Part 2:
Heroic Moments

4. Heroic Moments and/in History

Travelling into the past and educating the audience about the history of both the nation and the Earth is one of the cornerstones that *Doctor Who* was built on. History and the heroic are connected, since heroes are bound to their temporal and cultural origin. If *Doctor Who* and history as well as history and the heroic are closely tied together, then it is only logical to start the exploration of the programme's heroic moments in those episodes that engage with history. This exploration is set against the backdrop of a preliminary discussion of how popular memory participates in the construction of heroes. The case studies will then, firstly, show how historical settings facilitate heroic moments, secondly, how heroic moments in history can negotiate contemporary concerns and challenges and, thirdly, investigate the special case of artist heroes. In this third narrative mode, the episodes are self-reflective on the impact of cultural products on the construction of historical heroes.

The close links of *Doctor Who* to the historical have been ingrained in the programme from the beginning. The classic series began, after all, "as an elaboration of H G Wells' *The Time Machine*".[1] The new series took its "first trip back in time" already in its third episode, "a demonstration not just of the capabilities of the TARDIS but of the programme's ambition to recreate the past".[2] Raphael Samuel's claim that it is "the genius of television, and especially perhaps television directed at children, that it can reinvent historical characters in such a way as to make them speak in the authentic accent of the here-and-now" is especially true for the "long-running favourite *Doctor Who*".[3] The programme illustrates how television has "displaced cinema as an electronic canvas that teaches individuals about their past, their culture and society",[4] and the Doctor, their companions and the historical 'locals' they encounter as heroic figures play a fundamental role in this social formation.

Thomas Carlyle's 1841 lecture series *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* offers a good starting point to investigate the connection between history and the heroic, albeit with critical side notes to its pitfalls. For Carlyle, heroes are great, history-changing and history-making men, of whom he sketches six basic types.[5] The hero as divinity is followed chronologically by the hero as prophet, the

---

1 Alec Charles: The Flight from History. From H.G. Wells to Doctor Who – and Back Again, in: Colloquy. Text Theory Critique 17, 2009, p. 21, hdl.handle.net/10547/295195 [17 December 2016].

2 Sandbrook: Great British Dream Factory, p. 281.

3 Raphael Samuel: Theatres of Memory Volume 1. Past and Present in Contemporary Culture, New York 1994, p. 35.

4 Robert Dillon: History on British Television. Constructing Nation, Nationality and Collective Memory, Manchester 2010, p. 4.

5 Thomas Carlyle: On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History, edited by David R. Sorensen / Brent E. Kinser, New Haven 2013 [London 1841].

hero as poet, the hero as priest, the hero as man of letters and the hero as king. What they all have in common is that they have shaped history. Carlyle argues that "Universal History, the history of what man has accomplished in this world, is at bottom the History of the Great Men who have worked here".[6] Carlyle's heroes are larger-than-life figures who lead humanity through history. Since he first gave the lecture series, Carlyle has been harshly criticized both for his views on heroes and heroism and, often in relation to the former, for his sympathy for totalitarian regimes. Carlyle's final lecture in particular, in which he explored 'the hero as king', "revealed the contradictory impulses in his outlook that gradually drove him to more extremist positions", and his "connections to the violent ideologies of the Nazis and the Bolsheviks should neither be underestimated nor exaggerated".[7]

Despite the justified criticism, some of Carlyle's most basic assumptions about the connection between history and the heroic continue to resonate in more recent considerations. For one, the "pattern of heroic virtue that he [Carlyle] illuminated in his lectures continues to be relevant to the civic life of twenty-first century society", and many "heroes of the twentieth century, among them […] Churchill, [...] Martin Luther King, […] Nelson Mandela, [and] Roosevelt […] pursued paths that frequently fulfilled Carlylean notions of the heroic".[8] While Carlyle's theory relies "on a reductive definition indeed – that the hero should be sincere, and that the hero should be a man", a view that from "the perspective of twenty-first century readers […] seems restrictive, sexist and obsolete", Carlyle remains "central to the attempt" of considering "the heroic and its representatives".[9]

In a more recent theoretical intervention on the heroic and history, Geoffrey Cubitt has suggested that one can in fact read the whole of history through the heroic lens. In recent centuries, he argues, we "have witnessed a proliferation of 'heroic histories'":

> It is through their imaginative connection to […] sometimes formally stated but often implicit historical narrative that the lives of heroes most commonly take on a historical kind of significance. Two things happen here. First, heroes become associated with historical conceptions or narrative lines in which particular groups have a kind of emotional investment, as part of their collective sense of identity. […] Secondly, the points of intersection between individual existences and the larger narratives […] to which they are connected become promising material for imaginative development. The moments of the hero's heroic action are the moments that link the story of his or her personal development (the story of how the hero became a hero) to the collective story of historical change […].[10]

---

6 Ibid., p. 21.
7 David R. Sorensen: Introduction, in: Thomas Carlyle: On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History, edited by David R. Sorensen / Brent E. Kinser, New Haven 2013, p. 15.
8 Ibid., p. 16.
9 Brent E. Kinser: Thomas Carlyle, Social Media, and the Digital Age of Revolution, in: Thomas Carlyle: On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History, edited by David R. Sorensen / Brent E. Kinser, New Haven 2013, p. 272.
10 Cubitt: Introduction, in: Heroic Reputations, p. 18.

Cubitt is, to some extent, in line with Carlyle in the sense that he recognizes the connection between the heroic and history, but he takes the correlation further. Cubitt does *not* argue that heroes make history in the moment in which the events unfold, but rather that we, the contemporaries, imaginatively connect history to stories of heroes when we look back at those events and narrativize them. Only telling these stories "turns history itself – the whole process of humanity's creative development – into the product of heroic initiative".[11] Looking at the matter from the other direction, Max Jones has argued that heroes "should be analysed as sites within which we can find evidence of the cultural beliefs, social practices, political structures and economic systems of the past".[12] This implies that even though the heroes are constructed as such in the *aftermath* of a historical moment, they nevertheless negotiate the values of that moment (as well as of the present). The claims that history makes heroes, or that heroes make history, are therefore simplistic. Rather, it is our narrativization of history that makes heroes, and our narrativization of certain figures as heroes that shapes our historical narratives. The historical episodes of *Doctor Who* considered here serve as examples of such narrativization.

4.1 (Re-)Constructing History in Popular Culture: Popular Memory and the Heroic

The historical episodes of *Doctor Who* are popular-culture narrativizations of the past. 'The past' is recycled again and again through processes of shared memory – social, cultural and popular, and heroes are central to these processes. Although it is impossible to consider 'the past' while completely ignoring 'history', the theoretical considerations here decidedly do not focus on history as a field of study but rather on memory and thus, as Aleida Assmann has framed it, on the "dimension of emotionality and experience", on "history as memory" and on its "ethical orientation".[13] The past can thus not be treated as a neutral, value-free succession of events. In the opening pages of his book *The Past is a Foreign Country*, David Lowenthal succinctly states:

> We have partly domesticated the past, where they do things differently, and brought it into the present as a marketable commodity. But in altering its remains we also assimilate it, ironing out their differences and their difficulties in the process. […] And as we remake it, the past remakes us.[14]

---

11 Ibid., p. 17.
12 Max Jones: Historians, p. 439.
13 A. Assmann: Schatten, p. 50: "Drei Dinge sind es also vornehmlich, die aus der Perspektive des Gedächtnisses die Geschichtsschreibung ergänzen:
– die Betonung der Dimension der Emotionalität und des individuellen Erlebens
– die Betonung der memorialen Funktion von Geschichte als Gedächtnis
– die Betonung einer ethischen Orientierung."
14 Lowenthal: Foreign Country, p. xxv.

What Lowenthal calls the "ironing out" of difference and difficulties, I call 'crystallization': it is the process of turning a complicated, complex and potentially contradictory series of events into a coherent narrative, of further focusing and shaping that narrative, and investing it with emotions and values that are of importance for the contemporary audience. The effect of that process has trajectories, as Lowenthal also suggests, in both temporal directions – we make the past and the past makes us as we negotiate identity politics. The hero, as we will see, is part of the process of crystallization – they are the result of the effect and contribute to it at the same time.

How we envision the past is a cornerstone of how we define who we are, both as individuals and collectively, and heroes as identificatory figures very much have their place and part in this. The past is "integral to our imaginations".[15] Processing it contributes to the construction of a shared identity, along the lines of Jan Assmann's assertion that "memory is knowledge with an identity index" and "remembering […] a realization of belonging".[16] Memories we share as a group help us develop a sense of who we are and who we are not, through "a kind of identificatory determination in a positive ('We are this') or in a negative ('That's our opposite') sense".[17] Through remembering collectively and circulating these memories in medialized form, we construct and maintain shared identities.

The hero, meanwhile, has been ascribed with similar importance for the construction of shared identities. Heroes "serve as anchors of human culture, the condensation of collective identity, the personification of our values, beliefs, and knowledge".[18] These anchors are temporally and culturally specific, and "two different periods and cultural contexts" can create "two ostensibly very different kinds of heroic image[s]".[19] These combined considerations allow for the conclusion that heroic figures play a central role in constructing shared identities through memory processes. Somewhere in the process of circulating narratives of our past, the hero becomes prominent, which leads to two fundamental questions: how do heroes shape our memories? And how do memories shape our heroes? In the context of popular-culture products such as *Doctor Who*, the concept of 'popular memory' is the most suitable framework to discuss how heroes shape our memory of the past, and vice versa. The following considerations will trace the emergence of popular memory from *cultural* memory; popular memory, however, can comprise both social and cultural memory. No matter if derived

15 Ibid., p. 3.
16 Jan Assmann: Communicative and Cultural Memory, in: Astrid Erll / Ansgar Nünning (eds.): Cultural Memory Studies. An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook, Berlin 2008, p. 114.
17 Jan Assmann: Collective Memory and Cultural Identity, in: The New German Critique 65, 1995, p. 130. DOI: 10.2307/488538.
18 Strate: Heroes and/as Communication, p. 20.
19 Cubitt: Introduction, in: Heroic Reputations, p. 2.

from social or cultural memory, popular memory adds layers of crystallization that are entangled with the heroic.

Cultural memory depends on experiences that are both medialized and institutionalized, which is what distinguishes it from social memory.[20] Social memory can rely on biological carriers passing on memories inter-generationally through "conversational remembering",[21] or through less sustainable forms of medialization such as news coverage or interactions on social media. Cultural memory, however, is not limited by any temporal horizon and thus more strongly depends on "material carriers", on "symbols and signs" in the form of "monuments, anniversaries, rituals, texts and images" that can be passed on trans-generationally.[22] This trans-generational transfer requires a higher degree of institutionalization of the carriers, as Aleida Assmann's examples of monuments and rituals suggest. While it might sometimes be arguable whether something belongs to social memory or to cultural memory, there is, as Assmann has argued, a clear cut between these two realms of remembering. According to Assmann, the "transition from social to cultural memory is by no means flexible but has to go through disruption and abyss in the form of a separation and subsequent re-coupling of experience and memory".[23] Even medialized forms of social memory might be destroyed or disappear into the archive. Only when they are actively transformed into more sustainable and institutionalized forms of memory can they become part of cultural memory. Memory always depends on experience; the nature of that experience differentiates social from cultural memory. While social memory can be built on an experience a group has shared or learned about through direct communication or more ephemeral forms of medialization, cultural memory depends on medialization with a higher degree of institutionalization.

Cultural memory, even though it goes beyond the span of a few generations' lifetime, proves to be just as alive as other forms of memory, with the difference being that media take a more vital part in the process of remembering. Looking at cultural memory in this process-oriented way means to acknowledge that "memory can only become collective as a part of a continuous process" that requires "taking a fundamentally *dynamic* approach to the study both of cultural memory and of the media which shape it".[24] While the content of cultural memory is "beyond temporal horizons", it needs to be "re-appropriated by

---

20 For a discussion of social memory and its relevance for processes of heroization, please refer to Chapter 2: From Weirdo to Hero, in particular pp. 42–51.

21 A. Assmann: Schatten, p. 54: "biologische Träger, befristet (80 bis 100 Jahre), intergenerationell, Kommunikation, 'conversational remembering'".

22 Ibid.: „materielle Träger, entfristet, transgenerationell, Symbole und Zeichen; Monumente, Jahrestage, Riten, Texte, Bilder".

23 Ibid., p. 34: "Der Übergang vom sozialen zum kulturellen Gedächtnis ist dagegen keineswegs fließend, sondern führt über einen Bruch und Abgrund. Der Grund dafür ist, dass auf dieser Ebene eine Entkopplung und Wiederverkopplung von Gedächtnis und Erfahrung stattfindet."

24 Erll / Rigney: Introduction, in: Mediation, p. 1.

living minds again and again".[25] The cultural memories of 'original' experiences that seem beyond our reach thus circulate "among individuals and groups who have no actual connection in any biological sense with the events in question but who may learn to identify with certain vicarious recollections – thanks to various media".[26] This dynamic approach stresses that memory is not just a thing of the past; rather, it appears at the intersection between past and present. In the "ongoing process of remembrance and forgetting […] individuals and groups continue to reconfigure their relationship to the past",[27] and they do so through the circulation and experience of media products. Cultural memory as experienced through medialized form thus requires the active engagement and participation of the audience.

Popular culture, embedded in complex processes of production and reception, has proven to be extremely effective in engaging its audience in the circulating and re-shaping of cultural memory. Popular culture, in particular in audio-visual form, has a number of characteristics that turn its texts into a highly effective "shared frame of reference".[28] First of all, reproducible texts and images generally lend themselves to being carriers of cultural memory "both because they themselves are infinitely reproducible and because they are tied down neither to any particular time nor to any particular place".[29] Secondly, the reach of popular culture enables an especially wide circulation. Thirdly, the symbolic potential of images, the freedom provided by their fictional nature and the tendency to encompass various levels of remediation endow audio-visual products of popular culture with great potential for the further crystallization of cultural memory into what in some instances has been framed as 'popular memory'. It should also be noted at this point already, without going into too much detail yet, that it is in the realm of popular memory that heroes and the heroic increasingly come to the foreground, which hints at a relation between this form of crystallization (i.e. the formation of popular memory) and the appearance of the heroic.

