The casting of Jodie Whittaker as the lead in Doctor Who is the difference between tolerating and embracing change. This cynical old woman feels like she's nine years old again. I hope your child carries that joy with her for the rest of her life. I'm brilliant in Broadchurch.

And Jodie Whittaker is such an amazing choice. She was my mind racing: "Are those hips? I think those are hips, I hope those are hips!" And Jodie Whittaker is a truly great actress. *dance*

This is why I love the announcement so much. Not for us grown ups. For our daughters.

I can't wait for the day this doesn't shock people to tears. It would be nice for it just to be the norm.

The paradox of entertainment is that modern values take so long to catch on. The ultimate showbiz character is liberal, creative, mould-breaking, forward-thinking, highly unlikely to be bound by conservative and/or religious values. Showbiz is a world for misfits, not rule-followers. Yet nowhere do we see a plainer iteration of "traditional" thinking than on our screens. It is more surprising to find a woman in a blockbuster movie with a mind of her own than it is to find a woman in an "arthouse" film not naked or crying. It is more likely for a 10-part thriller to start with a dead woman's body than a living woman expressing agency and determination. It is routine for a current affairs team to be led by a grey-haired man doing the serious stories while a fit, younger woman handles the family stuff. Important political events, be they regular (Question Time) or irregular (general elections), are seen as male territory by default, women seemingly included under sufferance. Panel shows shoehorn in a woman to salve their consciences; women can exist, but never get old, on nature shows. Black actors have a more arduous journey still, sometimes having to go to the US and make it big before they are considered famous enough to overcome the tacit colour bar in the UK.

The extraordinarily slow pace of change is a stark contrast to the good game everyone talks. TV executives constantly underline their commitment to equality, while happily accepting that men must keep the main jobs until they are literally dead. Meanwhile, in fields considered naturally more conservative - policing, law, accountancy, government - women and people of colour, while still underrepresented, can make it to the top; there is broad acceptance that scrutiny is welcomed and male dominance unwanted.

Modern values take so long to catch on in showbiz.
It is the stasis that baffles. How is it possible for such a visible industry to stay for so long in a male-dominated, monochrome world that it often decries explicitly? Take the dynamics of the bloodbath. Its success on Twitter of which is to appeal to the widest audience possible.

A white, male protagonist adhering to classical heroic ideals is point zero, the character everyone understands and from whom no one recoils. If you lose only five viewers by giving him one unexpected trait — long hair; a third nipple — you would not, from a standing start, have lost. Sometimes those five are taken as collateral damage for giving the film some edge, but too much edge is money down the drain.

This is observable in women's magazines, too. The assumption is that featuring a person of colour on the cover will mean selling fewer copies. Conveniently, it has been shown that racism is not hardwired into our evolutionary pathway; indeed, the opposite is true — genetic diversity is a boon to survival. When you try to commodify beauty, however, a sociological Fordism intervenes: any colour, so long as it is white. The easiest way to serve a mass market is with identikit heroes.

The upshot is far more serious than a failure to reflect a changing world; culture that has its business model pegged to homogeneity reinforces and polices a world order in which everyone is the same age, the same sex and the same colour — and in which all admirable traits remain locked in that shape. In an ideal world, public-service broadcasting would be free from the constraints of mass production; it is not there for profit and should not have to worry about splitting the crowd. This has always been a conundrum for the BBC, which has its Reithian principles — to inform, to educate and to entertain — but no way of measuring its success beyond viewing figures and bare assertion. So, it is locked in the same value structure as its competitors, attempting to make the product most digestible by the largest possible audience.

Perhaps the most extraordinary thing about this is that it locks the BBC into tropes that you would not, from a standing start, deem crowd-pleasing. Who would think that a dancing contest would be best moderated by an 80-year-old? Why does a current-affairs interview have to be conducted by a man? Stuck in the values of a vanished world order, its editorial decisions have started to look almost quickly out of kilter with the regular world. But the BBC's audience continues to accept this — authority in the male, frumpiness in the female, trustworthiness in the Caucasian, funkiness in the foreign — as normal. The depressing reading is that, in maintaining this ossified vision of what normal should look like, the BBC has not only obstructed progress in the past, but also affiliated to this profile all its lauded virtues, meaning intelligence, social ease, charisma, quick thinking, humour, bravery and time travel can come only from a male hero. If true, this would be worse than failing to dispatch a public service: it would make the BBC a public-disservice broadcaster.

So, that is the depressing reading. In fact, I think the mainstream merely underestimates its audience. We do not need a Dimbbleby before we can appreciate seriousness, or knockout cheekbones before we can understand what a woman is doing onscreen. We put up with such protocols while we wait for better ones.

The female Doctor is part of a revolutionary feminist triptych, the other two being the female superhero (Wonder Woman) and the female Bond (the forthcoming Rhythm Section, directed by Reed Morano, is about a spy who is basically Bond in every respect, except that she is not called Bond). Wonder Woman is the only one we can judge at this stage, and reflect on how much these moments do for equality, beyond simply putting a woman front and centre. Once you do that, other canards around femininity fall like dominoes. Before you know it, you have a heroine who is not only preternaturally strong, but also can talk. Whittaker's inauguration is only the beginning. It is exhilarating to think how many cliches a woman in this role will tear down.