

Daniel Biltereyst & Philippe Meers, (eds.), **Film/TV/Genre**, Ghent Academia Press, 2004, 209 pp, €22,00 (paperback).

Reviewed by
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Film/TV/Genre is the second volume in the multilingual series *Film and Television Studies* of the Belgian publishing house Academia Press. The series aims at publishing high-standing and critical research in the fields of film, television and visual culture, and offers a forum to Belgian media scholars to present their research to local as well as international readers.

Philippe Meers and Daniel Biltereyst, equally the series' editors, prepared this volume on genre for publication. As its title indicates, the book pays homage to the writings on genre of Rick Altman, notably to his widely praised *Film/Genre* (1999). Originally conceived as a series of public lectures at the university film club *Filmplateau*, the articles in this book now offer an interesting range of perspectives on genre.

The book consists of nine chapters, eight of which are written in Dutch and one (by Rick Altman) in English. Besides the curious language mix, the book is a rather odd combination of thorough scholarly articles and more contemplative essays, each dealing with either theoretical issues (part 1) and/or with a specific genre or set of genres (part 2 and 3). Although no truly new perspectives are presented, the more theoretical contributions take position in a number of important debates central to both contemporary genre theory and films studies in general. For instance, Rick Altman, in a fascinating case study of American studio publicity, convincingly demonstrates the usability of contemporary genre theory in historically oriented film research. Philippe Meers pleads in favour of a larger role for audience and reception research in the study of genre, a plea answered by some of the other contributors, notably by Ernest Mathijs in his chapter on the horror movie and by Daniël Biltereyst in his study of reality TV.

The second part of the book deals with film genres. The choice of genres – one in each chapter – seems random: In order of appearance, these are the melodrama (Eric De Kuyper), the historical film (Willem Hesling), the horror movie (Ernest Mathijs) and the western (Dirk Lauwaert). In their analysis of all four, the authors take a mixed approach to genre, combining textual analysis with contextual (production and reception) argumentation. In the third part of the book, dealing with television genres, the focal points are women's genres and reality TV. Here, the crossbreeding and mixing of genres are at the centre of attention. For those who don't see the forest for the trees anymore, Daniël Biltereyst adds a useful 'little glossary of reality TV' to his chapter on the generic characteristics of reality television, explaining such subgenres as 'television of intimacy,' 'confessional chat shows' and 'dating shows.' With the exception of Sofie Van Bauwel's excellent chapter on the discursive construction of women's genres in both television and film and Maarten Reesink's contribution on the advance of reality soaps like Big Brother, the authors did not seize the opportunity the particular set up of the book offers to (explicitly) deal with the (dis)continuities between genres in film and television. Consequently, the critical approach to

hybridism and postmodernism in relation to genre seldom exceeds the traditional boundaries set by the respective media.

From the above, it is clear that *Film/TV/Genre* does not aim at exhaustiveness. This, however, is more a strength than a weakness. A large amount of excellent genre readers offering overviews of the most important genres and strands of genre theory is already available to the public. The fact that the book under scrutiny deals with more traditional (melodrama, western) as well as non-traditional genres (historical film, reality TV, women's television) and with film as well as television makes it an interesting surplus to these more conventional genre readers. The didactic approach and crystal-clear style of most of the articles –'high theory with low language,' as Altman puts it (p. 31) – makes it a challenging volume for (Dutch-speaking) media students. Most contributions combine a basic literature review with attractive examples and strong viewpoints. Moreover, referring to local (Belgian/Dutch) cases, quite a few authors (mainly the ones writing about television genres) add an appealing 'regional' contribution to international debates. The significance of the context in the study of specific articulations of genres is therefore underscored. The influence is reciprocal: local television shows are moulded on global genres and formats while locally developed formats are globalised by the many ways they are to be seen on television screens around the world. In the chapters on television genres, this dynamic is emphasised; the potential influence of the functioning of television genres on contemporary cinema is unfortunately somewhat neglected.