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Master thesis – "What's a girl like you doing in a job like this?": An Investigation of Representations of Women in *Doctor Who*

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

This thesis will explore how across its many seasons, *Doctor Who* has represented femininity, and the space and agency it has allotted to its female characters. It shall take into account both the original, classic *Doctor Who* series (1963-1989) and its more recent revival series (2005-present) to paint a fuller and more substantial picture of the show as a whole. By closely analyzing specific character-driven and character-centric episodes, this thesis will unpick how *Doctor Who* has constructed femininity, arguing that *Doctor Who* has been on a steady incline towards a more progressive and feminist-inflected version of the Doctor since its inception in 1963. This thesis will focus most of its attention on the revived series, only taking into account some key companions from the classic *Doctor Who*. Additionally, in order fully to deconstruct the progressive development of female characters in *Doctor Who*, this thesis will focus its attention on some specific factors: character development of the companions across the seasons, progressive inclusivity of minority groups in major roles, and the impact of a well-known actor portraying the role of companion. Ultimately, this thesis will argue that the show has been able to accredit its longevity on television to its ability to move with the times and adapt to new and more modern social insights, and that the show has become itself about the possibility of regeneration, not only in terms of individual identity but also in relation to its political and cultural position

In its infancy, television was almost exclusively used to broadcast the evening news. As the entertainment industry grew, television grew with it. As such, television has grown to become a medium for storytelling. In a way, *Doctor Who* has almost grown in sync with the television. For almost as long as the medium has been around, *Doctor Who* has been a staple of it (at the very least for British audiences).

The first episode of *Doctor Who* aired on 23rd November, 1963. With almost 300 individual stories running over almost 900 episodes, *Doctor Who* is one of the longest running shows in television history. Across its 26 seasons, the Doctor has had their fair share of companions (more often female than male). Very often, the standard formula for a *Doctor Who* pairing consisted of the Doctor, a heroic (young) man, and an attractive young woman. The incredible popularity of the show is proved time and again by the many spinoffs it has spawned; most notably these include *Torchwood* (2006-11), *The Sarah Jane Adventures* (2007-11), and *K-9* (2009-10). The long runtime of the show also moves right through the most recent and most influential waves of the feminist movement, and thus it is pertinent and revelatory to investigate it through this feminist lens.

Due to its long runtime, the choice was made to analyze only a select number of episodes. The episodes that will be analyzed more closely are the following, as they are particularly character-centric or specifically character-driven:

- "An Unearthly Child" (1963); the first ever serial episode of the classic *Doctor Who* series, introducing the Doctor and their companion, Susan Foreman (portrayed by Carole Ann Ford). It is an episode focused on Susan Foreman's identity, with an emphasis on her heritage as a Gallifreyan, her role as the Doctor's companion, and her place as the Doctor's granddaughter.
- "The Time Warrior" (1973-1974); the first serial episode of the eleventh season of the classic *Doctor Who* series, and the introductory episode of Sarah Jane Smith as a character (portrayed by Elisabeth Sladen). By this time, the *Doctor Who* has been on the air for over 10 years. This episode introduces a new companion of the

Doctor, and it is interesting to see if any developments in character have been made between this episode and one ten years prior.

- "Pyramids of Mars" (1975); the third serial episode of the thirteenth season of the classic *Doctor Who* series. This episode highlights the more independent characteristics of Sarah Jane Smith's character, as well as her relationship to the Doctor (and other male characters in the episode).
- "Rose" (2005); the first episode of the first season of the revived series of *Doctor Who*, and the introductory episode of Rose Tyler as a character (portrayed by Billie Piper). The episode introduces a new Doctor, a new companion, and a new era of *Doctor Who*.
- "Doomsday" (2006); the final episode of the second season of *Doctor Who*, and part two of the season's finale. This second part of the double episode heavily focuses on the relationship between Rose Tyler and the tenth regeneration of the Doctor, highlighting their love for each other. This element of a love story had thus far not been a significant element of the show in relation to the Doctor or the companion's characters, and as such is important to investigate.
- "Smith and Jones" (2007); the first episode of the third season of *Doctor Who*, and the introductory episode of Martha Jones as a character (portrayed by Freema Agyeman). The episode highlights Martha's independence, which sets a precedent for her time as the Doctor's companion.
- "The Fires of Pompeii" (2008); the second episode of the fourth season of *Doctor Who*, with Donna Noble as companion (portrayed by Catherine Tate). The episode highlights Donna's strong will and her influence on the Doctor's decision-making, continuing and expanding on the trend started by Martha Jones.

- “Silence in the Library” (2008) and “Forest of the Dead” (2008); the eighth and ninth episodes of the fourth season of *Doctor Who*, and the introductory episodes of River Song as a character (portrayed by Alex Kingston). Chronologically speaking, these episodes are also the final episodes of River Song’s narrative arc, which sheds an interesting light on River’s character and her relationship to the Doctor.
- “Turn Left” (2008); the eleventh episode of the fourth season of *Doctor Who*. It is an episode focusing on Donna Noble specifically, once again highlighting her strong mind and her autonomy in making her own choices in life.
- “Dark Water” (2014) and “Death in Heaven” (2014); the eleventh and twelfth episodes of the eighth season of *Doctor Who*. The double episode formally confirms “Missy” to be the new regeneration of the Master, allowing this thesis to investigate the villainization of the female character.
- “The Pilot” (2017); the first episode of the tenth season of *Doctor Who*, and the introductory episode of Bill Potts as a character (portrayed by Pearl Mackie). Apart from introducing Bill as the new companion to the Doctor, the episode also discusses her sexual orientation, as well as her home situation (which in turn impacts her character).
- “World Enough and Time” (2017) and “The Doctor Falls” (2017); the eleventh and twelfth episodes of the tenth season of *Doctor Who*. This double episode comprises the season finale of the tenth season. They will be analyzed to further examine both Missy and Bill Potts’ characters and character development.
- “The Woman Who Fell to Earth” (2018); the first episode of the eleventh season of *Doctor Who*, and the introductory episode of the first female regeneration of the Doctor.

Various other episodes, clips of episodes, and announcement trailers will also be used to support the main argument of this thesis, but the list above comprises all episodes that will be closely analyzed.

In order better to focus my arguments, there are some elements of the show that this thesis will not take into account. As may have become obvious from the list of episodes above, most of the companions from the classic Doctor Who series will not be discussed. That is because not necessarily the most important, but the most rapid feminist developments have taken place in the revival series, and it will thus prove more pertinent to investigate more of the later characters, with some key companions from the classic series providing a solid background for these more recent developments. That being said, there are a few companions from the even revived Doctor Who series, who will also not be discussed in this work. Most notably, Clara Oswald and Amy Pond will not be taken into consideration.

The reason is simple, though very basic: Clara and Amy did not do anything that previous companions had not already done (and more interestingly). Though Amy Pond presented a strong independent young woman, who ran away with the Doctor of her own accord and for her own reasons, her actions are nothing new when taking Donna Noble into account, and her hinted romantic arc with the Doctor in her earlier seasons pales in comparison to that of Rose Tyler and the Doctor. Similar issues arise when trying to analyze Clara Oswald. Though she had interesting plot lines, and was presented as a very independent female character, ultimately she provided nothing new or innovative for this thesis to analyze.

There are some more elements of Doctor Who that this thesis will not touch on, and there are a number of reasons for that. One of the most obvious things to be left out of consideration is the most recent season: season 12. The core reason for leaving this season out of consideration is simple: as the season is still airing at the date of writing this thesis, that means there will be running updates to the character development of any relevant characters in this season (including recurring characters that will be discussed below like the Master/Missy and the Doctor themself). As such, this thesis has opted not to consider season 12 as part of the established canon (yet).

Structurally, this thesis will first set out the methodology that will I be following, focusing on television studies, gender theory, and feminist criticism, as well as introducing some key concepts (drawn from the terminology specific to the scholarship, specific to the television genre, and specific to *Doctor Who*). It will also situate itself in relation to critical discussions of the show, delving deeper into previous research and scholarship on *Doctor Who*, to lay out an accurate and relevant framework within which this thesis will operate. It will then move into a close analysis of the list of episodes shown above. This analysis will be divided up into specific categories (that are not always chronological in order) related to the characterization and identity of the relevant companions. These categories will focus on factors such as race and sexuality, but also on emancipation and romance. Finally, this thesis will discuss some complications related to the subject, among which the exclusion of the most recent season from the present research.

Chapter 2 – Methodology

Television was invented in the late 1920s, but only became available for consumers some years later. In the early stages, television was simply a visual replacement for the radio; oftentimes a television had no more than three channels, or even just a single channel, which only broadcast according to government regulation in the evening (with the most common broadcast being the evening news). As the entertainment industry evolved, television evolved with it. More programs came to have 'entertainment' as a primary objective. This evolution eventually moved to other platforms; with the technology of today, television audiences can watch their desired programs anywhere and everywhere to their heart's content. Moreover, as audiences have become more widespread and diverse, television shows have had to move with these developments to keep their appeal. The literary framework laid out below will touch on the influence of television and television shows, genre theory as it applies to *Doctor Who*, and gender theory and feminism. It will also explain some key terminology, both from the Doctor Who universe and the world of present-day television.

2.1 – The Influence of Television

In the introduction to their book *Television and the Self: Knowledge, Identity, and Media Representation* (2013), Kathleen M. Ryan and Deborah A. Macy state that "television serves as a voice of our modern time." (1) They go on to quote Todd Gitlin, who states that television is "the principal circulator of the cultural mainstream" (3) As opposed to film, television is a much more present media within the home of its audience. As such, it can have a much greater influence on this audience. In his book *Home Territories: Media, Mobility and Identity* (2000), David Morley strengthens this idea by stating that television transgresses "the boundaries of the household – bringing the public world into the private – and simultaneously [produces] the coherence of broader social experience, through both the sharing of broadcast time and ritual." (3) Through television, the audience is exposed to the world that exists outside of their personal bubble, allowing new ideas and ideologies to enter into this bubble as well. Moreover, viewing certain programs creates an interconnectedness with others who have seen those same programs, allowing communities to form.

