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Political Satire and British-American Relations in Five Decades of *Doctor Who*

MARC EDWARD DIPAULO

“In all my travels I have battled against evil, against power mad conspirators. I should have stayed here! Power mad conspirators! Daleks, Sontarans. Cybermen! They’re still in the nursery compared to us!”

(The Doctor, “The Trial of a Time Lord” 1986)

SINCE ITS DEBUT IN 2005, THE CURRENT REVIVAL OF *DOCTOR WHO* HAS been a national phenomenon in Great Britain, with the Doctor and the Daleks returning to prominence thanks to the much-lauded creative vision of producer and head writer Russell T. Davies. Despite this widespread success, the series has met with resistance from two major quarters. The first is a vocal contingent of fans of the original series who feel that the revival differs too radically from the original to be seen as a true and faithful continuation of its storylines. The second is opposition from viewers who are offended by the overtly political, often anti-American, sentiments represented in the plots and dialogue. To a large degree, these complaints, while seemingly disconnected, are ultimately laid at the feet of Davies himself, who writes the majority of the scripts for the series, and whose political and aesthetic sensibilities permeate each episode. Because Davies is a celebrity as a BAFTA-award winning writer, a powerhouse industry executive, and a vocal atheist and gay rights advocate, both his work and his public persona have made him a lightning rod for controversy ever since he created the gay-themed television series *Queer as Folk* in 1999. Since bringing *Doctor Who* to the screens, he has attracted comments, from both journalists and bloggers, that can fairly be described

as consistently hyperbolic, be they positive or negative. He is either, as *The Independent* calls him, “The Savior of Saturday Night Drama” (Byrne) or the recipient of any number of homophobic slurs by bloggers and chat room posters who claim not to like his writing but who resort to ad hominem arguments to make their points. Both Davies himself and his *Doctor Who* scripts deserve to be discussed in a more objective manner, especially in light of the fact that Davies is merely one of a series of *Doctor Who* writers and story editors who have incorporated their progressive political ideas into a supposedly safe and conservative children’s show. Three of Davies’ most notable predecessors include David Whitaker, Malcolm Hulke, and Robert Holmes, all of whom wrote a number of landmark episodes of the original series, contributed greatly to the show’s mythos, and used their adventures as a platform to express their political ideas. In the end, their shows emerge not only as thinly veiled allegories condemning American imperialism and consumer culture, but also as a continuation of a pacifist, intellectual, and iconoclastic ethic that has been advocated by the series’ writers and producers since its inception.

For the uninitiated, *Doctor Who* is a British television series about a time-traveling alien with thirteen lives called “The Doctor.” The Doctor is a bohemian, anti-imperialist figure who fights Nazis, demons, and killer robots and is almost always accompanied by human female traveling companions to whom he acts as a friend and mentor. The show has had thirty seasons’ worth of episodes since its premiere in the 1960s, and eleven actors have starred in the role so far. The best-remembered of the original Doctors, Tom Baker, played the character as a brilliant Harpo Marx figure and wore an incredibly long, multicolored scarf to stress the character’s humor, otherworldliness, and staunch individualism. Christopher Eccleston wore a crew cut and a black leather jacket and played the Doctor as the personification of John Lennon’s iconic Working-Class Hero in the first season of Davies’ revival. Other actors, such as Jon Pertwee, projected a serious, Sherlock Holmes-style air, while wearing Edwardian, Victorian, or other dated-and-recognizably British-heritage clothes. However, as traditional as his clothing often is, there is usually something “off” about it to stress the Doctor’s individuality, such as the tenth Doctor’s insistence on wearing a shirt and tie, a pinstriped suit, and . . . red sneakers? In a similar symbolic and counter-intuitive outfit alteration, the only actor to play the Doctor in an American made-for-television film, Paul

McGann, dressed like Wild Bill Hickok but very deliberately did not wear a gun.

The “off”ness of the Doctor’s clothing not only contributes to the “alien”ness of the character but also makes a determination about the Doctor’s economic class and sexual orientation difficult to pin down. For example, the Doctor has been presented as, paradoxically, heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, and asexual during the course of the series in a manner that is sometimes overt and sometimes pure subtext. It is also left deliberately unclear whether he is a thief, con artist, and gadabout who left his home world out of boredom with its stagnant society of “door mice” or an aristocrat and codeveloper of time travel technology who was exiled from his home planet for political reasons. To further muddy matters, throughout the series the Doctor’s accent shifts by class and region, while remaining forever British, suggesting that he is, simultaneously, one hundred percent British as well as a “pure”-blooded Time Lord from the planet Gallifrey. In a sense, the Doctor’s fictional origins are a muddle and a mess more than they are a mystery, a natural consequence of decades of script writers who defied one another’s vision of the series and sometimes neglected to read one another’s work. However, the narrative inconsistencies are oddly appropriate for a protagonist who resists revealing too much about himself to even his closest friends, who travels under an alias, and who defies authority at every turn, refusing to be controlled, psychoanalyzed, or domesticated by anyone.

