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**THE ONGOING STORM:
THE DOCTOR IN BRITISH SOCIETY
AND CULTURE**

THE REGENERATION GAME: *DOCTOR WHO* AND THE CHANGING FACES OF HEROISM

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This chapter is dedicated to the memory of Matthew James Ragsdale (1995-2009). Forever in my thoughts and in my heart. You were, and remain, the best of me.

The chapter focuses on the articulation and rearticulation of masculinity and British heroism through the use of ‘regeneration’ in the popular science fiction series *Doctor Who*. It aims to map out significant changes in the portrayal of the Doctor, encompassing both ‘classic’ and ‘new’ *Doctor Who*, offering a comparative study to the performance of masculine identity and heroism. The study will examine the way in which the series has sought not only to reshape the character to appeal to a new audience, but how, through the act of regeneration, the Doctor reaffirms or challenges dominant images of the male hero. There has been a resurgence of interest in British fictional heroes, both on television and at the cinema. While James Bond was successfully re-booted¹ in the 2006 film *Casino Royale* (followed in 2008 by *Quantum of Solace*), we have also seen the re-emergence of interest and production of Sherlock Holmes² and Robin Hood³ and *Doctor Who* can be placed firmly in this renaissance of British fictional heroes.

The Doctor, in all his incarnations, is a contradictory character, literally multi-faceted. The fluidity of the Doctor’s appearance also emphasises his ability to suit different trends and encompass aspects of many heroes as well as masculine identity. In *Modernity and Its Futures*, Stuart Hall examines a supposed “crisis in identity” in contemporary society and identifies “three concepts of identity”⁴, the enlightenment, sociological and post-modern subject. By Hall’s admission, his conceptions are simplified, but do offer an interesting approach both in terms of masculine identity and the figure of the Doctor himself.

[The] Enlightenment subject was based on a conception of the human person as a fully centred, unified individual, endowed with the capacities of reason, consciousness and action, whose ‘centre’ consisted of an inner core... the sociological subject reflected the growing complexity of the modern world and an awareness that this inner core of the subject was not autonomous and self-sufficient, but formed in relation to ‘significant others’... the post-modern subject, conceptualised as having no fixed, essential or permanent identity.⁵

The Doctor in all his guises encapsulates all three of Hall’s concepts of identity, being in turns the Enlightenment subject, the sociological and the postmodern. He is positioned both as the essential self, in charge of his own destiny, whose ability to regenerate in effect allows him to recreate himself, but his actions are also mediated by those around him. Both Rose Tyler and Donna Noble teach the Doctor to reign himself in, to become more human. He is also Hall’s postmodern identity because he doesn’t have the “fixed, essential or permanent identity... historically, not biologically defined”⁶. As a traveller in time and space, the Doctor can slip between, and go to and from these identities. His identity is a paradox, being both fluid and fixed. Both his appearance and his position in a temporal or spatial ‘moment’ are ever shifting, yet he remains undeniably the hero figure, but his heroism resonates at different levels for different times and audiences. He becomes the splintered hero, creating and recreating identities that are often conflicting and certainly unstable, and therefore the series, intentionally or not, disturbs notions of fixed masculine identity.

There had been attempts to resurrect both *Doctor Who* and James Bond in the mid 1990s. While *Goldeneye* (1995) effectively resurrected 007 with Pierce Brosnan, the 1996 *Doctor Who TV Movie* met with considerably less success in terms of producing a new series during the late 1990s and early 2000s.⁷ In a 2008 interview, Steven Moffat discussed the continued success of the recent series of *Doctor Who*, very much placing his emphasis on the renegotiation of the hero figure in changing times:

Well, I’d say, it’s a great mythic character. It’s a great fantastical hero, but there are many great fantastical heroes. Why do some survive and some not? The answer is, generally speaking: it’s how well does change work for it? The Doctor can change brilliantly. You can have a new kind of Doctor every so often, as you will, obviously. No one will ever play that part forever. It will always change and therefore it is capable of adapting itself very exactly to the current moment, it doesn’t have to be a retread of

what it used to be. It can always be, in a strange way, *Doctor Who* can always be new. And that is true of James Bond as well.⁸

In discussing James Bond, Tony Bennett and Janet Woollacott have argued that the hero “constitutes a cultural phenomenon of a particular type... they break free from the originating textual conditions of their existence to achieve a semi-independent existence”⁹. For instance, several useful comparisons can be made - both the cinematic version of James Bond and the television *Doctor Who* originated in the early 1960s¹⁰, the title characters have been played by several actors in the same series and both were put on hiatus after 1989 to be revived in the mid 1990s. John Tulloch and Manuel Alvarado discuss further similarities between Jon Pertwee’s third Doctor and James Bond¹¹, remarking that many of the stories of Pertwee’s era ‘borrowed’ heavily from the James Bond movies and there are few fictional British heroes of the twentieth century which share the cultural dominance of these two characters over a period of more than forty years.

The study will examine how the character of the Doctor shifted the original run of the series, while interjecting these observations with comparisons of the more recent ninth and tenth Doctors from 2005 onwards. This approach will highlight how the recent incarnations of the Doctor both react to, and reaffirm or challenge the idea of the Doctor as an heroic figure in relation to the cultural and social context at the time of transmission. Given the wealth of both academic and fan-produced material available on the production of the series¹², I will avoid a direct discussion of the economic and broadcast context of the series, focusing instead on the cultural response to the Doctor, both historically and more recently.

