



Armchair Nation: An Intimate History of Britain in Front of the TV

By Joe Moran

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But what does your furniture point at?" asks the character Joey in the sitcom Friends on hearing an acquaintance has no TV. It's a good question: since its beginnings during WW2, television has assumed a central role in our houses and our lives, just as satellite dishes and aerials have become features of urban skylines. Television (or 'the idiot's lantern', depending on your feelings about it) has created controversy, brought coronations and World Cups into living rooms, allowed us access to 24hr news and media and provided a thousand conversation starters. As shows come and go in popularity, the history of television shows us how our society has changed. Armchair Nation reveals the fascinating, lyrical and sometimes surprising history of telly, from the first demonstration of television by John Logie Baird (in Selfridges) to the fear and excitement that greeted its arrival in households (some viewers worried it might control their thoughts), the controversies of Mary Whitehouse's 'Clean Up TV' campaign and what JG Ballard thought about Big Brother. Via trips down memory lane with Morecambe and Wise, Richard Dimbleby, David Frost, Blue Peter and Coronation Street, you can flick between fascinating nuggets from the strange side of TV: what happened after a chimpanzee called 'Fred J. Muggs' interrupted American footage of the Queen's wedding, and why aliens might be tuning in to The Benny Hill Show. As Alfred Hitchcock said: 'The invention of television can be compared to the introduction of indoor plumbing. Fundamentally it brought no change in the public's habits. It simply eliminated the necessity of leaving the house.'

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Editorial Review

Review

Moran has fast become Britain's foremost explorer and explainer of the disregarded -- Juliet Gardiner, author of 'Wartime: Britain 1939-1945' At last! The view from the sofa. A history of television that reflects the lives of those who watch it - and that means pretty well all of us. Informative, evocative, funny, moving, sometimes even startling, Joe Moran, Britain's premier historian of the everyday, has pulled it off again. -- Juliet Gardiner Terrific...both erudite and highly entertaining -- Simon Hoggart Joe Moran is the most perceptive and original observer of British life that we have -- Matthew Engel Joe Moran's affectionate and erudite chronicle of our nation's love affair with TV achieves the impossible - it is scholarly AND accessible. It is a compelling account of a golden age and reminds us in the process that today's age of plenty has diluted the cultural impact of TV -- Michael Grade A quite brilliant history of a now lost world of British terrestrial television, *Armchair Nation* is as warm and friendly as an old valve set and, correspondingly, also crackling and humming with new insights and fresh research. -- Travis Elborough All that time we were watching television Joe Moran was thinking about it. This wonderful book is packed with stories and characters, shot through with Moran's customary affection for the ordinary and the overlooked. A beautiful study of that flickering box that keeps us enthralled. -- Sam West Joe Moran is a wonderfully gifted social historian, with a ravenous capacity for research ... He is particularly good at overturning the bogus collective memories to which television so often gives rise ... His sources from diaries and memoirs are rich and varied ... *Armchair Nation* offers rich pickings for those, like me, who struggle to remember (everything we've watched). -- Craig Brown *Mail on Sunday* One of the most entertaining things about the book - and there are many - is finding out how many of the things we think we know about television are either myths, or simply hogwash ... As well as being consistently perceptive in his observations, Moran has done something I would confidently have thought impossible - he's made the history of British TV as dramatic as it is fun. -- John Preston *Sunday Telegraph* You will find a lot to love in *Armchair Nation*. Impeccably researched ... Perhaps the most admirable thing about this book is that it treats television with proper seriousness. -- Rachel Cooke *New Statesman* A richly detailed book, as profoundly nostalgic as scoffing Findus Crispy Pancakes or Bird's Eye Potato Waffles. -- Roger Lewis *Daily Mail* A formidable historical analysis of the gogglebox ... Moran's achievement is remarkable given the breadth of subject matter ... Extensive research is lightly worn -- Arifa Akbar *Independent* Moran is scholarly but welcoming ... But in its insights, clarity and honest wit, it's hard to imagine a more engaging book on a subject everyone already thinks they know about. As in the best TV itself, you find yourself learning something new with almost no effort. -- Phil Hogan *Observer* A warm, witty cultural history of television ... Moran creates a compelling and surprising patchwork of the nation through its viewing habits and rituals ... *Armchair Nation* may provoke nostalgia, but it's never enslaved by it - it's a timely and hugely entertaining assessment of a medium in flux. -- Gabriel Tate *Time Out* Quite wonderful, beautifully written ... it reveals a seated nation, something which has never happened before. There is nothing like it. -- Dr Ronald Blythe A scholarly, accessible and illuminating history of the everyday. -- Philippa Williams *The Lady* *Armchair Nation* is as compulsive as any soap, as informative as any documentary and as funny as any sitcom. Moran knows and loves his subject, exploring well-covered territory as well as the less familiar with wit and perception. -- Harry Venning *The Stage* Joe Moran is a superb elegist of the mundane ... *Armchair Nation* is a captivating look at a universal but unsung subject: the British television viewer ... packed with glorious details -- Ysenda Maxtone Graham *Country Life* Joe Moran's *Armchair Nation* does something I had thought impossible: make the history of British TV as dramatic as it is fun. It also nails some prevailing myths about British telly. -- John Preston *Spectator* An extraordinary history that is moving, perceptive, unexpectedly lyrical and full of remarkable anecdotes ... In these competitive and digital times it's (television history) a lost world. But at least, in this celebratory book,

Moran has become its chronicler and its poet. -- Tony Cohen RTS Magazine An engaging social history of Britain through the prism of TV ... Moran tells an insightful and evocative tale. He combines scholarly techniques with an eye for telling detail ... (and) brings great colour to his story. -- Fiona Chesterton LSE Review of Books Joe Moran exposes our love/hate relationship with British television in the splendid *Armchair Nation*, studding a scholarly overview with nostalgic recollections -- Christopher Fowler Independent on Sunday Engaging ... illuminates many of the medium's main moments with an acute witness statement -- John Wyver Sight & Sound

About the Author

Joe Moran is Professor of English and Cultural History at Liverpool John Moores University. He contributes regularly to the *Guardian* and other newspapers. His book *On Roads* was longlisted for the Samuel Johnson Prize and, together with his previous book, *Queuing for Beginners*, received unanimous critical acclaim.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Crystal McMullen:

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