Against ‘Hybridity’ in Genre Studies: Blending as an Alternative Approach to Generic Experimentation

Martina Allen

Abstract

This article presents a critique of the concept of hybridity which has, in recent years, become increasingly popular within genre studies, mainly as an approach to generic experimentation in contemporary literature. ‘Hybridity’ is particularly appealing in this context for two reasons: 1) it allows us to continue to draw on the semantics of heredity that has structured genre theoretical thinking for centuries, but has increasingly fallen into disrepute in recent decades; 2) it has enjoyed unparalleled success in postcolonial studies as a subversive concept that allegedly dislodges hegemonic discourse, and therefore lends itself easily to the analysis of texts which combine generic experimentation and a questioning stance towards dominant power structures.

Despite its popularity and ubiquity, however, ‘hybridity’ is both inadequate for a fruitful interpretation of innovative uses of genre, and misleading as to the effects of genre, precisely because it feeds off these two, interlinked, discursive traditions. I therefore propose an alternative model for genre ‘mixing’ that departs from the assumption that genres are complex schemata: generic blending. This concept not only presents a shift from a text-intrinsic to a reception-centred approach to genre, but also captures the political dimension of genre ‘mixing’ more aptly than that of hybridity.

Keywords: hybrid, genre, blending, schema, world