John Fiske on reading Roland Barthes regards modern narratives (myths) as a way of thinking about “masculinity and femininity, about the family, about success, about the British policeman, about science”¹³. The fact that the title character is referred to as Doctor reinforces a notion of patriarchal discourse and ideology. In the 1960s the medical profession was staffed almost entirely by male doctors and like the figure of the policeman, the doctor is a person to be trusted and entrusted with the life of others. The figure of the Doctor is not a doctor of medicine in the strictest sense. We are told that he is a Doctor of many things throughout the series. He is, however, reminiscent of the scientific ‘boffin’ who emerged during the Second World War. The Doctor represents the discourse of scientific reason over the alien unknown or the supernatural.

In this study of the Doctor as hero I wish to move away from the seminal reading on heroes, such as Joseph Campbell’s *The Hero with a*

Thousand Faces, to a study of the hero with just eleven faces, albeit contradictory and overlapping ones. The Doctor is the fragmented hero, ever changing but reassuringly the same. It is this paradox I wish to examine. The Doctor represents both historical and cultural moments. In much the same way as Bennett and Woollacott look at the moments of Bond, we can map out changing performances of masculinity and senses of heroism through the changing faces of the Doctor. The Doctor's ability to regenerate opens up a world of possibilities to address the changing articulation of heroism in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century and as Stephen Whitehead notes that "The male body, like the masculinities it suggests, is always open to disruption and anxiety"¹⁴. The Doctor's body as well as his mind becomes a site of negotiated readings of masculinity and heroism, its fluidity allowing us to map out ever shifting definitions of heroism. Tulloch and Alvarado also highlight that:

Each Doctor has been the site of intersection of different codes and each one has been encouraged to foreground the rhetoric of difference... although fundamentally, working for similarity and continuity to establish programme identity, orderliness and stability.¹⁵

This stability is problematic. While we could argue that the Doctor as a generic figure provides the reliable stability of basic heroic qualities, the instability brought on by physical and mental change with each regeneration, force a repositioning of notions of masculinity and the hero. As David Rafer indicates in relation to the figure of the Doctor, the traditional hero as extolled by Joseph Campbell moves from William Hartnell's first Doctor as "wise old man [who] dispenses wisdom to the more straightforward hero figures" to the "more simplistic and chivalrous kind of hero"¹⁶ as portrayed by Peter Davison's fifth Doctor. This points to the shifting role of the hero, who in turns, carries the moral weight of the other characters – the weight of decision and action, cause and effect or allows characters to become heroic¹⁷. Look to the recent portrayal of the ninth Doctor who never tires of telling us his burden, sees and hears the universe in his head. The Doctor is the self-sacrificing hero, although safe in the knowledge that he will regenerate it does put a question mark over the significance of the sacrifice – like Captain Scarlet, how can you make the ultimate sacrifice when you're virtually indestructible? One would also suspect that the Doctor's apparent limit of twelve regenerations maybe determined more by audience ratings than Gallifreyan mythology.

The BBC Head of Drama, Sydney Newman described the first Doctor as "a crotchety old bugger – any kid's grandfather"¹⁸. Later script notes add that although grumpy and partly senile, he would have a heart of gold,

where "...his forgetfulness and vagueness alternate with flashes of brilliant thought and deduction"¹⁹. From the outset then, the figure of the first Doctor was described in patriarchal terms, albeit the paternalistic grandfather. William Hartnell played the Doctor with a long white wig and an extravagant Edwardian costume, distancing himself from the universal image of the lab-coated scientist and reflecting a definite sense of Englishness. The Doctor is an alien (he has two hearts for example), yet he is presented as a well-spoken Englishman (with the exception being Sylvester McCoy's use of his own Scottish accent). His defiance against alien invaders and villainy reflect a British colonial and national spirit. The aliens of *Doctor Who* can be compared with the oppositional villainy found in James Bond, where it "... constitutes a threat to the peace and security of the Free World... represented by Britain"²⁰. The most notorious enemy encountered in *Doctor Who* during the 1960s was, and arguably still is, the Daleks. Mechanical creatures whose death cry of "*exterminate*" and whose aim it was to conquer the universe, the Daleks were drawn historically from the Nazi soldiers of the Second World War led (in later stories) by their Hitler-like creator Davros, who like the Doctor's arch-enemy, the Master, represents the foreign²¹, non-English threat.

The Doctor is an ambiguous figure, whose originally frail external features shrouded a stronger scientific mind. The early series explicitly positioned the Doctor as grandfather to his companion Susan. The first Doctor would act as the fount of all knowledge and would chastise his companions for their taste in clothing, music and actions. When the character of Susan Foreman was written out of the series in 1964, she was replaced in the following story by a girl companion of similar mid-teen age, a pattern (of the father figure and 'daughter') that would continue throughout the series' history, ultimately culminating with the 2008 episode '*The Doctor's Daughter*'.

If the first Doctor can be viewed as grandfather figure, Patrick Troughton's Doctor should be considered the eccentric uncle. His character was younger and his appearance scruffier, more in keeping with the image of the absent-minded professor or as Troughton himself described, "Chaplinesque... the cosmic hobo". The relationship between the second Doctor and his companions is still a paternalistic one, although less obvious. The Doctor would often meet his companions on their level, acknowledging their fashions rather than correcting them on their taste. His was a more contemporary father figure (to the first Doctor's assertion of Victorian values). His haircut was styled in a mop-top similar to that worn by 1960s pop group, the Beatles and his eccentricities were often of

a childish nature. He played the recorder and often ran away from the monsters in the stories. As Tulloch and Alvarado remark, “running away to outflank the enemy was Troughton’s forte”²². An important aspect of the second Doctor was that, unlike his predecessor, his hero took centre-stage to the action, whereas the older first Doctor was unable to do so and the action became focussed around his male companion Ian Chesterton (and later Steven Taylor). In this respect, the companions were explicitly placed as inferior to the Doctor, both on an intellectual and physical level, thus rendering both male and female companions as foils to the Doctor’s hero (creating a relationship similar to that of Sherlock Holmes and Doctor Watson).