Ultimately, it is a justified choice to examine television and television shows for the influence they have on society. And while television has of course changed from the 1960s to the present, it has changed in such a way that its impact and influence have broadened. Not only does television create communities around certain broadcasts, or even around the concept of watching television, the shows that people watch influence how they view the world. In his other book *Television, Audiences & Cultural Studies* (1992), David Morley posits "a 'hypodermic' model of the media, which were seen as having the power to 'inject' [...] ideology directly into the consciousness of the masses." (45) While Morley later applies some nuance to this theory, stating that the powers of the media may not be as direct as was historically assumed, media do have the ability to influence how people perceive the world around them; both news media and entertainment media have this power. In that same vein, the cultural theorist Stuart Hall proposes in his essay 'Encoding and Decoding in the Television Media' (1973) an encoding/decoding model of the media and its consumption. In this model, a broadcasting agency or network sends out a message (one implicitly ideological) that is verbally and non-verbally coded for the audience, and this audience in turn decodes the message to their understanding. And this understanding is based in part on the social norms of said audience, and can be different from, and even entirely counter to the understanding that the broadcasting network had supposed the program to have. As such, a television audience has the power to create their own meanings regarding what they watch on television. And so simultaneously, television is a representation of society and its ideals. Ryan and Macey state in *Television and the Self* that “the messages represented on television say something important about [a] culture and individuals' roles in it.” (2) And so investigating *Doctor Who* and its representation of femininity sheds a light on both how society views women and womanhood and how it should view them (the latter especially will be a point of discussion for this thesis).

John Fiske notes in his book *Television Culture* (1987) that ‘typical’ television is defined as “the most popular, mainstream, internationally distributed programs, for these are the ones of greatest significance in popular culture.” (13) While historically *Doctor Who* is a quintessentially British television program, today it is broadcast across the globe, and is available through various streaming services online. It can therefore be considered ‘typical’ television. And as such, the way in which *Doctor Who* represents its female characters and its ideas on femininity and womanhood are important to examine, because these ideas reach and influence an audience of such scale.

2.2 – The Confines of the Genre

With these ideas on television and its influence on its viewership laid out, it is pertinent to establish within which genre confines *Doctor Who* operates. This can be done by taking genre theory into account. Television and movie genres come with many different tropes, restrictions and formalities, some that audiences may not even be aware of while viewing a program or movie. *Doctor Who* very clearly operates within the science fiction genre, which is a flexible genre in and of itself; on top of that, the more recent seasons can also be categorized as ‘drama’. In the world of television, the drama genre is not defined by drama (sadness/catastrophe) as such; instead, drama is intended to denote the more serious tone of a television show, as opposed to e.g. comedy shows. That is not to say that *Doctor Who* is only ever serious, but its general tone is very much of a more serious nature than a comedic one. Because the term 'drama' alone signifies so little, the 'drama'-genre is often divided into specific subgenres like 'historical drama' or 'teen drama'. *Doctor Who* in this case is a sci-fi drama. However, within the context of this thesis, *Doctor Who* will also be considered as belonging to the action genre. While the Doctor as a character is a notorious pacifist, opting out of any and all physical altercations wherever possible, viewing the show as a whole through the lens of 'action' is actually rather applicable. Episodes often involve extended battle scenes (with aliens), the Doctor and his companions running from place to place chasing down enemies or leads, and victories over said enemies; all of these are classic tropes of the action genre. And by no means does this thesis aim to exclude other genres from my engagement with *Doctor Who*. Many different episodes of the show operate within their own subgenres; *Doctor Who* is very fluid in genre terms, and has, for example, historical episodes, detective-story episodes, and ghost-story episodes which all have their own sets of sub-tropes. However, in the broadest terms, the entirety of the show almost always operates within the confines of the action, science fiction, and drama genres.

And especially within the 'action' genre, there are clearly defined gender roles in place. In her book *Spectacular Bodies: Gender, Genre and the Action Cinema* (2012), Yvonne Tasker notes that the 'action' genre is "an almost exclusively male space." (13) Moreover, it is a stereotypically male space, adhering to pre-determined and socially acceptable ideas about masculinity (and thus also femininity). Jeffrey A. Brown expands on this in his book *Dangerous Curves: Action Heroines, Gender, Fetishism, and Popular Culture (2011)*, going so far as to posit that the action genre has "[presented] masculinity as an excessive, almost hysterical, performance. Indeed, the spectacle of the muscular male body has become the genre's central trademark.” (20) Such stereotypical depictions of maleness automatically bring forth stereotypical depictions of femaleness. Brown goes on to state quite plainly that in action movies “men are active, while women are present only to be rescued or to confirm the heterosexuality of the hero.” (20) While the Doctor (for some fifty years male) does not necessarily adhere to these stereotypes of maleness, especially the women from the earlier seasons have most often conformed to these female stereotypes. And as this thesis will highlight, over the years the lines between these gender roles and how they are performed have become increasingly blurred, sometimes to the point of interchangeability.

2.3 – Gender and Representation

This then brings up the idea of gender theory; if *Doctor Who* operates within a genre that adheres to ideas about gender to the degree that the action genre does, gender theory must be central to its exploration. The presentation of stereotypical gender roles in such a popular medium as television dictates the way in which society is likely to view persons who seemingly fit (or do not fit) those stereotypes. One of the most influential writers on gender theory is Judith Butler. In her book *Gender Trouble* (1990), Butler states that female representation “seeks to extend visibility and legitimacy to women.” (3) Feminist theory posits that seeing a woman in a certain political field, holding a certain job, or even playing a certain part in a television show allows for a more accurate representation of women and womanhood. Butler goes on to say that feminist theory has consequently complicated this idea by noting that representation of womanhood in the most general of terms in turn only allows for a limited perception of womanhood. Butler explains that “the qualifications for being a subject [of representation] must first be met before representation can be extended." (4) In other words, society as a collective first decides what exactly constitutes 'being a woman', before someone can represent these predetermined characteristics to a larger audience.

Butler also posits that gender is a performance, rather than a constant or essential state of being. This is in line with the feminist ideas about female representation. Over time, society has constructed what constitutes femininity and masculinity, or the male and female gender; Butler then goes on to say that

> "[g]ender ought not to be considered as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*." (qtd. in Hekman, 9)

This performative nature of gender has since been embraced by feminist movements and queer theorists.

John Fiske shares these ideas on gender, and further explains how such ideals are encoded in television programs in his book. When analyzing even the simplest of jokes, Fiske states that not only is there a

> complexity of meanings encoded in what is frequently taken to be shallow and superficial, but it also implies that this complexity and subtlety has a powerful effect upon the audience. It implies that the wide variety of codes all cohere to present a unified set of meanings that work to maintain, legitimate, and naturalize the dominant ideology of patriarchal capitalism. (13)

Fiske notes that there are codes for gender, codes for economics, even codes to indicate aesthetics, and these codes all work together to send a unified and ideological message to a specific audience. In this same way, television broadcasts have the power to instill ideas about gender in the audiences who consume such broadcasts.

2.4 – Feminism and Auteurship

From these ideas on gender, ideas about feminism can then be constructed. As has been noted above, Butlers insights into the performative nature of gender have inspired feminist movements and queer theories, both of which will resurface in the body of this thesis. Feminism is most generally defined by the *Encyclopedia of Global Studies* as "a doctrine that aims to improve the position of women" (560) in society. Important here to note is that the ultimate goal of feminism is equality between the sexes, not the superiority of women over men. Also important to state is that feminism still aims to explore differences between the sexes, its goal is simply for such differences to not *make* a difference.

As feminism focuses on the equality of the sexes, it is important in the context of this thesis as equality also encapsulates equal representation in media. The representation of female characters and femininity in *Doctor Who* as a worldwide television broadcast influences the perception of the audience towards these topics (according to the 'hypodermic' model that Morley describes). Equal representation on television engenders equality in the real world, and vice versa equality in the real world causes popular television shows to shift their focus away from a singularly male (and heteronormative) perspective towards a more diverse one. What is interesting to note here is that Ryan and Macey quote Susan J. Douglas in *Television and the Self* who states that "much of what we watched was porous, allowing us to accept and rebel against what we saw and how it was presented." (3) This would imply that even viewing non-feminist inflected narratives with little to no accurate female representation on television still allowed an audience to rebel against these ideas. While the media is indeed very influential in shaping society's views, this influence is not always as straightforward as may seem.

With these insights on television, gender, and feminism laid out, there is one literary theory this thesis will not take into account: auteur theory. At first glance, this theory may seem relevant, as television episodes have a writer and a director just like a motion picture has. However, across all seasons of *Doctor Who*, there have been a total of approximately 104 writers and 144 directors involved with the show. And while the same writer and/or director may have worked on a couple of episodes or even an entire season of *Doctor Who*, the episodes this thesis will look at span many different seasons, and thus span many different writers. For this reason, auteur theory has been excluded as a relevant theory for this thesis.

2.5 – Key Terminology

Before this thesis fully moves into the close analysis of the selected episodes, it is important to explain a few key terms that will be mentioned throughout this work in order to fully understand it. A couple of these terms are *Doctor Who*-specific, and a couple are more generally from the world of television and television shows.

To start, I will first discuss the *Doctor Who*-specific terms. These essentially all hang together in their meanings, and their explanations will simultaneously provide a very concise premise of the show as a whole. The Doctor is from an alien race who call themselves the Time Lords, and who originate from a planet called Gallifrey. As such, the Doctor is both referred to as a Time Lord and as a Gallifreyan throughout the show. Another prominent Time Lord in the show is their oldest friend and oldest enemy, the Master. This character was introduced fairly early in the classic *Doctor Who* series and is essentially the antithesis of the Doctor's character. Where the Doctor attempts to stay away from direct conflict, the Master is intent on creating it. In the beginning, the Doctor denounced the Time Lords and their practices, and ran away from their home planet in a stolen TARDIS, a time machine. TARDIS stands for Time and Relative Dimension in Space, an acronym which accounts for the machine being bigger on the inside. As its interior is much larger than its exterior, this time machine is supposed to be adaptive, taking the shape of something innocuous from wherever it has appeared in order to blend in with its surroundings, but due to a malfunction the Doctor's TARDIS is permanently stuck in the shape of a blue British police box. While on the run, the Doctor grew especially attached to Earth, and as such is almost always joined by one or more companions on their adventures. These companions, who are most often human women, is what this thesis will focus most of its attention on.

It is important to note here that the role of 'companion' has become somewhat vague over the runtime of both *Doctor Who*-series. As will also be discussed in the introduction to the body of this thesis, Stephen Brook states in an article that "what constitutes a *Doctor Who* companion is no longer clear," a trend especially noticeable in the revived series. While some characters quite clearly fulfill this role (examples according to Brook are Rose, Martha, and Donna), others are left much more hanging in their role (Brook here names Mickey and Jackie).

To continue, the following terms are more television-specific. The first of these terms relates to a larger concept which only fairly recently became more widely used within the world of television and television shows: 'retconning' or 'to retcon'. 'Retcon' is an abbreviation that stands for 'retroactive continuity', and refers to the practice of providing new information which intends to shed a different light on or change one's opinion of previous events in a show or series. In an article titled "Words We're Watching: A Short History of 'Retcon'", *Merriam-Webster* further elaborates that:

> retcons are often encountered in serial formats such as comic books or television series, where they serve as a means of allowing the work's creators to create a parallel universe, reintroduce a character, or explore plot lines that would otherwise be in conflict with the work.