The term 'popular memory' surfaced in the late 1970s when the Popular Memory Group at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) Birmingham investigated memory processes in non-canonical media forms of everyday life (e.g. radio programmes, soap operas, popular music). These scholars argued that "we must include *all* the ways in which a sense of the past is constructed in

25 A. Assmann: Schatten, p. 34: "Die entkörperten und zeitlich entfristeten Inhalte des kulturellen Gedächtnisses müssen drittens immer wieder neu mit lebendigen Gedächtnissen verkoppelt und von diesen angeeignet werden."
26 Rigney: Plenitude, p. 16.
27 Erll / Rigney: Introduction, in: Mediation, p. 2.
28 Rigney: Plenitude, p. 20.
29 Ibid.

our society".[30] Beyond looking at it as an "object of study"[31] that includes a wide range of media, the group also considered popular memory as "a political practice" that "directs our attention not to the past but to *the past-present relation*".[32] They argued that "it is because 'the past' had this living active existence in the present that it matters so much politically" (ibid.).[33] Despite the authors' insistence that they "do not have a completed project in 'popular memory' to report" and their 'explorations' are to be treated as work in progress,[34] two ideas are central: broadening the scope of material to include media that are not considered 'canonical' *and* the stress on looking at popular memory as a politically charged, dynamic relationship of past and present.

Furthermore, popular memory can be considered as a form of 'unofficial history'. This resonates in the respective chapter of Raphael Samuel's 1994 study *Theatres of Memory*, which is titled 'unofficial knowledge'. Samuel describes popular memory along the following lines:

> Popular memory is on the face of it the very antithesis of written history. It eschews notions of determination and seizes instead on omens, portents and signs. […] So far as historical particulars are concerned, it prefers the eccentric to the typical; the sensational to the routine. Wonders and marvels are grist to its mill; so are the comic and the grotesque. George III is remembered because he went mad; Edward VII because he had mistresses; Henry VIII because he married six times and executed his unwanted wives.[35]

It becomes clear from these lines that popular memory is highly selective in regard to which aspects of the past it circulates. The criteria for selection are closely tied to the heroic in the sense that popular memory is a version of the past that focuses on the extraordinary (the eccentric, the sensational, wonders and marvels) and anecdotal at the same time. It is a version that presents history in the form of entertaining stories centring on *individuals*. Furthermore, this 'unofficial knowledge' depends on repeated circulation in the form of mediatized shared memory and should thus be considered in relation to cultural memory, rather than being defined in relation to historiography. I therefore suggest using the term 'popular memory' to describe a heroized version of collective memory perpetuated in popular cultural narratives.

Visual forms of representation are central to the formation of popular memory. Samuel suggests that when looking at the past through popular memory, one should "give at least as much attention to pictures as to manuscripts or print".[36] One example he provides are history books for children that feature illustrations.

---

30 Popular Memory Group: Popular Memory. Theory, Politics, Method, in: Richard Johnson et al. (eds.): Making Histories. Studies in History-Writing and Politics, London 2017, p. 207.
31 Ibid., p. 206.
32 Ibid., p. 211, emphasis in original.
33 Ibid.
34 Ibid., p. 205.
35 Samuel: Theatres, p. 6.
36 Ibid., p. 27.

"Graphics", Samuel writes, "were of course quite central to the chap-books, those 'penny histories' which took as their subject legendary heroes".[37] The penny histories can be regarded as an earlier printed equivalent of "films [that] enjoy such a high public profile because of their *aesthetic properties* and manner of distribution that they play a role as catalysts in the emergence of topics in public remembrance".[38] These image-driven forms of popular culture (penny histories and film) have in common their focus on aesthetic properties and the fact that they both enjoyed widespread distribution. Samuel's explicit reference to "legendary heroes" as the subject of popular renderings of history implies that narrating history through visually recognizable, distinctly heroic figures is an effective way in which popular memory crystallizes the past.

Implicitly present in legends and films but worth a separate explicit point is the aspect of fictionalization, which similarly adds to the crystallization of cultural memory. Fictional texts, both in written and in audio-visual form, "can become powerful media, whose versions of the past circulate in large parts of society, and even internationally".[39] Erll speaks of "versions of the past", which implies that these fictionalized versions do not ignore history completely but do take the liberty to render them into entertaining narratives. This process becomes clear in a quite illuminating way in Erll's commentary on G.A. Henty's novel *In Times of Peril* (1881), a fictionalized version of the Indian Mutiny:

> The turn from eyewitness account and history-writing to fiction and the greater freedom of representation associated with the latter result in a further amplification of the 'Indian Mutiny' as a site of imperial memory. The 'vicious' Nana Sahib's troops become more and more numerous; British soldiers appear more and more heroic […]. This 'larger than life' version of the 'Indian Mutiny' […] would thus enter popular memory and prove very persistent. Even a hundred years later, in contemporary British narrative history, traces of the high-Victorian myth-making can still be discerned.[40]

Erll refers to the novel as a 'larger than life' version of history, implying that fiction works like a magnifying glass. The number of the Indian troops increases, as do the heroics of the British, resulting in a memorable narrative that forcefully entered popular memory of the Indian Mutiny in Britain.

Finally, in addition to the filters of the visual and the fictional, the medialization of the past in popular culture almost inevitably encompasses a remediation of previous representations: the "logic of remediation insists that there was never a past prior to mediation; all mediations are remediations, in that mediation of

---

37 Ibid., p. 31.

38 Rigney: Plenitude, p. 20, my emphasis.

39 Astrid Erll: Literature, Film, and the Mediality of Cultural Memory, in: Astrid Erll / Ansgar Nünning (eds.): Cultural Memory Studies. An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook, Berlin 2008, p. 398.

40 Astrid Erll: Remembering across Time, Space, and Cultures. Premediation, Remediation and the "Indian Mutiny", in: Astrid Erll / Ann Rigney (eds.): Mediation, Remediation, and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory, Berlin 2012, p. 118.

the real is always a mediation of another mediation".[41] Popular-culture versions of the past are thus not versions of the past in the narrow sense but rather versions of representations of the past. They do not merely mediate actual events but remediate a whole corpus of earlier medializations to the point where producers and audiences alike cannot differentiate any more between the parts of the story that originate from historiographic sources and such that are sourced from earlier cultural narratives. Raphael Samuel provides an enlightening example for this process:

> Robin Hood, though he has his origin in medieval ballad, was given a whole new life through the late medieval and early modern development of civic pageantry and ritual; Maid Marian […] seems to have been the brainchild of some sixteenth-century parish organizers of May games, who believed that the Robin Hood story might show to better advantage if it was played as a drama of young love.[42]

What survives in popular memory is not necessarily the version of the story that is closest to the actual events but rather the version that 'catches on' and is remediated again and again across different media carriers (text, image, film); each (re)mediation adds a filter and, thus, a layer of crystallization.

The 'past' as a complicated entanglement of events has been shaped considerably by the time it is rendered into popular-memory versions, and this is the case with the historical *Doctor Who* episodes that are to be discussed. In our never-ending attempts to order and make sense of the past, we focus and filter it in different ways. Our "modern-day reconstructions" of the past "tell us more about our relationship to the past" than about the past itself as they highlight "the connections between past and present, and our affective responses".[43] Every filter we apply works like a layer of crystallization, and the more layers lie between the 'actual' past and the memory of it (e.g. streamlining individual memories into social memory, mediating and remediating it, fictionalization and visualization), the more acutely and persistently the heroic emerges, most dominantly so in narratives of popular memory.

Popular memory simultaneously nourishes and feeds off the heroic. As an extremely crystallized form of memory, in terms of both narrative reduction and medial representation in symbols and images, it beckons heroes and villains opposing each other at a moment in time crucial for a progress that reflects contemporary values. The hero-villain constellation is the most focused form of narrative that 'survives' all layers of crystallization inherent to the memory processes outlined. Hero figures function as anchors for values and identity politics. They thrive in popular-culture narratives that provide medialized experiences of a remembered past for a wide audience to engage with. Hero figures shape popular

---

41 Richard Grusin: Premediation, in: Criticism 46.1, 2004, p. 18, qt. in Erll / Rigney: Introduction in: Mediation, p. 4.
42 Samuel: Theatres, p. 29.
43 Pam Cook: Screening the Past. Memory and Nostalgia in Cinema. London 2005, p. 2–3.

memory through their recognizable appearance that is necessary for visual representation. Furthermore, they are receptive to processes of fictionalization and endless re-medialization. In turn, popular memory, and the circulation thereof, is what brings heroes to life again and again in a dynamic process that involves both producers and recipients. These processes are linked to the present *and* to the past, and heroes emerge at the intersection between the two as meaning-making, identity-crafting focus points.

4.2 Doctor Who*, History and the Heroic*

The historical episodes of *Doctor Who*, often simply referred to as 'historicals',[44] form a special segment of the programme, which also mirrors some of *Doctor Who*'s overall developments. Shawn Shimpach has argued that New *Who* alternates between national and everyday matters:

> Episodes have been generously sprinkled with winking reminders of British cultural pride, from the piling up of anachronisms such as the spectacle of Billie Piper floating over blitz-era London wearing a cool Britannia Union Jack t-shirt ("The Empty Child") to episodes where the Doctor and his companion meet British literary luminaries like Charles Dickens ("The Unquiet Dead"), William Shakespeare ("The Shakespeare Code"), and Agatha Christie ("The Unicorn and the Wasp"). Visually, the program attempts to balance national heritage with cosmopolitan modernity.[45]

The historical episodes, not just those in the new series, tend to be part of the 'national heritage' category (all of the episodes Shimpach uses as examples *are* historicals). While this is a unifying aspect of the historicals, they can also be quite different from each other. One notable change in the nature of historicals reflects the programme's development from a children's programme to one directed more openly at all age groups: while early historicals have a clear educational focus and aim to deliver fact-based knowledge for the predominantly young audience, the focus of the later historicals shifts to messages about ethics and values. The broad nature of this observation includes a certain level of simplification. Early historicals are not value-free, and fact-based knowledge about their temporal setting is not completely absent from the later episodes. However, the early historicals do tend to favour education, while the later historicals tend to favour values.

The other overall development of the historicals is the amount of agency granted to the Doctor and their companions. In early historical episodes, for example "The Aztecs"[46] or even the very first story set in the distant past, "An Unearthly

---

44 With 'historical episodes' or 'historicals', I refer to all episodes that are set in the past on planet Earth. I use 'pure historicals' when referring exclusively to those episodes set in the past that have no science-fiction elements beyond the TARDIS and the Doctor's sonic screwdriver, and 'pseudo-historicals' to refer to those episodes in the past that include science-fiction elements beyond TARDIS and screwdriver.

45 Shawn Shimpach: Television in Transition, Hoboken 2010, p. 165.

46 Aztecs, 1964.

Child",[47] and "The Reign of Terror",[48] a story set in the French Revolution that is partly missing from the BBC archives, the aim of the First Doctor and his companions is to get out alive. In these early historicals, the Doctor stresses that they are not allowed to change history, an explicit reference to their limited agency. This is especially prominent in "The Aztecs", where companion Barbara wants to convince the locals to abolish human sacrifice, despite the Doctor's orders not to interfere with history. In the end, the Doctor is proven right and, once again, they only narrowly survive the consequences. Whenever the Doctor's actions influence historical events, the writers suggest that these actions have *always* been part of history, making use of the time travel paradox. In "The Romans",[49] for example, the Doctor accidently lights up Nero's architecture mappings for a new Rome, which gives the emperor the idea to set Rome on fire. The Doctor's actions providing alternative explanations for disasters in history is picked up again at various other points in the programme's history, most notably in "The Fires of Pompeii",[50] where the Doctor causes the volcano's eruption. Overall, the Doctor's agency, and thereby his heroic potential, is limited in the early historicals, which reflects the character's original configuration.

Many of the early historicals are missing from the BBC archives, which makes it difficult to make valid statements about whether and how historical characters were heroized. Richard Lionheart in "The Crusade",[51] for one, is heroized to some extent, though that heroization is more based on his moral qualities than on individual deeds that are presented as heroic acts.[52] The same might be true for Marco Polo, the eponymous hero of the 1964 episode,[53] but that story is unfortunately amongst the completely missing ones, as are "The Myth Makers", set in Ancient Troy,[54] and "The Highlanders", set in Scotland right after the Battle of Culloden in 1745.[55]

In the wake of the pseudo-historicals in the 1970s and 1980s, the Doctor and their companions gain agency. Often, they have to fight off enemies that are endangering the course of history as we know it, which gives them much greater heroic potential. Rather than history determining the plot, and the Doctor and companions merely trying to survive, the characters now shape the narrative and have to ensure that *history survives*. Sometimes, as in "The Masque of Mandrag-

47 Unearthly Child, 1963.
48 The Reign of Terror, Doctor Who, BBC One, 8 August – 12 September 1964 [partly missing].
49 The Romans, Doctor Who, BBC One, 16 January – 6 February 1965 [missing].
50 The Fires of Pompeii, Doctor Who, BBC One, 12 Apr. 2008.
51 The Crusade, 1965.
52 This episode will be considered in some more detail, although it is partly missing. Video recordings of two of the four parts and the availability of at least audio recordings of the two missing parts made "The Crusade" the best pick to look at, albeit briefly, how historical figures are dealt with in early episodes.
53 Marco Polo, Doctor Who, BBC One, 22 Feb. – 24 Apr. 1964 [missing].
54 The Myth Makers, Doctor Who, BBC One, 16 Oct. – 6 Nov. 1965 [missing].
55 The Highlanders, Doctor Who, 17 December 1966 – 7 January 1967 [missing].

ora",[56] the Doctor even imports the threat he then has to fight. However, these historicals are still generally in line with the idea that the Doctor cannot change history per se – an assumption that is somewhat questioned in the new series.

