

## Peirse Alison. *Rewriting Television*. 2025. [Book Review]

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Alison Peirse brings a good deal of charm to the writing of this book. Taking a highly reflexive approach, she seeks to answer ‘big questions about methodologies in television studies’ (19). The focus through which she explores these questions is the UK horror series *Bedlam* (Living TV and Sky Living, 2011–12). The book is, in effect, a large case study that examines how screenwriting for television works within the production of a series and how the decisions of commissioners and the development team impact on the stories being told.

Peirse brings a range of methodological approaches together in her intention to explore how television studies might ‘tell its stories differently’ (97). She discusses in her opening chapter the intersection between production studies, screenwriting studies and the reflexive or experimental approach to academic writing of ‘writing otherwise’. Through the latter she seeks to land, as she frames it, ‘somewhere slightly unexpected’ (Stacey and Wolff 2013: 2–3). Peirse is clearly frustrated with what she sees as a significant gap between scholarly discussion of the writing of television drama and the reality of the creative process as practised by those making it. This is a gap that has been being addressed in media more generally in the field of production studies for the better part of twenty years or more, certainly since John Caldwell’s (2008) seminal *Production Culture: Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television*. Her approach is therefore interesting, as while it may lead the reader to somewhere slightly unexpected, this rather depends on the reader’s background. For those like myself well-grounded in production studies, the book did not take me anywhere new in terms of its information. However, what I did like very much is the four short chapters where she brings together the voices of her interviewees and knits them into a narrative chorus that is a fast absorbing read, illuminating in great detail the thought processes of commissioners, producers, script executives and writers.

These narrative chapters are interspersed with considerations of the commissioning process, the long and winding road of script development, and a notably interesting commentary on an aspect of production rarely discussed, that of the cast read-through and subsequent broadcaster/producer/writer meetings which take place as preproduction starts. Threaded throughout are discussions which are clearly the meat of the book for the author, as she seeks to actualize a new way of writing about television screenwriting. Her experimentation with the narrative chapters achieves this in bringing to the surface for the reader a practitioner’s thought processes and creative decision-making in a way that is hard to achieve with conventional academic writing. The book as a whole succeeds in bringing the reader inside Peirse’s own struggles with

the task she has set herself, and her reflexive approach imbues the writing with a certain amount of character and playfulness while achieving a solid critique of the television drama commissioning and writing process.

There is also an important current flowing through the book, which is the author's feminist perspective, which not only positions her reflexive vulnerability as a political act but also enables her in the narrative chapters to 'reveal the (hitherto-invisible) woman-led commissioning and development of television drama' (127). The United Kingdom is just one of many media cultures where television is a domain in which women do much of the heavy lifting in the (creative) roles of commissioners, script executives and producers, and it is heartening to see this so clearly acknowledged. Peirse's commentary on the 'erasure of women's voices in male-dominated film and television studies' (134) is also important, and her consistent reference to women scholars in her writing matters for, as she notes, citation affects visibility.

This book is a very useful addition to the literature on script development as an industrial as well as a creative process. For those with no production knowledge, especially newer scholars in the fields of television and screenwriting studies, it will be a valuable read.

## References

**Caldwell, John Thornton** (2008), *Production Culture: Industrial Reflexivity and Critical practice in Film and Television*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

**Stacey, Jackie & Wolff, Janet** (2013), 'Writing otherwise', *Stacey and Wolff Writing Otherwise: Experiments in Cultural Criticism*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.