Jon Pertwee’s portrayal of the third Doctor showed a marked difference from his predecessors and added several significant facets to the Doctor’s character. The third Doctor is perhaps most closely linked with his fictional British contemporary hero, James Bond. This Doctor had a penchant for gadgets and fast cars - the Doctor’s sonic screwdriver featured heavily during Pertwee’s era, a device that helped the Doctor battle aliens and unlock doors, and the vehicles Bessie and the Whomobile were introduced specifically for the third Doctor, as alternatives to the TARDIS. He wore stylish clothing, had a taste for fine food and the series featured international intrigue (as in ‘*The Mind of Evil*’) and action. As previously mentioned, the third Doctor’s nemesis, the Master acts as the dark side of the Doctor and parallels the relationship between Sherlock Holmes and Professor Moriarty²³. This latter comparison is also played out in the 2007 story ‘*Last of the Time Lords*’ which hints at the confrontation between Holmes and Moriarty at the Reichenbach Falls in Arthur Conan Doyle’s *The Final Problem*.

Another aspect of the Pertwee era was the reducing of the onboard TARDIS crew. This had the effect of drawing the hero and companion closer together as well as refocusing the action onto the third Doctor. While it could be argued that *Doctor Who* during this period had a much larger ensemble cast in the form of U.N.I.T., the tensions borne out between the Doctor and Brigadier Lethbridge-Stewart as well as the Doctor’s own ill ease at this militaristic ‘extended’ family, serve to refocus our attention on the Doctor and his companion²⁴. When necessary the Doctor was provided with or could call upon U.N.I.T./the extended family from the Brigadier, Captain Yates or Sergeant Benton, but this relationship and reliance on the military was often a tense one. This close relationship between the Doctor and his companion is further exemplified in the story ‘*The Green Death*’ where a clearly envious Doctor ‘loses’ his assistant Jo Grant to another suitor, Professor Jones. If we continue to view *Doctor*

Who in the early seventies as a television version of the James Bond narrative, we can read the relationship between the Doctor, the Master and the Brigadier as Bond, the villain and M respectively. One could even compare the Doctor's sonic screwdriver with Bond's trademark Walther PPK gun and his vintage car as the Aston Martin made popular during Sean Connery's incarnation as Bond. Bennett and Woollacott suggest that the villain's criminality "... threatens to de-centre him, to pull him out of the ideological places into which he has been stitched in being enlisted in the service of England"²⁵. This comparison of *Doctor Who* and James Bond is an interesting one in terms of drawing our attention to the changing treatment of both the Doctor as hero as well as the updating of the programme's format. We have a more dynamic performance in Jon Pertwee who played the role as action hero more in keeping with Bond, reflecting changes in the figure of the hero, whilst the introduction of colour as well as what James Chapman refers to as "the shift away from the closed, claustrophobic sets of the Troughton episodes... towards more extensive use of outdoor locations"²⁶ not only allowed the series to rival ITV's product (particularly the ITC productions of *Thunderbirds* and *The Prisoner*), but also provide a televisual alternative to the cinematic adventures of James Bond, still popular in the 1970s.

The third Doctor is "enlisted in the service of England"²⁷, as scientific advisor to U.N.I.T., effectively making the Brigadier his superior (the M figure). The Master's weapon in the series was his power to hypnotise characters, an effect which renders the victim (who at times was the Doctor) unable to distinguish between 'good and evil' and so forth. The Master also uses the assistant as bait to lure the Doctor into a trap, playing on the hero's instinct to rescue the 'damsel-in-distress' and maintain his phallic dominance over her and over the villain. The Doctor's gallantry against the Master's villainy work in tandem, further highlighting that, without the Master, the Doctor could not exist²⁸. When the Master was effectively written out of the series due to actor Roger Delgado's death it became apparent that the third Doctor, without his arch enemy for the final season, could not continue and that ultimately a new incarnation of the Doctor was needed²⁹.

Tom Baker as the fourth Doctor was the most successful incarnation of the character, in terms of both longevity (seven years) and popularity, consistently topping polls in fan publications. Noted for his eccentric nature, long multicoloured scarf, hat and curly hair, Baker's image as the Doctor is arguably the most enduring and recognisable (famously parodied in *The Simpsons* and *Dead Ringers*). Tulloch and Alvarado suggest that the fourth Doctor, in a reaction against "the establishment figure"³⁰ of the

third Doctor, is presented as a “bohemian student... youth challenging authority”³¹. Furthermore, the eccentricities of the fourth Doctor share similarities with Sherlock Holmes rather than James Bond, as well as his contempt of villainy and the establishment they represent, “*The powerful and the very stupid have one thing in common. They don’t alter their views to fit the facts, they alter the facts to fit their views*” (*The Face of Evil*, 1977). His costume in ‘*The Talons of Weng-Chiang*’ (1977) further reinforces this image, complete with deerstalker hat, Victorian cloak and pipe and he is given a ‘Doctor Watson’ to accompany him within the story, in the figure of Professor Lightfoot.

