Danish Television Drama: A Crash Course

Introduction

In Denmark, as in many other countries, local scripted drama is among the most popular content on television. Since the late 1990s, new series from DR have continuously had impressive audiences on Sunday nights at 8 pm. Some reruns of older series also attract large audiences. In the autumn of 2012, the legendary family chronicle *Matador* (1978–1981), which was originally broadcast as four seasons, received its seventh rerun on Saturday nights at 8 pm with audience figures that forced the competing channel TV 2 to move their prestigious talent show to 9 pm. Even the national football team couldn’t compete, seeing the little over half a million viewers watching a game on 8 September beaten by more than a million viewers for the rerun of the first episode of *Matador* in spite of the fact that 3.6 million DVDs of the series had been sold by the spring of 2012 (Figure 2.1).

The possibility of reaching large domestic audiences is of course one of the reasons why TV series are generally popular with broadcasters despite their high cost and the challenge of finding the right material. Moreover, series can help to brand stations, as a US cable channel like HBO has effectively shown with their original series that are now famous worldwide as ‘not being TV’. The rerun potential is another contributing factor. While sport events and many reality formats are live shows, scripted drama has the potential of making a comeback and, in some cases, also of having a long life on the screens in other countries, maybe even as remakes.

Even though TV series are now recorded and ‘stacked’, watched on DVD and available on other platforms, they are still very much ‘appointment viewing’ in the national television landscape, where many viewers...
Figure 2.1  Mads Skjern (Jørgen Buckhøj) and his son in the legendary family chronicle Matador (1978–1981) on life in the small town of Korsbæk in the years 1929–1947. Photo by Rolf Konow. Courtesy of DR