Like the Doctor’s wardrobe and persona, *Doctor Who*’s aesthetic “feel” has changed radically over the years, partly due to the changing times but primarily because of the radically different creative sensibilities of its regularly changing roster of producers, stars, and scriptwriters. Some episodes, such as “The Web of Fear,” have sensibilities similar to those of *The Twilight Zone*, while others, like “The Aztecs,” seem more like a lost episode of *Masterpiece Theatre*. Other creative influences include steampunk, the fantasy films of Jim Henson, the comedy of *Monty Python* and Douglas Adams, the science fiction of Ursula K. LeGuin, and the postmodern cynicism and hip sensibilities of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Because the series was on the air for so many decades, there are those who love different eras of the show. Oftentimes viewers will like the Doctor they grew up with best. Some will choose their favorite episodes based on whether their tone is more Gothic horror or campy farce. Others choose their favorite Doctor based on whether he is a belligerent killer of aliens or a pacifistic, multicultural figure.

As John Tulloch and Manuel Alvarado argue in *Doctor Who: The Unfolding Text*, the show's mostly male production team, male star, melodramatic conventions, and Western-Christian-centric worldview often make it establishment in tone, although they point out that some liberal and anarchic creative influences from script writers, producers, and performers have sometimes pushed the show dramatically into the realm of the subversive and the left-wing (8). Indeed, the show was offensive enough to right-wing tastes that it was the target of semi-regular criticism from Mary Whitehouse's National Viewers' and Listeners' Association (now known as Mediawatch-uk), a conservative and religious pressure group in Great Britain that monitors the mass media for "offensive content" and lodges protest against programs that contain too much sex, violence, profanity, and blasphemy (Tulloch and Alvarado 3).

While the tone and the politics of the series may shift, the tradition of liberal political allegory in *Doctor Who* dates as far back as the original series' first script editor, David Whitaker (1963–64). Whitaker, working with groundbreaking female producer (and series co-creator) Verity Lambert, strove to make the series an educational adventure show with more enlightened political sentiments than the conservative Flash Gordon adventures it sometimes imitated. When Whitaker wrote his own *Doctor Who* adventures, he portrayed war as a form of madness; and the Muslim characters he created for the time-travel adventure "The Crusade" (1965) were arguably as likeable as his Christian characters, if not more so. The serial suggests that there are no winners in war, only survivors and good men on both sides caught up in an evil conflict. That is why the story has no apparent ending: the Doctor and his companions can do little more than flee the battlefield with their lives and accomplish nothing substantial. As Paul Cornell, Martin Day, and Keith Topping observed in *The Discontinuity Guide: The Unofficial Doctor Who Companion*, "The Crusade" is "[a]n ambitious project (some of the script is in iambic pentameter) which . . . manages to avoid racism, presenting Arabic culture with integrity."

In 1968's "Enemy of the World," Whitaker portrays the Doctor as one who will use violence only as a last resort. When a group of rebels tries to recruit the Doctor in their terrorist campaign against the fascist ruler Salamander, the Doctor needs proof positive that Salamander is evil before he will consider joining their cause. This characterization of the Doctor stands in stark contrast with the Doctor of the Big Finish

audio play “Project: Twilight” (first released on compact disc in 2001), who rushes into a conflict only to find out after the fact that he’s joined the wrong side and is working for vampires.

As a script editor, Whitaker would sometimes moderate the more conservative political sentiments expressed by other scriptwriters; and the result was a more nuanced, complex script, instead of a watered-down one. In fact, by incorporating his own views into the serial “The Daleks” (1963–64), he helped script a morally ambiguous classic that remains a favorite episode to this day. An early draft of Terry Nation’s script for “The Daleks” introduced the title characters as obviously allegorized Nazis obsessed with racial purity and dedicated to a policy of genocide. The Daleks were pitted against the Thals, misguided pacifists modeled on those battle-weary veterans of the First World War who advocated a policy of appeasement of Hitler in an effort to prevent another devastating global conflict. The Doctor’s challenge was to enlist the Thals in his quest to attack the Daleks and prevent the mass slaughter of the Thals, who mistakenly believe that they can negotiate with the fanatical Daleks.

Since the screenplay was clearly antipacifist, Whitaker moderated it in two key ways: (1) he emphasized the horror of combat and the heavy death-toll caused by war and (2) he cast into question the Doctor’s motivations in inciting the conflict, suggesting that the Doctor’s true reason for encouraging the Thals to attack the Daleks was not because they needed to defend themselves, but because he wanted to secure fuel for his time machine—fuel that was stored in the heart of the Dalek city. The Doctor’s companion, Ian, is the most eloquent in his defiance of the Doctor’s selfish plan, standing firm in his “No-blood-for-oil” policy. Ian only relents in his opposition when he is convinced that the Daleks are too dangerous to ignore because they plan to detonate a weapon of mass destruction that will wipe out all non-Dalek life on the planet.

