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Torchwood Declassified: Investigating Mainstream Cult Television ed. by Rebecca Williams (review)

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productively and provocatively complicated these naturalised ideas at the heart of British television studies.

However, these gaps pale into insignificance when compared to the wealth of scholarship Jowett and Abbott have provided in *TV Horror*. Their exploration of the tensions inherent within the representation of horror on television, and the subsequent negotiations of potential problematics by broadcasters through the strategies and aesthetics investigated through the wide-ranging chapters and case studies, reveals a previously hidden media history. This valuable and timely reassessment of horror as a specifically televisual genre with a long and previously unrecognised history is an essential work of scholarship within the fields of television and genre studies.

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Rebecca Williams, ed., *Torchwood Declassified: Investigating Mainstream Cult Television*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2013. 256pp. £16.00 (pbk).

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Rebecca Williams's single series anthology, *Torchwood Declassified*, is interesting, informative and at times delightfully engaging. As the title suggests, it examines the *Doctor Who* (UK 2005–) spin-off *Torchwood* (UK/Canada 2006–2011) as a media industry product by discussing the way it

moved from one BBC channel and target audience to another between series. It also examines how and if the representation of gender and sexuality, and its fan following, make it a 'cult' product or if its cult status is no more than an advertising gimmick deployed by its creators and the BBC. The collection looks at the ways fans accepted and rejected the narrative development of the programme as it moved from the adult BBC3 (marking it as a very different kind of show from its parent show *Doctor Who* that aired on the general audience BBC1) 'to first-run status on BBC2' (21) and finally to primetime BBC1 with the 2009 mini-series 'Children of Earth' (20–4 July 2009). Several of the essays discuss fans' dissatisfaction with and rejection of major plot points in 'Children of Earth'. Other essays use textual analysis to examine the representation of gender, sex, sexuality and sexual orientation on the show. Most of this discussion focuses, perhaps necessarily, on and around the character of Captain Jack Harkness (John Barrowman) and to a lesser degree Ianto Jones (Gareth David-Lloyd). Even with the narrow focus of the anthology and most of the textual analysis centering on Captain Jack, the collection generally avoids becoming too repetitive even when the essays cover some of the same ground.

The book is divided into four parts. The first section, 'Media Institutions, Branding and Multi-platforming', contains four chapters. Two of the chapters, Ross P. Garner's 'Access Denied? Negotiating Public Service and Commercial Tensions through *Torchwood's* Intertextual Barricade' and Gareth James's "'Cool But High Quality": *Torchwood*, BBC America and Transatlantic Branding, 1998–2011', examine the way the BBC marketed *Torchwood* so that it would not attract the *Doctor Who* audience that was too young for the darker, edgier show and its adult content, as well as the significant changes that occurred as the show moved not only channel to channel, but also country to country. As a US scholar with only a casual understanding of how the media industry and particularly broadcast television works in the UK, I found these chapters informative and interesting, although they might be less so to those more familiar with the topic.

Benjamin W.L. Derhy's contribution to the first section, 'Cult Yet? The "Miracle" of Internationalization', discusses the changes to *Torchwood* when it moved from BBC1 and became a BBC Wales, BBC Worldwide and US Starz channel co-production. This essay 'analyses how the use of US cult television writers [including Jane Espenson, John Shiban and Doris Egan] on Series 4 was received by the fans, and has therefore impacted *Torchwood's* status cult' (51). Derhy convincingly concludes that fans are media savvy and even if they love a show or its characters, they are still critical of media products, such as *Torchwood's* fourth season, 'Miracle Day' (2011), which many found

‘desperately disappointing’ (61). The last chapter in this section, Matt Hills’s ‘Transmedia *Torchwood*: Investigating a Television Spin-off’s Tie-in Novels and Audio Adventures’, focuses on the importance of reading texts such as *Torchwood* across media to truly understand their cultural impact. If the argument goes a little off course it is because the essay ultimately tries to cover too much ground, providing close textual analysis of the tie-ins, discussing how they relate to the original text and indicating how the *Torchwood* novels and radio shows disrupt academic notions of ‘transmedia storytelling’ (80).

The second part, ‘*Torchwood*, Aesthetics and Televisuality’, contains three chapters that focus more on close critical readings of *Torchwood* than the rest of the sections. Although Karen Lury’s ‘Lost Boys and the Fantasy of Empire: *Torchwood*—“Children of Earth”’ starts abruptly and does not define its terms very completely, its clever analysis of the music, issues of Empire and the eternally boyish nature of Jack and all the other boys featured in the mini-series presents a multilayered and compelling argument about the British Empire and masculinity. Martin Griffin and Rosanne Welch’s ‘Crisis of Authority/Authoring Crisis: Decision and Power in *Torchwood*—“Children of Earth”’ also makes some nice connections between the politics of the mini-series and the ‘irreversible decline of British power and global force’ (108). However, too much of the essay focuses on the shortcomings of Russell T. Davies’ script, which the authors describe as rushed and riddled with poor plot choices, such as the deaths of Ianto and Jack’s grandson, that were caused by Davies ‘writing for two and sometimes three different series at a time’ and the fact that ‘he let the opinion of the other producers ... override his instinct’ (116–17) when he revised an earlier version of the script in which Jack’s grandson did not die at their behest. While these authors, others in the anthology, and fans are upset and/or unhappy with these plot points and others, the essay is long on opinion and short on evidence.

