

Emmys and Critics Choice awards continue to heavily honor *Succession* and *Oppenheimer* in particular

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The 75th Emmy Awards ceremony, honoring US primetime television programming, was held in downtown Los Angeles January 15, a day after the 29th Critics Choice Awards, which recognizes achievements in both film and television. The Emmys were originally scheduled for September, but the writers' and actors' strikes forced a postponement.

Following up on its success at the recent Golden Globes, HBO's *Succession* won some of the most significant awards at Monday's ceremony. The scathing portrait of the American media and political establishment, which ended its run of four seasons in late May 2023 after 39 episodes, took the prize for Outstanding Drama Series, its third such Emmy.

Sarah Snook and Kieran Culkin, lead performers in *Succession*, won awards as Outstanding Lead Actress and Actor in a Drama Series, respectively (Brian Cox and Jeremy Strong were also nominated in the latter category), while Matthew Macfadyen was honored as Outstanding Supporting Actor in a Drama Series. The series' Nicholas Braun, Alan Ruck and Alexander Skarsgård received nominations for the outstanding supporting actor prize. J. Smith-Cameron was nominated for Outstanding Supporting Actress in a Drama Series, an award won by Jennifer Coolidge for *The White Lotus*.

Succession also collected awards for Outstanding Directing for a Drama Series (Mark Mylod, for the episode "Connor's Wedding") and for Outstanding Writing for a Drama Series (Jesse Armstrong, for the same episode). The series had the most major Emmy nominations (14) and the most nominations overall (27).

The Bear, the Hulu series about an award-winning

New York City chef who returns to Chicago to run the kitchen of his deceased brother's sandwich shop, also received major awards, for Outstanding Comedy Series, Outstanding Lead Actor (Jeremy Allen White), Outstanding Supporting Actor and Actress (Ebon Moss-Bachrach, Ayo Edebiri), Outstanding Directing for a Comedy Series (Christopher Storer) and Outstanding Writing for a Comedy Series (also Storer).

Beef, the Netflix comedy-drama focused principally on Asian Americans in southern California, took a number of important honors, including for lead performances by Steven Yeun and Ali Wong and the direction and writing of Lee Sung Jin, its Korean creator.

Between them, *Succession*, *The Bear* and *Beef* received 17 of the 26 Emmy awards, and virtually all of those handed out to dramas or comedies. These are all intelligent, literate series, with varying degrees of social insight and criticism.

The Emmy ceremony itself, like the Golden Globes, was a largely vacuous spectacle, with barely a reference to the world outside the entertainment industry. Anthony Anderson, a talented actor and comic performer, hosted the broadcast, but the sustained effort to avoid any reference to traumatic events, such as the ongoing genocide in Gaza, degrades and demeans the artists and their efforts. Such a presentation seeks to reduce their work to little more than a harmless plaything. If television productions were not directed toward social life, toward the conditions under which their vast audience lives at present, they would not be followed or deserve to be followed.

Succession in particular argues persuasively and dramatically that the companies that dominate the US

and global media industry—such as the Murdoch family-controlled Fox, which broadcast the Emmys—are essentially criminal in nature, headed by executives who are sociopaths with distinct fascist-authoritarian leanings.

And yet, the host, presenters and award winners on the program widely honoring such a series are prohibited, on pain of having their careers damaged or destroyed, from making a single reference to the processes that *Succession*, for example, depicts. That situation is untenable. Conscious, vocal opposition will break through the barriers, as substantial and intimidating as they presently may be.

The online presentations and protests against the Netanyahu-Biden mass murder by such figures as Cox, Mahershala Ali and, most recently, 29 actors and artists reading the South African charge of genocide against Israel have received some 30 million combined views. This is nothing to say of the demonstrations taking place in every large US city and many smaller ones. All of this can be ignored, but at the cost of producing a ceremony that is largely unreal, forced and empty.

To his credit, British actor Khalid Abdalla, who plays Dodi Fayed in *The Crown*, the series nominated for two Emmys, offered a silent protest on the red carpet at the ceremony. Dressed all in black, Abdalla held up his hand to the crowd, with the words “Never again” on his left palm. During the Emmys, he cited Martin Luther King Jr on X/Twitter, “Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.” Abdalla was one of the 29 actors who read out online portions of the the South African complaint against Israel to the International Court of Justice. At the Critics Choice awards Sunday, he had “ICJ” written on his hand.

The latter award ceremony, sponsored by the Critics Choice Association, an organization of more than 500 television, radio and online critics, was held in Santa Monica, California.

Oppenheimer, directed by Christopher Nolan, about the development of the American atom bomb and the danger of humanity’s annihilation in a nuclear war, received eight Critics Choice awards, for Best Picture, Director (Nolan), Supporting Actor (Robert Downey Jr.), Acting Ensemble, Cinematography (Hoyte van Hoytema), Editing (Jennifer Lame), Score (Ludwig Göransson) and Visual Effects.

Paul Giamatti (Best Actor), Da’Vine Joy Randolph

(Best Supporting Actress), Dominic Sessa (Best Young Actor/Actress) won for their performances in Alexander Payne’s *The Holdovers*.

Incomprehensibly, but revealing something about contemporary film “criticism” or the power of commercial pressures on the same, Greta Gerwig’s dreadful *Barbie* won the awards for Best Original Screenplay and Best Comedy.

Emma Stone was honored as Best Actress for *Poor Things*, and Justine Triet’s bland *Anatomy of a Fall*, from France, won the award for Best Foreign Language Film.

At the Critics Choice Awards too, *Succession* was honored as the best television drama, and Snook and Culkin received the awards as best actress and actor. *The Bear* and *Beef* also took a number of the prizes.

(Both awards ceremonies continued to largely ignore Martin Scorsese’s *Killers of the Flower Moon* and Bradley Cooper’s *Maestro*, demonstrating some degree of good taste.)

Again, however, the Critic Choice program offered little beyond banalities and trite jokes. Host and “contrarian” comic Chelsea Handler made a series of inane, conformist comments about female empowerment in 2023 that one doubted even she took seriously, or at least one hoped not.

The recipients thanked parents, agents and fellow performers, and generally said nothing about anything.

As noted above, the contradiction between the honest artists’ sharply critical attitude toward society and history, expressed in the best film and television work this past year, and the official structures and strictures of the industry is reaching a breaking point.



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