

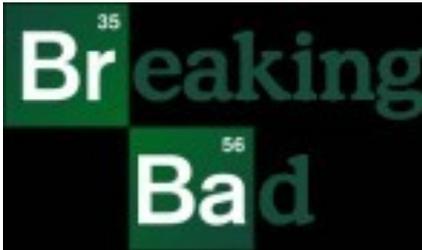
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Hobson's *Imperialism*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Theological Library, 1910, first published in 1902;

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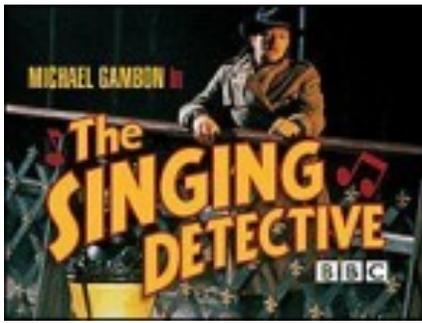
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RETURN OF THE NON-NATIVE by Toby Miller

Tuesday 03 January 2012 Last updated at 14:10

I've left Mexico and moved back to my beloved, benighted, lonesome home of LA. Improbably, in balmy temperatures, there are skaters on the Pershing Square rink that I look down on from my loft.

It's some distance from Coyoacán and my neighbor/protestors who saw themselves as the southern wing of Spain's *indignados*:

The week before I left Mexico City, we had a major earthquake. The first thing one does in such circumstances is attend to the television. It was safe—on a carpeted floor. Small exhalation of relief.

And my first task after finding somewhere to rent in the US was to organize cable back here, while en route from the airport, my first stop was, of course, to buy a TV.

I've been home a week and am settling in to television-watching. The season finales of [Dexter](#) and [Homeland](#) were reprised on the evening some people call Christmas. It was a shock after six months without Showtime to find that *Dexter* had jumped the shark into melodrama—always a risk, given its source, its theme, and the ways of capitalist over-production. But sad nonetheless.

Homeland is something else again (an alert to those who haven't watched it and wish to do so—don't look at the links below if you want to remain in the dark about the story's climax). It only began in October 2011 and [has already won viewers, praise, and awards](#).

I can see why. The serial is supposedly a remake of Israel's [Hatufim](#). But despite the [creators' disavowal](#), it's basically dependent on Richard Condon's wonderful 1959 novel *The Manchurian Candidate*¹ (and the two movies, one of which one might bother to see,

one of which one might not). Claire Danes is amazing, as ever, and the boys are very good, too, while the complexity of the drama is in keeping with Condon's work.

The showrunners include Howard Gordon and Alex Gansa, both of whom were involved in the notorious 24 (John Downing. "Terrorism, Torture, and Television: 24 in its Context." *Democratic Communiqué* 21, no. 2 [2007]: 62-82). Gordon is a Zionist whose fans [include shock jock Glenn Beck](#), but he is [also a skeptic about war and violence](#). And even the coin-operated, far-right [Washington Times](#) acknowledges that *Homeland* is more skeptical, judicious, layered, and thoughtful than the violent vigilantism of 24. I shall be following up on *Homeland* to see earlier episodes.

Returning to *Dexter*, ever since Theodor W Adorno and Max Horkheimer came to Santa Monica, we have understood that production-line culture sees demand dispersed and supply centralized, so TV operates via an administrative logic. Far from reflecting already-established and -revealed preferences of consumers in reaction to their tastes and desires, culture becomes one more industrial process subordinated to standardization. The requirements of the economy and media production dictate minimal innovation and maximal repetition, albeit with sufficient difference to draw a crowd (Adorno and Horkheimer. "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception." *Mass Communication and Society*. Ed. James Curran, Michael Gurevitch, and Janet Woollacott. London: Edward Arnold, 1977. 349-83).

In US TV terms, this is the difference between what we produce and such programs as [Fawlty Towers](#) or [Monty Python's Flying Circus](#). The prevailing political economy of commercialism and resale has meant historically that whereas BBC programs could be very short-run, and thereby maintain their quality, similarly successful US series were mass-produced and descended into dross—or at least failed to sustain their quality.

Thanks to JA Hobson and Lenin pointing out that capitalist over-production provides the impetus to imperialism, we understand how Hollywood deals with this problem internationally (Hobson's *Imperialism*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Theological Library, 1910, first published in 1902; Lenin's *Империализм как высшая стадия капитализма*. Петроград: Жизнь и Знание, 1917).

Networks like Showtime and HBO complicate the picture. They are manufacturing what many of us have been calling for a decade the golden age of US TV drama (forget those one-shot plays of the '50s, which I find boring as bat shit). Showtime and HBO use the money they get from working-class brown and black men paying to watch boxing to fund the white *bourgeoisie's* enjoyment of "quality" drama. Well that's partly how they do it. They also rely on subscriptions, not ratings, so instant acclaim and audience numbers do not have the same importance as they do for advertiser-supported networks: people buy premium-cable services, rather than having their viewing time sold to advertisers.

Returning to *Homeland*, the show's arc makes it a serial, albeit over more than one season. Conversely, *Dexter* is a series and can go on and on and on—though how far, given what his sister feels and sees in the 2011 finale, is debatable.

Will this generic difference save *Homeland* from ending in the dross predicted by political economy? Claire Danes may know. But she's a little shaky just now.

Toby Miller is a British-Australian-US interdisciplinary social scientist. He is the author and editor of over 30 books, has published essays in more than 100 journals and edited collections, and is a frequent guest commentator on television and radio programs.

His teaching and research cover the media, sports, labor, gender, race, citizenship, politics, and cultural policy, as well as the success of Hollywood overseas and the adverse effects of electronic waste. Miller's work has been translated into Chinese, Japanese, Swedish, German, Spanish and Portuguese. He has been Media Scholar in Residence at Sarai, the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies in India, Becker Lecturer at the University of Iowa, a Queensland Smart Returns Fellow in Australia, Honorary Professor at the Center for Critical and Cultural Studies, University of Queensland, CanWest Visiting Fellow at the Alberta Global Forum in Canada, and an International Research collaborator at the Centre for Cultural Research in Australia.

¹ [For Condon's remarkable essay on his responsibility for the assassination of JFK.](#) ↩

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