed with miscellaneous examples produced in other countries providing an excellent opportunity to examine these works of art in the broad context of its genre. In addition to posters, the editor of *Western Amerykański* chose to feature some book covers, pamphlets and advertisements dating back to the nineteenth century, as well as various photographs, including a wonderful image of a young poster gluer with his bucket of glue and a bag of rolled posters, pasting a colourful image onto an obscure fence, with ugly, grey buildings and an old, devastated sidewalk in a background. This image alone is worth a hundred words.

Unlike other exhibition catalogues, the illustrations presented in *Western Amerykański*, are subordinate to the text. The main body of the book consists of three essays, followed by artists' biographies, and a comprehensive bibliography. An index cross-references movie titles with art works; however, an English reader may find some difficulty in the fact that many of the indexed titles are cited in Polish. The three main essays are very informative and expressive, and were clearly preceded by in-depth historical and cultural research on the subject. They are a comprehensive source of information on Western imagery as presented in film posters.

The first of the essays, entitled "The Western Worldwide," written by Edward Buscombe, a former director of the British Film Institute in

London, and Kevin Mulroy himself, focuses on the history of a Western mythology and its journey into European culture. The authors do not attempt to analyse the sociological implications of the popularity of the myth of the last frontier in Europe and around the world, but concentrate mainly on the actual presence of Western motifs in other countries in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. They aspire to establish a historical context for their contentious argument that the visible presence of certain American values promoted by the Western, such as the conquest of fear, political freedom, and the equality of classes had far reaching political consequences on European history. It is fair to say that the authors did extensive research on the topic. They point to the fact that Western imagery was omnipresent, from books, to paintings, to plays and operas; they even provide a number of Western-theme volumes in European libraries. Buffalo Bill's trips to Europe and the popularity of Gene Autry's rodeo are described in detail and are illustrated with some interesting comments from contemporaries, including Queen Victoria. The ideas of openness, individual freedom and sexual innocence suited Victorian morality, and a tale of pioneers, adventure, and wildness captured the nineteenth-century European imagination. Hence a mass audience had been prepared for the arrival of the Western movie. Indeed, the genre was so popular that it had been adapted by directors around the world: Jean Renoir, Akira Kurosawa, Horst Wendlandt and Sergio Leone.

So too, the posters promoting movies flourished; some were only replicas of their American counterparts, yet many European graphic artists seized the opportunity to look at Western symbols in fresh ways in order to comment on movies rather than simply illustrate their content. The authors of the first essay are alert to the often omitted fact that Russian poster art was one of the first to manifest this innovative approach. The international popularity of the Western has slowly declined since the 1970s, but elements of its powerful imagery live on in advertising, design and fashion. The image of America brought to Europe in the nineteenth century is currently, in the authors' opinion, revived and reconstructed by Euro-Disney, where "every day, the showman and the promoter emerge triumphant as reality slips seamlessly and stylishly into myth. Buffalo Bill would have been proud; and the audience applauds" (p. 50). It is unfortunate that Buscombe and Mulroy chose not to explore further the effects of Disney's interpretation of the American West on European

popular culture. Although undeniable, this influence is not necessarily entirely valuable.

The subject of Western mythology and foreign societies is also examined in the second essay of the reviewed volume, entitled "Poland and the American West." The author, Frank Fox, an expert on poster art and a former professor of Eastern European history, builds his analysis of Polish posters around the political image created by Tomasz Sarnecki that had been successfully used by Solidarity in the 1989 elections. Based on the Western *High Noon*, the poster presents Gary Cooper in his perfect sheriff outfit, carrying a ballot instead of a gun. Throughout his article, Fox focuses on the political aspect of poster art in postwar Poland. He recalls historical events such as partitions, uprisings and mass emigration that made Poles especially receptive to the American myth of freedom. The author's erudition is remarkable; he uses immigrants' correspondence as a background for Polish views on America; describes the contribution of Poles to their new country and demonstrates similarities in the literary descriptions of the Polish borders and the American West. The story of Buffalo Bill's visit to Poland in 1906 and the introduction of the first silent Westerns in the 1930s set the cultural framework in which the Polish fascination with the Western developed.