In particular, during Philip Hinchcliffe’s era as producer, the Gothic stories do recall the hero of Victorian and Edwardian England, the Imperial rather than post Imperial figure. As John Beynon suggests in *Masculinities and Culture*, Victorian and Edwardian England was:

a period of unprecedented male achievement... Men were expected to be strong, authoritative, decisive, disciplined and resourceful. It is an ideal of masculinity which still echoes in the heads of men.³²

Doctor Who during this period evoked the work of the late nineteenth/early twentieth century novelists H. Rider Haggard and John Buchan with Doctor as explorer/adventurer, as well as George Bernard Shaw’s *Pygmalion* in the Doctor’s relationship to Leela³³, as teacher and moral compass. Given that the Doctor is a character out of time and space is doubly interesting to note that he tended to fixate on periods renowned for their strong male heroes. Even as recently as 2005, the ninth Doctor travelled back to visit his own hero, Charles Dickens (whose own politics seemed to reinforce rather than attack Imperialism), while the tenth Doctor visited other periods made famous by the ingenuity of men³⁴ – William Shakespeare in ‘*The Shakespeare Code*’ and the engineering feat that was the starship Titanic in ‘*Voyage of the Damned*’. In the 2008 Christmas special ‘*The Next Doctor*’ we see this admiration for strong men reach its logical conclusion when the Doctor apparently partners up with himself, an idea already toyed with in ‘*Journey’s End*’ when the Doctor works with himself, albeit unhappily given the parallel Doctors propensity for violence.

The fourth Doctor as alien is reinforced throughout Baker’s tenure, as evidenced in ‘*Pyramids of Mars*’ (1975), “*The Earth isn’t my home Sarah. I’m a Time Lord... I’m not a human being*”. The fourth Doctor is portrayed as an intellectual giant, positioned above the companion, physically and intellectually. By the 1980s however, the division between

strong hero and weaker subordinate companion began to blur as the middle-aged Doctor regenerated into the youthful Peter Davison.

The introduction of the fifth Doctor in 1981 saw the once heroic figure fragment and weaken in terms of the sense of self and in his positioning against the companion. His regeneration is marked as difficult in his first story '*Castrovalva*' (1982), whereby his companions have to lead him to the zero room to recuperate. In '*The Five Doctors*' (1983), the Doctor refers to yet another weakened state as "... *being diminished. Whittled away piece by piece*". His youthful appearance reflected an innocence and naivety seen in his characterisation. Davison's appearance (fine blonde hair and pale skin) is child-like. Unlike the previous Doctor, his costume is plain and undistinguished. He loses the famously colourful scarf that typified Tom Baker's character as we see the rich shades of purple and red of Baker's costume replaced by cricket whites. He also loses the sonic-screwdriver in his first season as the Doctor, a device which featured heavily during Pertwee's and Baker's period. After the screwdriver is destroyed, the fifth Doctor remarks, "*I feel as if I just lost an old friend*"³⁵, further suggesting that the gadget has become a part of his character. He does however get a piece of celery, which reinforces the weakness of the character³⁶ and the revelation in '*The Caves of Androzani*' (1984) that it helps alert the Doctor to gases he is allergic to further presents this fifth incarnation as a physically weaker version of his previous selves. While these 'weaknesses' could be read as a flaw to the character, they do not necessarily undermine his authority as hero, rather reframe heroism in a more naturalistic, sensitive and less super-heroic male figure.

The number of companions increases from one to three, thus displacing part of his power and authority on to the other characters. He is seen to be uncertain about his actions and their consequences, often relying on chance - the tossing of a coin to determine a move. As previously discussed, his regeneration is problematic and he is seen imitating previous incarnations of his self. One could read Davison's (and later Colin Baker's) Doctor as masculinity in crisis, where his position as head of 'the family' is threatened and diminished. This certainly reflects the shifting attitudes to masculinity and the fragmentation of 'traditional' notions of family in the 1980s, in particular during Margaret Thatcher's Conservative Government (1979-1990), a period of great economic instability, unemployment and social unrest, arguably evoked most powerfully during the Miner's Strike in 1984 which saw many men being unable to support their families financially during the dispute. In '*The Five Doctors*' this fragmentation of the male figure becomes manifest, in that his very being is splintered and the previous incarnations are summoned

together to fight an assortment of monsters from past adventures (including Cybermen, the Master, a Yeti and a Dalek). His previous selves constantly undermine the authority he has over his companions and the situations he encounters as he remarks that “*I’m certainly not the man I was*”.

The image of the weakened, ill Doctor is ever present during the 1980s. As Stephen Whitehead has noted, “As men grow older the authoritative gaze on them changes... their bodies alter, their health becomes more fragile, their place in the world as men shifts”³⁷. Whitehead continues:

... the fluidity and disruption that comes with constantly shifting notions of masculinity. Masculinity is not static and unchanging over a male’s life; it changes just as the body moves in time and space. The masculinities that become inscribed on the youthful male body become transformed through ageing.³⁸

