

Body counts

From Netflix to mainstream TV
ANOUSHKA BEAZLEY analyses the stories
playing out on our screens.

QUEEN OF THE SOUTH – NETFLIX. I like a body count. There I said it. It's how I roll. And I understand how easy it is to think that I may be putting the face of my mother upon bloody, gratifying images of violence and death, but this is not about my A1 gone wild with a chainsaw (not all of it); this is about *physis*. Based on the book *La Reina del Sur* by Artura Pérez-Reverte, Teresa Mendoza is livin' the dream of an arse-fondled, low-paid waitress going nowhere in Mexico when she meets the love of her life. But what is the cost of balancing out her avoidant attachment style (Erskine, 2009) with a secure attachment drug runner for the Mexican cartel? Soon Teresa finds herself in over her head before she can say *pinche pendejo* (look it up). She is barely surviving in a world where people are not who they say they are, the authorities in whom they trust are corrupt, lying dictators and life seems to be one Herculean test after another – ah the heady world of escapism – but despite everything, and in a male-dominated world, this girl wears her *physis* right on her sleeve and, what's more, she plays no games. None. Inspired by real life players of the Sinoloa cartel, Teresa may be on the golden triangle but she is firmly off the drama triangle, refusing to engage in ulterior transactions of any kind. She is a woman who says what she means and speaks from the heart, at times to her detriment. An anti-heroine whose *physis* is so strong and so determined to live life, she is both inspiring and exhilarating. Her desire to play the hand she has been dealt without engaging in games may reveal to us the exact point where the fictional risk ends and the real risk of living our life begins. Season 4 would suggest I'm not the only one rooting for Teresa.

'[Teresa's] desire to play the hand she has been dealt without engaging in games may reveal to us the exact point where the fictional risk ends and the real risk of living our life begins.'

MOTHER, FATHER, SON – BBC 1. The ambition of this eight-part drama is palpable across multiple discourses: politics, sex, family, disability and war, for starters. The fact that it skilfully manages to present a compulsive, though at times, abrasive watch can be much attributed to the gifts of actor Billy Howle who plays Caden. The poignant second order symbiosis between Caden and his father Max, played by Richard Gere, a media mogul with the prime minister's number on speed dial is at the story's centre. Despite the title this remains a story about a father and his son. Max is an unstoppable lone force, while his emotionally troubled ex-wife, played by Helen Cory, helps out at a homeless shelter as Caden slips further behind the mask of drugs and sexual dominance; desperately clawing for his father's approval. Max's recklessness towards the truth and purpose of his newspapers is no different to his attitude towards Caden and his expectations for him to become the man he thinks he should be. Max would argue he is simply 'being a man,' pretty new European wife half his age and new baby on the way notwithstanding. Tragedy hangs from the outset and ensues in the climactic first episode. A family torn apart long ago from the inside, is now ripped from the outside too leaving open wounds within which scathingly human family dynamics are all set to fester. The backstory heralds a shift in political power, a fresh new government, but the power games are old with the final power play about how much truth is too much and who shall decide. This confirms, if nothing else, that it is not simple to be who we want to be, man or woman, especially when Max's truth, the legacy of a hot potato (Woods, 2000) from a disciplinarian Nazi era, can never be Caden's truth, a little boy lost in the body of a man. Howle is magnificent and the hospital scene with him and Cory will have viewers aghast.

BLACK MIRROR – BANDERSNATCH – NETFLIX. As a child books were my salvation and I had a guilty pleasure for a special variety which allowed you to roll a dice and choose how the narrative could progress. As a kid all too familiar with the feeling of powerlessness, the power in my choosing was transformative.

We try to encourage our clients to own their power so they can make their own decisions and Charlie Booker attempts the same with his new offering in an interactive feature length episode of *Black Mirror*. The viewer is in control all the way along – or are they? Various story routes lead to a choice of possible endings, hours of pre-shot footage designed to give the viewer the idea that they have choices.

Booker's stylistic-heavy premise will be a trip for some and nightmare for others. What if we don't know what we want?

GENTLEMAN JACK – BBC1. Long before we were advising our clients that journaling their thoughts might be a good idea it was 1832 in Halifax and Anne Lister was penning her four-million word diary written in code, the inspiration for Sally Wainwright's frothy period dramedy, giving us another wonderful female pioneer to admire, and let's be honest, there can never be too many. Suranne Jones is Anne Lister, landowner during the industrial revolution, where she rides her horse like Calamity Jane and her women without cliterference. Lister is too modern for her era, perhaps sadly even for ours, but that doesn't mean we don't need her. Behind the soft velvet curtains of Regency, Wainwright deftly reshapes our sexual mainstream and it is long overdue.

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