In the new series, the Doctor's general inability to alter history is frequently circumvented by focusing on details which the Doctor *can* change because they are no 'fixed points' of history. In "Fires of Pompeii", the Doctor explains to his companion Donna that "Pompeii is a fixed point in history", that generally "some things are fixed, some things are in flux", and he as a Time Lord "can see what is, what was, what could be", and can therefore tell the difference between fixed points and times of flux.[57] This allows for (a quite random) narrative freedom that the new series merrily exploits. This development becomes especially obvious in the 2005 double episode "The Empty Child"[58] / "The Doctor Dances"[59] set during the London Blitz where the Doctor manages to save everyone. The Doctor also tweaks history on a small scale in "Vincent and the Doctor"[60] and "The Unquiet Dead".[61]

In other historical episodes, the Doctor stresses that they are not allowed to meddle with history because it would affect a 'fixed point'. Examples for such fixed points are the death of companion Rose's father in "Father's Day"[62] and the aforementioned fire of Pompeii. In contrast to the Doctor 'improving' history on a small scale during the London Blitz, he does not allow Churchill to defeat the Nazis earlier than 'fixed' in history by using Dalek power.[63] A special WWII case is the 2011 episode "Let's Kill Hitler" where the Doctor actually *saves* Hitler in order to keep the general history intact.[64] This satirical, almost farcical episode offers a humorous take on the limits of the Doctor's heroic potential when travelling to the past. Finally, "Rosa"[65] offers a very different take: here, the Doctor and her companions make sure that someone else's historically heroic act can unfold by fighting off a perpetrator from the future, which can be read as a variation of the 1970s/1980s pseudo-historicals. Overall, while the development of the Doctor's agency and heroic potential in the new series is by no means uniform and homogenous, the series has become more creative in dealing with the Doctor's role in history.

Finally, it seems necessary to lay out how the episodes considered in the case studies to follow were selected from the vast field of historicals. The most important requirement was that the episode's temporal setting be relevant for and con-

56 Masque, 1976.
57 Fires of Pompeii, 2008.
58 The Empty Child, Doctor Who, BBC One, 21 May 2005.
59 The Doctor Dances, Doctor Who, BBC One, 28 May 2005.
60 Vincent and the Doctor, Doctor Who, BBC One, 5 June 2010.
61 The Unquiet Dead, Doctor Who, BBC One, 9 April 2005.
62 Father's Day, Doctor Who, BBC One, 14 May 2005.
63 Victory of the Daleks, Doctor Who, BBC One, 17 April 2010.
64 Let's Kill Hitler, Doctor Who, BBC One, 27 August 2011.
65 Rosa, 2018.

nected to the episode's plot. History cannot merely serve as a stylistic setting or backdrop; it must be, in whatever manner, narratively relevant. This ruled out a number of episodes where the point in time merely served as an excuse for the BBC to use costume drama gadgets – an example for this would be "Black Orchid", in which the main driving narrative force is the genre of the murder mystery rather than its temporal setting.[66]

Additionally, and maybe obviously so, the heroic does have to be of *some* significance to the episode. This had an effect on the selection of case studies in a twofold way. Firstly, it led to a slight overrepresentation of newer episodes, both in quantity and in quality. As the brief survey of *Doctor Who* historicals has shown, the heroic tends to be more pronounced in the more recent historicals. Often, we can observe similar mechanisms of how the historic and the heroic interact in similarly structured 'old' *and* 'new' episodes, with a difference in the degree to which the heroic appears, which leads to newer episodes often being discussed in greater detail. Some episodes from the late 1980s, the last years of the old series, do combine a historical setting that is important for the plot and heroic potential but simply are not coherent enough. As Shawn Shimpach has rightly pointed out, the (old) series was at this point "nearing the end of its life", which resulted in narratives that were "frequently enmeshed in the minutiae of its [the programme's] own considerable narrative buildup".[67] The lack of narrative coherence ruled out episodes such as "The Curse of Fenric"[68] and "Ghost Light"[69], although they do have some interesting scenes. The incoherence of these plots disrupts the narrative pace and prevents the unfolding of heroic potential.

The following case studies are divided into three parts. The first group explores the narrative set-up of the historicals that favours the appearance of the heroic. The stories present the Enlightenment and democracy respectively, framing them as human progress brought about and protected by heroic action. The meta-heroic discourse in an episode featuring Robin Hood adds a self-reflexive dimension to the question of how heroes and history are entangled. The second group of case studies uses a narrative formula very similar to the one dissected previously but complicates it with a more complex entanglement with contemporary concerns: the episodes use the historical setting of World War II and the American civil rights movement to negotiate challenges regarding national unity and racist tendencies in twenty-first-century Britain. The third group turns to more self-con-

66 Black Orchid, Doctor Who, BBC One, 1–2 March 1982.
67 Shimpach: Television, p. 158.
68 Curse of Fenric, 1989.
69 Ghost Light, 1989. In his 2012 review of the episode, Radio Times' Patrick Mulkern wished prospective viewers "good luck understanding it" and wrote: "Ghost Light, like so many stories of this period, is a shambles. […I]t is incoherent and almost incomprehensible. I've read other reviewers excusing Ghost Light, raving about its complexity and insisting that repeated viewings will eventually shine light into its obscure recesses. Well, I watched the story on transmission in 1989, again in the 1990s and just recently for this review. Three viewings and I'm none the wiser."

scious episodes that explore how popular culture and historical heroes function together: three episodes dedicated to artist heroes. The time travelling of the Doctor and their companions invests yet-to-be famous artists with the significance they will have for later generations, thus providing them with the heroic potential that the artists live up to by mastering a challenging moment in their lives. These episodes prove to be especially self-aware of the impact popular culture has on the construction, circulation and negotiation of historical figures as heroes.

4.3 The Narrative Set-Up of Heroic Moments at Turning Points of History

Before looking at more complex case studies where heroic moments in history are used to negotiate contemporary concerns, we need to examine the narrative formula at the basis of historical episodes and explore how it favours, demands even, the appearance of the heroic. As we will see, the episodes present certain moments in history as turning points. The idea that certain situations, and certain moments in history specifically, call for heroic action dominates recent studies of the heroic. In general, certain circumstances, in combination with "capacities, traits, […], decisions, and actions" can trigger "individuals to behave heroically".[70] One prevalent argument is that "heroic figures emerge especially in crises of adaptation, when social orders erode or are not yet fully established".[71] Often, heroes are "defined by doing the right thing at a critical moment even when their lives until that moment have not been heroic".[72] The element of crisis seems to be especially fundamental – only when challenged will certain people rise to heroic action. The case studies at hand cannot evaluate whether or not heroes simply 'appear' in certain critical, charged situations. In light of the concept of popular memory introduced earlier, it seems more accurate, at least in reference to popular-culture renderings of the past, to assume that a certain way to *narrate* historically charged situations calls for heroic action as part of the story. The following case studies seek to shed light on how fact and fiction, the historic and the heroic, the matter and its medialization, can and do interact.

Both case studies are based on the assumption that human history is essentially a narrative of progress. The presence of characters questioning what is universally acknowledged as progress – enlightenment and democracy – allows the Doctor and their allies to act heroically in defending that progress. Simultaneously, the episodes present singular moments as decisive and thus perpetuate narratives of heroic moments as *making* history, obscuring the multi-layered processes that are actually the drivers of progress.

---

70 Allison / Goethals: Heroes, p. 7.
71 von den Hoff et al.: Heroes, p. 12.
72 Allison / Goethals: Heroes, p. 9.

The Masque of Mandragora *(1976)*

The four-part story "The Masque of Mandragora", set in Renaissance Italy, is an excellent example of how *Doctor Who* uses a specific point in history to teach its audience something about values that are presented as universal: reason, progress and just rule. These values are made enjoyable and entertaining through a two-fold heroic narrative: part of the narrative concentrates on the specific 'local' level of historicized characters, the other part on the Fourth Doctor's more abstract level of universal balance.

The serial draws on the general cultural memory of the early sciences connected to a superficial iconification of Leonardo da Vinci to set up a narrative of progress. This narrative is made palpable and relatable by pitting the likeable, reason-driven and just Giuliano against his uncle Federico, the power-hungry and superstitious antagonist of the serial. This historicized hero-villain constellation is mirrored by the Doctor and his antagonist, the Helix of Mandragora, the science-fiction villain who wants to rule over Earth and a reason-deprived humankind. The Doctor's plot takes the historical one to a larger scale while remaining connected to the same values, namely reason and progress. The Fourth Doctor has been labelled as "surprisingly heroic" in a retrospective 2010 review of the episode,[73] which suggests that the extent of the Doctor's heroism is unusual for the era the serial originated in.

The episodes' historical setting does not merely serve as a backdrop; it has narrative meaning. The Doctor identifies this moment in history as a turning point for humankind, explaining to his companion Sarah Jane Smith that the fifteenth century is "the period between the dark ages of superstition and the dawn of a new reason", confirming Sarah's guess that the Helix at this moment could "gain control of Earth now through an ancient religion".[74] The danger intensifies when Giuliano tells the Doctor that he has gathered "the most learned men of all Italy, scholars, artists, men of the new sciences" for his accession to dukedom, including Leonardo da Vinci. In response, the Doctor fears that "if anything should happen to those men, they'd be thrown back into a new dark age".[75] If the Helix succeeds, it would take away humankind's ability to "shape its own destiny",[76] turning them "into sheep, idle, mindless, useless sheep".[77] In the end, the Doctor is the last one standing heroically between the Earth and the Helix, telling the villain he cannot "allow [it] to interfere with Earth's progress".[78] The Doctor ultimately protects Earth at what the episodes present as a vulnerable point in history. The episodes thus distil the complex advent of early reason-based science

73 Mulkern: Masque of Mandragora.
74 Mandragora 3.
75 Ibid.
76 Ibid.
77 Mandragora 4.
78 Ibid.

into a condensed narrative: if Leonardo da Vinci comes to harm, Earth will be stuck in the Dark Ages. The struggle for reason is thus crystallized in the historic moment of "The Masque of Mandragora".

The value of reason and reasonable ruling becomes tangible for the audience through two plotlines that pit heroes and villains against each other. The first, 'local' hero, Giuliano, is presented as the legitimate heir and a just ruler from the beginning. After his father's death, Giuliano proclaims: "I am Duke now, and I want to rule over a land where there is no tyranny, no lies, no blind ignorance and superstition."[79] This vision of the dukedom under his rule strongly juxtaposes the previous scene where innocent peasants are attacked, a brutal act that is linked to the villainous uncle Federico a few minutes later. The second episode repeats the juxtaposition of hero (Giuliano) and villain (Federico), when Giuliano expresses his fear not "so much for [himself] as for the people. Were [Federico] ever to rule San Martino, all knowledge, all attempt at learning, would be suppressed",[80] which connects his ambitions to be a just ruler to the value of reason.

Giuliano is not just shown as a good ruler but also as equipped with a number of prototypically heroic traits that induce the audience's sympathy: he can fight and is courageous, he is loyal and people voluntarily follow his lead. He is shown sword-fighting with half a dozen guards while his antagonist Federico watches and does not get involved himself.[81] When his friend and sidekick Marco has disappeared and their chambers are left in a chaotic state, Giuliano wants to help his "loyal friend" against the Doctor's advice.[82] The loyalty he shows is also shown to him. When Marco is threatened with torture in the dungeons, he says: "I shall not lie against the Duke. You can kill me first".[83] Marco acknowledges Giuliano as "the ruler, […] the leader" and follows him willingly, without questioning his competence and legitimacy.[84] The episode uses narrative tropes from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* that the audience might be familiar with and which might (even unconsciously) impact their judgement of these characters: the just heir (Giuliano/Hamlet) of a deceased king/duke is threatened by an ill-wishing uncle (Federico/Claudius, who even had a hand in killing the late ruler), but has the support of a true friend (Marco/Horatio). The BBC episode guide, for one, lists *Hamlet* as a source of the story. The parallels to Hamlet as well as Giuliano's favourable character traits construct him as a likeable character that the audience can emotionally invest in as he struggles against the villainous antagonist Federico.

Federico is a proverbial villain as much as Giuliano is a proverbial hero. He has Giuliano's father killed, threatens innocent peasants, has guards do his ugly fighting and uses religious extremists for his own ends. Federico is rude, calling his sub-

79 Mandragora 1.
80 Mandragora 2.
81 Mandragora 3.
82 Ibid.
83 Ibid.
84 Mandragora 4.

ordinate Rossini an "oaf" and a "fat clown of a chancellor";[85] and Marco explicitly characterizes Federico as a "murderer and a tyrant".[86] Federico and Giuliano are also visually pitted against each other: while Federico is normally shown in dark rooms, cellars and dungeons, Giuliano's scenes predominantly take place in well-lit rooms. The dark vs. light trope is also reflected in the colours of their costumes, connecting Federico to the Dark Ages and Giuliano to the Renaissance.

From the beginning, the hero-villain set-up is connected to the concept that the historic episode is negotiating: reason. When Hieronymus claims that "everything is foretold in the stars", Giuliano opposes that he "[does not] believe it".[87] Shortly after, Giuliano philosophizes about an astronomical experiment he is conducting: "That way we can learn more about them [the stars], understand their mystery. […] Perhaps the stars don't move as we think they move. That's what this man in Florence [hint to Leonardo da Vinci] is saying. Maybe the stars don't move at all. Maybe it's we who move." Giuliano not only neutrally proclaims the importance of reason but displays enthusiasm for a new Age of Reason that is just around the corner of history, thereby emotionally charging the struggle for progress.