The next notable left-wing writer of *Doctor Who* serials crafted several adventures in the 1970s for Jon Pertwee’s depiction of the Doctor. Scriptwriter Malcolm Hulke, an atheist and a one-time member of the British Communist Party, wrote several episodes that boasted multi-layered characterization portraying aliens who were sometimes friendly and always complex figures. Even if Hulke’s aliens proved hostile to humans, they had a graspable motivation and were not purely evil. For example, in 1970, Hulke created the Silurians, a race of intelligent

reptiles who ruled the earth in the time before humanity evolved. They went into hibernation during the prehistoric era and awoke to find humans the dominant species. Their distress at their displacement encouraged the more militant Silurians to advocate a war to overthrow or annihilate humanity, while moderate Silurians favored negotiation with humans and peaceful coexistence (“Doctor Who and the Silurians”). Some American viewers might find themselves drawing a parallel between the Silurians and displaced Native Americans planning to retake the land stolen from them by the European settlers, but Hulke crafted the Silurians in a way that might just as easily represent any displaced people, be they Palestinians, Jews, or other victims of conquest, colonialism, natural disaster, or diaspora.

While most classic *Doctor Who* villains look like monsters, Hulke’s villains were more often all-too-human figures, especially in the episodes “Invasion of the Dinosaurs,” “The Sea Devils,” and “Doctor Who and the Silurians.” They are often high-ranking members of the military who would prematurely kill friendly aliens out of a desire to protect Britain from foreign threats when negotiation should have been used instead. Hulke casts his military villains as well intentioned, ultimately wrong, but not evil. The perfect example of this kind of villain is the often-heroic Brigadier Alistair Gordon Lethbridge-Stewart, who buried alive an entire colony of Silurians, some of whom were good, when he feared they would unleash a disease that would wipe out all of humanity. While the threat the Silurians represented was legitimate, the Doctor, on the other hand, was horrified that a fear of the potential use of a weapon of mass destruction would inspire a usually good man, his friend the Brigadier, to commit an act of genocide. The episode is politically balanced enough that it would allow a more conservative viewer to favor the Brigadier’s position over the Doctor’s, but Hulke clearly wants viewers to side with the Doctor. Unfortunately, this depressing ending offers little hope to viewers concerned about the fates of the real-life displaced people the Silurians arguably represent.

Another writer who tended toward political allegory was Robert Holmes, a military veteran who served in Burma during World War II and also had a background as a police officer and as a journalist before breaking into television writing. Holmes’ genre of choice was gothic horror, and his stories tended to be far more conservative than either Whitaker’s or Hulke’s. For example, “The Talons of Weng-Chiang”

(1977) and “Pyramids of Mars” (1975) have been criticized for trotting out the old-school gothic villains of Chinese opium dealers and Egyptian religious fanatics, even as they are often praised for being among the best written episodes of the series. Also, Holmes’ version of the Doctor has no problem killing villains at the end of a given storyline—sometimes quite brutally, as in the adventures “The Ribos Operation” (1978) and “The Two Doctors” (1985) in which the Doctor blows up one irredeemable enemy with a grenade and uses cyanide to poison another. However, Holmes did create feminist companions Elizabeth Shaw and Sarah Jane Smith, and his *Doctor Who* scripts cannot easily be pigeonholed as purely left wing or right wing. His political satire “The Sunmakers” (1977), often classified as a rant against the tax-happy Labour government of the 1970s, has dialogue and plot developments evoking Karl Marx, and a populist, anticorporate message that might well make Michael Moore proud. Indeed, Jeremy Bentham, cultural critic and author of *Doctor Who: The Early Years*, observed that the serial “was heavily laced with left wing propaganda” (Tulloch and Alvarado 149).

“The Two Doctors” has a conservative political message opposing the foolishness of the First World giving technology to violent Third World cultures that are not ready for it, while simultaneously mocking Europe and America for jealously guarding their power against developing nations. The episode also boasts of being one of the most violent in the history of the series, while concurrently promoting vegetarianism. It is an odd mix of conservative and liberal sentiments that makes confusing and entertaining food for thought. Indeed, some viewers might wonder if Holmes himself had a consistent political worldview, or if he was working out his own mixed feelings about international politics and imperialism as he wrote his scripts.