While the definition of 'retconning' itself has no obvious negative connotations, it is most often used in a negative sense. Fans of a show often speak out against elements of shows they feel are retcon-elements, as they (often rightly so) feel that these elements are cop-outs. For example, instead of finding a legitimate motivation for a character's actions that fits within the canon of a show and holds well with the characterization established up to that point, a showrunner might retcon something which has been long-established and accepted as a show element, sometimes even tearing down 'canonical' elements of the show in the process. 'Retconning' and its issues, especially as they relate to the contents of this thesis, will be further expanded upon in the main analytical chapters of this thesis.

That introduces another term relevant to this thesis: 'canon'. Essentially the same as a literary canon, the canon of a show refers to the body of established episodes that is accepted as being an official part of the story a show attempts to tell. For *Doctor Who* this canon encompasses all episodes of both the classic *Doctor Who* series and the 2005 revival series, as well as the 1996-movie released on television only. However, it does not always include the contents of all these episodes. This is because the show has had numerous showrunners, writers and directors, who have sometimes added elements and storylines to the show that have been widely contested (also referring back to the term 'retconning', to be further discussed below).

As a final note, this thesis will wherever possible refer to both the Doctor and the Master as 'they,' unless a specific regeneration portrayed by either a male or female actor is specified. Moreover, all transcriptions from scene to text were done by me. Now with the literary framework and formalities laid out and the appropriate terminology introduced, this thesis will move into the close analysis of the relevant characters and episodes.

Chapter 3 – Companions

"Doctor, don't travel alone."

The body of this thesis will be divided up into nine parts; each sub-heading is named for the companion discussed therein. With each individual companion, this thesis will explore aspects of female representation and gender portrayals in *Doctor Who*. These companions and aspects are as follows (in order of discussion):

- Susan Foreman, and the precedent she set for all companions to come;
- Sarah Jane Smith, and ideas on second wave feminism and female liberation;
- Rose Tyler, and the introduction of romantic subplots in popular (science fiction) media;
- Martha Jones, and the inclusion and representation of women of color;
- Donna Noble, and ideas on female authority and autonomy;
- River Song, and insights into gender roles and androgyny;
- Bill Potts, and the inclusion and mainstream representation of LGBTQ+ individuals;
- Missy, and the villainization (and redemption) of the female character;
- The 13th Doctor, and the importance of female representation and female-led television shows.

As a general introduction, it is important to establish the role of a companion on *Doctor Who*. Through time, the term 'companion' in reference to *Doctor Who* has always been slightly vague. Stephen Brook notes in an article for *The Guardian* that "what constitutes a *Doctor Who* companion is no longer clear. […] How do you qualify? Name in the opening credits, regular trips in the Tardis? The Doctor kisses you?" Many official and unofficial fan sites explain that the Doctor's companions are simply those who are his best friends, and know his innermost secrets (e.g. the fact that he is an alien). The role of companion has undergone some changes over the years, as this thesis will also reveal. On the classic series, Britton and Barker note in their chapter “Originality and Conservatism in the Imagery of *Doctor Who*” that the “narrative function of the Doctor’s girl companion was to get into trouble, and [the Doctor’s] role was to get them out of it” (146) Note here that Britton and Barker specifically point out female companions, as the Doctor has had male companions over the years too.

While this thesis will largely only discuss the companions from the revived series, the companions from the classic series are important to discuss within the context of Doctor Who’s progressive development, because they form the basis of what this thesis will explore. Each companion laid the groundwork for the next companion to start building from, and so it is important not to skip over the first and more influential ones.

While still on the topic of scholarly debate on *Doctor Who*, there has not been a great deal written on the show within an academic context. Britton and Barker are one example. Another is James Chapman, who wrote about the longevity of the show in his article “Fifty Years in the TARDIS: The Historical Moments of *Doctor Who*”. He argues that “the success and longevity of *Doctor Who* has been due in large measure to its ability to negotiate the shifting institutional and cultural landscapes of British television,” drawing parallels with the James Bond franchise as well. (43-44) And in large part the contents of this thesis will agree with Chapman’s findings. Furthermore, Chapman wrote *Inside the Tardis: The Worlds of Doctor Who*, in which he lays out the entire history of *Doctor Who*, encompassing both the classic and revived series. Similarly, Kim Newman wrote *Doctor Who*, a work focusing only on the classic series, in which he expands more on the regenerative aspect of the show and how precisely that came to be a key component of it.

Other prominent writers on the subject of *Doctor Who*, especially in relation to gender, are Valerie Estelle Frankel and Lorna Jowett. Frankel wrote *Women in Doctor Who*, in which she explores the ways in which the show utilizes and presents archetypal females ranging from damsels in distress to memorable villains. Similarly, Lorna Jowett explores the presentation of gender in *Doctor Who* in her work *Dancing with the Doctor: Dimensions of Gender in the Doctor Who Universe*, also taking into account showrunners and episode directors.

Now with the relevant works and authors laid out, this thesis will move into its close analysis of the companions.

3.1 – Susan Foreman

“Grandfather and I don’t come from Earth.”

Susan Foreman is the very first companion of the very first ever incarnation of the Doctor. She is the one that has set the bar for all companions to come. Her character is introduced as an exceptionally bright fifteen-year-old girl with skills in history and science who lives with her grandfather, seemingly in an old junk yard. She is also presented as being a little odd; when she is lent a rather thick book by a teacher, she says she’ll finish reading it in one afternoon, and she “rather like[s] walking in the English fog,” as if she is not from Earth and has never seen the English fog. What’s more, she continually seems to have knowledge from the future (instantly apparent to a modern-day viewer); when she answers a question by stating that the British had adopted the decimal system, she exclaims “Yes of course! The decimal system hasn’t started yet!” And as it turns out, she is not from Earth. She is the granddaughter of the Doctor, and they are both from an alien planet called Gallifrey. They are now fugitives, who are hiding out on Earth in their TARDIS.

Susan is often referred to as a brilliant young girl. In “An Unearthly Child,” one of her teachers says of Susan that she “knows more science than I’ll ever know. She’s a genius.” Further on in the episode, Susan shows of her ingenuity once more. As the Doctor, Susan, and her two teachers are transported to the Stone Age, they are captured by cavepeople who demand they give them the gift of fire. Susan finds out that placing an animal skull over a fire will make it seem like there are spirits in the cave, scaring away the cavepeople and allowing the group to escape back to the TARDIS. Her character is smart and able to think on her feet.

Nevertheless, throughout her run as the Doctor's companion, she is most often portrayed as a naïve and hysterical teenager. She often gets the Doctor and her other companions into trouble. What is more, Susan's character is done away with rather bluntly. In "The Dalek Invasion of Earth" Susan falls for a young man from the twenty-second century. Her mounting feelings for this man make her wonder if she should leave her grandfather behind. However, before she can well and truly make her own decision on the matter, the Doctor decides for her and locks her out of the TARDIS as it dematerializes. As he locks her out of the TARDIS, he tells her:

> I want you to belong somewhere, to have roots of your own. With David, you'll be able to find those roots and live normally like any woman should do.

While the Doctor's intentions may have been good, men making decisions for women is very much a product of the sixties clearly reflected on television. Moreover, his expectation for Susan is still very much heteronormative and patriarchal in nature: she should settle down and find some roots, implying she should start a family and become a (house)wife.

Though Susan set the bar for future companions, it is expected that she and other women in the episode are very much a product of their time. Second-wave feminism only started to gain traction in the late 1960s, some five years after the first episode of *Doctor Who* aired. This second feminist wave was introduced by writers such as Simone de Beauvoir and Betty Friedan, who examined the place of women in society in their works *The Second Sex* (1949) and *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). Though De Beauvoir was well before her time with her critical work, the influence of these works would not be found in *Doctor Who* until the arrival of companions like Liz Shaw and Sarah Jane Smith in the early

1970s. Simple clues of the lack of a feminist inflection can be found all throughout the first series. In the very first episode, the Doctor confronts the two teachers who had been following Susan to the TARDIS. While both the male and female teachers speak to the Doctor, telling them they are adamant Susan is inside the police box, the Doctor takes aside the male teacher and implores him to think logically that Susan would never fit inside the box, leaving the female teacher to herself. 'The men' are speaking.

In later seasons, jokes have been made about the 'backwardness' of the initial seasons of *Doctor Who*, and of the first Doctor specifically. In the 2017 Christmas special "Twice Upon a Time," where the twelfth regeneration of the Doctor meets the first, and they both refuse to regenerate. When confusion arises over who is who, the following conversation starts:

> *(The First Doctor speaking to a commander of the British Army, who is feeling slightly unwell)*
>
> DOCTOR 1: Older gentlemen, like women, can be put to use.
>
> DOCTOR 12: You can't, you, you, you can't say things like that…
>
> DOCTOR 1: Can't I? Says who?
>
> DOCTOR 12: Just about everyone you're going to meet for the rest of your life.
>
> *(The conversation progresses, and the First Doctor remarks on the lack of cleanliness on board the TARDIS)*
>
> DOCTOR 1: Yes, in fact this whole place could do with a good dusting. Obviously Polly isn't around anymore.
>
> DOCTOR 12: Please, please. Please stop saying things like that.

Over the years, the show has become self-aware enough to acknowledge that the characterizations of its earlier seasons are no longer acceptable. And as the show has progressed, characterizations like Susan's have become more and more scarce, as this thesis will attempt to highlight.

3.2 – Sarah Jane Smith

“Call me old girl again and I’ll spit in your eye.”

While the companions from the classic *Doctor Who* era in no way display the independence and authority that the revival-era companions do, they do have moments where they inhabit the gray area between traditional and more modern gender ideals. One such companion is Sarah Jane Smith, who was first introduced in “The Time Warrior,” the first serial episode of the eleventh classic *Doctor Who* season. She also went on to become the longest ever serving companion of the Doctor, joining both the third and fourth regeneration of the Doctor for four seasons, as well as star in her own spin-off series titled *The Sarah Jane Adventures*. Such a track record alone is proof of her appeal, which is in part due to her more non-traditional characterization.

Some exceptions notwithstanding (such as Zoe (Wendy Padbury) and Liz Shaw (Caroline John)), Sarah Jane’s character breaks the overwhelming precedent set by Susan Foreman and other companions before her. Much of this change in character for a companion can be attributed to second wave feminism, which came to prominence in the 70s. According to Andrea L. Press, in the late 70s and early 80s it was not uncommon to see “strong women working in non-traditional positions” on television. Sarah Jane’s character can in some ways be viewed as such. She is more independent than companions before her, though in the context of *Doctor Who* she still inhabits the traditional position of companion.

