TELEVISION REVIEWS

Sympathy for the Devil?
Appropriate Adult
(ITV 1, September 2011)

Not much feted previously for the quality of its dramas (unless it was by fans of outlandish psycho thrillers about the perils of adultery), ITV has recently been enjoying a renaissance in quality that has made even the BBC sit up and take notice, as witnessed by last-year's much hyped *Downtown Abbey* / *Upstairs Downstairs* face-off (the enjoyably preposterous *Downtown Abbey* walked away with all the prizes and plaudits). However, producing a drama based on events surrounding one of the most notorious crime stories of the 1990s – the serial killing exploits of gruesome twosome Fred and Rosemary West – was always going to be a rather more delicate proposition than assembling an assortment of noted Thesps in a stately home and letting them get on with talking ponderously about how "War changes things..."

Let's face it, the serial killer biopic is a particularly debased format, as epitomised most vividly in the distasteful antics of the now defunct (but much lamented, at least until its partial reincarnation as Palisades/Tartan) Tartan Metro company, which was a respectful and intelligent distributor of international and hard-to-get genre films but which also helped bankroll three particularly regrettable movies of this type. These were; the sordid, workmanlike *Ed Gein* (2000), the deeply offensive (on many levels) *Ted Bundy* (2003) – which actually sound-tracked a montage sequence depicting Bundy's peripatetic assaults on dozens of young women with comedy music and the supposedly "hilarious" sound of his victims being hit on the head – and the equally repugnant *The Hillside Strangler* (2006). As the abject failure of this loose "trilogy" indicates, films about real-life killers all too often sensationalise and (perhaps) unintentionally glamorise the activities of their nefarious subjects even as they pretend to be presenting hard-hitting and insightful portraits of individuals for whom human life has ceased to have any value at all. To be fair, at least the Gein film made some attempt to depict the deeply disturbed Wisconsinite as the pathetic, socially inadequate loser that he actually was, even if it did plump for the predictable "blame it all on the mother" explanation for his necrophiliac proclivities, but the other films are sleazy, voyeuristic, and sorely misjudged disasters which display no genuine feeling at all for the victims of their central characters, and the Bundy biopic's monumentally misjudged final moments have to be seen to be believed.

Rather like another high-quality drama based on the exploits of a real-life serial killing couple – Channel 4's equally excellent *Longford* (2009) – *Appropriate Adult* avoids many of the pitfalls of the subgenre by focusing not on the period during which the crimes took place, but rather on events which took place in the aftermath of their discovery, and by concentrating on the complex relationship between one of the killers and an outsider who is pulled into their orbit.

Closely based upon real-life events during the West investigation, the story's central character, Janet Leach (a notably wan and vulnerable-looking Emily Watson), is a trainee social worker whose unremarkable life - juggling her partner, children, and college work - is disrupted when she receives a call asking her to assist a suspect at the local police station. (Apparently, when a suspect is assessed as being a "vulnerable" adult, this is a legal requirement, and there is a register of specially trained volunteers for the police to call upon). Initially believing, naturally enough, that the affable, scruffy man whose interview she's sitting in on is in for something run-of-the mill crime, Watson's character is stunned when

he matter-of-factly starts explaining, a couple of minutes into the interview, how he murdered his own daughter and dismembered her body, before dumping her head in a wheelie bin. The suspect is, of course, none other than Fred West (Dominic West), and neither Leach nor the police know that they are about to uncover some of the most profoundly disturbing crimes in modern British history.

Seen just a few weeks ago in the BBC 2's *The Hour* as a charming, caddish 50s newsman, Dominic West is transformed here into an unkempt, garish-jumper-wearing, buck-toothed West Country yokel who is additionally terrifying because he genuinely seems to see himself as a put-upon good guy. Though considered to have a low-IQ (hence the Appropriate Adult), he's a florid liar, with a gift for the gab, who pretends to be helpful but is in fact doing everything he can to postpone the inevitable discovery of the full extent of his crimes; as much out of misguided loyalty to his equally monstrous wife Rose (Monica Dolan, in a small but chilling role) and a deeply twisted sense of responsibility for his much-abused "family" (two of whom were murdered by the pair).

As happened in real life, West here is quick to see an opportunity to manipulate Leach by broadly hinting at information crucial to the investigation that he knows she cannot tell the police because she is bound by advisor/client confidentiality. Whereas a lesser drama might have made this into yet another variation on the predictable Machiavellian male killer/vulnerable woman dynamic seen so often in the wake of *The Silence of the Lambs*, the relationship here, between West and Leach, develops into something a great deal more realistic and complex. He is constantly looking for sympathy from her, seeing himself and Rose as the real victims, yet able only to cry crocodile tears for the many young women the two of them have tortured and killed.

