

## ON *HOMELAND*'S ELECTRIFYING CONCLUSION

The rival protagonists of Showtime Cable TV's hit series, *HOMELAND*, both suffer from exuberant Axis I psychopathology. Ace Marine sergeant Nicholas Brody (Damien Lewis) returns from eight years of horrific imprisonment by jihadis to a hero's welcome. Outwardly the same stalwart patriot, he's in fact a PTSD poster-boy. Ace CIA officer Carrie Mathison (Claire Danes), believes Brody is also a turncoat, dispatched by his former captors to wreak havoc upon the Great Satan. Carrie herself is haunted by traumatic memories – of a bungled Iraq covert mission. She's also covertly bipolar.

During *HOMELAND*'s first season, Carrie and Brody briefly became lovers; Brody's true – false – colors were revealed; Carrie's moods swings grew as volatile as her conviction about Brody's sinister intentions. In the penultimate episode, Brody took Carrie off the board by revealing her illness to the Agency. Now he could proceed unhindered with the plan to suicide bomb a hawkish vice-president as the latter announced his presidential candidacy, together with top military and defense officials.

*HOMELAND*'s creators now faced a dilemma brought on precisely by the powerful, complex narrative so responsible for its popularity. Lame cliffhangers are the traditional bane of a successful second season. With viewer expectation running so high, how to bring off a final episode which would somehow allow Brody to outlive impending martyrdom; and enable disgraced, still smitten Carrie to resume her dogged pursuit?

*HOMELAND*'s writers turned to electro-convulsive therapy for a cunning, literal *deus-ex-machina*. Brody, tormented about again abandoning his wife and children – this time to their certain humiliation – opted out of martyrdom at the last moment. He chose instead to dwell in the chambers of power by running for office. Carrie, now convinced her suspicions about Brody were spinning out of paranoid despair, committed herself to a course of inpatient ECT. Hovering in anesthetized twilight on the brink of her first treatment, a memory from the affair with Brody surfaced which uncontestably established his villainy. But – would ECT stop her remembering her memory?

The last episode's jolting conclusion pleased viewers terrifically. Mental health professionals also praised the show for mounting a reasonable account of ECT. The treatment's actual depiction seemed blessedly untainted by the gross shake-rattle-and-rolling so dear to the makers of mental health movies since *THE SNAKE PIT*.

However, ECT knowledgeable psychiatrists found *HOMELAND*'s take on ECT far from balanced. They believed Carrie's treatment was unwarranted – her

depression largely reactive; symptoms not grave enough, et cetera. They were chiefly concerned that desparately ill patients would be frightened away from a long established, potent, and safe remedy. Heavily emphasizing ECT's dire threat to Carrie's crucial recollection overrode the brief passing statement that ECT poses no danger of permanent memory loss. The stark closing shots of Carrie's subconvulsive twitching, her jaw agonizingly clenched around a baby-blue bite plate, only served up a gentler, kinder version of Holwood's standard ECT epileptoid extravaganza.

Such protests ignore the central purpose of mainstream film-making. For most movie and film dramas are not crafted to educate us about *anything* – not ECT, nor veterinary medicine, nor moose stalking. They are made to garner great profit by gratifying our ancient appetite for great stories.

Not necessarily a bad thing. Should demonstrating how to stalk a moose or give ECT keep us glued to our Sixplex seats, so much the better. But if viewer pleasure commands sacrificing clinical accuracy, depend upon it, that price will be paid. Whatever its impact upon hapless Carrie's noggin, ECT as a pure narrative device was instrumental in bringing home *HOMELAND*'s first season, leaving the viewer just unsatisfied enough to crave next season's fix. A handsome achievement, doubtless with handsome rewards to follow.