Right in Sarah Jane’s introductory episode “The Time Warrior”, she challenges established beliefs on the respective roles of men and women, which are only emphasized by the fact that she and the Doctor traveled to a medieval castle and village. In the episode, Sarah Jane travels with the Doctor as a stowaway on board the TARDIS to the England of the Middle Ages. Sarah Jane quickly discovers how women are viewed in this historic setting. When one of the men she has met there pulls Sarah Jane aside saying “I still say this is no work for women,” she quickly replies “I wouldn’t have missed this for anything.” Sarah Jane steps outside of the female stereotype set by years of one-sided representation of women in media. At a further point in the episode, Sarah Jane voices her dissatisfaction with the arrangement of work in the castle they are staying at. She tells the Doctor “Oh. Typically masculine arrangement, though. We [women] do all the dirty work, you [men] get all the fun.” At this point in time, she has no established rapport with the Doctor, but she is not afraid to call out an unjust situation when she sees one.

Sarah Jane also proves that she is more than just a helpless companion who is there to get in trouble and be saved. There are even examples in the series where she is the one to save the Doctor from a bad situation. As Sarah Jane is an investigative journalist before she meets the Doctor, she often goes off without the Doctor’s knowledge or consent to investigate a situation. However, there are still many moments across Sarah Jane’s seasons where her character returns to the set concept of helpless ‘girl companion.’ Many examples of this can be seen in “Pyramids of Mars,” the third serial episode of the thirteenth season of *Doctor Who*. In this episode, the Doctor has to tell Sarah Jane what to do multiple times. At one point in the episode, Sarah Jane even admits to the Doctor “I was waiting for you to tell me what to do.” On many fronts, Sarah Jane is still very much operating within the pre-feminist concept of a companion. On the surface this very much connects to the appeal of the show, in which the Doctor is an extremely wise and intelligent alien who has traveled across the galaxy for hundreds of years. However, Sarah Jane has already proven she is no stranger to rebuking or admonishing the Doctor when she disagrees with him, or expressing her feelings even when they are contrary to the Doctor’s. Still overwhelmingly, the *Doctor Who* audience needed a ‘traditional’ companion, meaning Sarah Jane sometimes still needed to be told what to do by the Doctor.

However, proof of Sarah Jane's strong character can still be found, namely in the fact that she is one of the only classic *Doctor Who* companions who has made a reappearance in several revived *Doctor Who* episodes, as well as starred in her own spin off shows. She came back during the Tenth Doctor's run, in which she helped Rose reflect on a possible future in which her and the Doctor are no longer together. Her character is emancipated to such a degree that it still fits with the revived-era *Doctor Who*, and she is still able to be relatable to a newer *Doctor Who* audience, as well as able to lend some sage advice to newer companions.

Sarah Jane is by far not the only companion from the classic-*Doctor Who* to display such feminist-inflected characteristics; she is simply the one that set the true precedent. After her, many more companions came who seemed to be on a more equal footing with the Doctor. An example of such an independent and knowledgeable character (who actually came before Sarah Jane) is Liz Shaw. She is a scientist at UNIT, a government agency tasked with handling extraterrestrial occurrences. She was very much on equal footing with the Doctor, being a scientist herself. One reason Liz and other companions have been omitted from this thesis is that these often seemed to leave the show after only a few episodes. Nonetheless, their presences, though short-lived, still helped the show grow towards where it is currently.

3.3 – Rose Tyler

"Her name was Rose."

Markedly different from companions that had gone before her, Rose Tyler's story arc was very much set to introduce a new era of *Doctor Who*. She is the very first companion of the ninth Doctor, introduced in the very first episode of the revived series. This first episode of the new season is also aptly titled "Rose," foreshadowing her importance as a character. The new era of *Doctor Who* faced new challenges, and required new roads to be taken. A *Televisual* article from 2005, just before the new series was about to air, states that "*Doctor Who* was never a space drama anyway, it was about horror." But mainstream television audiences were no longer looking for horror; after the rise of shows like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003), audiences were looking for darker romance and emotional attachment. The same *Televisual* article corroborates this idea, quoting Russell T. Davies: "In the 60s we could watch programmes like *Randall and Hopkirk* because we were happy with the spectacle, but now we're more adult and we expect that emotional content." And precisely that emotional content is what Rose Tyler's character and story arc were set to provide. With this revival, the show was moving away from more classic science fiction themes, which often focused on larger ideas about the human condition, rather than character and character development.

On the surface, Rose's character did what all companion characters did before her; she accompanied the Doctor on their travels, she asked the right questions to get and keep the story moving, and she occasionally got into just enough trouble to need rescuing by the Doctor. In the *Televisual* article mentioned above, Russell T. Davies elaborates on the new companion that "[she] can be our eyes, discovering spaceships and alien creatures with awe and wonder, and a vital sense of humour." She provided the audience (who were assumed to include new fans of *Doctor Who*) with a solid link to the Doctor and their adventures, because she was the relatable aspect of the show. And what is more, critic reviews about her debut were positive. Looking back ten years later, Louisa Mellor writes in her article "10 Years of New *Doctor Who*: What 2005 Reviews Made of "Rose"" that at the time, "Rose Tyler was labelled a chav, a sidekick, a post-feminist, and more the Doctor's equal than previous companions." Such qualities were precisely what the television audience of 2005 was needing from new shows.

Rose's character as it's introduced to the audience is very aptly described by Robin McKie in their review of the first episode of the new *Doctor Who*: "Rose lives on a housing estate, has flunked her A-levels, is stuck with a dodgy, compensation-seeking mum, possesses a fine estuary accent and has a black boyfriend." Similarly, Patrick Mulkern wrote in his review in the *Radio Times*:

> As the episode title makes clear, it's all about Rose Tyler – a young woman with a humdrum life, who's sleepy in the opening moments but soon wakens to the mystery, the magic and enticing dangers offered by the Time Lord and his Tardis. And she takes legions of new viewers along with her.

Critics agreed that Rose's character was simultaneously the one in charge of drawing in new viewership and keeping their attention. On all levels, she was intended to be relatable to the average British viewership. And this required her to be more than just a sidekick, like the classic companions; she needed something a little more progressive, she needed something that would hook the average British audience more. It is important to note here that Billie Piper, who portrayed Rose Tyler, had been quite famous before she was cast to play the new companion. She was a well-known singer in the United Kingdom, and so her portrayal of Rose would garner instant recognition among newer viewers.

Apart from introducing the new *Doctor Who* series, "Rose" highlights some important aspects of the Doctor's character. When Rose (and thus the audience) first meets the Doctor, he is an eccentric stranger, travelling alone through space and time. The bulk of the television audience will most likely not have seen the classic *Doctor Who* series, or even the 1996 movie, and thus know next to nothing about the Doctor as a character. "Rose" highlights that the Doctor needs a companion to travel with. When Rose initially rejects his offer for her to travel with the Doctor, he quickly finds another reason for her to want to accept anyway. And she does, completing the Doctor/companion-formula to set off the new season.

Rose travels with the Doctor through a regeneration cycle, and it is after that regeneration the truly relevant character developments take place. Where Rose's infatuation with the Doctor started with the ninth regeneration of the Doctor, she fell in love with the tenth. And precisely this romance is what sets Rose Tyler apart from previous companions of the Doctor. None of the companions before her had had a serious romantic plot arc which involved the Doctor. And when this romance between Rose and the Doctor became more and more undeniable, fans were quick to judge. In his article "Machines will break your heart", Andrew Harrison notes:

> There is a simpler reason why love has seldom dominated the science fiction landscape. Who has time for romance when the planet is doomed? […] Yet the delicate combination of pop entertainment and the never spoken attraction between Rose and the Doctor helped make it the most successful revival in television history. (50)

The romantic arc that developed between Rose and the Doctor over the course of the two seasons comes especially to the fore in "Doomsday," the final episode of the second season of *Doctor Who*. This episode is the second half of a two-part story. In the episode previous, a government headquarters called UNIT was taken over by Cybermen, after which four Daleks emerged from a so-called ‘void ship’, ready to lay waste to the Earth. The Daleks decline any form of cooperation with the Cybermen, and consequently kill two of them. In the meantime, the Doctor has found out that this ‘void ship’ was intended to travel between different dimensions, which is where the Daleks have come from as well. Ultimately, as the fight between the Cybermen, the Daleks and the humans comes to a head, the Doctor is forced to close the breach between worlds, causing anyone who has travelled to or from the other universe to be pulled back into that universe; this includes Rose.

As Rose is now trapped in this parallel universe, she can be seen slamming the wall she just disappeared through, breaking down crying as she yells “Take me back! *Take me back!*” Similarly, the Doctor can be seen leaning his head against that same wall in the other universe, mirroring Rose’s pose; this is a clear indicator that he loved Rose as much as she loved them. Over the following seasons, the audience gets a little bit of resolution to their love story: at the end of season four, Donna accidentally creates a second version of the Doctor, one that is purely human. This version goes to live with Rose in her alternate universe, ready to pick up their on-again-off-again relationship. In a way, this was the most satisfying way to end the Rose/Doctor relationship for the audiences. As the Doctor is nearing a thousand years old, and Rose is only around twenty-five, they could never realistically form a long-lasting couple. And yet audiences wanted that resolution to the will-they-won’t-they plotline introduced by David Tennant’s Doctor.

Though Rose’s character introduced the new *Doctor Who*, and added a layer of romance to the established formula, these factors did not seem to stick over the years. While romance in general did become a more integral part of *Doctor Who* (see for example Amy and Rory’s plotline over the seasons), romantic arcs which included the Doctor remained scarce. The one true exception to this rule is River Song, as this thesis will point out later.

3.4 – Martha Jones

"I'm dr. Martha Jones. Who the hell are you?"

Martha Jones is the Doctor's second companion, joining them throughout the third season of the revived *Doctor Who*. Martha is introduced in "Smith and Jones," the first episode of the third season of *Doctor Who*. In it, the hospital where Martha has her internship is transported to the Moon by the Judoon, the alien for-hire police force, because a fugitive criminal is hiding somewhere in the hospital. Over the course of the episode, Martha and the Doctor help the Judoon figure out where the fugitive is and capture them.

The episode establishes a lot about Martha's character. To start, she is not easily fazed. When the entire hospital building is transported to the moon, she and the Doctor can be found on a balcony. She is perplexed as to how she is able to breathe, but in no way panicky about being on the moon. Ironically, she is very down to Earth, telling the Doctor she has a party tonight. She even acknowledges they may die any second, unfazed. She quickly figures out on her own that the hospital was transported to the moon by some extraterrestrial power, as she is resourceful and intelligent. When she then asks about the Doctor's identity, this exchange follows:

> MARTHA: What, people call you 'the Doctor'?
> THE DOCTOR: Yeah…
> MARTHA: Well I'm not. Far as I'm concerned you've got to earn that title.