Both mind and body is transformed after each regeneration. Sometimes it ages, but usually the Doctor evidently becomes ‘younger’ as he enters old age³⁹. It would seem that Whitehead’s observations on the ageing man are being reversed in the Doctor. He is allowed to rejuvenate, to continually remain the active, healthy potent male hero. While I am not suggesting that his position as heroic male throughout the series has remained unchanged in relation to the other characters, it has at times become unstable. Particularly during the 1980s, the Doctor both on and off screen appeared to be losing his potency. The series have to wrestle with shifting schedules, away from its comfortable Saturday evening schedule slot and threats of cancellation. With the text the Doctor also began to see his power diminish, “whittled away” as Davison’s fifth Doctor attested to. If we again consider the large TARDIS ‘family’ the fifth Doctor inherited by the end of *‘Logopolis’* alongside the Doctor’s own weakened state, we see the hero figure fighting to stay at the centre of the narrative. Given the following story *‘Castrovalva’* featured Adric, rather than the Doctor, literally at the heart of the puzzle while the Time Lord is himself held sterile in the ‘zero room’, we are introduced to our hero as a weak, flawed figure. While the fifth Doctor would ultimately win through each of his adventures, it is appropriate that this physically weakened, cautious Doctor would succumb to a disease that potentially ate away the body. The Doctor as hero is of course redeemed in his sacrifice for the female companion Peri, but rather than continue this noble sacrifice into the next regeneration something rather different occurred with the arrival of the sixth Doctor, Colin Baker.

The sixth Doctor continues to reinforce the image of the male hero in crisis at a time when the science fiction movie was producing a series of female heroes such as Ellen Ripley in *Alien* and later *Aliens* as well as Sarah Connor in *The Terminator*. There appears to be a determined effort on putting the ‘woman in her place’, whilst revealing the instability of the male image. As women in Britain were pushing towards a less imbalanced role in the workplace in terms of authority and salary, men were ‘fighting’ to reassert themselves in terms of gender dominance. As Andrew Spicer argues:

The legacy of Thatcherism has created... a pervasive sense of social and psychological damage. Not only is the hegemony of the idealised gentlemen over, but also the other post-war ideal of the (white, heterosexual) common man”.⁴⁰

His costume reflects a fragmented sense of self in that his jacket is made up of many multicoloured patches that conflict with his yellow and black striped trousers. He wears on his lapel, a porcelain figure of a cat, an image that is both fragile and independent. Orrin Klapp and Leo Lowenthal in their discussion of the deterioration of the hero point to the image of hero as “not much better than the average; that high ‘character’ is not stressed” (Dyer, 1986, p. 26). This is certainly true of the fifth and sixth Doctors, whose position as hero is constantly challenged⁴¹. *Doctor Who* attempted to reposition the Doctor as strong hero by reducing the number of companions to one and by making the seventh Doctor visibly older than his companion⁴². In ‘*The Curse of Fenric*’, the female companion Ace uses her faith in the Doctor as a way of guarding herself against the vampire-like creatures attacking her and likewise, the Doctor recites the names of previous companions in order to protect himself. This reinforces the relationship between the hero and the companion that had been weakened during the fifth and sixth Doctor’s era. Furthermore, the element of mystery surrounding the Doctor was returned to the series (an element that had been lost during the Tom Baker era, naming his home planet and presenting the Time Lords as bureaucratic old men). The suggestion in the final season of the series was that the seventh Doctor was “*more than just a Time Lord*”⁴³ and it was also hinted that the Doctor was, during one of his regenerations, Merlin the wizard, manipulating people and events around him. The figure of the Doctor is drawn closer to his original incarnation as the mysterious, older man whose age and wisdom are positioned above his companions. Like the Doctor’s during the sixties and seventies, the seventh Doctor is given a trademark object, the

umbrella, which acts as the phallic signifier for the Doctor's masculinity (as the recorder, sonic screwdriver and long scarf had done before).

While Paul McGann only played the eighth Doctor in one televised story⁴⁴, his portrayal in the 1996 TV Movie does raise several interesting issues. Most notably (or for some fans, notoriously⁴⁵), it is learnt that he is half-human and the Doctor is seen kissing his companion twice, a first for the series. The Doctor is young and attractive, Byronic in appearance, with flowing dark hair and Edwardian costume. He is the quintessential Englishman, who is shown drinking tea and listening to classical music at the beginning and end of the story. In one scene the Doctor is held at gunpoint by an American policeman, who questions his sanity. The female companion rescues the Doctor by telling the arresting officer that "*He's British*"⁴⁶. It is his very Britishness (arguably writ as Englishness) that characterizes the Doctor as alien, whose customs and eccentricities are different to the natives of that land.

Doctor Who by 1996 had been cautious not to allow the forming of a sexual relationship between the Doctor and his companions, by the distancing technique of portraying him as both alien and as father-figure to his TARDIS family. This has the effect of rendering a potential sexual relationship between the Doctor and his companion as an act of incestuous transgression. This 'threat' is exemplified most clearly during Pertwee's era, particularly evident in '*The Green Death*', where the line between the Doctor's platonic relationship with Jo Grant becomes blurred and Jo finds a surrogate lover in the form of Professor Jones. When the Doctor kisses Grace in the 1996 movie, the writers decision to make the Doctor half-human (thus legitimising the embrace by removing the incestuous potential of the scene), the Doctor is cast as the Byronic romantic, a man of action (that in part echoed Pertwee's Doctor, particularly during the bike chase) and not the 'safe' patriarchal figure, so allowing for the romanticised kiss to take place. The companion in this instance only appeared with the Doctor for one adventure and the bonding between them was never developed, creating a safer space for the two to share this brief transgression.