The Doctor's fight against an antagonist who wants superstition to rule over humanity mirrors Giuliano's struggle for reason. When the Doctor is captured and first meets Federico, he begs to be released because he must deal with a "wave of energy" that could "do untold damage" – but he is met with laughter and mockery.[88] Only when the Doctor rephrases the energy as a "ball of heavenly fire" that "has come down to Earth" is he taken seriously.[89] Hieronymus then questions the Doctor to find out more about his powers, a conversation during which the Doctor mocks Hieronymus' superstition and belief in the stars. The Doctor calls the investigation a "great waste of time" and mockingly suggests that their 'fate' "depends […] on whether the Moon is made of cheese, on whether the cock crows three times before dawn, and twelve hens lay addled eggs".[90] This take on astrology aligns the Doctor with Giuliano and the side of reason before the two even meet. When they do, they immediately join forces. When Giuliano sees the corpse of a guard killed by Helix energy, he states that the harm was not done by "a fire demon" and that "such things are pure superstition".[91] The Doctor explains that the man died from "helix energy – high ionization that has only to touch human tissue to destroy it utterly".[92] Giuliano has an entirely different reaction to the Doctor's scientific explanation than Federico and Hieronymus. From that moment on, Giuliano and the Doctor are fighting on the same side.

85 Mandragora 3.
86 Mandragora 4.
87 Mandragora 1.
88 Ibid.
89 Ibid.
90 Ibid.
91 Mandragora 2.
92 Ibid.

The Doctor's own plotline, almost paradoxically, both complicates the narrative and crystallizes it. On the one hand, it gives the episodes more depth and allows the editing to jump back and forth between Giuliano's and the Doctor's stories, connecting and intertwining them. On the other hand, the Doctor's plotline essentially mirrors the 'local' historical one, replicating the same threat and conflict but reflecting them on a larger scale. The Doctor makes this explicit in conversations with Giuliano, whom he tells "there are other considerations besides your uncle and his petty ambitions", and with Federico to whom he says that he is "not interested in [Federico's] political ambitions. […] If Hieronymous isn't stopped, I promise you, there'll be no dukedom for you or anyone else to rule over after tonight".[93] The Doctor's insistence that there is more at stake infuses the victory of reason over superstition with significance for universal balance.

Three essential elements contribute to making "Mandragora" a heroic story of Tom Baker's Fourth Doctor: he is repeatedly shown as a solitary figure and performs heroic deeds and even uses weapons. In each of the four episodes, the Doctor goes off on his own at least once, ordering others to safely stay behind. Furthermore, the Doctor performs deeds conventionally deemed heroic – although always tongue-in-cheek to not have this unusual demeanour be taken too seriously. He steals a horse and flees on it,[94] prevents his own execution by using his iconic scarf as a lasso to trip the executioner over,[95] sword fights to rescue Sarah and save Giuliano,[96] and he has an armorer equip him before facing the Helix alone.[97] The use of a whole array of weapons other than his screwdriver is out of the ordinary for the Doctor and evokes a violent heroism unusual for the character.

"The Masque of Mandragora" is written and edited exceedingly well.[98] The most important aspects of the story are consistently woven through all the episodes, each of which ends on an effective cliff-hanger. The narrative and formal coherence is vital for driving home the story's point. The final part ends with making one of the key lessons of the story explicit. When Giuliano beckons the Doctor to stay because there is "so much [they] could learn from [him]", the Doctor replies: "It'll all come in time. Keep an open mind. That's the secret."[99] While "in time" stresses the idea of progress, an "open mind" implies that reason, including thinking out of the box, will lead towards that progress.

The narrative 'recipe' for the serial seems simple but it is precisely this straightforwardness that makes the story so effective. Likeable characters fight for the

93 Mandragora 3.
94 Mandragora 1.
95 Mandragora 2.
96 Mandragora 3.
97 Mandragora 4.
98 The story was written by Louis Marks, and, maybe more importantly, Robert Holmes served as script editor. Holmes wrote many prolific, popular and often highly political *Doctor Who* episodes.
99 Mandragora 4.

values of reason, just rule, loyalty and progress on two parallel and interconnected plot levels at a point in history when these values, the narrative suggests, lead to a change in the course of human existence on Earth. The various heroic moments of Giuliano and the Doctor – whose own plot adds a heroic layer on a larger scale with a greater enemy and greater consequences – infuse these values with emotional significance. As the viewers invest in the characters, following their struggles, they invest in the values for which they are struggling. The story thus perpetuates the popular memory of a turn from the Dark Ages to the Renaissance as progress, made emotionally tangible for the audience. This progress is condensed into two heroic fights that lead to one result at a significant moment in history: humanity comes out of the dark and into the light.

The King's Demons *(1983)*

Consisting of just two episodes, "The King's Demons"[100] lacks the narrative depth of "The Masque of Mandragora" but presents a concise and compelling heroic tale that feeds into the popular memory of Magna Carta (1215) as the crucial and irreplaceable starting point of Western democracy in the English-speaking world. The episode participates in the negotiation of Magna Carta's legal and symbolic meaning. While scholars keep questioning the accuracy of these claims, speeches like that of David Cameron on the occasion of the Magna Carta's 800-year anniversary illustrate how politicians keep constructing Magna Carta as the foundation of Western democracy. In his speech, Cameron called Magna Carta "a document that would change the world", a "great charter" that "shaped the world for the best part of a millennium helping to promote arguments for justice and freedom".[101] Legal scholars, meanwhile, keep pointing to the limited actual political influence Magna Carta had and has. While "*Magna Carta* has become synonymous in the English-speaking world and beyond with fundamental rights, the rule of law, and limited government", whole "generations of scholars" have shown that its "fame rests on several myths"[102] because, in legal terms, "the document was ineffective, hardly democratic, and not the actual source for many of the rights associated with it".[103] Nothing is "more British than Magna Carta" and the document "undoubtedly […] has affective meaning" but its popularity is "positively assisted by the fact that its legal content is so archaic and, at best, only

[100] The King's Demons, Doctor Who, BBC One, 15–16 March 1983.
[101] David Cameron: Magna Carta 800th Anniversary. PM's Speech, Original Script, Gov.uk, 15 June 2015, gov.uk/government/speeches/magna-carta-800th-anniversary-pms-speech [6 March 2019].
[102] See David Carpenter: Magna Carta, London 2015, J.C. Holt: Magna Carta, Cambridge 1992 [Cambridge 1965].
[103] Zachary Elkins et al.: On the Influence of Magna Carta and other Cultural Relics, in: International Review of Law and Economics 47, Special Issue: 800 Years of the Magna Carta, 2016, p. 3. DOI: 10.1016/j.irle.2016.05.004.

vaguely recalled".[104] "The King's Demons" participates in the circulation of the affective meaning of Magna Carta by connecting it to a heroically charged narrative that neglects the contested legal significance of the document. As with the advent of the Renaissance in "Mandragora", Magna Carta as an icon of democracy is invested with significance for humankind's progress, made emotionally palpable for the audience when the Fifth Doctor heroically defeats the Master to ensure that King John signs the document.

The first episode negotiates some of the popular-memory beliefs around Magna Carta. Several times, companion Tegan brings up the idea that King John was "forced […] to sign Magna Carta", telling the Doctor that she "know[s her] history".[105] The Doctor, meanwhile, tells her that King John "wasn't forced" but was "as much for it as anyone", that he "could have crushed that rebellion as easily as that".[106] The Doctor's repeated insistence on King John's active involvement in the birth of Magna Carta in negotiation with Tegan's contrary 'version' of history reflects the dynamic character of popular memory – it is not set in stone but reliant on the activation and circulation by biological carriers. Furthermore, the insistence that King John is *not* the antagonist of the story who refuses to sign Magna Carta makes room for the fictional villain, the Doctor's arch-enemy, the Master.

The second episode is dominated by the heroic acts of both the Doctor and a historically 'local' character to protect Magna Carta. The Doctor figures out that the Master "has set up an imposter as King John of England […] to change the course of history" because he "wants to rob the world of Magna Carta", which the Doctor "intend[s] to stop if at all possible".[107] This explicitly sets up the episode's central conflict between the Doctor and the Master as centring around Magna Carta. In his efforts, the Doctor is supported by 'local hero' Geoffrey de Lacy, introduced as a "local knight"[108], who immediately says that he "must to London to warn the King" when he learns about the plot. He repeats his readiness to help save Magna Carta even if he has to do it "alone", merely asking someone to "help with a horse" so that he can get there.[109] The little developed character of Geoffrey clearly evokes a typical knight who is loyal, courageous and willing to risk his life for his king. As he rides away on a white horse, the Master shoots him down with bow and arrow; but even on his deathbed, he continues his fight with his final words: "the king, Doctor, seek." The introduction and self-sacrifice of this prototypical knight hero emotionally charges the episode, raising the stakes of the Doctor's final face-off with the Master.

---

104 Martin A. Kayman: Imagining the Foundations of Law in Britain: Magna Carta in 2015, in: German Law Journal, 18.2, 2017, pp. 364–398. DOI: 10.1017/S2071832200021994.
105 Demons 1.
106 Ibid.
107 Demons 2.
108 Demons 1.
109 Demons 2.

The Doctor and the Master explicitly talk about the significance of Magna Carta, which directly links the document to the either-or situation of their conflict: either the Doctor wins and democracy can start to develop, or the Doctor loses, and chaos will reign. Before entering the fight, the Doctor reveals to the Master that he has seen through his plot:

> DOCTOR: The King turns the Barons solidly against him, he is killed in battle or deposed, possibly in favour of King Philip of France. He cannot therefore offer Magna Carta. What do you think of it so far?
>
> MASTER: I couldn't do better myself.
>
> DOCTOR: Thus the foundations of parliamentary democracy will never be laid.
>
> MASTER: Brilliant.
>
> DOCTOR: You cannot be allowed to alter the course of history, even indirectly.[110]

The Doctor presents the development of parliamentary democracy as dependent on Magna Carta, thus perpetuating the popular memory of Magna Carta as the foundation of Western democracy, which he intends to protect heroically.

The final fight between the Doctor and the Master brings down to the story level the values of fundamental rights and freedom. The Master had forced the non-human, shape-shifting Kamelion to pose as King John. When the Doctor fights the Master for control over Kamelion, and thus the course of history, he postulates that Kamelion "does have a mind of his own", while the Master insists Kamelion "obeys only [his, the Master's] will".[111] The Doctor turns out to be right: he wins the fight and sets Kamelion free, granting the creature the fundamental right to decide over his own destiny and proving that "unexpected as it may be, [Kamelion does] have a mind of [his] own".[112] This action on the microcosmic story level reflects the historical backdrop of Magna Carta: although it might be 'unexpected' to the ruler (King John or the Master), subordinates (the barons or Kamelion) develop a consciousness of their freedom and fundamental right to have a say in their destiny, rather than blindly following the rulers' orders. This sub-plot mirrors the aim and effect of Magna Carta and makes the asserted values of the document even more palpable for the audience.

Overall, "The King's Demons" demonstrates why reducing the narrative of complex historical contexts to crystallized popular memory versions thereof allows the heroic to appear. By presenting Magna Carta as crucial and all-important for Western democracy gives the Doctor's fight against the Master significance. If the episode presented Magna Carta as having a small impact on the development of democracy, if any, the Doctor's struggle with the Master would become less affective and its potential for heroic action would diminish.

---

110 Ibid.
111 Ibid.
112 Ibid.

Doctor Who does not explicitly discuss the heroic very often, but when the Twelfth Doctor meets Robin Hood in "Robot of Sherwood",[113] that is exactly what happens. This episode takes the exploration of how heroes and history are linked narratively one step further by incorporating arguments between the outlaw and the Doctor about how 'real' an "impossible hero" like Robin Hood is. This negotiation is not merely a recycling of Robin Hood as a heroic figure to whom certain values like chivalry are attached; rather, it mockingly questions his self-fashioned heroization before ultimately confirming his status as a legend within British popular culture. Robin Hood has become such a "mobile and elusive" character over the centuries[114] that there is "no single truth that stands behind [him]".[115] Popular-culture products often do not centre on the question "whether Robin Hood lived" but instead creatively celebrate "his heroic status".[116] Out of all the characters in the case studies, Robin Hood is the most extreme example of the selective and crystallizing processes of popular memory. The representation of Robin Hood on *Doctor Who* draws on many previous fictionalized versions of the character; his heroic status has been so unquestionably established that there is narrative space left to self-reflectively and playfully discuss the nature and function of heroes in history.

The episode engages in explicit discourse about the function of heroes in popular memory. When companion Clara expresses her wish to meet Robin Hood, the Doctor at first protests that "the heroic outlaw, who robs from the rich and gives to the poor" is "made up" and that "old-fashioned heroes only exist in old-fashioned story books". "Robot of Sherwood" does not represent the historical hero in a realist mode but mocks him. When they first meet, the Doctor refuses to 'properly' fight Robin Hood and uses a spoon instead of a sword. The scene is edited with unnecessary slow-motion that makes apparent how staged the whole 'fight' is and parodies the outlaw. The Doctor continues to mock Robin Hood for the major part of the episode, challenging him and questioning whether he is 'real'. Ironically, almost all elements of the episode *but* Robin Hood turn out to be fake. The castle is a spaceship in disguise and the sheriff wants to take over the world with an army of robots, which would "alter the course of history". Facing this threat, a familiar trope in historicals, the Doctor ultimately teams up with Robin Hood despite his initial lack of sympathy for the "long-haired ninny". Their final joint heroic act – hitting the spaceship with the golden arrow they have won at the archery competition earlier so that it explodes a safe distance away from the Earth – fits the mocking tone of the episode.

---

113 Robot of Sherwood, Doctor Who, BBC One, 6 Sept. 2014. Unless otherwise noted, all quotes that follow in this subchapter refer to this episode.
114 Thomas Hahn: Robin Hood in Popular Culture. Violence, Transgression, and Justice, Brewer 2000, p. 3.
115 Ibid., p. 11.
116 Robert A. Segal: Hero Myths. A Reader, Blackwell 2000, p. 94.