This section closes with an essay by Stacey Abbott, who has written extensively on horror and cult television. In ‘Walking Corpses, Regenerating Dead and Alien Bodies: Monstrous Embodiment in *Torchwood*’, she interrogates the representation of monstrosity through the character of Captain Jack. She argues that the focus of this spin-off series ‘is humanity itself’ and it is not ‘presented as utopian progress in the manner that the Doctor often speaks about the evolution of human race but, rather, it is preoccupied with anxieties about monstrous embodiment’ (121). Her close textual reading and analysis of the show are insightful and engaging.

The two essays in the next section, ‘*Torchwood*, Place and Location’, examine the significance of Cardiff in series one through three. Using celebrity theory,

Rebecca Williams effectively interrogates the ways in which Barrowman's status as actor, variety show host and local celebrity or 'localebrity' (in Sully a small 'village' about five miles from Cardiff where he lives) disrupts current theories about celebrity in relation to mainstream and cult television. Stephen Lacey's essay examines 'the complex ways in which [Cardiff] is portrayed' and 'Welshness' is represented (138, 150). Part of the evidence in this essay comes from a research report commissioned by the Audience Council Wales and the BBC Trust in which Lacey participated. He incorporates responses from the report, as well as analysis of character, accent and idiom, and a discussion of how the move from Cardiff to London in 'Children of Earth' highlights the historical 'tension between London/England and Cardiff/Wales' (148), thus providing a multifaceted and compelling argument. Although not very cohesive as a section, both chapters are well written and argued.

The final section, 'Part IV: *Torchwood's* Reception and Audiences', considers issues of fandom and what makes the show, if it truly is, 'cult'. Lindsay Bryde's 'Love Captain Jack or Hate Him: How *Torchwood* Has Polarized the *Doctor Who* Fandom' looks at the way Davies, Barrowman and the character of Captain Jack 'have toyed with the fandom at every turn' (189). Jeannette Vermeulen's 'Quaint Little Categories: Gender and Sexuality in *Torchwood* and Its Importance to the Fandom' traces how and why fans form connections with characters. She concludes that when 'an audience identifies with the characters ... that's when ... a show gains the edge as cult television' (206). This section also contains the weakest essay in the collection and, unfortunately, it is the last chapter of the book. Craig Haslop's 'The Shape-Shifter: Fluid Sexuality as Part of *Torchwood's* Changing Generic Matrix and "Cult" Status' works to 'trace how the innovative representation of fluid sexuality might have fitted into the show's classification as a cult series and then its later move to a more "mainstream" position' (210), and it makes some good observations. However, a good portion of the essay uses data from focus groups Haslop developed as evidence, and this is where the problem lies. The number of people involved with the focus groups is far too small and the time spent with them too short to yield information that is anything more than anecdotal. There were five focus groups of four to six people, and the participants met with the author for an hour and forty-five minutes which included a screening of the series two episode 'Kiss Kiss Bang Bang' (26 Jan 2008). In addition, some participants were familiar with or fans of the show while others had never seen it until the focus group's screening. Moreover, the data used from the focus groups is not well contextualised within the chapter's larger arguments. While Haslop is right that 'the role of sexuality

in “cult” TV is an area which seems ripe for further consideration’ (223), it needs to be done more rigorously than it is here.

The anthology also contains a fairly lengthy (seven page) Select Bibliography that is useful and covers a range of works from those focusing on cult and genre television, gay and lesbian studies, media industry studies and, of course, other work on *Torchwood*, a List of Television Series and Films and an index. The index is useful, but could be more thorough. For example, Judith Butler is used prominently in one chapter and Russell T. Davies is mentioned throughout the anthology, but neither appears in the index. This is true of other secondary sources used in the collection as well. They are listed in each essay’s individual notes section, but for research purposes it is far more time-consuming to look through twelve chapters worth of notes to find a needed source than to have it readily referenced in the index.

The collection also has some rhetorical shortcomings, including several abrupt introductions that do not set the essays’ context or define key terms completely before moving on to their arguments. Several essays, though they do have interesting passages, have weak or ill-defined thesis statements or the thesis gets lost in extended discussions of theory, history, fan practices or textual analysis. However, most of the essays effectively come back to the thesis in the conclusion so the reader can contextualise the authors’ arguments and evaluate their evidence.

Overall, editor Rebecca Williams has put together a strong anthology that is useful for research purposes and also for the classroom. Since the essays take different approaches to the critical analysis of media texts and use a variety of primary and secondary sources, they can be used as case studies in approaches to writing and/or research and methods. I recommend this book to educators and anyone working on media studies, *Torchwood* and other genre and cult television and film.