Leach, rather bafflingly, it must be said, puts up with his queasy over-familiarity and cloying sentimentality, perhaps out of a sense of duty, or perhaps even because her peripheral involvement in such a huge media story gives her a feeling of self-importance. Whilst she realises very quickly that West is getting a sick thrill out of dropping hints as to the true magnitude of his crimes (the first half of the drama ends in just such a moment), she's also all too aware that she cannot tell the police, and that even if she did, such information would render the evidence gathered inadmissible in court. It's a remarkable situation for any normal person to find herself in, and whilst Watson has the less obviously showy of the two central roles, hers is a quietly compelling portrait of an everyday woman coping with remarkable events as best she can, and failing miserably.

Apart from her duty of care to the odious West, who has become notably dependent on her (in a way that hints at the nature of the relationship between him and Rose), Leach finds herself under considerable pressure at home also, as her children suffer from her protracted absence, and her mentally delicate partner (Robert Glenister) gets dangerously caught up in the excitement of the case, pressuring her to sell her story to the newspapers. The fact that both Leach and West are each, in their own ways, trying to keep their families together (albeit in the face of very different obstacles) is emphasised, but to the drama's credit, never rammed down our throats.

There are some moments of likely poetic licence (I doubt very much that the police would leave a member of the public locked in a cell, on her own, with a suspect known to enjoy murdering young women), and while Fred West, to be fair, is depicted as an odious, sordid manipulator, he is granted a modicum of reluctant empathy entirely absent in the drama's depiction of Rose West. This may be somewhat unavoidable, given that Fred's relationship with Leach serves to humanise him in our eyes, whereas Rose is only ever glimpsed in brief scenes which emphasise her profound unpleasantness and inhumanity.

The most notable moment in this respect comes when the couple meet in the dock for a court hearing, during the second instalment. Fred, devastated by the fact that Rose has not been answering his letters, or made eye contact with him in the dock on previous occasions, has been coached by Leach to preserve his dignity by making no effort at all to communicate with her this time round. It's a testament to the relative complexity of the way in which the drama is written and acted that when West, having managed to keep up the act for a few moments, gives in to his desperate desire for acknowledgement and frantically begs Rose to look at him, the viewer, like Watson's character, actually momentarily feels sorry for him.

The whole thing is filmed in the de-saturated colour scheme which is now overwhelmingly associated with 70s/early 80s set dramas like *Life on Mars* or the more recent (and much more outlandish) fictional serial-killer thriller *Fields of Blood*, and whilst I don't remember everything being quite as brown in the mid-1990s as the series suggests, it does help bring home the sense of the sordidly mundane horror that the West's long spree of sexual violence and murder inspires. The grim details of the police investigation and of the murders themselves are treated with an admirable degree of restraint, even though the despicable nature of the killings themselves certainly isn't glossed over.

There are also some nice visual flourishes from director Julian Jarrold (previously responsible for an instalment of the *Red Riding* trilogy), such as the moment when West rings Leach at home over Christmas, to disconsolately ask why she won't come visit him in remand anymore. As she makes her awkward excuses – her natural goodness and sense of duty meaning that she feels bad even for letting down a loathsome serial killer – we see that the phone cord has gradually knotted itself around her neck. The symbolism, though admittedly unsubtle, has at least three pay offs: we know that Fred strangled many of the young women that he killed (and that he believes that Leach is a kind of reincarnation of one of them); he hangs himself in his cell shortly after the phone call; and finally, his death means that Leach will soon be very reluctantly dragged back into the case, this time as the main witness for the prosecution case against Rose, because her pact of confidentiality no longer applies after his death.

The courtroom scenes that conclude the drama, though relatively brief, are genuinely harrowing, both because they mean that Leach much describe in detail the weirdly co-dependent nature of her relationship with Fred West, and because, like her, we're waiting for the moment when her one act of fairly understandable weakness – when she discusses the case with a reporter from the *Mirror*, with a view to selling her story later – will be revealed. Like Fred, she lies to the authorities, and like him, quickly finds that her deception has been exposed. Furthermore, whilst in the witness stand she unwillingly serves as Fred's surrogate, repeating his account of Rose's behaviour and proving that the couple acted together during many of the murders. Though Leach's testimony ultimately does prove vital in convincing the jury that Rose was a full and willing partner in what transpired in 25 Cromwell Street, the experience has obviously been a deeply damaging one. After all, "The thing is, you can't *un*know something, can you?"