Despite the exaggerated mode used to depict the actual heroic action of the narrative, the explicit discourse about the importance of heroic stories at the end of the episode is sincere. Robin Hood asks the Doctor if it is true that he is "forgotten as a real man", that he is "but a legend", which the Doctor confirms. Surprisingly, Robin Hood does not mind, and what follows encourages the Doctor to acknowledge that neither history nor 'factual' evidence of whether or not someone was 'real' or 'really' a hero matters, as long as there are stories to inspire others to join the 'good fight':

> ROBIN: History is a burden. Stories can make us fly.
>
> DOCTOR: I'm still having a little trouble believing yours, I'm afraid.
>
> ROBIN: Is it so hard to credit? That a man born into wealth and privilege should find the plight of the oppressed and weak too much to bear...
>
> DOCTOR: No.
>
> ROBIN: Until one night he is moved to steal a TARDIS? Fly among the stars, fighting the good fight. Clara told me your stories.
>
> DOCTOR: She should not have told you any of that.
>
> ROBIN: Well… well, once the story started, she could hardly stop herself. You are her hero, I think.
>
> DOCTOR: I'm not a hero.
>
> ROBIN: Well, neither am I. But if we both keep pretending to be, ha-ha, perhaps others will be heroes in our name. Perhaps we will both be stories. And may those stories never end.

The story Robin Hood tells, about himself *and* the Doctor, highlights the similarities between the two. They then say good-bye, addressing each other with their full names and titles, "Doctor, Time Lord of Gallifrey" and "Robin Hood, Earl of Loxley", followed by a last reminder on the part of Robin Hood that he is "just as real" as the Doctor. "Robot of Sherwood", while self-reflectively mocking the 'ridiculousness' of heroes, ultimately confirms the importance of heroic tales as cornerstones for how we remember and reflect on the past as a guideline for the present.

4.4 History, the Heroic and the State of the Nation

The following case studies explore how narratives of historical heroic moments can connect to collective challenges the audience faces at the time the episodes are aired. In these episodes, heroic moments in historical settings are used to negotiate the state of the nation in the contemporary setting. The first two case studies will look at how narratives of World War II propagate national unity in the 2000s, an era marked by national insecurities during the 'War on Terror'. A more recent case study will then analyse how an episode set in the wake of the civil rights movement in Alabama negotiates racial tensions during the Brexit era.

The two-parter "The Empty Child" / "The Doctor Dances" tackles an important time in British history and cultural memory, namely the British experience of World War II. The double episode was produced and broadcast at a moment in time that is very interesting with regards to British memory of the War. Within national memory, the War generally "stands for […] a *shared common purpose*: a sense of a national unity, […] for *defiance* against the enemy, […] a kind of *certainty* and *pride*: that 'we' know who 'we' are"[117] and has thus become "a touchstone for a widely shared (yet still exclusive) concept of national identity".[118] In the production context of "The Empty Child" / "The Doctor Dances", two factors add to the significance of World War II within British national memory: firstly, the number of people who had witnessed World War II dwindled in the early 2000s, which shifted the nature of the memories. The BBC's project "WW2 People's War", which ran from 2003 to 2006, reflects an awareness of the fact that living memory of the War would soon die out. The BBC "asked the public to contribute their memories of World War Two", which resulted in an archive of "47,000 stories and 15,000 images" that mirror "how the wartime generation remembered those years […], subjective interpretations that described 'what it was like', not what happened".[119] The BBC did not check the entries for historical accuracy. Lucy Noakes has noted that the "largest number of stories, 14,336, are listed under 'Childhood and Evacuation', reflecting the demographics of the contributors".[120] Interestingly, one of the 'local' protagonists of "The Empty Child" / "The Doctor Dances", Nancy, is a teenager. Her experience thus resonates with that of the majority of veterans still alive in 2005 who were old enough to remember the Blitz.

Despite the decrease in living memory of the War, it remained a fixture in national memory and gained relevance again during the post 9/11 years. 9/11 brought back a sentiment of fear and, in consequence, a longing for national unity: "It has been a long time since average inhabitants of this country thought they lived in a dangerous place", a lead article in the *Guardian* from 2002 reads: "The thought didn't even hit after September 11. But the thought is out there now, whether we like it or not. […] There is fear in the air this winter."[121] Two

---

117 Robert Eaglestone: Cruel Nostalgia and the Memory of the Second World War, in: Robert Eaglestone (ed.): Brexit and Literature. Critical and Cultural Responses, London 2018, p. 97, emphasis in original.

118 Lucy Noakes / Juliette Pattinson: Introduction. "Keep Calm and Carry On". The Cultural Memory of the Second World War in Britain, in: eaed. (eds.): British Cultural Memory and the Second World War, London 2014, p. 11.

119 WW2 People's War, BBC Online, bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/ [24 February 2020].

120 Lucy Noakes: "War on the Web". The BBC's "People's War" Website and Memories of Fear in Wartime in 21st-century Britain, in: Lucy Noakes / Juliette Pattinson (eds.): British Cultural Memory and the Second World War, London 2014, p. 51.

121 Face up to Fear, The Guardian Online, 21 Nov 2002, https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2002/nov/21/terrorism.september11 [24 August 2021].

aspects fed into a connection between 9/11 and World War II and the evocation thereof in the years that followed: 9/11 was seen as a "threat to ourselves, not just the United States", with 'ourselves' denoting "every country […] that was attempting to create or maintain civil societies based on democratic consensus, human rights, and the rule of law – all the principles for which we had fought two terrible world wars".[122] 9/11 was seen as challenging the values that the allies had sought to protect against the Nazi threat – so perpetuating memories of the defiance of the Nazis served as a reminder for what was at stake in the 'war on terror'. Significantly, the comparison between fighting terrorism and fighting in a war was reiterated, practically on a daily basis, in the media: a "common conceptual metaphor" in British tabloid press between 2001 and 2005 was "TERRORISM IS WAR":[123] media reports frequently contained "metaphorical expressions which draw comparisons to the Second World War", with terrorist attacks being linked to Pearl Harbor as well as referred to as a "'blitz' by 'islamonazis' motivated by 'islamofascism'".[124] During the post-9/11 years that were marked by national insecurity, remembering WWII meant remembering a period of national unity.

In comparison to the diffuse threat of terror, the war against the Nazi regime seemed simple. Feelings of national insecurity in the post-9/11 period resulted in a backlash against pluralist ideas of a multicultural society and a rise in the 'unifying' nationalist rhetoric and politics that fed on the popular memory of British resistance and ultimate victory during WWII. Paul Gilroy observed in his 2004 study *After Empire* that the war "against foes who [were so] simply, tidily, and uncomplicatedly evil" kept fascinating the British; "the totemic power of the great anti-Nazi war seem[ed] to have increased even as its veterans [had] died out".[125] While the 'War on Terror' was complex and controversial, the recollection of national unity and military prowess when facing the Nazi terror evoked and renewed a feeling of national belonging and significance.

The *Doctor Who* two-parter "The Empty Child" / "The Doctor Dances" contributes to the continued circulation of the memory of WWII in the early 2000s; it deconstructs conventional soldier heroism but participates in the popular memory of the Blitz as a nation-building experience and as Great Britain's 'finest hour'. The episodes cover the war experience of ordinary citizens who are not affiliated with the army.[126] The story emphasizes non-violent resistance to the Nazi threat,

---

122 Michael Howard: "9/11" and After – a British View, in: Naval War College Review 55.4, 2002, p. 11.

123 Alexander Spencer: The Social Construction of Terrorism. Media, Metaphors and Policy Implications, in: Journal of International Relations and Development 15.3, 2012, www.gsi.uni-muenchen.de/personen/wiss_mitarbeiter/spencer/publ_spencer/jird_spencer_post_print.pdf [24 August 2021], p. 9.

124 Ibid.

125 Paul Gilroy: After Empire. Melancholia or Convivial Culture? London 2004, p. 96–97.

126 This sets the episodes apart from other Doctor Who stories dealing with WWII, such as "The Curse of Fenric" (1989, set at the battle line at the coast of France) or "Victory of the Daleks" (2010, set in Churchill's London War Room).

which is in line with the overall characterization of the Doctor as a pacifist. The denial of violence even in wartime, which is portrayed as heroic, is not limited to the Doctor; it extends to Nancy, a teenager looking after homeless children, and Doctor Constantine, a physician taking care of victims. Overall, the episodes promote trust over suspicion, healing over killing, alliances over solitary heroism, and non-violent resistance to extremely violent outside forces.

"The Empty Child" brings the Ninth Doctor and his companion Rose to London in 1941. They are chasing a dangerous object that turns out to be a Chula war ambulance from the future, crashed by Jack Harkness, a former time agent and now con man who wants to profit economically by selling the ambulance. The 'nanogenes' in the ambulance are not familiar with human DNA, and they begin to mutate the population on the model of a young boy (hence, "The Empty Child") who was close to where the ambulance landed, transforming their faces into gas masks and reducing their life mission to finding their "Mummy". Remarkably, the Doctor manages to save everyone in the most unlikely of circumstances: in a story set in a historic moment of destruction, everyone survives.

The very beginning of "The Empty Child" establishes the World War II context of the story – the extreme violence London is confronted with during the Blitz – and the significance of that historic moment for Great Britain as a nation. Shortly after landing in London at night, Rose finds herself holding on to a rope, dangling mid-air above the city, which is made clearly identifiable by a shot of St Paul's Cathedral. Rose sees the city under fire and the German planes are coming directly at her. Dramatic music during this scene implies that Rose in particular and London in general are in a very dangerous situation. Rose's Union Flag T-shirt, though commented on laconically later on, implicitly connects the episode to discourses of nationhood and nation-building. The establishing shots of London during the Blitz furthermore activate a pre-existing cultural memory. The audience already *expects* a certain kind of narrative – of resistance, of nation, of suffering; the double episode will fulfil these expectations, albeit with a few twists.

Against the London Blitz backdrop, the first non-violent hero figure enters the screen. Nancy, presumably in her late teens, takes care of homeless children for whom she steals food from the tables of families that are hiding in shelters during the air raids. Nancy is portrayed as courageous and caring, enduring and pro-active at the same time. The Doctor is extremely impressed by Nancy, calls her survival skills "brilliant" and endows her actions with national significance in a speech on the importance of her courage and resistance:

> 1941. Right now, not very far from here the German war machine is rolling up the map of Europe, country after country, falling like dominos, nothing can stop it, nothing, until one tiny damp little island says no, no, not here. A mouse in front of a lion. You're amazing, the lot of you. Don't know what you do to Hitler, you frighten the hell out of me. Off you go then, do what you gotta do, save the world.

While the Doctor tells her all this, Nancy is standing in the dark, it is raining ("damp island"), bombs can be heard falling in the background, yet the Doctor looks up at her from further down the staircase, which results in several hero shots of the girl. The angle becomes more extreme when the Doctor walks down the stairs and she seems taller and taller in comparison. Nancy, who looks a bit like a mouse herself in her grey coat, scurrying through the streets by night, becomes the personification of the British resilience in the face of a superior German force attacking them from the air night after night.

Rose similarly tries to give Nancy hope while they are fixing a wire fence together in the second episode, "The Doctor Dances". Nancy comments on the violence surrounding them, on "the sky […] full of Germans dropping bombs on [them]". Rose assures her that "this isn't the end", that "the Germans don't come here. They don't win. […] You win." The scene consists almost exclusively of close up shots, which creates a very intimate and personal atmosphere between the two women. Similar to the Doctor before, Rose gives Nancy the feeling that what she does matters for the future of the country. The formulation "you win" carries the double meaning of Nancy as an individual winning and the British winning the war, which, again, turns Nancy into a representative of the heroic civil, markedly non-violent resistance of London during the Blitz.

The story's second 'local hero' is Doctor Constantine. He is introduced simply as "the doctor" by Nancy who tells the (actual) Doctor that this is the person he must go to if he wants to solve the mystery of the mutated people.[127] This strongly aligns Doctor Constantine with the Doctor before he even appears on screen, implying that Constantine functions as an enhancement or doubling of the Doctor's values and non-violent principles. When the Doctor meets Doctor Constantine, the latter is already very weak, coughing and using a walking stick, but despite being infected himself, he still takes care of his mutated patients. He tells the Doctor that "before this war began, [he] was a father and a grandfather" and that now he is neither but "still a doctor".[128] This shows that, firstly, Doctor Constantine has already suffered losses in the war but, similarly to Nancy, keeps going nevertheless and that, secondly, he very much defines himself as a doctor, which is now the only part of his identity that the war has not taken from him. When everyone is saved in the end, including Doctor Constantine, the Doctor praises him for his resilience. The Doctor tells Constantine and the other cured patients to "beat the Germans, save the world" and reminds them not to "forget the welfare state",[129] which hints at the creation of the NHS and situates the episode's narrative within a nation-building discourse that transcends WWII. Doctor Constantine is constructed as a heroic figure very similar to the Doctor in his

127 Empty Child.
128 Ibid.
129 Doctor Dances.

preference for healing over killing, non-violent resistance and significance for the future of the whole nation.

Finally, the story uses particularly pacifist heroic efforts on the part of the Doctor to shift the popular memory of heroism towards a decidedly non-violent form of resistance. Throughout both episodes, the Doctor's pacifist agenda clashes with the more conventional soldier heroism impersonated by Jack Harkness, which allows the narrative to negotiate both concepts of WWII heroism. Jack Harkness is introduced through several hero shots and is consequently depicted as a typical, physically strong, attractive and distinctly American soldier hero who is visually in line with figures the audience is familiar with from war movies such as *Pearl Harbour* or *American Sniper*. He is shown to be a rather ambiguous figure who, on the one hand, rescues Rose from amidst the German air raid but, on the other hand, then wants to "get down to business" and suggests an obscure business deal involving the nanogene ambulance he illegally imported from the future.[130] As he does this, he is charming and flirting with Rose, and he only reveals his rude, selfish, arrogant and opportunist side when he meets the Doctor.

The confrontation with the Doctor leads to the deconstruction of the soldier hero façade that had previously been constructed, both narratively and visually. The Doctor has already understood that the object Jack dropped caused the mutation of all the people in the hospital, and forces Jack to admit to his real agenda: "I wanted to sell it to you and then destroy it before you found out it was junk. It's a con. I was conning you. That's what I am, I'm a con man."[131] Sitting in a chair, hands crossed behind his head, legs on the table, he freely explains his selfish scheme, telling the Doctor and Rose that the "London Blitz is great for self-cleaners", adding that he senses "a hint of disapproval" on the part of the Doctor, although that does not seem to bother him at all.[132] The Doctor, on the other hand, is visibly angry, telling Jack to "take a look around the room" to see "what [his] harmless piece of space junk did". In contrast to the Doctor, who is upset by the people's predicament, Jack Harkness tries to talk himself out of any responsibility. In this scene, Jack is, on the surface, as charming and carefree as before but, in opposition to the previous scenes, his lazy carelessness has turned from amusing to repulsive in the presence of the mutated people he is responsible for. The beginning of "The Empty Child" introduced him as a clear-cut heroic figure, and the beginning of "The Doctor Dances" deconstructs that very image.