Her character is quickly established: she doesn't accept nonsense, and values authority. And this scene as a whole sets a precedent for her time with the Doctor; she looks up to them, but with a certain amount of skepticism.

While Martha is decidedly more independent and self-sufficient when compared to Rose, in some aspects she is still very much following the same formula set out by her. Martha too is attracted to the Doctor romantically, though it is an unreciprocated attraction. In “Human Nature” (2007) Martha admits these feelings to a brainwashed Doctor (and the audience), saying “You had to, didn’t you? You had to go and fall in love with a human, and it wasn’t me.” While Martha’s character indicates a step forward in terms of minority inclusion, by no means does it mean the series was entirely uprooted and changed. What is new to the classic Rose/Doctor-formula, is the fact that Martha is independent enough to work through and get over her feelings for the Doctor. When the audience sees Martha again in “The End of Time” (2009-10), she is engaged to be married to Mickey Smith, the on-again-off-again boyfriend of Rose Tyler, indicating that she has gotten over her feelings for the Doctor. One critic years later wrote: “only Martha is brave enough to realise she doesn’t need the Doctor forever and can do good on her own terms, using what she learned.” Though she is (or was) in love with the Doctor, she has grown and learned since then. It is a character development that wasn’t allotted to Rose, or even Donna.

One difference between Martha and Rose (and classic *Doctor Who* companions) is the fact that Martha is a black woman. What is interesting is that the show does not seem to dwell on Martha’s ethnicity at all (a recurring aspect, as will also be discussed in Bill Potts’ section of this thesis). Though Martha’s ethnicity is an implicitly accepted part of her character, it does help shape society’s view of people like her. By including people of color in popular media, a show like *Doctor Who* acknowledges that everyone can be a companion to the Doctor, no matter their skin color. Mohamed Zayani puts this very pointedly in his article, “Media, Cultural Diversity and Globalization: Challenges and Opportunities.” He argues that “the accessibility of media, the free flow of information and the free exchange of views have been instrumental in promoting tolerance, understanding and co-existence." (50) As *Doctor Who* is decidedly a part of the accessible and popular media, its inclusions of people of all ethnicities (more increasingly across the years) has helped foster this space of tolerance and understanding.

It is interesting to note that Martha Jones was not the first person of color to join the Doctor on their adventures. In the revived series, Rose's boyfriend Mickey, a black man, sporadically joined the two on their trips. However, Mickey had far from the influence on *Doctor Who* that Martha had; moreover, he was often referred to in derogatory ways by the Doctor. But where Martha set the precedent, more people of color soon followed. The Twelfth Doctor travelled with Bill Potts, a mixed-race woman, and the current Doctor travels with Ryan and Yasmin, a black man and an Indian woman respectively.

3.5 – Donna Noble

“Donna, human, no!”

Donna Noble is the Doctor’s third companion in the revived series. The Doctor and Donna first meet very briefly in the final scene of “Doomsday,” the season 2 finale episode, where she materializes in the TARDIS in a wedding dress, as she has just dematerialized from her own wedding. Donna’s story is then picked up in “The Runaway Bride,” the 2006 Christmas special following season 2. Immediately, Donna is introduced as a female character with much more ‘spunk’ than the previous companions. In her new and very unfamiliar surroundings (namely, a space ship), she demands from the Doctor: “Tell me where I am! I demand you to tell me *right now* where am I?” after which she immediately accuses him of kidnapping her. This line, and the entire scene surrounding it (in which she also accuses the Doctor of abducting other women before her), set a precedent for Donna’s character throughout the season: she is an independent, smart and adaptive woman who will tell others what she is thinking at all times.

This characterization of Donna is very much aided by the fact that she is portrayed by Catherine Tate, a well-known comedy actor. Within the comedy genre, element like love and romance are much less prevalent already, and certainly dealt with on a much more superficial level when they *are* present, and so casting someone like Tate to play the new companion of the Doctor signified that the showrunners were moving away from the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*-esque, romance-led plots set forth by Rose Tyler and Martha Jones.

When the audience is first introduced to Donna, she has just disappeared from her own wedding ceremony. Now, as Judith Butler posits in her book *Gender Trouble*, gender is a performance. Society collectively decides which traits and characteristics in a person constitute femininity and masculinity, within which confines the corresponding genders are then expected to operate. One archetypal moment in which such stereotypical gender is performed is precisely at a wedding ceremony like the one Donna has just come from. The bride, who represents the epitome of the female gender performance, is escorted by her father to be given away to her future husband, both of whom perform the ultimate male gender stereotypes. This view of a wedding ceremony as stereotypically gendered is corroborated by Jost and Hunyady in their chapter, "The Psychological System Justification and the Palliative Function of Ideology." They posit that a wedding is precisely where "people seek to maintain or enhance the legitimacy and stability of existing forms of social arrangements." (113) Initially, Donna participates in this stereotypical and ideological performance of gender, appearing in front of the Doctor in a white wedding dress, being in a hurry to return back to said wedding, even mentioning that she has been waiting all her life for a wedding like this. She lives in a world where gender is performed stereotypically, and her character is introduced to the audience as being very similar in terms of femininity to the companions that have gone before her. However, she quickly steps outside of these stereotypes as she realizes her husband-to-be has collaborated behind her back with the alien race of that particular episode (as well as started the reception without her).

At the end of this very same episode, the Doctor tells Donna he has no idea why she appeared in his TARDIS, telling her "it's weird, I mean, you're not special, you're not powerful, you're not connected, you're not clever, you're not important." Yet despite all these nondescripts, it is precisely Donna who appeared in the TARDIS. Donna may not be (or rather seems not to be) special in any way, her character is proven time and again to have a certain sway over the Doctor and their decision making, as both "The Fires of Pompeii" and "Turn Left" will prove. What is more, Donna is essentially the first companion of the Doctor to truly blur the set line between male and female gender performance as set out by Butler, making her a more active participant in the narrative and thus granting her more authority and autonomy as a female character.

Finally, where Rose and the Doctor very clearly shared a romantic connection, Donna and the Doctor share no such romantic bond. One quickly established running joke throughout Donna's season is that she and the Doctor are not a couple, as minor characters quickly assume they are involved romantically. And the show makes no attempts to change this fact; Donna and the Doctor share a deep though platonic friendship, in which some mutual comedic flirting is not out of the ordinary. Nonetheless, when minor characters automatically assume that Donna and the Doctor are together, they sigh deeply, roll their eyes, and say "We're not a couple". Similarly, in "Midnight," Donna hangs up a phone call with the Doctor in which they agree to meet up later, telling him: "It's a date. Well, not a date. Oh you know what I mean. Oh get off!" She clearly shuts down any romantic possibilities between her and the Doctor, while simultaneously joking about the farfetched possibility.

As has been noted above, when discussing Donna Noble as a character, two terms especially come to mind: female authority and female autonomy. The former will be discussed within the context of "The Fires of Pompeii", the latter in the context of "Turn Left."

As was stated earlier in this section, Donna has a certain sway over the Doctor that previous companions seemed to lack. In "The Fires of Pompeii," Donna and the Doctor visit Pompeii just before the Vesuvius was set to erupt. The Doctor explains to Donna (and the audience) that this event is a set point in time, and there is nothing they can do to alter any of the things that are about to happen. Consequently, over the course of the episode, Donna grows more and more dissatisfied with the idea of ‘just letting Pompeii burn’. When the Doctor tells Donna to hold her tongue in the presence of a Roman politician, she plainly says to him “Listen, I don't know what sort of kids you've been flying ‘round with in outer space, but you're not telling me to shut up.” Donna displays a certain authority over herself that previous character seemed to lack.

In the final scenes of the episode, when the eruption of the Vesuvius causes Donna and the Doctor to have to leave Pompeii, Donna pleads with the Doctor to save the people. The Doctor counters that he simply can’t, Pompeii is a set point in history, and he can do nothing to change that. With tears in her eyes, Donna asks the Doctor: “Just someone. Please. Not the whole town. Just save someone.” Ultimately, this causes the Doctor to save a family of Romans they encountered over the course of the episode. Donna convinced the Doctor to take action, and the Doctor acted on it, because he trusts Donna’s judgement and advice. This scene is indeed a good example of the blurred lines between male and female gender roles, as Donna displays traits from both. She feels she has the authority to ask the Doctor to save someone from the disaster of Pompeii (quite a male character trait), yet she is emotionally overwhelmed by the events (where emotional instability is stereotypically female). Both male and female traits come together in Donna’s character.

Now, it is not the most outrageous leap of faith to make for Donna to start blurring the lines between male and female gender performance, as the Doctor was never the stereotypical male that the action genre requires. Where the genre calls for a buff, archetypal male character, the Doctor has always been a ‘gangly’ pacifist, and most of the time an old man. The Doctor is always being shot at, but never the one shooting. Donna has instead adopted the more stereotypically ‘manly’ traits that the Doctor sometimes lacks; she speaks her mind, she makes plans, she stands up for herself. And the Doctor accepts and respects her authority.

This protection of and authority over her own identity can also be found in "Turn Left," the eleventh episode of the fourth season of *Doctor Who*. To start, this episode focuses almost solely on Donna Noble; the Doctor is very much absent the entire episode. In it, Donna is thrown into an alternate universe in which she turned right on a crossroads, which caused her to have never met the Doctor, which in turn made it so that the future was doomed. As the episode concludes, Donna is forced to go back in time and make herself turn left at the crossroads, which she does in the most drastic of ways: she throws herself in front of oncoming traffic, so that past-Donna has no choice but to turn left in order to avoid the resultant traffic jam. As such, the future version of Donna will cease to exist, as she will have never existed. Donna displays the ultimate form of authority over herself; she decides what she does with her body and her fate, no matter how devastating the consequences for herself.

3.6 – River Song

“I’m River Song. Check your records again.”

River Song is somewhat of an outlier within the context of this thesis. Her character is introduced to the Doctor and the audience in “Silence in the Library,” the eighth episode of the fourth season of *Doctor Who*. At this time, the Doctor is still travelling with Donna Noble. Moreover, River will not become their companion for some seasons. At her introduction, River seems to know quite a lot about the Doctor, while they have no idea who she is. Over their consecutive meetings, it is revealed that River is a time traveler just like the Doctor, and their stories are notoriously out of sync. When the Doctor first meets her, for River it is the last time she will ever see the Doctor (as she dies at the end of “Forest of the Dead”). Simply put, River and the Doctor are time travelling in opposite directions.

