

TV Columnist Blasts New Season, Efforts to Reform TV

A Pulitzer-Prize winning TV critic has lambasted the upcoming new shows on network television, also criticizing media watchdog groups whose efforts, he said, have proved futile.

“Cry havoc and let loose the dogs of fall,” wrote Tom Shales, “repurposing” Shakespeare’s phrase from *Julius Caesar*, “let slip the dogs of war.” Shales, chief TV critic for the *Washington Post* and syndicated columnist, is unimpressed, to say the least, with the new crop of TV shows.

“Not that all the shows are dogs—no, just a majority,” he wrote in his most recent [column](#) at *Television Week*, the weekly newspaper of broadcast, cable and interactive media. Shales titled his column, “The Naked Truth About the Fall Season.”

“Networks are further diluting the old strictures on sex and violence,” Shales wrote, pointing out that “smuttier” shows on both basic and pay cable have driven competition for viewers.

Shales went on to catalogue offenses from some of the new shows, many of which are crime dramas: CBS’ “Cold Case” and “The Handler,” FOX’s “Skin,” NBC’s “Las Vegas” and ABC’s “Karen Sisko.” Shales pointed out that four of the five shows feature a scene in a strip club—a new convention for the genre.

Shales wrote, “Nobody complains much anymore; there are now so many shows with amplified sex and violence that even once-tireless pressure groups appear to have given up.”

“The pressure groups are not missed; they gave the impression that you have to be a nut, a prude or a fanatic to dislike smut on network television,” Shales wrote.

“They picked targets capriciously and, over the years, accomplished little that was positive.” He fingered no groups in particular.

Shales also suggested that even if the “great mass audience” decided enough was enough in terms of sex and violence, it had nowhere to run. Cable was worse, he opined, and radio was dominated by “shock jocks by the dozen.”

“There really are no more safe harbors,” Shales concluded, so “the dogs of fall can feel free to run riot.”

In early August, Shales [satirized](#) the upcoming TV season, providing descriptive snippets of fictional shows like “CSI: XYZ: IRS: LMNOP,” “Oh, That Joey!” and “Fear Factory.”