The genre reached the peak of its popularity in Poland between the 1960s and early 1980s. Fox comments that the response of audiences was so powerful that Polish producers and directors, such as Józef Kłtyk — a name completely unknown to this reviewer and her Polish friends — attempted, obviously with no great success, to develop a Polish version of the genre, the so called "kielbasa western." This comprehensive description of the presence of the American West in Polish culture is followed by an equally detailed analysis of the history of Polish film posters created for both Western and Eastern European movies in the context of the communist regime. Fox describes the limited funding, the lack of supplies and the hard economic conditions that forced artists to be more creative, use alternative techniques such as simple printing and a sensual approach: a stress on colour, light and suggested texture. One of the most recognizable qualities of any aesthetic vision is a spontaneous, unpredictable use of irony and the grotesque, so characteristic of art created in times of despair. These ideas are illustrated with comments from critics and artists, providing an interesting mix of their opinions and Fox's own views.

The third and final essay of the catalogue, entitled "Two Legends: The American Western and the Polish Poster School" nicely complements the two previous articles. The author, Mariusz Knorowski, skillfully avoids repetition by focusing his article on the iconography of the posters rather than their history, a subject already recounted by Frank Fox. Yet again, the text is concerned in large part with the political circumstances surrounding the creative process. The author lists Westerns movies distributed in Poland and describes in detail the artwork produced to promote them. He analyses a number of requisites used in unconventional ways, such as the leitmotif of a gunman, in the Polish posters often outlined from the back, and portrayed in gray or red to stress passion. The mid 1980s saw the slow decline of the genre. The posters became redundant, the motifs uninteresting, the stylistics repetitive, and eventually, according to the author, Western posters disappeared completely from the streets of Polish cities.

The main weakness of the volume is a certain limit in the scope of the critique. The analysis of Polish poster art offered in *Western Amerykański*, although definitely interesting, is focused almost entirely on the political aspects of poster making and the political response of the viewer to conveyed ideology. This is not surprising, since the book was published in 1999, the tenth anniversary of the overthrow of communism in Europe. The influence of ideology on artistic creation in a country such as Poland is important and worth discussion. However, the ten years that passed since 1989 provide a distance that allows one to examine the non-political aspects of Polish art and culture. One of the intriguing, still unanswered, problems is the question of what the posters disclose about popular culture, rather than politics. What does the chosen imagery tell us about modern Polish society? Why did Westerns and the resulting artwork that promoted them become an integral part of Polish mass culture, and why, during the 1989 election, did Poles respond with such force to the image of the lone sheriff from *High Noon*?

The authors of *Western Amerykański* successfully present the origins of Western mythology in Polish culture and its influence on graphic art. Nevertheless, the volume lacks a critical examination of viewers' responses to Western imagery. The power with which the Polish society reacted to the images of the

American West goes far beyond the political reasons and is well worth exploring. Such an approach would provide insight into socio-cultural as well as ideological problems. The instant values of the Western contained all the attributes and functions of myth: the mystical or metaphysical level — a hero suffering mysterious pain, any pain — a stylistic analogy of an empty signifier that can be filled with any number of concepts: postwar contradictions, internal conflicts, loss of loved ones. At a cosmological level, the morally simple world of the Western offers an escape from social chaos; and, finally, at the sociological level, the Western provides a means of validating and maintaining a specific social and moral order in the community.

In fact, it is perhaps worth noting here that the Western, as a genre, was mostly popular among Polish men and therefore they were the posters' assumed audience. Mesmerized men would watch all of the numerous reruns of *The Magnificent Seven* on the national television channel with a religious fascination. The streets would become deserted, apartment buildings gleamed with the blue glow from television sets and the sound of gunshots carried through the Polish cities, as Polish men sat to catch a glimpse of the American way of life. At the same time, Polish wives identified themselves with the nineteenth-century slave Isaura, from a popular Brazilian sitcom. A social commentary on this matter can be found in poster design. The photograph of Gary Cooper used in *High Noon* is a very good example of the impassioned use of easily recognized accessories. The actor himself is only a shape, a physical perfection dressed in a costume, a cowboy hat and boots, black jeans with a double belt. A pure sketch of masculinity appealing to the intended audience, he escapes the ambiguity of gender roles in a society where women were becoming increasingly educated, important and independent. This was the sort of hero Polish men wanted to be. He was in command of his needs, a loner that will never be domesticated, and he saw the world with clarity. Arguably, it was the representation of a strong personality rather than the evocation of political freedom that Poles ultimately found so appealing. Yet gender representation in posters is only one of the vast array of interesting sociological issues conveyed in Polish graphic art. Any publication on this subject would benefit from a further analysis of social themes, in addition to the discussion of politics.