Difficult Men. Gifted Women (Young writers, start your engines)

I just downloaded the new book by Brett Martin. It gives an insider’s view of how cable transformed television with shows like The Wire, The Sopranos, Mad Men, Deadwood, The Shield. (This transformation matters to an anthropologist because as TV goes so goes American culture.)

In particular, this is the story of “difficult men” like David Chase, David Simon, Ed Burns, Matthew Weiner, David Milch and Alan Ball. The implication is that it takes some unholy alliance of the cantankerous and a deep, enduring oddity to foment a revolution of this order.

As the publisher puts it on Amazon, these men gave us shows that gave us “narrative inventiveness, emotional resonance, and artistic ambition. No longer necessarily concerned with creating always-likeable characters, plots that wrapped up neatly every episode, or subjects that were deemed safe and appropriate, shows such as The Wire, The Sopranos, Mad Men, Deadwood, The Shield, and more tackled issues of life and death, love and sexuality, addiction, race, violence, and existential boredom.”

Well, that and better television. Way better television. Helmut Minnow’s “wasteland” is now producing something remarkable, and several intellectuals (below) owe us an apology.

But Martin’s book raises a question. Some of the new TV is being written and produced by women. Ann Biderman gave us Southland and most recently Ray Donovan. Shonda Rhimes isn’t “cable” but with shows like Scandal she takes advantage of (and pushes) the creative liberties the cable revolution makes possible. And then there is Bonnie Hammer now consumed, one guesses, by administrative responsibilities but in her day a creative force to be reckoned with. There are many others, I’m sure. (My memory stack holds three and no more.)

We need a companion piece, a gendered view. We need a look at the revolution in TV and American culture driven by the rest of the industry. There may be absolutely no difference between male and female creatives in this industry. And that would be a fantastic finding. Yes, but what are the chances. Almost surely there are tons of differences. And they await the young writer prepared to dive in and phone home.

Bibliography


The Counter Argument may be found here:


Get Difficult Men here at Amazon.

-- Automated anthropologist (some thoughts)  Full Disclosure at The Economist (an open question for John Micklethwait)
Start by providing your daughter with a journal in which she can write on a regular basis. Journals capture the thoughts, ideas, and feelings of young writers and make great gifts for birthdays and the holidays. Encourage her to read biographies of writers, especially women authors. Biographies of Laura Ingalls
Wilder, Maya Angelou, Beatrix Potter, and Judy Blume can all serve as examples of successful women writers. Provide other opportunities for her to write. Encourage her to share selected writing samples with you. To be with a good man is certainly difficult, but to then be without one is devastating. No one can fault a good man for making the logical decision to end an arrangement, especially when he is not doing it for himself. Of course a good man will always be courteous and gentle, which then makes getting over him essentially impossible. A good man will change you; you will bask in the warmth of hours upon hours of meaningful conversation and the knowledge that your good man isn’t doing this for any other reason other than his genuine interest in you and your thoughts.