In perhaps his greatest episode, “The Caves of Androzani” (1984), Holmes allegorically posits the possibility that greedy Western corporate moguls are responsible for much of the violence in the Middle East. It is they who wish to keep the conflict brewing because the longer it goes on, the longer the price of the oil they market can remain high and the more guns they can surreptitiously sell to their supposed terrorist enemies through gun-running middle men. It is an idea ahead of its time, predicting the controversial thesis of George Clooney’s *Syriana* (2005), which, upon its release, was roundly condemned by Republican critics as being anti-American. But “Caves of Androzani”

was more subtle than *Syriana*. Rather than state this highly charged theory overtly, Holmes sets “Caves” on Androzani Major, an alien planet, which represents the rich West, and Androzani Minor, a pseudo-Middle-Eastern wasteland. In the adventure, the Doctor finds himself trapped on Androzani Minor, caught in the middle of a guerilla war between an army of robots led by a fanatic and duped colonial marines who do not know they are fighting for rich traitors back home instead of for the high ideals they thought they were upholding. Furthermore, in “Caves of Androzani,” the symbolic stand-in for oil is Spectrox, a gooey substance that is poisonous in its natural state but an elixir of youth when refined. It is referred to as “the most valuable substance in the universe” and, like the spice in Frank Herbert’s *Dune*, is an obvious allegorizing of the central importance of oil in our own reality.

It is in the tradition of “The Caves of Androzani,” long considered one of the best-ever episodes of *Doctor Who*, that modern-day series scribe Russell T. Davies writes. He has great respect for the writers of the original series and attributes the franchise’s longevity to the brilliance of its writers, especially Holmes. “Take ‘The Talons of Weng-Chiang,’ for example,” Davies explained in a 2007 *Telegraph* interview. “Watch episode one. It is the best dialogue ever written. It is up there with Dennis Potter. By a man called Robert Holmes. When the history of television drama comes to be written, Robert Holmes won’t be remembered at all because he only wrote genre stuff. And that, I reckon, is a real tragedy” (qtd. in Johnson). Davies’ affection for the original series inspires him to seed his new scripts with in-joke references to old adventures, to resurrect old villains such as the Autons, and to adapt *Doctor Who* tales originally crafted for other media—written as popular spin-off novels or for Big Finish’s CD and mp3 audio adventures—into episodes of his series.

As a political satirist, Davies’ targets of derision are similar to those of Whitaker, Hulke, and Holmes, but he also imitates other left-leaning *Doctor Who* writers, such as Robert Sloman, who advocated vegetarianism and sustainability while condemning corporate pollution of the environment in “The Green Death” (1973). Overall, Davies skewers a media intent on fostering a hawkish, commercialized culture of ignorance and regularly attacks former American President George W. Bush and former British Prime Minister Tony Blair for their imperialist policies. In a column he wrote for *The Guardian* on June 13,

2005, Davies himself said that he enjoyed helming the revival of *Doctor Who* primarily because he was able to resurrect science fiction characters and concepts he loved as a child for the benefit of old fans and to have the opportunity to create a new generation of fans. However, he stops just short of asserting that his second greatest joy in writing *Doctor Who* is the opportunity to recast real-world political figures as monstrous and grotesque villains. As he explains, “[A]s a writer, I have had a ball. This program gave me the chance to swing from New Labour to Dalek armies, taking in plastic surgery, Fox News, religious fanatics and farting obesity along the way” (“Alien Resurrection”).

Of course, Davies has always mixed entertainment with activism, most notably in his miniseries *The Second Coming* (2003), a political fantasy in which he posited what would happen if a new Messiah would be born into modern-day England. By the end of the story, the Messiah’s girlfriend convinces him that God, and all organized religion, holds humanity back by fostering a global culture of ignorance and violence. In response, the savior obliges her, and humanity, by killing himself. Davies is also famous for writing the series *Bob and Rose*, about a gay man who falls in love with a woman. In the series, the couple encounters prejudice from members of both the gay and the straight communities. As Davies explained in a 2001 article he wrote for *The Observer*, he intended to surround Bob and Rose with an array of “cardboard” villains but fleshed out the characterizations of their enemies by revealing that everyone has something to hide, and everyone has some “coming out” to do (“A Rose by Any Other Name”).

Earlier in Davies’ career, between 1988 and 1992, he produced the television show *Why Don’t You?* which, almost counterintuitively, exhorted children to stop watching television and do something constructive with their time. The minor hypocrisy of the message—“Thanks for watching my television show, now stop watching television”—has followed Davies into his career on *Doctor Who*. In the first episode of the new series, “Rose,” the Doctor (Christopher Eccleston) criticizes his new teenage companion Rose Tyler (Billie Piper), for being a typical human, content with eating beans on toast and watching telly while there’s a war on. Fortunately, Rose stops watching “the idiot’s lantern” and joins the Doctor in fighting evil throughout time and space. Unfortunately, the Doctor’s second companion, Adam (Bruno Langley), acts as a negative example and a condemnation of those who cannot stop immersing themselves in television, the

Internet, iPods, and other nonstop broadcasters of what the Doctor calls “useless information.” During his very first adventure into the future with the Doctor (“The Long Game”), Adam gets a cybernetic implant enabling him to soak up limitless amounts of information. He absorbs the information, but he does not understand it. He has gained a mountain of facts but no wisdom; nor does he have any ethical sense, wanting the information only to make money. And yet, the joke is on Adam because all of the information he downloaded into his brain was controlled, censored, and rewritten by the Jagraffess, a loathsome alien being clearly intended to represent mass media mogul Rupert Murdoch, owner of, among other things, *The New York Post*, *The Sun*, *Star Magazine*, *20th Century Fox*, *Fox News*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Harper Collins*, *IGN Entertainment*, and *MySpace*. Thus, all Adam succeeds in doing is becoming a spy and a stooge for the Jagraffess.