In 1999, the BBC charity Comic Relief produced a one-off comedic *Doctor Who* story entitled '*The Curse of the Fatal Death*' which concluded with the Doctor regenerating into a woman (Joanna Lumley). It is interesting to note that only in a comedic framework can the Doctor be allowed to become female, subverting the image of masculinity completely (going as far to suggest that the Doctor's sonic screwdriver is a vibrator). The female Doctor would in Richard Dyer's terms, "express discontent with or rejection of dominant values"⁴⁷, as represented in the

previous male incarnations of the Doctor. A female Doctor also places a question mark over the future of the traditional female companion and how the series could deal with this relationship. In *'The Curse of the Fatal Death'* the (male) Doctor is going to marry the female companion and refers to 'his' assistant as "*the only companion I ever had*", suggesting that the two characters intend to have sexual intercourse. By making the Doctor regenerate as a woman (albeit in a comedic parody of the series) however, the potential for this sexual relationship to develop is swiftly destroyed and instead the story ends with the Doctor and the Master walking off hand-in-hand, hero and villain finally drawn together (in a 'safe' heterosexual partnership). Not until the arrival of the ninth Doctor and his companion Rose Tyler, would we see such an explicit sexual tension arise between hero and companion.⁴⁸

In terms of *Doctor Who's* recent return in 2005, the Doctor as played by Christopher Eccleston is recast to stress the ordinary rather than alien. If the Doctors of the 1980s represented the Thatcherite, fragmented male, displaced by mass unemployment and shifts in gender politics and the 1996 Doctor is situated at the time of significant political change, from Conservatism to Labour⁴⁹ then the ninth Doctor is situated in the final throes of Tony Blair's 'New' Labour Government. Eccleston's Doctor evokes the youth-orientated 'Manchester swagger' of Oasis, the band utilised in much of Labour's early promotional material. The ninth Doctor is defined by his northern accent as well as his austere clothing, but this is a 'young' Doctor, jaded by war and disjointed from both his home planet, Gallifrey and his adopted home, Earth. This Doctor can no longer legitimately call on his previous 'selves', having moved on from the 1996 movie and the series proper in 1989, so we find him very much situated in a contemporary Britain, cut off from the attitudes and politics of his earlier regenerations. Gone are the excesses of previous Doctors, such as costume and camp eccentricities. There is also an emphasis on the domestic, placing much of the narrative within or around the Powell Estate and the lives of the Tyler family. Alien worlds and bizarre characters are kept to a minimum, or are grounded in the Pertwee tradition of earthbound stories. The later *Doctor Who* series does seem to play on the ordinariness of its characters and it is the Doctor's gift, to reveal the specialness beneath. The focus on family and the move to the domestic space echoes Tony Blair's warning that society will remain unstable if "we ignore its very foundations: family life"⁵⁰. However, whereas Blair was harkening back to a traditional sense of family, with two heterosexual parents and two children, the 'reality' of the Doctor Who family never fits this imaginary ideal.⁵¹ However, the post 2005 series does continue to place value on

family and on the normalness of family life. This is evidenced several times, when each of the Doctor's companions ordinary and 'insignificant' lives are turned around. We see this with Rose in *'Parting of the Ways'*, Martha Jones in *'Last of the Time Lords'*, Astrid Peth in *'Voyage of the Damned'* and Donna Noble in *'Journey's End'*. This sense of the special is also evidenced in the small lives of peripheral characters, namely those in *'Father's Day'* where we see the ninth doctor assure a young couple that meeting on a street corner and sharing a taxi is the most special thing there is. During the 1960s the companion was very much side-lined in terms of their characterisation – we never really got back stories or significant development. Companions would come and go and we'd learn very little in between. Even much loved characters like Jo Grant and Sarah Jane were neglected, given only cursory back stories as to how they found themselves with the Doctor, or briefly shown falling in love and leaving the Doctor. This began to change with the introduction of Ace (1987) and it seemed that the show actually wanted to explore Ace's past and indeed future. She can certainly be read as the predecessor of Rose Tyler.

We live in a time when television in particular has the capacity to turn 'everyday people' into celebrities⁵². In this sense, the Doctor is allowing these companions their moment in the sun. Like reality television's capacity to turn the ordinary person into a celebrity, the Doctor brings the companions their fifteen minutes of fame, lifting them up to almost Godlike proportions, but in the tradition of the first wave of *Doctor Who*, the companions are cast aside – either left on a parallel earth, reduced to stardust or have their memories wiped. We may live in a celebrity driven culture, but success is inevitably fleeting.

A worrying trend in the recent series has been to cast the tenth Doctor as messianic hero. The saviour figure, who imparts his wisdom, forgives but more importantly heals those around him becomes overwhelming during Tennant's third and fourth seasons. Forgiveness and redemption figure heavily during the tenth Doctor's era. This is *Doctor Who* for an audience coming to terms with a continued military presence in the Middle East, where accusations of torture and mistreatment of non-allied soldiers and civilians have dominated the news. Post-war guilt and our continued presence in an Iraqi war that was supposedly over in 2003 are all too real reminders that the clear definitions of the hero and heroism have become blurred. As the tenth Doctor signals in the 2005 Christmas special, *'The Christmas Invasion'*, "I gave them the wrong warning. I should have told them to run, as fast as they can. Run and hide, because the monsters are coming - the human race". The Doctor's alien qualities alone, are no longer enough to elevate him as hero. Instead he is instilled with a

theological power, almost returning to the hero figures outlined in Campbell. We witness this in *'Voyage of the Damned'* (escorted by a choir of angels) and *'Last of the Time Lords'*. The ninth Doctor's regeneration mimicked the Christ-like pose with arms splayed out cruciform. We also witness the Doctor's resurrection after his apparent extermination in *'The Stolen Earth'*. Of course, the Doctor can stay alive because of his ability to regenerate but essentially "this way of cheating death" still represents the death of the physical body and certain characteristic attributes. However, the tenth Doctor unlike his predecessors manages to return, Christ-like, his current incarnation intact. It is worrying, because part of the allure of the Doctor is his supposed apolitical, religiously ambiguous position. He should operate as the blank canvas to which we the viewer ascribe meaning or significance, but under the tenth Doctor, the iconography of Christianity comes to the fore, asserting the hero figure not only into the realm of the mythic, but also the theological.