In a way, River continues the precedent set by Donna Noble; however, where Donna operates almost solely in the gray area between male and female space, River fully crosses that line at times. She is knowledgeable (more so than the Doctor at times, as for instance she knows how to fly the TARDIS properly), she is prepared to take direct action (which includes firing kill shots at potentially lethal enemies, something the Doctor is never prepared to do), and she takes the lead in difficult situations (even to the extent of sacrificing herself for the greater good in “Forest of the Dead”). Moreover, across the seasons she is first *doctor* River Song, and later *professor* River Song, indicating her intelligence and perseverance. She embodies something that Jack Halberstam has dubbed ‘female masculinity’ in his book of that same name. Halberstam posits quite simply that female masculinity is “framed as the rejected scraps of dominant masculinity in order that male masculinity may appear to be the real thing,” (1) in which example James Bond embodies the ultimate masculine male. His argumentation stands in line with Butler’s ideas on the performative nature of gender; he also notes a "mounting cultural indifference to the masculinity of white males." (41) With the rise of genders that alternate from the classic male/female system, lines between such genders can become more and more blurred. And this section argues that River Song is doing precisely that.

In almost all aspects, River is the stereotypical male to the Doctor's stereotypical female. However, she is also a product of feminism entering into the action genre. As Press notes in her book when talking of *Charlie's Angels*

> [they] were both active and attractive; their collaboration and command could appeal to feminist sensibilities; their glamour and sex appeal could also appeal to decidedly nonfeminist sensibilities, including the action genre's historically male audience. (35)

In many respects, River is like a Charlie's Angel; however, River is in many ways *more* feminist than the Angels. This may be expected of course, as River's characterization is not only set after second wave feminism, but set after third-wave feminism as well. Audiences had come to expect more than *just* a pretty lady who also kicks ass. River has more substance.

Many of River's non-stereotypical characteristics can be found in her introductory episode. In "Silence in the Library," the Doctor meets River for the first time. For River, however, she has seen the Doctor a million times before. She is introduced as the leader of an archeological expedition. When she recognizes the Doctor, she immediately asks them how they got into the library, skipping all pleasantries. When she realizes there's danger in the library, she orders her expedition party to do as she and the Doctor say. Later, she takes the lead and tells the Doctor "Okay, shall we do diaries then? Where are we this time?" Though her assumption that the Doctor knows who she is, is wrong, her characterization is no different from later seasons, confirming that she has always been an assertive leader.

There are some factors which complicate River's characterization. Though she is a very independently oriented, self-sufficient woman, she is also in love with the Doctor. A more complicated love story even than that of Rose and the Doctor, as River and the Doctor only meet incrementally. It is never certain which version of the Doctor meets which version of River. Nevertheless, River ultimately becomes the wife of the Doctor; as such, River's character does conform to stereotypical and patriarchal norms, something her character continually operates outside of. Even though this 'marriage' to the Doctor is almost nothing more than a simple agreement, it is established that River loves the Doctor and so values the marriage as a true one. In the later seasons River's marriage to the Doctor was subject to a critical backlash among online fan-communities. In the final scene of the Twelfth Doctor, in which they regenerate into Jodie Whittaker's version, the camera explicitly lingers on the Doctor's wedding ring, which falls off Whittaker's finger and disappears into the depths of the TARDIS. Many fans saw this as the show suddenly annulling the marriage, as it had now become a homosexual union. Because the Doctor is now female-presenting, their marriage to River Song no longer exists, which denies River the opportunity once again to step outside of heteronormative stereotypes of marriage.

Moreover, River is never 'just a human woman' travelling with the Doctor, as all companions before her have been. Because she was conceived on board the TARDIS, and was thus exposed to the time vortex, she has similar abilities to that of the Time Lords. From the start, she has been special, and from the start, she should be viewed as such.

3.7 – Bill Potts

"In amongst seven billion is someone like you."

Bill Potts is introduced in "The Pilot," the first episode of the tenth season of *Doctor Who*, as an employee at the university where the Doctor has been teaching (and hiding). Initially, she is unaware of the Doctor's true identity. As the episode progresses, she starts to develop feelings for a fellow student at the university: Heather. Her love interest is promptly turned into a water-based alien being, and she and the Doctor have to flee across space and time to escape it. As the episode comes to a close, it turns out that Heather wasn't chasing Bill and the Doctor to hurt or kill them, rather she simply wanted a travel companion.

This immediately offers a new insight into Bill's character: she is an openly gay woman. While this should by no means be a defining trait of her character (as she is more than *just* a lesbian), it is worth investigating why this revelation was such a (happy) shock for so much of *Doctor Who*'s audience. She is, for instance, also a woman of color, but that representational 'hurdle' had already been crossed by Martha Jones before her. When it became known that Bill would become the Doctor's next companion, critics were intrigued and enthusiastic. Not in the least because the opportunity of a romantic subplot involving the Doctor was quickly done away with; Stuart Heritage wrote in an article that "Fortunately, the appointments of the Twelfth Doctor (too old) and Bill Potts (too gay) put an end to this [chance of a romantic plot]." The show attempted to portray the Doctor as more of a paternal figure than a romantic interest. Audiences were no longer looking for the Rose-type romances that had been part of the show's initial appeal. It was time for inclusion, for representation. Of course, this makes sense: repeating the same formula of a young girl falling for an eccentric time-traveling alien will ultimately bore a loyal audience, and not attract any new viewers. Modern audiences who are still considering watching *Doctor Who* need more modern elements to get them excited. And so when episodes began to air, fans were still happy about the inclusion. Shanna Lieberman wrote in an article that she found Bill's sexuality especially well-handled, precisely because it wasn't made a big deal: "it wasn't treated like anything remarkable or unique at all – it just was."

Queer representation in media has been an issue for the longest time (and sometimes still is today); only recently has it become more and more acceptable for the (main) characters of television shows and movies to identify somewhere on the LGBTQ+-spectrum. And there are reasons for that. Gilad Padva writes in their article "Educating *The Simpsons*: Teaching Queer Representations in Contemporary Visual Media" that "most of the images that we encounter in popular communications reflect the experiences and interests of the majority groups in our society." (58) This explanation can be extended to cover the entirety of this thesis, as it can also apply to the representation of people of color, and even the representation of women in general if the majority audience is male(-identifying) (as it was in the days of classic *Doctor Who*). However, as the audience of the revived series was more evenly distributed across the genders, the show needed to reflect that too. As it happens, Bill Potts covers all three of these 'minority' groups mentioned by Padva, so her character furthers the representation of all three. Pearl Mackie, the actress who plays Bill Potts, acknowledges as much herself in an interview with *BBC News*, saying: "I remember watching TV as a young mixed race girl not seeing many people who looked like me, so I think being able to visually recognise yourself on screen is important."

It is important here to note that Bill Potts was not the first ever LGBTQ+-character to be featured on the show; aside from a few minor characters, and of course Madam

Vastra and Jenny, the first character with a regular appearance on the show who was part of the LGBTQ+-community was captain Jack Harkness (portrayed by John Barrowman, who is himself a gay man). Though the reason Bill Potts' character was lauded as the 'first ever openly gay companion' of the Doctor is because Jack Harkness' sexuality was never explicitly mentioned, or indeed explicitly dwelt upon longer than one or two scenes across its *Doctor Who* runtime. Only later in the *Torchwood* spin-off was his sexuality explored more deeply.

And as her sexuality wasn't ever made a big deal, there are only a few instances in her season-long run where the show acknowledges it, or focuses on it for more than a scene. One such instance comes in her introductory episode. Bill is explaining her tutoring arrangement with the Doctor, when her foster mother tells her "You need to keep your eye on men." Bill responds softly "Men aren't where I keep my eye, actually." If the audience had not yet picked up on Bill's interests in her fellow female classmate, such slightly less subtle hints help bring the point home. And where the soft tone of Bill's confession may lead the audience to believe that her foster mother would not so easily accept her same-sex attractions, the Doctor is certainly either too oblivious to notice or too uninterested to care negatively, offering Bill an escape into a space where she will be accepted unconditionally.

When Bill dies in "The Doctor Falls," it is Heather who comes to collect her. The ending was regarded as both satisfying and infuriating to audiences. On the one hand it very much played into the "Bury Your Gays" trope, in which queer characters are introduced and promptly killed off. This is indeed a valid argument, as Bill only served one season as the Doctor's companion. A little while after Bill Potts had been written out of the show, Jess Woodley-Stewart wrote in an article:

> The end of her first season caused disappointment from fans, despite the attempt to lessen her death by showing her as appearing to be living on as a spirit-like form, it still felt it was treading close to the trope.

On the other hand, as the quote mentions, Bill is reunited with her love interest, who explicitly tells her “You’re like me now. It’s just a different kind of living,” acknowledging that Bill may not be as dead as dead can be. Her plotline is resolved in a *Doctor Who* manner, and for a *Doctor Who* companion she lives ‘happily’ ever after.

3.8 – Missy

“Couldn’t very well keep calling myself the Master, now could I?”

First introduced in 1971, the Master is the Doctor’s oldest enemy. Moreover, as was soon revealed, the Doctor and the Master used to be best friends when they were growing up, and as such the Master is often referred to as the Doctor’s ‘best enemy.’ Same as the Doctor, the Master is a Time Lord; very different from the Doctor, the Master thrives on destruction and pain.

Before Missy’s introduction in 2014, the previous Master was presumed dead since 2010, from his final appearance in “The End of Time” (2010). Missy’s character is introduced to the audience gradually. As the audience had only ever experienced the Master portrayed by a male actor, this allowed the show to reveal Missy’s true identity slowly, bit by bit. In the episode “Dark Water,” the audience is shown a mysterious, eccentric woman who she says is the welcome droid of a special type of funeral home/mausoleum called 3W. Inside this mausoleum are large water tanks in which human skeletons are submerged in a substance called ‘dark water’; the mausoleum also preserves the consciences of the recently deceased, as they found out the dead remain aware of their cremation or burial after their death. As the episode comes to a head, it is revealed that the eccentric welcome droid is actually the female incarnation of the Master, who has now dubbed herself Missy (short for Mistress) to go with her new female identity, and the skeletons are actually Cybermen who heed Missy’s every command.

This introduction of the Master’s female regeneration opens the door to discussing the villainization of the female character. This is a tradition with a long history, starting as early as the witch trials of the late 1500s. Other examples can be found in fairytales, in which women are portrayed as witches, evil sorceresses, or horrible step-mothers. And it raises an interesting question, too. Not only does Missy's presence prove that Time Lords are capable of regeneration across the gender spectrum, it highlights specifically that the Doctor has yet to do so. Why have the villain-character transcend these gendered boundaries first? Having the Master regenerate into a female form also has consequences for the portrayal of women on the show. An article written on the villainization of female characters in *Once Upon A Time* (2011-18) very apply writes that:

> Although having strong women characters on television shows is empowering, creating them as villains only allows the media to further the stereotypes of women's negative traits, the sexualization of women in entertainment, and reduce the respect of women in power.