The political satire here is among Davies’ most successful from a dramatic perspective, and his most accurate from a sociological one. Davies is not alone in his concerns that Fox News distorts the truth and is, functionally, the Republican Party’s (un)official television station, as documentaries such as *Outfoxed: Rupert Murdoch’s War on Journalism* (2004) and satirical books by Jon Stewart and Al Franken have brought such concerns to the attention of the American public. However, in the series itself, Davies is wise not to identify the Jagraffess as being essentially Fox News personified. In not making the connections overt, the criticism rises above what might be perceived as scapegoating and character assassination and leaves open the possible interpretation that the oft-cited media “evildoer” Murdoch is not the only distorter of the truth in the international media; the modern news media as a whole distorts the truth.

As Lisa Finnegan contends in *No Questions Asked: News Coverage Since 9/11*, “In the midst of the chaotic 9/11 hijackings and in the years that followed the first major foreign terrorist attack on US soil, members of the press forgot that their role is to observe what happens, to ask difficult questions, and to report what they see and hear. Instead, journalists minimized alternative viewpoints, amplified the administration’s perspective, and presented half-truths that misled the American public” (xvii). Quoting scholar John Pilger to drive her final point home, Finnegan argues that true journalism is the first casualty of war. It is killed and replaced by a perverted form of censored journalism that acts as “a weapon of war” with a power that “could mean the

difference between life and death for people in faraway countries such as Iraq” (155).

Given the state of affairs described by Finnegan, Davies’ satirical attack on contemporary journalists is not only accurate but also a breath of fresh air and a call to greater public awareness of how much of the news is not just biased but practically fiction. But Davies’ satiric treatment of contemporary social ills does not stop with news venues, as he tackles topics such as commercialism, global warming, and the pharmaceuticals industry in other episodes.

One of the Doctor’s most despicable opponents in the revival series is the Lady Cassandra, a Texas widow who has had so much plastic surgery that she is as thin as a trampoline. As part of an elaborate stock market scam intended to raise money for her next wave of plastic surgeries, Cassandra murders a living tree (one of the last descendants of the Amazon rain forest) and plots to murder other aliens whom she sees as not “human” enough. The episode (“The End of the World”), takes place on the day the Earth dies, but the characters are so engrossed in fighting for their own survival and to listening to Britney Spears music that they neither prevent the destruction of the earth nor watch as it burns. Here again, the criticism is that humans in general, and Americans in particular, are more interested in investing in the trappings of a consumer culture—pop music, plastic surgery, fast food—than they are in preventing global warming and other ecological disasters from destroying the Earth.

After the Lady Cassandra’s appearance on the series, another ruthless American capitalist emerges: Utah multibillionaire Henry Van Statton, who presumably owns the Internet, Area 51, and the cure for the common cold—which he has prevented from being released to the general public because it is more profitable to sell a million palliatives instead of one single cure. Clearly, here is another rich American who places profits above the value of human life. He also cares little for his personal army of soldiers, who lay down their lives in an attempt to secure him a profitable artifact, the last living Dalek in the universe (Shearman).

Even though Davies specializes in over-the-top, snarky political commentary in his stories, some of his best work on the series is subtler and more somber in tone. Indeed, Davies’ crowning artistic achievement on the series may well be “Midnight,” an episode which condemns racism, stupidity, and paranoia more effectively than any other

Davies episode because the allegory is smarter, the plot tighter, and the writing less self-conscious. When a tourist shuttle falls under attack by an invisible alien menace, a group of otherwise “normal” and “everyday” civilians experiences a fit of paranoia and are almost driven to murdering the innocent Doctor because he is “different.” The episode is similar in message and tone to the Stephen King story *The Mist* and is one of the few Davies episodes embraced by the die-hard fans of the original *Doctor Who* series who tend to dislike Davies’ work.

Such fans irritate Davies, but he tries to ignore their complaints, by and large. As he observed in 2007, “In the community of sci-fi shows, I think we’re the only one that actively ignores its online fanbase. American shows seem to court them, or pretend that they do. That way lies madness. I cannot think of a show that’s improved its quality, or its ratings, by doing it. It is like going in search of a massively biased focus group—why would anyone do that?” (qtd. in Johnson). Nevertheless, “Midnight” seems like a nod in the direction of the traditionalist fans—an old-school Gothic *Doctor Who* adventure.