Appropriate Adult is a compelling, respectful take on crimes which could easily have been treated with ghoulish sensationalism, and features sensitive, effective performances from both the film-star leads and the capable supporting cast (in particular, Sylvestra Le Touzel as DC Hazel Savage, the no-nonsense female detective who was, in real life, as here, suspicious of the West's before anyone else). Those interested in another well-handled serial killer dramatisation which tells the story from the perspective of the victims and their families should seek out the poignant 2009 BBC mini-series *Five Daughters*, which depicts the lives of the deeply vulnerable young women murdered by Ipswich serial killer Steve Wright.

BERNICE M. MURPHY

Torchwood: Miracle Day
(Starz: US and BBC: UK, 2011)

The 1980s sketch show *Alas Smith and Jones* featured a regular parody of *After Dark*, Channel 4's late night discussion show. One spoof discussion about euthanasia contained a question about what constituted the physical point of death. A panellist answered: "what's the point of death? Surely it's to stop old people cluttering up the world." This line occurred to me periodically while watching *Torchwood: Miracle Day*, whose teaser line was "one day... no one dies. Next day... no one dies. And the next, and the next, and the next..." followed by a counter showing a rapidly increasing world population.

Miracle Day is *Torchwood*'s first outing since creator Russell T. Davies left BBC Wales and took the show to the United States, as a co-production of BBC Worldwide and the Starz cable channel. This move not only allowed for transatlantic location shooting and improved production values, but also the inclusion of established American television writers, most notably Jane Espenson (*Buffy* and *Battlestar Galactica*). Notwithstanding any scepticism about the effect of the show's relocation, *Miracle Day* was also going to find it a challenge to surpass 2009's acclaimed and award winning *Torchwood: Children of Earth*. This was the story of what were essentially a race of alien paedophile junkies, who demanded a tribute of millions of human children, to be used as narcotics. *Miracle Day*, by contrast, eschews alien involvement and explores the refusal of the old, infirm, and the mortally ill and wounded to shuffle off this mortal coil. This threatens a Malthusian disaster of overpopulation with a consequent spread of famine, disease and societal breakdown. Antibiotics become useless against viruses that no longer kill, and effective pain relief becomes the new medical Holy Grail. This entire scenario has been engineered by a shadowy conspiracy called the Three Families, who intend to use the resulting economic and social chaos to remake the world.

The truly terrifying aspect of *Children of Earth* was how the arrival of the aliens led to the amplification of processes already immanent within British society: extended anti-terror laws, the demonization of working class children, standardised testing and academic streaming, etc . Despite a loss of momentum towards the end, the narrative always felt as if these processes could be pursued to their logical, grisly conclusion: the forced abduction, by the state, of millions of children. The conspiracy was concocted and carried out by an elected government, using existing legislation. By contrast, the conspiracy in *Miracle Day* feels generically shadowy, more *The X-Files* than *The Wire*. The attempt to attribute the seemingly imminent collapse of capitalist society to an external force fails to evoke any feeling beyond a shrug of "so what". At one point, a CIA analyst announces that Greece and Ireland have gone bankrupt and are taking the rest of the EU with them. The problem is that this plausible, even very likely scenario is terrifying enough without the existence of a group of conspirators, who may (or may not) have engineered the financial crisis of 2008.

The arrival of the titular ‘Miracle’ coincides with the planned execution of murderer and paedophile, Oswald Danes (Bill Pullman), and with a car accident involving a CIA agent, Rex Matheson (Mekhi Phifer). Danes survives lethal injection, and Matheson survives having a pole driven through his chest. The former theatrically repents on television and becomes a spokesperson for Phicorp, a pharmaceutical corporation who are attempting to exploit the Miracle by supplanting the state's role in healthcare. The latter subjects Gwen Cooper and Captain Jack Harkness to extraordinary rendition from Britain to the United States, but later joins them in their fight to expose Phicorp.