Forced to work together in the following scenes, Jack and the Doctor are repeatedly compared to each other, which serves to stress the Doctor's peaceful approach in contrast to Jack's more conventionally violent interpretation of heroic action. The characters' weapons are most symbolic of their simultaneous similarities and differences: Jack carries a sonic blaster; the Doctor a sonic screw-

130 Empty Child.
131 Ibid.
132 Doctor Dances.

driver. Jack uses his sonic blaster to violently open a door but, when they need to lock a door behind them, it is the sonic screwdriver that they need, despite Jack's mocking of it ("The Doctor Dances").[133] Their weapons are similar – they are both sonic – but they are fundamentally different in their effect. Jack's is powerful and destructive but its usability is short-lived ("the special features […] really drain the battery"), while the Doctor's is a durable tool for repair and renewal.

The Doctor's subtle and decidedly non-violent approach to resistance perseveres in the end, and Jack Harkness joins the 'good side'. The shot of Jack, Rose and the Doctor walking towards the site where the Chula ambulance crashed visually evokes a team of superheroes. The setting is extremely dark with only some back lighting, which creates a frame of light around them as they walk determinedly towards the threat to the sound of marching music dominated by drums, fanfares and French horns.[134] Jack voluntarily chooses to join the team and is accepted by Rose and the Doctor as an equal member. Jack's arc of redemption is completed when he acknowledges that he has made a mistake and agrees to take care of the bomb that is set to fall on the site although he is aware that this act could lead to his own death. Over two episodes, Jack is introduced as a prototypically male, strong, good-looking soldier hero; this image is then deconstructed when he turns out to be a selfish con man; and finally Jack is redeemed as a more complex heroic figure who, despite his weaknesses, is inspired and guided by the Doctor to ultimately choose 'the good side'. Jack thus mirrors the episode's overall narrative by shifting his focus toward a less violent approach to WWII heroism.

Forcing the Doctor, a central hero figure in British popular culture, and Jack Harkness, a character modelled on the American soldier hero, to work together evokes the British-American coalition in the 'war on terror'. DiPaolo has argued that Harkness as a "heroic American figure" is portrayed far more positively than other American characters on *Doctor Who*, but nevertheless states that the "Doctor himself often seems unsure what to make of Harkness".[135] This mirrors the ambivalent British sentiment towards their American ally in general and towards the American military in particular: the missions in Iraq and Afghanistan in the early 2000s forced the British to cooperate with the Americans, similar to the Doctor and Jack Harkness, who ended up in war and stick together for lack of better options and despite scepticism towards each other's methods.

In addition to two non-violent heroes of resistance, Nancy and Doctor Constantine, and a reformed Jack Harkness, the Doctor's ultimate heroic act of saving everybody drives home the pacifist twist of the London Blitz narrative. First, the Doctor cures the boy first mutated by nanogenes, Jamie: the Doctor figures out that Jamie is Nancy's son and brings them together. When Nancy and Jamie hug, the nanogenes gather additional information on human DNA and Jamie is trans-

133 Ibid.
134 Ibid.
135 DiPaolo: Political Satire, p. 978.

formed back to normal. The Doctor then faces an army of other mutated people who serve as an allegory of armies in general: they are stripped of their individuality, transformed into a faceless, dehumanized mass, made "ready for the frontline". The Doctor, however, is not a 'normal' opposition – instead of killing or destroying that miniature army, he makes them human again. He meets the army with a mother's love for her son. When the nanogenes swirl around Nancy and Jamie, lighting up the night, the Doctor runs to them, lifts the gas mask off Jamie's face as the music's crescendos and cries out, "Oh, come on. Give me a day like this. Give me this one!" The Doctor collects all the nanogenes in his hands and throws them at the mutated army like a weapon – but this weapon heals, as befitting for a Doctor. The nanogenes are the light that brightens this two-parter, which is set during the London blackout where, usually, the only light is that of falling bombs. When all the people return to their normal selves, the Doctor exclaims, "Everybody lives, Rose. Just this once, everybody lives!" The Doctor, in the end, manages to remain a pacifist even in the middle of the London Blitz, admittedly an unlikely setting for a double episode at the end of which no one has died.

Overall, the two-parter suggests a model of heroism which is different from conventional soldier heroism yet still contributes to the circulation of the popular memory of WWII as a nation-building moment in British history. The episodes set up a clear binary between the 'good' British and the 'evil' Germans. The deconstruction of the conventional heroism of Jack Harkness furthermore implies that the resistance during the Blitz did not need any charming (but also arrogant) American heroes. The story explicitly constructs Great Britain as "a mouse in front of a lion" and thus participates in the mythmaking of Great Britain single-handedly facing the Nazi threat "forever battling alone, bereft of allies, against a dominant continental European power".[136] Ultimately, "The Empty Child" / "The Doctor Dances" negotiates nationalist identity politics of the post-9/11 years, presenting heroic moments during the Blitz as the 'making' of Britain in a situation when it was on its own and isolated from the rest of Europe.

The 2010 episode "Victory of the Daleks" picks up World War II again, albeit in a more concise way: "Victory of the Daleks"[137] uses Winston Churchill as a heroic signpost in a World War II scenario characterized by a very clear conflict. The episode circulates Churchill's general status as hero without focusing on specific heroic acts. The heroization is thus reliant on the attribution of character traits conventionally conceived of as heroic to Churchill. Rather than reacting to a crystallized historic plot with heroic acts, Winston Churchill, an established heroic figure with symbolic meaning, crystallizes the story at hand.

---

136 Simon Montlake: Battle of Britain's History. How the Myth of WWII Shaped Brexit, The Christian Science Monitor, 28 March 2019, csmonitor.com/World/Europe/2019/0328/Battle-of-Britain-s-history-How-the-myth-of-WWII-shaped-Brexit [24 February 2020].

137 Victory of the Daleks, 2010.

"Victory of the Daleks" presents Winston Churchill's behaviour during the London Blitz as the best way to deal with the desperate situation. The episode portrays Churchill as a symbolic national hero and does not problematize – or even mention – his imperialist, nationalist and racist tendencies. The episode participates in the circulation of the 'myth' of Churchill as the closest "imaginary embodiment" of the "the historical experience of British world dominance".[138] The unchallenged heroization of Churchill does not leave any room for complexities. The beginning of the episode shows Churchill sitting between two British flags, framing him quite literally as a figure of national importance. Churchill then tells the Doctor that he "weep[s] for [his] country, […] for [his] empire", and that "it is breaking [his] heart" to see Britain suffer. Churchill's fear for the country and its capital city, London, resonates throughout the story, which ends with the news that "they hit the Palace and Saint Paul's again". The Doctor's prediction that "there are terrible days to come, the darkest days" further stresses how desperate the situation is. At the same time, the Doctor reassures Churchill that he "can do it", thus contributing to the narrative that Churchill was a leader capable of steering Great Britain through one of its worst crises.

Churchill tries to use a shortcut to beating the Germans, which the Doctor prevents, implying that Churchill's long resistance is the only way. The Doctor tells Churchill that the "whole world knows [he is] resisting" and calls him a "beacon of hope". Throughout the episode, Churchill utters his signature line "keep buggering on" several times, stressing his determination to not be defeated. When Churchill asks the Doctor in the end why he cannot, after all, stay and "help [them] win", the Doctor tells him he is not needed because "the world's got Winston Spencer Churchill". Spelling out his full name again places Churchill at the centre of Britain's eventual victory over the Germans. As with Richard's pacifist prudence and dignified sense of duty, Churchill's consistent resistance is presented as the 'best' behaviour in the war setting of the episode.

"Victory of the Daleks" does not actively construct Churchill as a hero by narrating his heroic acts. Rather, the episode uses Churchill as a symbolic example of how to be a leader in a time of war. Like the 'local heroes' in aforementioned episodes,[139] the character of Winston Churchill in this episode connects the audience's contemporary moment with a moment from the past: Churchill's qualities and values are still required in the present. Other than the local heroes who need considerable narrative build-up to appear heroic, Churchill offers the episode a narrative shortcut. The narrative uses this well-known historical hero to activate the audience's popular memory, which makes the historical setting emotionally accessible without having to incorporate detailed explorations of these situations and their significance for the nation.

---

138 Gilroy: Empire, p. 9.
139 Mandragora, King's Demons, Empty Child, Doctor Dances.

Popular heroic narratives such as the WWII episodes based on an 'us vs. them' rhetoric are not unproblematic or innocent. Notably, the episodes draw a very homogenous picture of Great Britain as an essentially white society, which links back to the backlash against multiculturalism after 9/11. Though not conservative in an authoritarian far-right sense – the Ninth Doctor is, after all, a markedly working-class hero who champions rather leftist ideas such as the welfare state – this echoes a conservative understanding of British identity, of what it means to be a unified nation. This understanding, as reflected in the episodes considered thus far, includes exclusively white people.

There are no explicit statements on part of the production team concerning a post-Brexit (re)consideration of *Doctor Who*'s position regarding questions of British identity politics. The shift within the programme's World War II rhetoric in the 2020 two-parter "Spyfall", however, suggests some awareness of the matter. "Spyfall" is set at different points in time and thus not suited as a detailed case study in this chapter, but the scenes during World War II offer an intriguing point of comparison to the earlier episodes. The War scenes are set in Paris instead of London, shifting the narrative from a singular British war effort to that of the Allied Forces. In Paris, the Thirteenth Doctor meets a British spy, Noor Inayat Khan, a real historical figure. Inayat Khan was of Indian and American descent and born in Moscow, Russia. Her family moved to London in 1914 and to Paris in 1920. The character, the "first female wireless operator to be dropped behind enemy lines", as the Doctor reveals, embodies the Allied war effort.[140] In "The Empty Child" / "The Doctor Dances", by contrast, all 'local' characters in London during the Blitz are English and white. In "The Doctor Dances", Rose tells Nancy that "the Germans […] don't win", thus constructing a binary between the British and the Germans. In "Spyfall", Noor Inayat Khan asks the Doctor if "the fascists […] win", and the Doctor replies: "Never. Not while there's people like you."[141] The binary opposition is thus shifted from 'British vs. Germans' to 'fascist vs. resistance to fascism'. In comparison to the earlier episodes, "Spyfall" suggests that *Doctor Who*'s participation in the construction of popular memory of the War has shifted towards less nationalist narratives.

Rosa Parks

The 2018 episode "Rosa"[142] narratively constructs Rosa Parks' refusal to give up her seat on a bus for white people in Montgomery, Alabama in 1955, as a turning point in history. This moment is situated at a crossroads between stability and instability in a twofold way. On one hand, the 'turning point' can be more adequately described as a transgressive moment that requires heroic action to ques-

[140] Spyfall 2.
[141] Ibid.
[142] Unless otherwise noted, all quotes that follow in this subchapter refer to this episode.

tion the seemingly stable and fixed status quo to start a 'movement' and thus initiate change that *breaks* the stability. On the other hand, looking at the events as part of the course of history from the retrospective point of the twenty-first century, the sequence must be kept stable against the threat of intrusion from the future, which requires the Thirteenth Doctor and her companions to prevent a (fifty-first century) villain's attempt to disrupt history. The heroic is thus situated right at the intersection between past and future, stability and instability.

The episode stems from a very particular political climate both in the UK and in the US after 2016. It responds to new waves of racism and a backlash against people of colour in both countries. The episode was written by executive producer Chris Chibnall (2018–) and Malorie Blackman, the first black female scriptwriter of *Doctor Who*, and was broadcast during Black History Month in the UK, which illustrates an awareness of the story's political relevance in the current moment. It brings a (for some rather hazy) popular memory of Rosa Parks back to the forefront. The vagueness of this popular memory is explicitly vocalized in the episode, when the Doctor's companion Ryan recalls Rosa Parks as "the bus woman". Upon fellow companion Yaz' questions about whether Ryan remembers what the 'bus woman' actually did, he specifies that he thinks she was "the first black woman to ever drive a bus". Beyond showing some gaps in Ryan's schoolbook knowledge, this statement reveals two intriguing aspects of the episode's take on history: firstly, Ryan represents a tendency within recent popular history to pay attention to the role of women in history and to identify the 'first women' to achieve something. Secondly, the impulse to associate people of colour with public transport is distinctly British. In London in particular, immigrants constitute a high percentage of the public transport workforce, which has its origins in the Windrush generation arriving in the UK around the same time the episode is set in. The development was fuelled by London Transport starting to "operate a scheme recruiting staff directly from the Caribbean" in 1956.[143] "Rosa" is informed by its production environment in manifold ways. It answers to racist trends in the UK and the US, it resonates with the tendency to pay special attention to women within popular history and it is informed by a particularly British perspective on race, despite being set in the South of the US.

The whole story arc of "Rosa" is directed towards the iconic moment when Rosa Parks refuses to give up her seat for a white passenger. The episode frames Parks as a potential hero from the beginning, drawing on the most basic popular memory, namely that she was a black woman who had something to do with a bus in a historically meaningful way. The opening credits reveal the episode's title, "Rosa". The first scene shows a black woman waiting for a bus and then getting in at the front – a privilege reserved for white people in segregated Alabama

[143] Rachael Minott et al.: London on the Move. West Indian Transport Workers, in; Our Migration Story, ourmigrationstory.org.uk/oms/london-on-the-move-west-indian-transport-workers [11 November 2019].

in the mid-twentieth century. She is harassed by the bus driver and forced to get back off. The bus then leaves without waiting for her to get on via the back doors designated for people of colour. Even though the woman is not explicitly identified as Rosa Parks in the opening sequence, the episode title and the opening scene strongly evoke cultural memory of a decisive moment in history, one that the episode will circle back to later on: Rosa Parks refusing to give up her seat on the bus for white passengers, resulting in her arrest and the civil rights movement gaining momentum.