Even though many of Davies’ episodes are far from subtle in their political commentary, Davies’ writing was at its most outrageous in a two-part adventure, “Aliens of London” and “World War Three” (2005). In this storyline, capitalist aliens, the Slitheen, infiltrate the British government, taking possession of the heads of state and the military. In their new positions of respectability, they fake a global emergency and con the public into believing that a race of alien pigs is about to destroy the planet. Even though the alien pigs do not exist, the Slitheen give their argument credibility by crashing a spaceship into Big Ben. Once the world is whipped into a panic by the sight of Big Ben in flames, the Slitheen work to start an international war that will destroy human civilization but will allow them to make a tidy profit from spaceship fuel resources that will be left behind when the smoke clears.

If one were to imagine that the American government was the one infiltrated by the Slitheen, that the World Trade Center was destroyed by a plane instead of Big Ben by a spaceship, and crude oil was the Slitheen’s goal instead of spaceship fuel, then the episode would play as an allegorized dramatization of the 9/11 conspiracy theory presented by Thierry Meyssan in the book *L’Effroyable Imposture (The Appalling Deception)*; in which Meyssan claimed that Bush himself staged 9/11 to start an unnecessary series of wars in the Middle East over oil (qtd. in

Hagen). Meyssan's book, which was a bestseller in France, was criticized by *Skeptic* columnist L. Kirk Hagen for not being "even marginally plausible" in its theories, and for its misguided attempt to exonerate Al Qaeda for the crime. After all, as Hagen states in a 2002 book review, a left-wing critic like Meyssan should not be expressing solidarity with Al Qaeda, a group that is "about as far-removed from leftist values as anyone can get. They are antidemocratic, antisecular, unabashedly homophobic, and they openly endorse one of the cruelest forms of gender apartheid in the world" (38).

Since Meyssan's book angered Americans and certain conservative British nationals, it is hardly surprising that the *Doctor Who* episodes that seem to be inspired by it were targets of equal ire. "Aliens of London" and "World War III" were lambasted on the Internet by bloggers such as Christianus (the pen name of an anonymous Essex-based art history PhD student) who observed in a post dated June 26, 2005:

Throughout the two episodes, the aliens are shown as war-crazy, greedy, unscrupulous, fat politicians, laughing as Armageddon approaches. Of course, the fact the loathsome capitalist aliens have replaced, what we might assume to be, a more dignified host of British politicians, is a rather crude comment on the American influence on British foreign policy. Watching and listening to the constant parade of unsubtle political innuendo, we know precisely what we are meant to think of these green abominations: That they are like neo-conservatives and capitalists of the real world, right?

...

Crass leftist bias is typical of journalists of the mainstream media. It has been so for decades, and it seems that it is something we must try to tolerate. Nevertheless, should we also have to accept that even innocuous entertainment programs like *Doctor Who* are being transformed into platforms for leftist agendas? It would be sad.

As a counterargument to these kinds of criticisms, the writers of *Doctor Who: The Completely Unofficial Encyclopedia*, Chris Howarth and Steve Lyons, crafted this sarcastic encyclopedia entry:

Anti-Americanism: Charge laid against the new series on the US Sci-Fi Channel's message boards—based, as far as we can tell, solely on the fact that, er, Henry Van Statten was American and he wasn't very nice. Yeah, and decades of British villains in Hollywood films count for nothing, we suppose. (12)

Admittedly, Americans can be amazingly thin skinned when encountering criticism of their culture and international policies in entertainment from overseas. Angry viewers of Richard Curtis' film *Love Actually* (2003) bombarded the Internet Movie Database's discussion board, grouching that the American president played by Billy Bob Thornton was clearly an amalgam of the worst personality traits of Bill Clinton (womanizer) and George W. Bush (gunboat diplomacy) and represented an attack on the American people. As one British poster patiently responded, Richard Curtis has been mocking British conservatives for years, so it was only a matter of time before he got around to the Americans. And it was only gentle teasing, after all.

A similar point can be made about Davies.

The 9/11 allegory episodes are audacious, and it is surprising that the BBC did not stop production on those episodes when it knew it would be trying to sell the series to the American Sci-Fi Channel. But it is, perhaps, equally surprising that big-budgeted American movies such as *V for Vendetta* and *Happy Feet*, produced during the Bush administration, have managed to be so unapologetically politically subversive while being marketed to mainstream audiences. However, in the case of Davies' story, the objective distance the allegory provides helps remove some of the emotion from the equation and allows the viewer to consider Davies' thesis: that war, and the spoils of war, are profitable and could lead the greedy to push for war when peace and negotiation are better for the international community as a whole.

Also, to provide some historical context, Davies' satire exposes evil social tendencies in a manner that is just as sarcastic, unsparing, and crude as the works of Voltaire and Jonathan Swift. After all, there is plenty of scatological humor and dildo jokes to go around in the writings of Swift, who used such subtle themes as cannibalism in the service of making a political point; and Voltaire's works are filled with grotesque characters, improbable scenarios, and unqualified political arguments, none of which undermined his valid social criticisms. There is precedent for this kind of over-the-top political writing; and if "Aliens of London" is not as well written as "A Modest Proposal" or *Candide*, that does not make its observations about Western greed or the military industrial complex any less valid or important to hear.