Numerous subtextual elements hang over *Miracle Day*, but paradoxically it wears them simultaneously too thinly and too heavily. Topical comments and plot elements pile in thick and fast, but often to no more purpose than to emphasise the drama's topicality. There are references to the global economic collapse, healthcare reform, NHS privatisation in Britain and the "Tea Party" movement in the United States. China flexes its financial muscles as the world economy approaches a population-boom-accelerated collapse. The problem of what to do with those who should be dead (Category Ones) is dealt with by setting up holding camps, which are a cover for the incineration of "living corpses". This is referred to as "a new age of care and compassion" by an unnamed British prime minister. The accompanying crematoria and smoke-belching chimneys evoke the Nazi extermination camps and the standard tropes of banal and bureaucratic evil. When Doctor Juarez confronts a San Pedro camp administrator over the inhuman treatment of uninsured Category Ones, he defends himself by telling her he's under budget.

The real revelation in *Miracle Day* is Lauren Ambrose (*Six Feet Under*) as the malicious, narcissistic and misanthropic PR woman, Jilly Kitzinger. She dominates every scene she appears in, and Ambrose plays the part almost entirely through facial expressions capable of expressing every negative human emotion. She describes a woman accidentally reduced to a torso as being "made up of positive thinking and colostomy bags". Elsewhere, of the two remaining original Torchwood members, Gwen Cooper (Eve Myles) continues her ongoing transformation into a female action hero. This culminates in her blowing up an incineration camp in Wales and declaring: "I don't care if the whole of society bends over and takes this like a dog. I'm saying no." In fact, in terms of character, the only superfluous note is struck by Captain Jack himself (John Barrowman), a lead character reduced to the status of a McGuffin. The conspiracy that leads to Miracle Day stems from the theft of his blood in a search for the secret to his immortality. When *Torchwood* was originally posited as a "grown-up" *Doctor Who*, this simply seemed to mean that the characters had sex. By the time of *Children of Earth*, this had changed, and the show differentiated itself by concentrating on more visceral science fiction at the expense of *Doctor Who*'s camp and kitsch elements. Consequently, the constant presence of Captain Jack in his vintage coat has become progressively more ridiculous. The possibility that the relatively more serious Rex Matheson survives into a further series suggests that he may be intended as either a supplement to, or a replacement for, the captain.

Ultimately, as Gwen Cooper points out, "it's always about blood". An extended flashback shows the immortal Jack being repeatedly killed, so the supposedly unique characteristics of his blood can be harnessed. The Miracle begins when this blood is introduced into something called "The Blessing", which regulates the planet's life/death balance. This resembles nothing so much as a giant lump of kebab meat reaching through the centre of the earth. There are few moments of visceral, visual horror in the series. In the first episode, a body that has been blown apart by an explosion continues to move and exhibit consciousness, even after the head is severed from its last connecting tendon, at Jack's suggestion. Helicopters and cars explode with people inside, but their undying occupants seem to suffer in silence. The burning of still-living Category Ones is initially a closely guarded secret but after its exposure by Torchwood is shrugged off by governments as a necessary and pragmatic solution. There is no outrage. It is in these moments of recognisable apathy and impotence that the series is at its most effective, if also at its most pessimistic. There is no philosophical agonising about what happens to the soul or to human consciousness. Like the torments suffered by those in burning vehicles, there are just implications, left hanging in the air.

The problem with apocalyptic television series is that they run into a contradiction, as *Children of Earth* showed. You cannot properly, and convincingly, destroy society if you need to come back for a new season; the possibility of return needs to be denied, but the demands of popular television dictate

otherwise. The inevitable, if unconvincing, last-minute resolutions to both *Miracle Day* and *Children of Earth* devalue the physical and psychological horror, and the ideas, built up over their initial episodes. But they left the principals in place for a future return, in a world that more or less still resembles our own. One cannot help but wonder if the hasty and tidy resolution in *Miracle Day* restores not only the mortal balance, but also the world economy. Aside from an inevitable boom in funerals, we have no idea.

SHEAMUS SWEENEY

I Was a Teenage Remake
Teen Wolf
(MTV, 2009)

Back in 1985, the thought of Michael J. Fox turning into a werewolf right there on screen was probably quite rightly terrifying. While some of us were shielded from such horrors by overprotective parents or older siblings, even said elders and betters must have got something of a shock at the spectacle of an actor better known either as the chirpy hero of the *Back to the Future* series (1985 – 1990) or as the neat, studious, conservative little know-it-all, Alex, in *Family Ties* (1982 – 1989), suddenly transformed into his polar opposite. Sprouting copious amounts of facial and body hair, growing at least a foot in height and putting on some serious muscle, and subsequently winning basketball games single-handed, being seduced by scantily clad blond girls and getting aggressive during a school dance, his character in the original *Teen Wolf* film (Rod Daniel, 1985), coming out just months after the first *Back to the Future* film, imaged a fairly unsubtle rejection of his on-screen person to date.