The opening scene is set in 1943, over a decade before Rosa Parks' heroic moment. It reconstructs events that are historically accurate and sets up one of the two hero vs. villain constellations, that of Rosa Parks and bus driver James Blake. When the bus driver gets up to harass Rosa Parks off the bus, the camera looks up at Parks from behind Blake's gun on his belt. The camera focus shifts from the gun to Parks' face, resulting in a hero shot that still includes, though blurrily, the threat she is facing. Parks actually sits down on a seat that is marked as "white" a moment later, a shot that provokes the audience's vague popular memory, but then only picks up her handbag from the floor and gets off the bus. Furthermore, the scene also introduces a character-specific theme tune that reappears throughout the episode: a simple, high fanfare.

The opening scene is followed by the arrival of the Doctor and her companions in Alabama in 1955 and the introduction of the episode's other villain, Krasko, who threatens the course of history. This serves two ends: firstly, the episode adds another hero vs. villain constellation with the Doctor and her companions facing off Krasko. Secondly, this plot device makes room for a discussion on the nature of history. Both the Doctor and Krasko explicitly remark on the vulnerability of history. The Doctor says that "history is very delicate" and, noticing that they are "one day out of a tipping day in Earth history", tells her companion that she does not "want anything disrupting that". That, of course, is precisely the villain's agenda because he, too, knows that "history changes when tiny things don't go to plan". The Doctor, who did not intend to land in Alabama in 1955, deducts that the TARDIS brought them there because the stability of history is threatened.

To ensure the stability of a pivotal moment in history, the Doctor and her companions have to embark on their own heroic mission, parallel to that of Rosa Parks. This becomes especially clear in the scene where the Doctor brings her companions up to date after meeting Krasko:

> He's not planning on killing or destroying or breaking history. He's planning to nudge it just enough so that it doesn't happen. […] Well, he didn't reckon with us keeping it in place. […] Now we know what our task is. Keep history in order. No changing it. Just guarding it against someone who wants to disrupt it. Tomorrow we have to make sure that Rosa Parks gets on the bus driven by James Blake and that the bus is full, so that Rosa sits when she is asked to stand for white passengers.

The Doctor's speech is set against a backdrop of fast music that becomes louder towards the end of the scene as more string instruments join in, adding longer notes to the jumpy base layer and resulting in the tune developing towards a symphony-like sound. When both the Doctor's speech and the music culminate, all three companions stand up one after the other. Similar to Rosa's call to action facing James Blake, the Doctor and her companions are challenged to heroic action. The episode thus has two parallel thematic strands of heroic action: one of change, questioning the status quo of segregation; and one of (retrospective) stability of overall history.

The villain, Krasko, as a character and his interaction with the Doctor add to a diversification of heroic representation. Overall, Krasko can be read as a villainous embodiment of white supremacy. Significantly, Krasko has travelled to 1955 from the far future. At first sight, he looks like a picture-book male action hero: physically fit, masculine jaw, distinct facial features and a demeanour reminiscent of Pierce Brosnan's James Bond. Any heroic potential, however, is consequently stripped from this character by every single one of his actions and claims throughout the episode. His motivation to go back in time is that he has identified Rosa Parks' refusal to give up her seat as the moment when "things started to go wrong". Talking to Ryan, he says that if "Parks won't be asked to stand, she won't protest, and your [Ryan's] kind won't get above themselves". This, as well as ordering Ryan to "stay in [his] place", expresses a strong feeling of racist superiority and entitlement on Krasko's side. The white male action hero is thus deconstructed, Krasko instead impersonates a far more extreme version of early twenty-first century white supremacists who fear their privileged positions in society would be 'threatened' by people fighting for gender and race equality.

The only scene where the Doctor faces Krasko on her own effectively pits these two characters against each other and uses a multitude of formal means to portray the Doctor as a hero, Krasko as a villain and to visually create an impression of threat for (history's) stability. The scene is set in an empty bus depot from which Krasko operates. The setting is dark, which marks it as Krasko's territory, whose black hair, beard and dark leather jacket align with it, while the Doctor stands out with her blond hair and light-grey coloured coat. The sharp overhead back-lighting soaks the scene in tension, as does the unconventional framing and editing of the shots. The Doctor and Krasko are frequently shown in close-ups that are closer than what the viewers would be typically accustomed to. Combined with an extremely high depth of field and the positioning of their faces at the periphery rather than the centre of the shot creates the atmosphere of an aggressive stand-off. They both walk out of their own frames, a formal suggestion of them entering the other's space. Furthermore, the off-centre framing reflects the threat of history being thrown off balance, which is made explicit by Krasko in this scene when he states that "history changes when tiny things don't go to plan". The Doctor sets herself and her companions up as the opponents to this plan, telling

Krasko his plan "won't work" while they are there. This scene, through both the discourse and the formal elements, clearly pits Krasko and the Doctor against each other, rather than Krasko and Rosa. Both Krasko and the Doctor are elements foreign to the actual historical setting. They are an extra pair of villain and hero added in, heating up the episode's overall atmosphere, which leads to higher emotional investment on the side of the audience and crystallizes the conflict.

There is only one instance in which Krasko and Rosa actually meet; other than that, the connection between the two remains indirect and, literally, invisible. The first connection between Rosa Parks and Krasko is made without them even sharing the same physical space. When Rosa walks away from the four travellers after their first encounter, the Doctor's sonic screwdriver registers "traces of Artron energy" all around her, which the Doctor calls "a problem". After a cut, Krasko is first seen, lurking around the TARDIS against the backdrop of threatening music, a low string timbre with rhythm instruments that becomes his signature theme throughout the episode. In the only scene where Krasko and Rosa meet, the same theme intrudes on Rosa's music, rather high fanfares forming a clear tune. The exchange of words is short and not very meaningful, but the dark timbre is threatening to drown out the fanfares at the end of that sequence. Krasko remains an invisible threat for Rosa. Interestingly, he is not the villain *she* is fighting. Her fight remains true to history – the struggle against the racism of her own time. Krasko remains in the shadows, kept at bay by the Doctor's parallel but neatly separate heroic storyline.

The fight of the Doctor and her companions against Krasko does not undermine Rosa's story. The Doctor's heroic potential is in a way 'outsourced' to fighting Krasko. The amount of measures the Doctor takes and their nature verge on the ridiculous: they bully the intended bus driver James Blake out of a fishing day and back onto a replacement bus they also organize, they send the replacement bus driver on a trip to Las Vegas, they escort Rosa Parks to the bus she is supposed to take, they run along the bus route telling passengers to wait for a slightly late bus. This has two effects: on the one hand, it pushes the whole episode towards that one moment where Rosa Parks refuses to give up her seat, investing it with far more heroic potential and importance than it might have had historically. On the other hand, it lets Parks' activism appear simple and serious, dignified and meaningful in contrast to the almost slapstick performance of the Doctor and her companions.

Besides keeping Krasko in check, the Doctor and her companions also narratively set up Rosa Parks as a civil rights hero early on. The heroization thus actually starts *before* the heroic act, guiding the audience's reception by framing the events in a certain way before they happen. In a (segregated) diner, they have the following conversation.

> YAZ: She refused to give up a seat on a segregated bus for a white passenger. And got arrested for it. Her arrest started a boycott of the buses in Montgomery.

DOCTOR: Or rather will start. Today is Wednesday, November 30th, 1955. Tomorrow, Rosa refuses to give up her seat.

RYAN: And all this basically kicked off the US civil rights movement led by Martin Luther King. See, I'm not totally ignorant. I just got confused by the whole bus thing.

This conversation condenses the rather complex historical reality of the American civil rights movement into a few heroism-infused decisive moments: Rosa Parks refuses to give up her seat, the boycott starts, Martin Luther King does the rest. This illustrates very well how the formation and circulation of popular memory works. It is reduced and anecdotal, highly selective, invested with emotion. It is a crystallized form of cultural memory that does not work without heroes, and Rosa Parks is the one to fill the heroic void of this story.

Significantly, and in opposition to many other historical episodes in which the Doctor and their companions save the day and thus history directly,[144] Rosa Parks keeps all her agency. The Doctor does not do anything instead of Rosa Parks. Neither she nor her companions encourage Rosa explicitly to go through with her refusal to get up, they merely make sure that the circumstances remain the same. In fact, the Doctor, Yaz and Graham are even part of the white by-standers (or rather, by-sitters) on the bus making sure all 'white' seats are taken, which leads to Rosa's harassment and arrest. Throughout the episode, Rosa Parks is portrayed as an intelligent, kind and sympathetic woman. In the scene on the bus in particular, she is characterized as determined and courageous. Her behaviour is shown to be transgressive, she literally crosses the colour-line and refuses segregation, starting a movement that will ultimately transgress racial segregation in wider society.

The whole episode, from the title displayed in the opening credits and the first scene also featuring Rosa and a similar situation on the bus, is developed towards the moment in which she refuses to give up her seat. That very moment is framed as heroic not only within the episode's narrative arc but also formally: it is set apart from the rest by slow motion effects, asking the audience to pay very close attention to this decisive moment in history. After driver James Blake claims "those seats back there" are for white passengers, Rosa's face is shown in a close-up, accompanied by the fanfare tune that has become her signature theme. Rosa stands up to let a man sitting next to her pass. After another shot of Blake's angry face, Rosa sits back down in slow motion. The camera is positioned in such a way that Rosa sits back down *into* a hero shot, which is followed by a close-up of her face, with her theme tune now the only sound. After another cut, all non-diegetic music has disappeared, instead we see and hear Blake get up and approach Rosa, ordering her to "stand up now". She replies that she "think[s she] should not have to". For a moment, the only sound audible is the running motor of the bus. Everything is reduced to her refusal. After Blake announces that he is going to have her arrested, all diegetic sound is muted. With the camera resting on Rosa's face, a pop song with telling lyrics starts.

144 See e.g. King's Demons.

You're broken down and tired […]
And you can't find the fighter
But I see it in you, so we gonna walk it out
And move mountains […]
And I'll rise up
I'll rise like the day
I'll rise up
I'll rise unafraid […]
And I'll rise up
High like the waves
I'll rise up
In spite of the ache
I'll rise up
And I'll do it a thousand times again
For you […].[145]

Music with lyrics is a rarity on *Doctor Who*, which infuses the lines and Rosa's act of heroic resistance with even more significance. The lyrics from Andrea Day's song *Rise Up* furthermore evoke Maya Angelou's famous poem *Still I Rise*,[146] an anthem of the civil rights movement. Rosa Parks' refusal to give up her seat is thus the heroic climax the episode narratively steers towards, a scene loaded with filmic effects that emotionally charge her transgressive act of resistance, accompanied by a song whose lyrics already in that moment intertextually embed her act in the memory of the overall civil rights movement.

The explicit heroization in retrospect is then provided by the Doctor, who serves as a hero-maker. Right after the song ends, a voiceover of the Doctor starts, while we still see the inside of the bus. A cut then shifts the scene to the TARDIS where the Doctor delivers her speech:

> On Monday, the boycotts begin. Across Montgomery, people refuse to use the buses as a response to Rosa's arrest. And in just over a year, on the 21st of December, 1956, segregation on buses in Montgomery was ended. [Nevertheless,] life's still hard for Rosa. She loses her job, so does her husband. It's a struggle, they keep fighting. And in June 1999, Rosa receives the Congressional Medal from President Clinton [shot of TV], the highest award given to any civilian, recognising her as a living icon for freedom. [It took her whole life] but she changed the world. In fact, she changed the universe.

At the end of the speech, the TARDIS doors open, revealing a view of Asteroid 284966 named after Rosa Parks. Parks is referred to explicitly as a "living icon", whose lifelong struggle resulted in change. The last scene of the episode thus stresses the Doctor's role of hero-maker rather than primary hero herself.

This episode, via the past, comments on the present situation, which reflects both in the episode's narrative in itself as well as its reception. Within the episode, the Doctor's companions Yasmin and Ryan share a conversation about prevalent

---

145 Andrea Day: Rise Up, song in the album: Cheers to the Fall, Los Angeles 2015.
146 Maya Angelou: Still I Rise, Poets.org, www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/still-i-rise [27 October 2018].

racist tendencies in contemporary Britain, incidentally while hiding, in the 1955 Alabama setting, behind a garbage can outside a motel room that does not allow any non-white guests (Yaz is of Pakistani descent and Ryan is black):

> RYAN: It's not like Rosa Parks wipes out racism from the world forever. Otherwise, how can I get stopped way more by the police than my white mates? […]
>
> YAZ: I get called a Paki when I'm sorting out a domestic, or a terrorist on the way home from the mosque. But they don't win, those people. I can be a police officer now because people like Rosa Parks fought those battles for me. For us. And in 53 years we'll have a black president as leader. Who knows where we'll be fifty years after that? That's proper change.

The conversation between the Doctor's companions directly connects Rosa's resistance to the British history of racism and to the British present atmosphere. It explicitly comments on the fact that racism is not a thing of the past. Furthermore, the importance of Rosa's act is universalized far beyond the US border. The significance of the moment in history they are saving is thus broadened both temporally and spatially. In addition, the conversation is also a call to action. Yaz' question of where they will be in fifty years contains the hope for further positive change. That hope, of course, is pitted against Krasko. The threat of this white supremacist from the future, who functions as a reminder of the fact that the rights gained cannot be taken for granted but must be defended, is an implicit request directed at the audience – and one that has sparked controversies.

