



Genre-Busting Dark Comedies of the 1970s: Twelve American Films

Wes D. Gehring

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This examination of dark comedies of the 1970s focuses on films which concealed black humor behind a misleading genre label. *All That Jazz* (1979) is a musical...about death--hardly Fred and Ginger territory. This masking goes beyond misnomer to a breaking of formula that director Robert Altman called "anti-genre." Altman's *MASH* (1970) ridiculed the military establishment in general--the Vietnam War in particular--under the guise of a standard military service comedy. The picaresque Western *Little Big Man* (1970) turned the bluecoats vs. Indians formula upside-down--the audience roots for the Indians instead of the cavalry. The book covers 12 essential films, including *Harold and Maude* (1971), *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1972), *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1975) and *Being There* (1979), with notes on *A Clockwork Orange* (1971). These films reveal a compounding complexity that reinforces the absurdity at the heart of dark comedy.

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