

**Book Review: Cardwell, Sarah, Jonathan Bignell, and Lucy Fife Donaldson (eds), *Epic/Everyday: Moments in Television* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2023)**

Leanne Weston, Independent researcher, UK, [lweston695@gmail.com](mailto:lweston695@gmail.com)

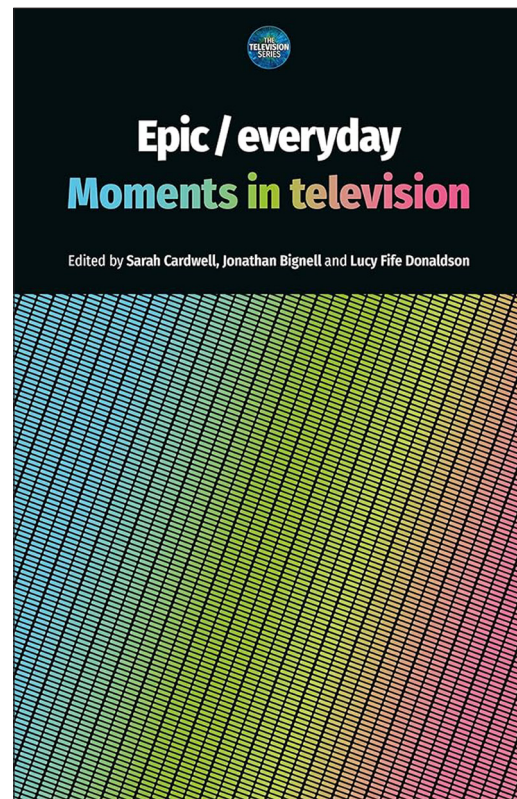
---

Cardwell, Sarah, Jonathan Bignell, and Lucy Fife Donaldson (eds), *Epic/Everyday: Moments in Television* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2023), pp. 264, ISBN: 9781526170224 (hb), £90; ISBN 9781526170217 (ebook ePub), £90.00.

---



The latest addition to series editors Sarah Cardwell, Jonathan Bignell, and Lucy Fife Donaldson's 'Moments in Television' strand offers a timely scholarly intervention into persisting debates regarding the conception and definition of television in the post-broadcast viewing landscape. Following previous edited collections published in 2022 on *Substance/Style*, *Complexity/Simplicity*, and *Sound/Image*, *Epic/Everyday* (2023) engages with another provocative binary: the epic and the everyday. This binary first appears to be oppositional, but is ultimately revealed as a complex, symbiotic relationship. The featured case studies – ranging from *Columbo* (1968–2003, NBC/ABC) to *Game of Thrones* (2011–2019, HBO) – are presented as inspiration for analysis rather than justification, breaking down hierarchies of value and inviting us to see familiar television texts in new ways.



In *Epic/Everyday*, both the epic and everyday are shown to exist in different genre contexts operating at multiple levels, impacting upon how the featured series have typically been read. As Cardwell's introduction carefully outlines, the notion of epic is not solely limited to genre conventions, and in this collection is understood less as a rigid category and more as a free-floating conceptual framework (1). In the collection as a whole, the relationship between the epic and the everyday is characterised instead by contrasts in scale – large and small – with the epic and everyday operating as stylistic and/or thematic modes, resulting in specific implications for how aesthetic, narrative, and affective meaning is generated within each text.

James C. Taylor begins the process of re-evaluation with his opening chapter on *The Incredible Hulk* (1977–1982, CBS), exploring how the tensions between the epic and everyday manifest in the conflicting identities of David Banner and the Hulk. Attending to the series' narrative structure and recurrent themes, Taylor frames Banner as the lone hero of the classical Hollywood Western; a man who struggles to maintain the stability of a normal life when disrupted by the Hulk's extraordinary quests, emphasizing the emotional cost of living in an 'epic body' (41). Chapter 2, by Louise Coopey, concerns *Game of Thrones*. Focusing on its 'epic 9s' – transitional narrative events occurring in

the ninth episode – she argues that the series’ construction of the epic is founded upon the everyday. Foregrounding the everyday in her analysis, Coopey reveals these pivotal moments are understood in human terms, which disrupt the stability maintained through the characters’ everyday lives and experiences, complicating *Game of Thrones*’ reductive classification as a fantasy epic.