At any rate, it's to be hoped that this radical transformation provided that particular generation of adolescents with some sort of frisson of fear at the disruption of normality that Fox's lycanthropic turn embodied – and not just because more of his wiry, strangely shiny skin was on display than one should ever have to see. Otherwise, it is difficult to comprehend the extent to which the film has entered the popular consciousness – spawning both a 1987 sequel *Teen Wolf Too* (starring a clearly embarrassed Jason Bateman) and an animated television series (CBS, 1986 – 1987), despite modest box-office success and the fact that it transforms inexplicably into a basketball movie towards the end. A possible explanation can be found in the sheer sunny optimism of the films, which renders them little more than cheap attempts to borrow some of the imagery of the horror genre that had long been closely bound up with teen cinema, and that evidently provided a lucrative market. They therefore bear only a superficial resemblance to films such as *I Was a Teenage Werewolf* (starring Michael Landon, 1957), rejecting the violence, pessimism and engagement with the actually frightening aspects of the genre that the earlier film embraces.

Whatever one might think of the original *Teen Wolf*, proof of its enduring legacy comes in the form of a 2011 MTV reimagining developed by Jeff Davis, which upgrades the basic concept for the *Twilight* generation, while retaining enough features of the MJF vehicle to lure in the more mature fans of the earlier film's dubious charms. So, Scott Howard has become Scott McCall (possibly to add a certain Celtic mystique to the monster) and is, we are assured, still geeky and awkward (though believing this of the improbably pretty and equally improbably monikered Tyler Posey requires something of a stretch of the imaginative faculties). More successfully, Scott's best buddy Rupert "Stiles" Stilinski (played by Jerry Levine in the film) is now merely Stiles Stilinski (Dylan O'Brien, giving a screen-stealing performance in his very first acting role). This particular name change provides one of the show's more humorous moments, especially for anyone familiar with the original, and the glaring fact that no-one ever calls Stiles "Rupert". In a rather tense parent-teacher meeting scene (yes, this is that kind of programme), a teacher asks Stiles' dad, the local sheriff, what his son's real first name is, assuming that it could only, rationally, be an abbreviation of the patronymic, and is dumb-struck by the response that they'd named him "Stiles" because his mother liked the name. Silly fan stuff aside, Stiles is probably the best thing about the entire show, a worthy descendant of the secondary characters of *Buffy* in his bumbling-but-not-unbearably-quirky take on what could have been a rather hackneyed long-suffering best-friend role.

Indeed, much like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, to which it appears (rather inevitably) to owe something of a debt, the shiny new *Teen Wolf* is primarily about the heady world of adolescence. We are treated to a by-now rather familiar parade of looming academic failure, repeated painful rejection by members of the opposite (or indeed the same) sex, endemic bullying by muscular athletic types, and rapidly crumbling friendships, made all the more trying by a constant struggle to work out what to do about the monsters your parents seem not to know exist – especially if one of those monsters is your closest friend, your potential boyfriend, or, worse still, yourself. This, however, is precisely where *Teen Wolf* becomes somewhat more interesting, because, in a reversal of the usual situation in supernatural horror, the father and aunt of Scott's love interest, Allison (Crystal Reed, whose parents were clearly even crueler than those of the fictional Stiles), actually know about the existence of werewolves. Indeed, as we quickly learn, her family has for generations hunted and killed the beasts they consider to be monsters. Cue a series of somewhat predictable complications as Allison comes ever closer to discovering the truth about the inner beast her boyfriend is barely keeping at bay every time they kiss – a truth which would (and ultimately does) make it all too clear that her wolf-hunting ancestry renders her his mortal enemy.

This may all sound less than inspired or inspiring, and, in many ways, *Teen Wolf* is indeed little more than another cynical attempt on the part of MTV to tap into the ever-burgeoning young-adult market, where horror iconography, mixed with drawn-out story arcs driven by sexual denial and moodily-lit emotional longing, is now guaranteed to draw in audiences – and cash. Nevertheless, the result is a fairly competent and, in places, really rather charming exercise in producing low-level scares that acknowledge and extend some of the best things about the teen-horror subgenre. Again, like *Buffy*, it insists that sex is frightening, not because it might result in punishment meted out by some external authority figure (as occurs in classic 1970's and '80's slasher films like *Halloween*, *Friday the 13th* and *Nightmare on Elm Street*), but because it renders one almost unbearably vulnerable, both to the other person and to oneself. The show therefore deals, more or less head on, with a world where adolescent sexual activity may still make parents uncomfortable, but where the responsibility for protecting both oneself and one's partner from possible dangers (whether physical or emotional) is now placed squarely on the still-narrow shoulders of young people themselves.

