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Docusoaps

Professor David Crystal

I was watching a docusoap on the television the other day. A what, you might be saying? A docu-soap. Well, it's another one of these blend-words, where two words have come together to make a third word. In this particular case, I'm talking about a TV genre, which mixes a documentary programme and a soap. Now the documentary programmes we all know, and these are particular fly-on-the wall documentaries we're talking about now, where people are carrying on their everyday lives, doing their ordinary things and yet being televised or radio-recorded at the same time.

But why soap? Why are these things called soap operas? Well that goes back to the 1930s and it was probably because some of the early sponsors of radio programmes at the time and television programmes were soap manufacturers, and so the idea came that a soap was one of these everyday, you know, washing machine kind of dramas. And so a docusoap is a documentary attempt to take one of these programmes and put it into an everyday circumstance.

It's not the only word of its kind – docudrama is another one, for a dramatised film based on a semi-fictional interpretation of real events. Oh, and don't forget, it's used in the novel as well, in literature. You talk about "factions" – documentary fiction in the novel – it's a blurring of reality and fiction: very popular these days!



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