Much like the life of David Banner/the Hulk, in *Game of Thrones*, the epic and the everyday are inextricably linked, with one mode informed by the other. Exploration of this interplay continues in Chapter 3, where Phil Wickham examines *Detectorists*’ (2014–2022, BBC) celebration of everyday pleasures. His analysis draws out the series’ depiction of the contrasting of mundane experiences and the powerful connections the protagonists make with other human beings, akin to the treasure they are so eager to find. In Chapter 4, Timotheus Vermeulen extends the interplay discussed in the preceding chapters to consider existence of the epic *within* the everyday in *Community* (2009–15, NBC/Yahoo). For Vermeulen, the epic is ever-present and constantly foreshadowed in this series. Breaking down the screen image into background and foreground planes, Vermeulen argues *Community*’s aesthetic subverts the traditional visual hierarchy of each plane, and thus, mirrors *Detectorists*’ allegiance to the everyday, while also offering a reading of *Community*’s epic mode that is defined by its expansiveness, which operates on psychological, metaphysical, and spatiotemporal levels.

Jonathan Bignell’s chapter on *Doctor Who* (1963–1989, 2005 –, BBC) serial ‘The Chase’ signals the halfway point of the collection. Bignell’s analysis details the ‘unexpected ways’ *Doctor Who* addresses the epic and everyday (119). Its interweaving of the two modes, Bignell suggests, is not only central to the series’ ongoing popularity and enduring cultural significance, but is also characteristic of the ways we experience and engage with television. Wider formal and cultural considerations of television are also evident in James Walters’ chapter on Russell T. Davies. Drawing from a range of texts across Davies’ career, Walters examines the presence of the epic and everyday through the lens of authorship. Davies’ mobilisation of the epic and everyday exists within a specific televisual context, founded upon an understating of narrative weight and scale, which, Walters argues, functions as a ‘creative response’ to television as a space where the epic and everyday come into constant contact (161).

In Chapter 7, Courtney Hopf and Liam Creighton discuss *The Americans* (2013–2018, FX), a series in which these contact points cause friction in the lives of the Jennings family as they negotiate the tensions between domesticity (the everyday) and espionage (the epic). Hopf and Creighton argue that *The Americans* recontextualises global political struggle, transforming its marital drama and domestic spaces from the mundane into the eventful and epic. While the Jennings’ lives are largely built upon

falsehoods, the character at the heart of Alex Clayton and Sarah Moore's chapter on *Columbo* is driven by truth. Clayton and Moore's detailed-oriented analysis illuminates the series' attention to the everyday through examination of *Columbo*'s aesthetic and the intricacies of Peter Falk's performance. Through their consideration of Falk's embodied thinking, they also highlight the intrinsic rewards of engaging with long-running series such as *Columbo*, ones that encourage us to think differently about the world and the events that structure our lives.

Structure and routine lie at the heart of the collection's final chapter, where Zoë Shacklock reflects on *Lost* (2004–2010, ABC). Drawing on everyday aesthetics and the viewing pleasures offered by the series, Shacklock argues for its reconsideration, emphasizing its affective potential and appeal to the ordinary. Underlining the significance of daily life, its details and rhythms, she makes connections between the narrative structure of *Lost* and its enmeshment into 'everyday fabric' of her own life during its original transmission (223). In a fitting summation of the collection, Shacklock defines *Lost*'s legacy as one of duality, where the modes of the epic and everyday happily co-exist. Throughout, the collection reasserts television's cultural value and medium-specificity and reaffirms it as a serious object of study. Most importantly, *Epic/Everyday* advocates for the value of returning to and reconsidering television and consequently, will surely inspire further research that re-evaluates both contemporary and non-contemporary television texts.

---

**Competing Interests**

The author has no competing interests to declare.

---