Beyond this, the vast improvement, since the time of the ur-*Teen Wolf* and its sequel, in the portrayal of female characters is glaringly evident. The alluring bimbos our heroes must resist, originally distinguished sharply from the jumper-wearing, studious brunettes with their best interests at heart, are effectively merged in the figure of the hard-working yet popular and attractive Allison, and avoiding situations in which her physical presence causes the violent, hirsute wolf to erupt from beneath Scott's smooth, barely pubescent exterior provides the central conflict of the programme. Even her rather more come-hither friend Lydia (Holland Roden) is gradually revealed to have hidden depths, leaving only her jerk-of-a-jock boyfriend Jackson (Colton Haynes) to bear the brunt of the stereotyping that normally dominates shows of this kind. Moreover, in a move that, along with the knowing allusions to the original films, broadens the audience appeal beyond the teen market, much of the plot revolves around the character of Derek Hale (Tyler Hoechlin). Derek is an experienced werewolf, in his late twenties, who vacillates between trying to train the recently bitten Scott to protect himself from the mysterious "Alpha" werewolf (who wants to recruit Scott and/ or kill his friends), and becoming the Alpha's bitch – almost literally. Caught between adulthood and adolescence, apparently unemployed and homeless, he is unsure whether he needs an authority figure or to be an authority figure. Played with a smidgen of dangerous but sympathetic homoeroticism, Derek is an apt representative of a generation betrayed by an adult world they were about to enter when the financial structures that supported it came crashing down.

In line with this, the programme as a whole is far more focused on the fragility of the status quo on which the televisual and cinematic representation of small-town America rests – the ease with which the apparent safety of the locale can be shattered by malignant forces, whether external or internal – than the earlier *Teen Wolf* films, which revolved primarily around a distinctly uneasy relationship with ambition, success and fame. Both films censure their heroes for temporarily choosing sex, popularity and partying over love, friendship and modestly good grades, and order is all too easily restored when they decide to abandon the wolf persona in favour of "being themselves." Considering that the 1980's incarnations posited the werewolf as a hereditary trait rather than the result of being bitten, this message is less than coherent, and implies that self-control might take some work, but is ultimately attainable and sustainable. Jeff Davis' rethinking of the concept, by contrast, and following the considerably less optimistic *I Was a Teenage Werewolf*, highlights the victim status of the werewolf, even those like Derek who hail from werewolf families. The result is an imaginative universe that, like that of the Landon film, is rarely stable, predictable, mirrored by the darker look and grimmer atmosphere of the programme compared to the *Teen Wolf* films, which goes hand-in-hand with more animalistic, uncontrollable lupine forms and surprising amounts of gore. Add to this the very real peril and confusion in which the protagonists often find themselves; and the compromised nature of moral authority, provided mainly by the dubious actions of Allison's wolf-hunting family, and what we have here is a properly Gothic piece of television. Even if the scares are admittedly limited in number and impact, the vague sense of cosy nostalgia for 1950's America that pervaded the *Teen Wolf* films (and that is made explicit in *Back to the Future*) has been largely swept away, in favour of what is, arguably, a return to the angst-ridden universe presented in Landon's offering, where death, violence and the dangerous nature of both authority and intimate relationships are all too real and immediate.

It would be putting it too strongly to assert that all of this makes *Teen Wolf* into something ground-breaking or even genuinely thoughtful, nor would many horror aficionados wish to claim it as a legitimate contribution to a genre that is increasingly focused on more bodily dismemberment and disgust than on slowly creeping feelings of discomfort and insecurity – or indeed (some might argue) on character or story. Indeed, where the latter is concerned, it might be better served by a slightly more episodic format than it is by the relentless plot arc that leaves little room for anything else. Nonetheless, it's entertaining to watch, affectionately written and produced, and a good bit grittier than most recent, small-screen, young-adult offerings featuring supernatural monsters. Compared to the flock of glossy, soulful vampires who have been pouting their way across our screens of late, *Teen Wolf*'s heroes, villains and anti-heroes are hairier, scarier and just a bit more like us.

DARA DOWNEY