While Missy is introduced as the quintessential villain of the show, she ultimately starts to work to become a better version of herself. In "Extremis" (2017) it is revealed the Doctor saved Missy from being executed, and now guards her prison vault. The only reason her life was spared is because Missy promised she would become good; the Doctor keeps watch over her vault to make sure she keeps this promise. Throughout the season, the Doctor comes to visit Missy in her vault for some type of therapy session, in order to reform her and set her on a better path.

In her final scene in "The Doctor Falls," Missy is able to show off all the character development she has been working towards over the past season. Her final conversation here is very insightful, especially because it is ultimately a conversation she has with her former self. Because Time Lords are able to regenerate, it is wholly possible within the *Doctor Who* universe for one version of a Time Lord to run into a previous or future version of themselves. On one hand, this is often discouraged by the Doctor or other minor characters in the show, so as not to complicate established timelines; on the other hand, the show has multiple instances of the Doctor meeting another version of themselves for plot-development reasons (one most obvious example being the 50th anniversary episode, in which all established versions of the Doctor came together to save Gallifrey). With this in mind, Missy's final scene showcases a dialogue she has with her penultimate regeneration (portrayed by John Simm). The conversation goes as follows:

> *(Missy and the Master share an embrace)*
>
> MISSY: I loved being you. Every second of it. Oh, the way you burned like a sun. Like a whole screaming world on fire. I remember that feeling, and I always will. And I will always miss it.
>
> MASTER: Now that was really very nicely done.
>
> MISSY: Thank you.
>
> *(He retracts his hand, with blood on his fingers, and she has a stiletto blade hidden up her sleeve)*

Missy here acknowledges that she has grown from the person she used to be; John Simm's iteration of the Master was a diabolical and disturbed man, who craved world domination and the Doctor's demise. Though Missy loved being like that, and misses being that person, it is time for her to fully let go of this version of herself, by killing him. What is interesting here is the implication that Missy has always known that she would be the one to kill her former self, as she will have taken the memories from this conversation with her from Simm's regeneration into her own.

However, Missy is not allowed to act on her good intentions for long (or even at all). As the scene progresses, and Simm's Master lies dying in the entrance to the elevator, he asks Missy why she stabbed him. She answers "Oh, because [the Doctor]'s right. Because it's time to stand with him. It's where we've always been going, and it's happening now, today. It's time to stand with the Doctor." In reply, the Master screams "No, never!" and shoots Missy in the back. She dies, alone in the woods, without being able to regenerate, and unable to fulfill her redemption. Missy's character will now forever remain the villain she worked so hard to change from. Sara Martin opts in her work that “the defeat of the villain tells a cautionary tale intended to discipline those others who, like the villain, might be tempted to amass too much power.” (30) While killing Missy fulfills this need (she will never be victorious over the Doctor and their companions), it also does not allow for any sort of character growth outside of the tropes of the genre.

3.9 – The 13th Doctor

"Why are you calling me madam?"

The Thirteenth Doctor was first introduced in the 2017 Christmas special "Twice Upon a Time," in which Peter Capaldi's Doctor initially refuses to regenerate. After a moving speech, in which he leaves the new Doctor with some sage advice, he regenerates into Jodie Whittaker's Doctor, whose very first words are "Oh, brilliant!" ushering in a new era of *Doctor Who*.

After nearly 55 years, audiences felt it time that the Doctor be portrayed by a female actor. Similar concerns and wishes had already been raised by audiences with previous regenerations, only increasing in volume every time the Doctor regenerated from one man into the next. When David Tennant's Doctor regenerated into Matt Smith's Doctor, the character even blurted out "I'm a girl!?" mid-regeneration, signaling the show was very aware of the audience's wishes. And the show *had been* very aware of the audience's wishes; before the official announcement of Whittaker as the Thirteenth Doctor, *Radio Times* wrote in an article that "[people] always have [gone on about a female Doctor] – well, at least since 1981 when the outgoing Tom Baker mischievously answered the question about his successor, 'you're making the presumption it's going to be a man'." Initial critique (or concern) surrounding the Doctor's ability to regenerate into the opposite sex were raised well before the anticipated announcement of Jodie Whittaker. These were quickly stifled though when the Master regenerated into Missy, and when another innocuous white Time Lord regenerated into a black Time Lady (answering the additional question that Time Lord regenerations can also cross ethnic boundaries).

In "The Woman Who Fell to Earth," the audience meets the newest regeneration truly for the first time. And many reviews of the episode were largely positive. Pete Dillon-

Trenchard wrote that this first episode was nothing new or out of the ordinary: as it should be. He writes

> At its core, "The Woman Who Fell to Earth" is simply the latest instalment of post-2005 *Doctor Who* – a pacy adventure which sees the same old Doctor surrounded by contemporary humans as they protect the Earth (or at least, part of Britain) from an alien threat.

Doctor Who treated this new season just as they had treated any other new inclusion of a minority group: they barely touched upon it. During the episode, there are no more than two off-hand jokes made about the fact that the Doctor is now a woman. The most obvious nod to this new fact is the following conversation:

> *(A police officer attempts to get the Doctor's attention)*
>
> POLICE OFFICER: Hold on there, please, madam. [...]
>
> DOCTOR: Why are you calling me madam?
>
> POLICE OFFICER: Because you're a woman...
>
> DOCTOR: Am I? Does it suit me? [...] Sorry, half an hour ago I was a white-haired Scotsman. When's the next train due?

This conversation, and another comment near the end of the episode about the Doctor now needing women's clothes are all the explicit attention paid to the new gender of the Doctor.

The reception of the eleventh season as a whole among audiences was very mixed. While fans were excited that the Doctor would finally be portrayed by a female actor, they also felt that the eleventh season was rather boring, and when the show introduced elements that the audience had been clamoring for (like the reintroduction of the Judoon in season 12), they felt like the show handled these elements badly. Some fan and critic reviews of even the first episode predicted the reviews of the entire season. User John Elledge wrote in his review in *New Statesman*: "I encountered the most terrifying thing

Doctor Who has yet thrown at me: boredom." Many reviewers could not help but compare Whittaker's performance to those who has come before her. Liz Shannon Miller wrote in an article on *Indie Wire*:

> For Christopher Eccleston's introduction as the ninth Doctor, he bellowed at living plastic evil invading London shopping malls. When David Tennant proved his place, he used a satsuma to drop an alien warlord to his death. Matt Smith put on a bow-tie as he flat-out told another invader "*Basically… run.*" And Peter Capaldi… well, he was scary from the beginning.

For many fans, Jodie Whittaker's Doctor missed some level of characterization; she missed depth. And many fans blamed this lack of depth on the writing by Chris Chibnall, acknowledging that Jodie Whittaker was an actress of some report, who was working with what she had been given. Much like Billie Piper and Catherine Tate, Jodie Whittaker had an already well-established acting career before *Doctor Who*, playing a major role in *Broadchurch* (2013-17).

Though Whittaker's first season was quickly dubbed 'dull', having a female lead in a popular and widely broadcast television show like *Doctor Who* does engender diversity across the board. For example, Hoewe and Sherrill found that female-led political television shows:

> can lead to increases in political engagement [among women] through the transportation experienced and the parasocial relationships formed while watching these shows. (71)

In short, they found that watching a show with a lead actor who is 'like you' increases engagement in the field in which that show operates; in this case, that was political engagement, mainly focused on political interest and participation. And so, a show like *Doctor Who* starring a female lead allows women and girls a way into the universe of science fiction, without feeling like they are an outlier in that world. And although traveling through time and space may not be an attainable goal like political engagement is, recognizable, strong, and diverse female representation in *Doctor Who* can carry over into real life, where these portrayals can be mimicked.

What is now important to discuss in terms of Jodie Whittaker's introduction are the issues related to the most recent season of *Doctor Who*. This thesis has at its center the argument that *Doctor Who* has been able to move with the times and adapt to social insights, and so casting a female lead seems to move well with this train of thought. However, the most recent reason has been subject to a horde of criticism, both from long-time and more newfound fans, which seems to be contrary to such a progressive development in the show as casting a female Doctor. There is a reason for this fan backlash, stated outright by fans and critics alike. In the literary framework of this essay, the term 'retconning' was brought up as a relevant term regarding the subject of this thesis. And that is because 'retcon'-issues have been at the basis of much of the criticism for the most recent season of *Doctor Who*. While the critic ratings of Rotten Tomatoes have given the season an overall 78% (out of 100%), the audience score bottomed out at a small 17%. This disparity can be explained in as little as two words: Chris Chibnall. This showrunner has been widely accused by fans of both boring writing and rampant 'retcon'-activity, with much fan outrage as a result. If this outrage keeps on, the show may still choose to remove Chibnall from the team of writers and producers, and consequently release new episodes in which contested and 'retconned' plot points are reverted back to fit with the original canon of the show, which makes season 12 unfit for the scope of this thesis.

To elaborate, user reviews of the most recent season echo many of the same issues. User Tim A., who gave the season half a star out of five (presumably because a star-rating system does not allow for a zero-star review), wrote on April 26, 2020, that "the show has gone from well written, engaging storytelling under Russell T. Davies and Steven Moffat, to insipid, poorly thought-out fan fiction by the end of the 12th series." He goes on to say that the newest season does away with so much of the established canon of the show, and establishes characters only for them to remain unused or be disposed of. These are issues that clearly stem from the 'retcon'-activities that Chris Chibnall has been accused of by fans. The negative views of Tim A. on the most recent season are shared by user Luke W., who wrote more bluntly in their review on April 24, 2020, that: "these episodes seem hell-bent on destroying the canon of this show that has been established over 60 years." On a more character-driven level, Daniel Goldstraw wrote in an article titled "*Doctor Who*: Season 12 Review – A Bad Time On Memory Lane" that: "[t]he characters in this one are all just bit-parts existing merely to state their various motivations, their arcs go exactly where you expect them to, and the resolution to the episode is just ridiculous." In that same article, Goldstraw further elaborates on why the most recent season has been disappointing in general. He states that

> The show under Davies was one that was very much focused on having that mainstream appeal – which had the same mix of horror and comedy that made the classic years popular, while also completely dropping most of the camp and the fan service. It was a show which at all times aimed to feel grounded, giving us not only a fully-fleshed-out Doctor and companion, but also their families and their domestic life. It was above all else accessible, with characters that managed to be relatable, who fell in love or had realistic flaws – even though they were 900 year-old aliens who flew around the universe in police boxes.

He continues to note that season 12 (and even season 11) shares none of this emotional attachment, and that it feels like the entirety of the season is made up of superficial character traits and “nostalgia baiting,” which do nothing to hook the casual viewer, and only anger the longtime fans.

