

Television Series as Literature: From the Ordinary to the Unthinkable

The past 20 years have seen the rise of the once-humble television series to new heights of popular success and critical estimation. Given this rise, this book asks if and how contemporary scripted television and web series can be read as a form of literature. While Jason Mittell (2015) and others have made a convincing case that complex contemporary TV series constitute a unique art form and should be described on their own terms, there can be equally little doubt that TV series are closely related to various forms of literature, most obviously perhaps drama and the novel, but also, arguably, poetry. Although the adaptation of literary texts into TV series is not strictly excluded from this project, the primary focus lies on trying to understand the TV series themselves as literature, with all the implications such an understanding brings with it in terms of a variety of factors such as critical attention, care and respect afforded to them as objects of study, and certain modes of reception. Part of the project will therefore consist in reconsidering what 'literature' might mean in our thoroughly mediated world.

On a thematic level, the book is interested in considering how contemporary TV series balance and negotiate the space delimited by the ordinary, the everyday, on the one hand, and the extraordinary, strange, sometimes even supernatural, on the other. In addition to being a fundamental dynamic at work in the themes as well as the plot of a great many TV series, the trajectory from the ordinary to the exceptional also describes the evolution of the TV series itself, from mass-produced, disposable entertainment to intensely debated and appreciated works of narrative art. The book is international in scope, covering TV and web series produced in a range of countries. High profile primetime shows are, of course, objects of study we are interested in. Nonetheless, other forms of television – such as comedy – are welcome as works potentially analysable as literature.

On a methodological level, we are interested in contributions by scholars from a wide range of disciplines who may be interested in approaching the subject of TV as literature. TV, literature, adaptation, film, and drama scholars and academics from other disciplines will all be providing fresh and valuable perspectives to build up a case to consider the popular medium of TV as literature. We would like to encourage our contributors to approach the subject of TV as literature with a wide range of textual, cultural and/or philosophical analytical tools. We welcome contributions offering theoretical views on television as a specific – or all-encompassing – literary form as well as well-informed case studies.