All in all, Davies' scripts are not truly anti-American, but offer reasonable criticism of American public policy. The only times the show, under his direction, appears to drift a little too closely to anti-

American sentiment occur whenever the Daleks are symbolically linked with the Americans, such as in the episodes “Dalek,” “Bad Wolf,” and “The Parting of the Ways.” The Dalek episodes of the new series take place in New York and Utah, and one of the adventures featured Americans who were recruited to become a new generation of Daleks. These new Daleks also exhibit a religious reverence for their leader, the Emperor Dalek, and are portrayed as zealots, a flaw often attributed to certain religious fundamentalist citizens of the United States with a penchant for revering President Bush as a messianic figure. The suggestion that the Americans are the new Daleks is, in the world of *Doctor Who*, an implicit suggestion that the Americans are the new Nazis, bent on global domination and religious purity.

However, the seemingly mathematical formula of the first season—Nazis = Daleks = Americans—breaks down somewhat in the third season storyline “Daleks in Manhattan” (2007), in which a utopian, multiracial community of disenfranchised Americans living in Central Park represents a cell of “good Americans” (read: Americans opposed to imperialism and sociopath capitalists) and is contrasted to the Daleks, who are the “ugly Americans.” Following the broadcast of this episode, written by series script editor Helen Raynor, liberal American fans found it easier to watch the series knowing that the existence of Americans opposed to the Bush doctrine was being acknowledged and saluted.

It is also important to note that Davies created the character Captain Jack Harkness to be a heroic American figure. Indeed, as a regular on the show, Jack consistently threatens to rehabilitate the portrayal of Americans on *Doctor Who*. However, since Harkness seems to be primarily a satirical character, spoofing Tom Cruise’s tabloid persona and Harrison Ford’s 80s film personalities Indiana Jones and Han Solo, he often fails to register as a believable character, despite his funny one-liners and actor John Barrowman’s natural charisma in the part. In “The Empty Child” and “The Doctor Dances” (written by Steven Moffat), Harkness is introduced as a pseudo-villainous figure since, like Henry Van Statton, his greedy pursuit of a valuable alien artifact almost destroys the world. While Capt. Jack dies heroically fighting the Daleks and is later resurrected so that he can star in his own *Doctor Who* spin-off series, *Torchwood*, Harkness is an amazingly ancillary figure in *Doctor Who*, interesting only in the fact that he is a daringly bisexual character. The Doctor himself often seems unsure what to make of Harkness but has recently accepted him as a friend.

Indeed, on the whole, *Doctor Who* has never had many interesting American characters. Morton Dill, the silly cowboy from “The Chase,” is an appalling minor player who is one of the few “Americans” in the series; but it can at least boast 1980s-era Peri Brown, a popular traveling companion of the Doctor—sweet, smart, and strikingly gorgeous in the great episodes “Caves of Androzani” and “The Two Doctors.” Nicola Bryant, the British actress playing Peri, occasionally pronounces a key word here and there the British way and once deviated from a Midwestern American accent to a Brooklyn accent, but she is, overall, a solid, charismatic actress creating an American character to be proud of. Other nice Americans appeared in the *Doctor Who* episodes “The Claws of Axos” and the *Doctor Who* made-for-television movie starring Paul McGann. In a sense, *Doctor Who* portrays dangerously amoral American cowboys as negatively as American science fiction show *Battlestar Galactica* portrays dangerously amoral British intellectuals. Gaius Baltar is a poorly realized character because the American script writers caricature British figures in much the same way that Davies’ team of writers caricatures Americans, making turnabout fair play. Baltar also demonstrates why *Doctor Who* has never achieved mainstream popularity in the United States: Americans traditionally tend to think of smart people as evil and have often been reluctant to watch a series with an intellectual protagonist, *House M.D.* being the exception that proves the rule.

Those who find the “anti-Americanism” in *Doctor Who* troubling should also consider the fact that the series has been as critical of British conservatism as it has been of the American right wing. Angry references to the Falklands war, the Thatcher legacy, and Tony Blair’s support of the Iraq invasion abound in the series. Blair in particular is a target of derision. In “Aliens of London,” the Slitheen surprisingly, and unceremoniously, murder him. He is also featured as—allegorically—the villain of the three-part storyline “The Sound of Drums” (2007), in which the Doctor’s archenemy, the Master, becomes prime minister of England. The Moriarty-like Time Lord was first introduced as a suave, goatee-sporting Latin gentleman in a 1971 adventure by Robert Holmes, but his contemporary counterpart, played by John Simm, looked—and even smiled—like the young, charismatic Blair. While the Master was not supposed to be Blair, his destructive reign as Prime Minister “Harold Saxon” was intended to make viewers wonder if an alien villain had, indeed, taken over their country in the real world.