Unfortunately, these ‘retcon’-issues not only make for an arguably bad season, they complicate otherwise interesting plot points that would have fit well into the scope of this thesis. One example of this is the introduction of a character named Ruth, who first appeared in episode 5 of season 12, “Fugitive of the Judoon”. She is a middle-aged woman of color, who it turns out is a previous regeneration of the Doctor. This inclusion raises many questions. And many of these questions were once again based on the continuity of the show up to that point. Ruth’s character is supposed to be a version of the Doctor even before William Hartnell, who is the very first Doctor of the classic series. And as season 12 has also revealed, the Doctor is not a Time Lord, as they have been for the entirety of both the classic and revived *Doctor Who*, but something Chris Chibnall has dubbed ‘the Timeless Child.’ This Timeless Child is a being at the center of the universe, who has always existed and will always exist (as it has infinite regenerative powers). The Time Lords discovered this entity, experimented on it, and extracted the science of regeneration from the Timeless Child. Even if the fans were to take this new (‘retconned’) information at face value, that still leaves a number of questions unanswered. Why does Ruth have a police box TARDIS, for example, as William Hartnell’s version of the Doctor stole a TARDIS and broke it in such a way that it is stuck in that shape. Moreover, if the Doctor does possess infinite regeneration, does this not negate all the times a minor character has stepped in and sacrificed themselves in order to save the Doctor? With Chibnall shoehorning such grand plot points into the newest season, seemingly without any regards for what has come before, he has antagonized even the most loyal of fanbases.

Another plot-point this thesis has thus been unable to touch upon is the complicated redemption arc of the Master/Missy, of which we have only discussed the first part in this thesis. The Master has appeared on screen across both classic and revival series in nine different forms (portrayed by nine different actors). Chronologically and before season 12, Missy was the last to portray the Doctor's nemesis. Across her final season, Missy's arc was one of penance and redemption, which ultimately concluded in "The Doctor Falls" with the death of the Master. As such, a new incarnation of the Master made no appearances across the entirety of season 11. Until the very first episode of season 12, which concluded with the big revelation that one of the unassuming characters from that episode was actually a new regeneration of the Master (portrayed by Sacha Dhawan). This reveal was met once again with much fan outcry and confusion. Though many reviews state to enjoy Dhawan's interpretation of the Master as a standalone performance, the bulk of the critique was centered around one big point: did Missy's redemption still stand? If this new version of the Master was chronologically a version before Missy, then Missy's character development and death would remain intact. However, and more likely, if the new version of the Master was a continuation of the previous seasons, then Missy's redemption would have been done away with entirely. And that leaves out of the account the critiques surrounding racial stereotyping in this instance, as the new version of the Master is an Indian man.

So, despite the interesting plot points, introductions of new characters, and complicated character developments, the issues mentioned above are ultimately why season 12 was not included in the scope of this thesis.

Chapter 4 – Conclusion

This thesis has attempted to chart the development of female characters in the British television series *Doctor Who*, in order to show it has been on a progressive incline towards more inclusivity and more accurate social representation, which has allowed the show to remain on air and relevant for as long as it has. It has focused its attention on three key factors that work towards this goal: character development of the companions across the seasons, the inclusion of minority groups like people of color and LGBTQ+-individuals, and portrayals by well-known actors. And on these topics, this thesis has highlighted some interesting elements.

First, and perhaps most obviously, the companions have developed in character across the seasons. That is to say, they have acquired more substance; they are no longer the stereotypical 'helpless girl' who has to be saved by the Doctor for the sake of a plot. With the rise of second-wave feminism in the late 1960s and early 1970s, companions in *Doctor Who* became more self-sufficient at times, showed more practical knowledge and intelligence, and presented an overall more well-rounded character of real-life women, while still mostly adhering to stereotypical gender norms. Most of the time, the companion was very much the girl who got into trouble and had to be saved (by the Doctor, or even another male companion). Then as the show moved into the 2000s, audiences were more developed, and instead wanted companions with more depth. This need was reflected not only by introducing companion characters who provided more well-rounded pictures of humanity, but in plotlines centered on the Doctor's character rather than grand alien invasions. Take for instance "The Waters of Mars," in which the Doctor struggles with and fights against the fact that a space crew *must* die, instead wanting to save all of them, or "The Fires of Pompeii," in which Donna convinces him to save someone from the devastating outbreak of the Vesuvius volcano. These episodes both focus on character over spectacle. However, audiences still maintained that want (and need) for 'proper' science fiction storylines, which had been the foundation of *Doctor Who* since its inception, and so character-driven plotlines were often backgrounded still with alien spectacles. Additionally, shows like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* had left the audiences wanting more (dark) romance in the types of shows they consumed as well, and so the newer companions like Rose and Martha provided these plotlines. As this too became a tired formula for modern audiences, the Doctor's companions grew more and more independent with every new actor filling the role. And while currently the role of companion is still very much defined as 'the person who travels with the Doctor and is the anchor point for the audiences at home,' they have also become more the Doctor's equal and their friend, challenging the Doctor when they have wrong beliefs, and forcing them show their more human side at times.

Second, a good indicator of the progressiveness of a television series is its inclusion of minority groups. In this regard *Doctor Who* has moved with the times (and not necessarily ahead of them). The classic *Doctor Who* series very much conformed to the societal stereotypes of their time, with the show's lead being a man, and the woman in the supporting role. Moreover, in classic *Doctor Who*, both the Doctor and the companions were always Caucasian. Then in the revived series, the show started including people of color in (significant) roles from the start. Rose's boyfriend Micky was a black man, and the Doctor's companion after Rose, Martha, was a black woman. Additionally, the newest incarnation of the Doctor travels with Yasmin and Ryan, an Indian woman and a black man respectively, and the newest version of the Master is portrayed by an Indian man. And not only ethnic minorities are brought more to the fore, but people from the LGBTQ+ community have slowly been incorporated into the show, right up to Bill Potts who was the first openly gay companion of the Doctor. Inclusion of such minority groups opens up societal discussion of their characters and engenders a better understanding of people who are similar to them. It also allows the show to be more representative of its current audience, as not only white men (and women) watch the show anymore. Representation means representation of everything and everyone, and accurate representation should center on diversity. Ultimately, every companion right up to the Doctor herself has added a facet of diversity to the series; initially this was inclusion of women in more prominent and non-stereotypical roles, then it became inclusion of people of color, inclusion of LGBTQ+ individuals, and inclusion of everyone.

Finally, there have been some more well-known actors to play the role of companion to the Doctor. Most notably these have been Billie Piper, Catherine Tate, and then Jodie Whittaker who played the Doctor herself. Such portrayals of companion-characters by well-known actors enhance audience recognition, which in turn heightens familiarity and empathy with the characters they portray. When audiences feel they already have a sense of who is portraying the new companion, they can become more engaged with the show and its substance. However, only a handful of characters were portrayed by truly 'famous' actors (again, Piper, and Tate) so the importance of having a companion played by a famous actor cannot be explicitly stated. Moreover, portrayal by a well-known actor seems to happen only when the show wants to usher in a new era. Billie Piper was introduced to breathe new life into *Doctor Who* which had been off the air for roughly ten years; Catherine Tate was introduced to curb any more romantic involvement of the companion and the Doctor; Jodie Whittaker was introduced to signal a new time in *Doctor Who*, in which the Doctor is a woman with a diverse cast of companions joining her on her adventures.

Nonetheless, all these factors ultimately come together to allow *Doctor Who* to remain relevant and socially engaged. What these factors reveal is that the show has attempted to remain within the realm of ‘pop,’ or popular culture, and has thus adapted to changing social attitudes regarding representation and inclusivity. Like the Doctor, the show has regenerated time and again to adapt to social demands. These attitudes and demands are very much focused on female representation and integration into the science-fiction genre, as the first seasons of *Doctor Who* were by no means feminist-inflected. And while *Doctor Who* is ‘just’ one show, when it takes steps to increase female representation, that affects the tropes of the genre, allowing future shows more easily to incorporate women and minority groups into their plots.

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"An Unearthly Child." *Doctor Who*, directed by Waris Hussein, written by Anthony Coburn and C.E. Webber, relevant performance by Carole Ann Ford, season 1 (classic), BBC, 1963.

"The Time Warrior." *Doctor Who*, directed by Alan Bromly, written by Robert Holmes, relevant performance by Elisabeth Sladen, season 11 (classic), BBC, 1973-1974.

"Pyramids of Mars." *Doctor Who*, directed by Paddy Russell, written by Robert Holmes and Lewis Greifer, relevant performance by Elisabeth Sladen, season 13 (classic), BBC, 1975.

"Rose." *Doctor Who*, directed by Keith Boak, written by Russell T. Davies, relevant performance by Billie Piper, season 1 (revived), BBC, 2005.

"Doomsday." *Doctor Who*, directed by Graeme Harper, written by Russell T. Davies, relevant performance by Billie Piper, season 2 (revived), BBC, 2006.

"Smith and Jones." *Doctor Who*, directed by Charles Palmer, written by Russell T. Davies, relevant performance by Freema Agyeman, season 3 (revived), BBC, 2007.

"The Fires of Pompeii." *Doctor Who*, directed by Colin Teague, written by James Moran, relevant performance by Catherine Tate, season 4 (revived), BBC, 2008.

"Silence in the Library." *Doctor Who*, directed by Euros Lyn, written by, Steven Moffat, relevant performance by Alex Kingston, season 4 (revived), BBC, 2008.

"Forest of the Dead." *Doctor Who*, directed by Euros Lyn, written by Steven Moffat, relevant performance by Alex Kingston, season 4 (revived), BBC, 2008.

"Turn Left." *Doctor Who*, directed by Graeme Harper, written by Russell T Davies relevant performance by Catherine Tate, season 4 (revived), BBC, 2008.

"Dark Water." *Doctor Who*, directed by Rachel Talalay, written by Steven Moffat, relevant performance by Michelle Gomez, season 8 (revived), BBC, 2014.

"Death in Heaven." *Doctor Who*, directed by Rachel Talalay, written by Steven Moffat, relevant performance by Michelle Gomez, season 8 (revived), BBC, 2014.

"The Pilot." *Doctor Who*, directed by Lawrence Gough, written by Steven Moffat, relevant performance by Pearl Mackie, season 10 (revived), BBC, 2017.

"World Enough and Time." *Doctor Who*, directed by Rachel Talalay, written by Steven Moffat relevant performances by Michelle Gomez and Pearl Mackie, season 10 (revived), BBC, 2017.

"The Doctor Falls." *Doctor Who*, directed by Rachel Talalay, written by Steven Moffat, relevant performances by Michelle Gomez and Pearl Mackie, season 10 (revived), BBC, 2017.

"The Woman Who Fell to Earth." *Doctor Who*, directed by Jamie Childs, written by Chris Chibnall, relevant performance by Jodie Whittaker, season 11 (revived), BBC, 2018.