One of fandom's biggest issues with the Doctor is his moral integrity which seems to change to suit the narrative⁵³. At times he is the pacifist, chastising anyone for using a gun, but in another moment he can become the executioner, "the oncoming storm" of Dalek legend. Consider Davros' dialogue exchanges with the Doctor in *'Journey's End'*:

Davros: The man who abhors violence, but this is the truth: you take ordinary people and fashion them into weapons... How many have died in your name? The Doctor, the man who keeps on running, never looking back because he dare not, out of shame. This is my final victory, Doctor. I have shown you yourself.

Davros: Never forget, Doctor, you did this! I name you, forever! You are the Destroyer of Worlds!⁵⁴

Each regeneration offers a performance of masculinity although rarely does the Doctor fulfil (thankfully) dominant images of masculinity. It is still a case of intellect over might, although throughout the history of the series the Doctor has aligned himself with male companions who have been, or are, in active military service⁵⁵.

The Doctor is, as it has been noted, a paradoxical figure, at once the constant and the changeable. His power in the last four seasons of *Doctor Who* has not simply been to present himself as the lone hero but to bring out the hero or the special qualities in the everyday. The Doctor's heroic qualities also extend to the empowerment of those around him. He doesn't simply wander into the proverbial town to right the wrongs, rather he re-enchants the lives of others, turning the ordinary into the extraordinary, the

office temp into the saviour of the universe. In other ways he does mimic the classic figure from the American west, the hero who can never settle, yet despite his protestations that he must travel alone as witnessed in *'Planet of the Dead'* (2009) that "people have travelled with me and I've lost them"⁵⁶, he also needs his companions, his extended family. The companions define him; they construct the hero as much as the television audience does. He does not make himself, but like the celebrity culture of recent years, he is made and in turn makes the hero, gathering up the fragments and reconstituting them.

The Doctor's ability as hero to reflect society beyond the text and indeed become the hero maker is more problematic and John Fiske's argument that "socially responsible popular art can, in theory, articulate and thus encourage that change, but it cannot originate it"⁵⁷ seems as pertinent now as it did in 1984. Fiske categorically states that the text itself cannot change the "socio-political structure of society"⁵⁸ and of this I would agree, but an interesting development from the recent success of the new series has been the resurgence of interest and subsequent revival of several classic hero figures on television, notably the BBC series' *Robin Hood* and *Merlin*, both of which occupy the *Doctor Who* slot in the television schedule when not being broadcast. Added to this, *Torchwood* and *The Sarah Jane Adventures* continue to prove not only the continued success of *Doctor Who*, but also its influence over the emergence of new hero dramas. The Doctor has not only helped create his 'children of time' but has become, as the Doctor himself noted, "the stuff of legend"⁵⁹.

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Notes

¹ Whereby a text is free to disregard all or some of the earlier narratives, imagery, codes and conventions, timelines and characterisation attached to an earlier format or franchise.

² See BBC's *Sherlock* (2009) co-created by Steven Moffat and Mark Gatiss, as well as Guy Ritchie's *Sherlock Holmes* (2009).

³ See the recent BBC series *Robin Hood* (2006-2009).

⁴ Stuart Hall, David Held and Tony McGrew, *Modernity and its Futures* (1992), 275.

⁵ Stuart Hall, David Held and Tony McGrew, *Modernity and its Futures* (1992), 275-277.

⁶ Stuart Hall, David Held and Tony McGrew, *Modernity and its Futures* (1992), 277.

⁷ While the TV movie had, on original transmission, a UK audience of 9.1 million, the British/American co-production failed to be picked up by an American network. See James Chapman, *Inside The TARDIS* (2006), 173-183 and Philip Segal and Gary Russell, *Doctor Who - Regeneration*, (2000), 154.

⁸ Steven Moffat interviewed by Mark Redfern:

http://www.undertheradarmag.com/interviews/steven_moffat_interview_072008/

⁹ Tony Bennett and Janet Woollacott, *Bond and Beyond* (1987), 13.

¹⁰ The first James Bond movie, *Dr. No* was released in 1962, one year before the first episode of *Doctor Who*.

¹¹ John Tulloch and Manuel Alvarado, *Doctor Who – The Unfolding Text* (1983), 99-105.

¹² In particular I would recommend Kim Newman, *Doctor Who*, (2005) and Tat Wood and Lawrence Miles' *About Time* book series (2004-2009).

¹³ John Fiske, Introduction to Communication Studies, 2nd ed., (1990), 88.

¹⁴ Stephen Whitehead, *Men and Masculinities* (2002), 186.

¹⁵ John Tulloch and Manuel Alvarado, *Doctor Who: The Unfolding Text* (1983), 63.

¹⁶ David Rafer, 'Mythic Identity in *Doctor Who*', in *Time and Relative Dissertations in Space*, David Butler (ed.), (2007), 124.

¹⁷ See Rose Tyler, Martha Jones and Donna Noble's progression in seasons 1,2, 3 and 4 of *Doctor Who* respectively (2005-2008).

¹⁸ David J. Howe, et al., *The Doctor Who Handbook: The First Doctor* (1994), 43.

¹⁹ David J. Howe, et al., *The Doctor Who Handbook: The First Doctor* (1994), 47.