However, the Master is allowed one “heroic” moment in his Prime Minister Harold Saxon persona. At a decisive point, when American President Arthur Coleman Winters appears to be making a play for world domination, Saxon declares, “I’m taking control, Uncle Sam! Starting with you!” And then he orders his alien minions to vaporize Winters. The scene when Winters is murdered before the eyes of the world represented a form of burning in effigy of another American president with a prominent “W” in his name. It also served as a wish-fulfillment fantasy for a British public disgusted with Tony Blair for being too deferential to American interests and angry that he did not stand up to the Americans as the Master did.

This memorable, and controversial, moment in the series came at a historical turning point, as President George W. Bush’s popularity was waning, and as Davies’ tenure as the driving creative force behind *Doctor Who* was beginning to wind down. Since the broadcasting of the Blair-Master-Saxon storyline, a new American president has arrived on the political stages, Barack Obama, and new *Doctor Who* producer, Steven Moffat, has taken control of the long-running series.

Moffat, the writer of some of the best episodes of the revival series—including “The Girl in the Fireplace,” “Blink,” and “Silence in the Library”—continued to promote progressive politics and incorporate social satire in the stories he wrote during his first season as producer even as he made their sensibilities more Gothic and romantic. The adventures he has written thus far feature fascinating time-travel paradoxes, star-crossed lovers, and truly horrific villains that include stone angel statues that come to life, clockwork men, and airborne piranha that lurk in the shadows. Those Season 31 (aka Series Five) adventures that commented on contemporary issues, such as “The Beast Below,” reflected the international politics of a world faced with daunting economic and environmental challenges but that has a measure of renewed hope in the leadership of President Obama and a “New” United States. (Ironically, in interviews and via his script to “The Beast Below,” Moffat has expressed grave concern that, while the United States has moved to the political left, England is now moving sadly to the right.)

In fact, in stark contrast to President Bush, who shared personality traits with the Doctor’s archenemies, the Daleks, some fans and reporters have noticed that Obama is uncannily like both the Doctor and Mr. Spock from the *Star Trek* franchise. As the argument goes, both Obama and the Doctor are articulate, self-aware intellectuals, of mixed

racial descent (the Doctor's mother was British and his father Gallifreyan). Reporters have also suggested that Obama and the Doctor both believe in science, negotiation, and peaceful, imaginative solutions to problems. They are both citizens of the universe, not of one insular, prejudiced society. (Spock shares these traits, too.)

Arguably, if Obama had a British accent, and wore slightly more outlandish clothing, he might have made a good Doctor. At least, that is what some fans and reporters contend. Consequently, after tenth Doctor David Tennant announced he was leaving the show with Davies, and it would soon be time for the Doctor to regenerate into an eleventh incarnation, the British press speculated that Obama's election would inspire the casting of the first black actor to play the part.

That was not to come to pass.

When white, 26-year-old unknown Matt Smith landed the role, cultural commentator Matthew Sweet was disappointed "that the Obama effect hasn't reached Gallifrey yet" and that the "idea of a black or woman Doctor is something we only seem to enjoy as a tease" for a gossipy press, but not something to be realized on screen (qtd. in Davies and Smith). In response, executive producer Piers Wenger stated that he and Moffat, "[auditioned] a dozen or so people, some of them black. There was never any resistance to the idea of a black Doctor and it would have got us all sorts of headlines and brownie points, but we set out to cast the best actor for the role irrespective of ethnicity or age, and that was Matt" (qtd. in Singh).

And, Matthew Sweet's disappointment in the casting of a Caucasian male Doctor notwithstanding, at this juncture, it seems unreasonable to view the hiring of Smith as any kind of rejection of the United States' first African-American president or his policies. Quite the contrary, as the first season of Moffat-produced episodes has already indicated, the show will continue to promote secular humanism, cultural pluralism, and globalism under Smith and Moffat, and maintain its traditional stance against imperialism, prejudice, willful ignorance, and the bureaucratic mindset.

While the British may well always have their problems with the United States and its foreign policy, it seems reasonable to predict that the Obama White House will not only improve the image of America in the press abroad but also in the portrayal of Americans in *Doctor Who*. Indeed, given the fortuitous overlap in the main personality traits of Obama and the Doctor, it seems equally plausible that the American

president will soon have his beliefs and policies echoed by dialogue spoken by the heroic main character of *Doctor Who* instead of seeing his speeches mocked and parroted by the series' signature villains.

However the Moffat-Smith era unfolds, it will undoubtedly be unique in many respects but recognizably part of the same, nearly fifty-year narrative that is *Doctor Who*. In that manner, the Moffat-Smith era will be like all the others that have come before, whether they were shaped by a David Whitaker, a Robert Holmes, a Malcolm Hulke, or a Russell T. Davies. There will be mystery, there will be wonder, and there will be an eccentric, fascinating hero called the Doctor at the center of the action. And, with luck, there will continue to be, at the core of the series, a positive social message that encourages viewers to embrace tolerance, individuality, good humor, and a thirst for true knowledge that can never be quenched.

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