²⁰ Tony Bennett and Janet Woollacott, *Bond and Beyond* (1987), 25.

²¹ The Master is coded as foreign on several levels – firstly like the Doctor, his alien-ness can be seen as viewed as the foreign other, but secondly, actor Roger Delgado (who was born to a Spanish father and French mother) had had a reputation for portraying non-British villains on British television shows. See Howe, Stammers and Walker (1994), 36.

²² John Tulloch and Manuel Alvarado, *Doctor Who: The Unfolding Text* (1983), 61.

²³ See *Roger Delgado: The Master* (2Entertain, 2009).

²⁴ The third Doctor is constantly trying to escape from his exile Earth, as well as the confines of the U.N.I.T. headquarters throughout the first three seasons.

²⁵ Tony Bennett and Janet Woollacott, *Bond and Beyond* (1987), 136.

²⁶ James Chapman, *Inside the TARDIS* (2006), 76.

²⁷ Tony Bennett and Janet Woollacott, *Bond and Beyond* (1987), 136.

²⁸ See the part two of *The End of Time* (2010), where David Tennant's tenth Doctor posits the notion, "I wonder what I'd be, without you" or conversely, the Master's musings in *The Five Doctors* (1983), that "a cosmos without the Doctor scarcely bears thinking about", for ways in which the series continues to draw these two figures together, by suggesting alternatives where they are apart.

²⁹ It is alleged that Jon Pertwee announced his departure after being refused a fee increase, but further reports suggest it was a combination of the Doctor Who production team disbanding as well as the death of Delgado. See David J. Howe and Stephen James Walker, *The Third Doctor Handbook* (1996), 46.

³⁰ John Tulloch and Manuel Alvarado, *Doctor Who: The Unfolding Text* (1983), 112.

³¹ Ibid..

³² John Beynon, *Masculinities and Culture* (2002), 30.

³³ The Doctor's relationship to Leela could be regarded as a reaction to the second wave of feminism, in terms of providing a strong female character, but one who is constantly put in her place and eclipsed by the male Doctor.

³⁴ The exception to this was Agatha Christie's appearance in the 2008 story '*The Unicorn and the Wasp*'.

³⁵ See Doctor Who: 'The Visitation', (BBC, 1982).

³⁶ Both the loss of the sonic screwdriver and the focus on the celery offer amusing, if not interesting Freudian approaches to male potency. This particularly flavourless and limp salad vegetable inspired derision rather than mystery (a point returned to in the 2007 Children In Need special '*Time Crash*').

³⁷ Stephen Whitehead, *Men and Masculinities* (2002), 199.

³⁸ Stephen Whitehead, *Men and Masculinities* (2002), 200.

³⁹ The casting of 27 year old Matt Smith as the eleventh Doctor further highlights this paradox.

⁴⁰ Andrew Spicer, *Typical Men: The Representation of Masculinity in Popular British Cinema* (2003), 203-204.

⁴¹ Colin Baker's final season '*The Trial of a Time Lord*' involves the Doctor being put on trial for genocide. This season has and can be read as an analogy of a) the future of *Doctor Who* on television, which by 1986 had seen audience ratings fall to under two million viewers and as b) the future of the Doctor as heroic figure. See Tat Wood, *About Time 6* (2007), 123-124.

⁴² Of course, budgetary constraints during this period are an undeniable factor in the creation of this dynamic.

⁴³ See Doctor Who: 'Remembrance of the Daleks', (BBC, 1988).

⁴⁴ Although, since January 2001, Paul McGann has continued to portray the eighth Doctor in over 50 audio dramas for Big Finish Productions.

⁴⁵ See Tat Wood, *About Time 6* (2007), 353-374, for a damning account of this story.

⁴⁶ See *Doctor Who: The TV Movie*, (BBC/Universal TV, 1996).

⁴⁷ Richard Dyer, *Stars* (1986), 59.

⁴⁸ Given that the future of *Doctor Who* was very much in the balance at the end of the twentieth century and given that the male hero of the 1980s was experiencing such a crisis in terms of holding on to patriarchal authority, a female Doctor may well have seemed the logical and only progression.

⁴⁹ One is inclined to make the 'cheeky' observation that both offered a hope and change (unfulfilled perhaps), particular in hindsight, given that the TV movie remained a pilot for an unmade new series (changing the series format too much), while the Labour Government would later be criticised for not changing enough.

⁵⁰ Tony Blair (1997) Labour Party Annual Conference, Brighton.

⁵¹ The Tyler family are 'restored' in a parallel Earth during the 2006 story 'Doomsday'.

⁵² See Turner, *Understanding Celebrity* (2004).

⁵³ See Wood and Lawrence's *About Time* series (2004-2009) which seems to fascinate on the Doctor's morality in a subsection of 'The Continuity', called *Ethics*.

⁵⁴ See Doctor Who 'Journey's End' (BBC, 2008).

⁵⁵ Each of the following companions had served in the armed forces: Ian Chesterton, (possibly) Steven Taylor, Ben Jackson, Brigadier Lethbridge-Stewart, Captain Mike Yates, Sgt. Benton, Surgeon-Lieutenant Harry Sullivan and Captain Jack Harkness. In addition to this, Jamie McCrimmon had been a piper at the Battle of Culloden.

⁵⁶ See Doctor Who 'Planet of the Dead' (BBC, 2009).

⁵⁷ John Fiske, *Interpreting Television* (1984), 197.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ See *Doctor Who 'The Satan Pit'* (BBC, 2006).