The reception of the episode on Twitter expresses similar thoughts to those voiced by Yaz and Ryan, celebrating "Rosa" as an important message in an increasingly xenophobic political climate in Brexit Britain and Trump's America. First of all, the amount of activity on Twitter around the episode is remarkable. One user points out that in her area, "Rosa Parks is trending on Twitter", about which she is delighted because Parks is "such a big hero in history and such an important person".[147] Another user similarly notes that their "twitterfeed is buzzing w/ Brits celebrating an American hero. Parents are discussing issues of race w/ their children over breakfast this morning".[148] These are just two examples of the several hundred tweets and retweets containing "Doctor Who" and "hero" after the broadcast of the episode, considerably more than average. The connection between the popular narrative of history and the present moment goes beyond that of the producers' intention. Various users on Twitter linked the episode's storyline to a racist incident on a Ryanair flight that happened the day before

147 @Laura_Shannon_. "The fact that Rosa Parks is trending on Twitter is just amazing! She deserves it so much. She's such a big hero in history and such an important person 💝 #RosaParks #DoctorWho #JodieWhittaker." Twitter, 21 October 2018, 12:34 am., twitter.com/Laura_Shannon_/statuses/1054093557747859457.

148 @JordanHillebert. "My twitterfeed is buzzing w/ Brits celebrating an American hero. Parents are discussing issues of race w/ their children over breakfast this morning. I received an email from someone initially skeptical of a female Doctor w/ nothing but praise for the new series. Bravo #DoctorWho." Twitter, 22 October 2018, 1:16 am., twitter.com/JordanHillebert/statuses/1054285389115113472.

"Rosa" was broadcast. On that flight, a white passenger refused to sit in the same row as a black woman, and Ryanair was consequently "facing criticism that it did little to prevent a male passenger inflicting a tirade of racist abuse on a 77-year-old woman".[149] Against this backdrop, one Twitter user commented that the episode "Rosa" was "needed more than ever after that ryanair video came out" and that "many children have found a new hero in rosa parks".[150] The Twitter account of *Doctor Who Online* even tweeted Ryanair directly, reminding them that "racism should not be permitted in any way, shape or form".[151] This connection between the *Doctor Who* episode and current affairs shows how much the heroism portrayed in a popular television programme is relevant for its audience's everyday life and that overall, not enough has changed in the decades between Rosa Parks and the Ryanair racism incident.

The reception of the episode, however, was not unanimously positive. In its aftermath, Mandip Gill and Tosin Cole, the actors portraying companions Yaz and Ryan, had to answer to questions about whether *Doctor Who* was becoming "too politically correct" with episodes such as "Rosa" and "Demons of the Punjab", set during the 1947 partition of India, provoking "'extreme opinions' among some viewers commenting online".[152] In an interview with *inews* in December 2019, Jodie Whittaker evaluated the reactions to "Rosa" in retrospect:

> [The episode] highlighted Rosa Parks' heroic moment in history, but it also highlighted that modern society is still suffering from a lack of progress in some people's attitudes towards different people. I just don't understand what's politically correct about saying there is still racism within our current society.[153]

The fact that the portrayal of a heroic moment in the past as relating to contemporary society remains part of the discussion of the programme over a year after the episode's original broadcast highlights the affective dimension of the heroic

---

149 Alexandra Topping: Ryanair Accused of Inaction over Racist Incident on Plane, The Guardian Online, 21 October 2018, theguardian.com/business/2018/oct/21/ryanair-refers-racist-incident-to-police-amid-criticism-over-inaction [23 October 2018].

150 @Starlightjodie. "this episode was needed more than ever after that ryanair video came out. i'm so glad to see doctor who tackling these issues head on and not shying away. so many children have found a new hero in rosa parks tonight. #doctorwho." Twitter, 21 October 2018, 3:25 pm., twitter.com/starlightjodie/statuses/1054136500340867072.

151 @DrWhoOnline. ".@Ryanair Hey guys! Maybe after recent events you should have watched tonight's episode of #DoctorWho A rather timely reminder that racism should not be permitted in any way, shape or form." Twitter, 21 October 2018, 11:56 am., twitter.com/DrWhoOnline/status/1054084057175339009.

152 Mattha Busby: Doctor Who Stars Say Claims the Show is Too Politically Corrects are "Bizarre", The Guardian Online, 3 December 2018, www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2018/dec/03/doctor-who-stars-say-claims-the-show-is-too-politically-correct-are-bizarre [1 March 2020].

153 Stephen Kelly: Jodie Whittaker: "I Don't Understand What's Politically Correct about Saying There Is Still Racism within Our Current Society", inews, 27 December 2019, inews.co.uk/culture/television/doctor-who-jodie-whittaker-chris-chibnall-interview-new-series-1350321 [1 March 2020].

as an emotional bridge connecting past events to a present in which similar problems prevail in a more complex and complicated way.

The episode depicts history in a condensed manner, suggesting that the whole civil rights movement depended on Rosa Parks' heroic act on that specific day, on that specific bus. However, the episode's presentation of Parks' act as spontaneous and unplanned is historically inaccurate. Another individual, Claudette Colvin, in fact refused to give up her seat for white passengers nine months before Rosa Parks did but "the local civil-rights campaign, led by a then little-known Montgomery pastor by the name of Martin Luther King Jr, ostracised her" because of "her age, her gender, her darker skin tone".[154] The civil rights movement made a conscious choice to use Rosa Parks' similar act of resistance instead because the latter was older, married, of lighter skin colour and generally considered more respectable. The refusal to give up her seat was thus by no means a spontaneous and individual heroic act of resistance but planned and, in fact, staged. Even in the moment of its occurrence, the act was meant to be – and be perceived as – heroic. As we have seen throughout this chapter, the crystallization of historical events through heroic acts is not unusual on *Doctor Who*. Rather, "Rosa" participates in the programme's overall systematic construction of history as a series of individual heroic acts rather than as complex and multicausal.

While one might criticize the construction of history as a series of heroic acts, "Rosa" illustrates the connection of past and present through the heroic extremely well. Depicting Rosa Parks' refusal to give up her seat as a heroic act of resistance that changed the world, gives the story its affective dimension. While the civil rights movement as a whole might not have depended more on Rosa Parks refusing to give up her seat that day than the eventual development of democracy on Magna Carta, and while the episode even allows itself the further circulation of a story that is in itself slightly inaccurate, "Rosa" has an emotional truth to it, and that is closely connected to the heroization of its protagonist. The added conflict between Krasko and the Doctor furthermore stresses the *dynamics* of heroes: they do not become heroes and stay heroes forever; they must be defended and heroized again and again. They are born out of a situation, and out of the narrative that is spun retrospectively around this situation. They remain heroes only if they are remembered as such, and "Rosa" suggests that memory in popular culture is a very effective way to keep them alive and relevant.

---

154 Oliver Laughland: Claudette Colvin: the Woman who Refused to Give up Her Bus Seat – Nine Months before Rosa Parks, The Guardian Online, 25 February 2021, https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/feb/25/claudette-colvin-the-woman-who-refused-to-give-up-her-bus-seat-nine-months-before-rosa-parks [13 March 2022].

4.5 Artist Heroes and/in Cultural Production

The depiction of artist heroes in history is both a regularity and an irregularity within the *Doctor Who* corpus. On the one hand, famous artists have somewhat become 'regulars' in *Doctor Who* episodes and can thus be considered a normality within the canon of historicals. On the other hand, these stories have their own rhythm and their own conventions. The three episodes that serve as case studies in this section share one characteristic that sets them apart from the historical heroes of the section before. Vincent van Gogh, Agatha Christie and Charles Dickens do not know that one day, they will be turned into artist heroes – artists that are heroized based on conceiving their art as the exceptional work of a genius. As Bernhard Giesen has pointed out, "since the eighteenth century, aesthetic heroes like Michelangelo, Shakespeare, Mozart and Goethe have been revered as geniuses whose pathbreaking exceptionalism transcends the level that can be achieved by regular education and common effort".[155] Based on the assumption that "if we regard a poet, a composer, a painter, a sculptor to be a supremely creative individual, that is, a genius, we are constructing a hero",[156] artist heroes do not become such because their agency transcends the ordinary in conventionally heroic ways but because their artistic output is represented as exceptional.

Van Gogh, Christie and Dickens are at low points of their respective lives when the Doctor meets them. They are desperate, depressed, poor, unrecognized, disillusioned and outcast. This drastically clashes with how the Doctor and their companion see them based on their popular memory of van Gogh, Christie and Dickens as artist heroes. The artists' interactions with the Doctor and their companions help them to see themselves in a new light. Allowing for and accepting a heroization 'from the future' gives their art power and helps them to unlock the heroic potential that resides within their art and beyond. The episodes thus display self-awareness of the gap between actual people during their lives, the heroes they are made to be later on, and the role that cultural production and reproduction plays in the process.

Vincent van Gogh

"Vincent and the Doctor",[157] centring on the painter Vincent van Gogh in the final year of his life, most strongly juxtaposes the man as he lived and his experience on the one hand and the myth and cultural icon he becomes in popular memory on the other. Reading the monster of this episode, the Krafayis, as an externalization or projection of van Gogh's mental illness, "Vincent and the Doc-

155 Bernhard Giesen: Triumph and Trauma, Boulder 2004, p. 16.
156 Ibid., p. 34.
157 Vincent, 2010. Unless otherwise noted, all quotes that follow in this subchapter refer to this episode.

tor" can be qualified as the most purely historical episode of the new *Doctor Who*. The episode zooms in on its protagonist as a deeply troubled yet passionate and remarkable man, putting his human experience at the heart of the episode. The private and intimate portrait is framed by scenes set in the public, bustling present-day Musée d'Orsay in Paris, where his extraordinary art is celebrated, and van Gogh turned into a hero.

The very beginning of the episode, even before the opening credits, sets up the tension between Vincent, the man who lived, and van Gogh, whose pictures are admired in the Musée d'Orsay, as central for the story.[158] The first images show a golden field and a detail of a painting of that field, then a shot of Vincent's eyes, framed between the edges of his canvas and straw hat. This is followed by a shot of the whole picture, and, zooming out, it is revealed that we are no longer looking at the painting on Vincent's easel but on the museum wall, as a museum guide by the name of Black walks into the frame in front of the masterpiece. Before a single word is uttered, the episode visually introduces both the simple man Vincent and the renowned artist van Gogh. The museum guide's introduction to the picture further supports this set-up:

> So this is one of the last paintings van Gogh ever painted. Those final months of his life were probably the most astonishing artistic outpouring in history. It was like Shakespeare knocking off Othello, Macbeth and King Lear over the summer hols. And especially astonishing because van Gogh did it with no hope of praise or reward. […] Each of these pictures now is worth tens of millions of pounds, yet in his lifetime he was a commercial disaster. Sold only one painting, and that to the sister of a friend. We have here possibly the greatest artist of all time, but when he died you could have sold his entire body of work and got about enough money to buy a sofa and a couple of chairs.

By suggesting that van Gogh's work is more impressive than Shakespeare's, Black discursively establishes van Gogh as the artist hero that he has been visually introduced as. During this scene, we see a self-portrait in the background, showing van Gogh with the 'same' straw hat Vincent was wearing in the scene that showed him painting the field, stressing that the 'real' man resembles the picture we have of him today as a cultural icon. The representation of van Gogh in the artwork, i.e. the cultural product, is not the same entity as the man, but a selective version, crystallized through popular memory that includes his heroization as an artist.

When the Eleventh Doctor and Amy travel back in time to Vincent's final year of life, he is shown as poor and ridiculed by his contemporaries. Amy and the Doctor's admiration, which was 'normal' in the museum setting, suddenly seems out of place. When the Doctor asks a waitress at the café if she knows Vincent van Gogh, she replies that she does "unfortunately" because "he's drunk, he's mad and he never pays his bills". The Doctor's objection that he is a "good painter, though" is met by laughter and hilarity. Vincent's attempt to swap "one

[158] Note that in the following, I will use "Vincent" to refer to the man who lived as he is represented in the episode and "van Gogh" to refer to the cultural icon he became posthumously.

painting for one drink" is perceived as a completely ridiculous idea by the Doctor and Amy, and by Maurice, the bar keeper – albeit for different reasons. While the time travellers are shocked by the degradation of a masterpiece to payment for some wine, Maurice tells Vincent that it "wouldn't be a bad deal if the painting were any good". Even Vincent himself is not convinced of the quality of his work. When Amy calls his painting "one of [her] favourite paintings", he remarks that she cannot "have seen many paintings […]. It's terrible. It's the best I can do." The completely different perception of the paintings in the museum and in his own time is stressed even more when the Doctor and Amy enter his house, which is full of artwork, causing Vincent to apologize for "all the clutter". He does not perceive Amy's "wow, I mean, really, wow" as praise for his work but thinks she means the "mess" and promises to "have a proper cleanout".

The two spaces – that of the museum and that of Vincent's house – share the very basic characteristic of being full of his paintings but they are different based on how these paintings are perceived and treated. To the Doctor and Amy, the paintings seem out of place in Vincent's house as they watch him carelessly put a coffee pot down on a still life. Vincent, on the other hand, can neither understand nor accept his guests' praise, telling them that he has "come to accept the only person who's going to love my paintings is [him]" and that his pictures are "precious to [him], not precious to anyone else". The Doctor and Amy have to realize that while Vincent's house looks similar to the museum, it is a completely different space and that the man they have met is not the famous, celebrated artist yet.

Closing the gap between the man Vincent and the myth van Gogh becomes the main challenge of the episode for the Doctor and Amy in their mission to save Vincent and thus the yet-to-be-painted works that would ensure his legacy as artist hero. This challenge is embodied by the episode's monster, first spotted by the Doctor in a painting in the museum where is does not belong. The Krafayis can be read as an externalization of the fear and mental illness that kept Vincent from embracing his potential. When the Krafayis first appears in Vincent's backyard, the Doctor and Amy (and with them the camera that adopts their perspective on the scene) cannot see it. Fighting the creature, Vincent looks like he is punching the air like a madman. That only Vincent can see the creature implies a close link between them, and opens up the possibility to read the creature as an externalized embodiment of his mental illness.

Soon after the first appearance of the Krafayis, the episode depicts Vincent's illness in an intimate scene between the painter and the Doctor. The Doctor finds Vincent in his room, curled up in his bed, visibly in pain, like a child suffering from nightmares. Set to music in minor key, which blends in with Vincent's sobbing, the Doctor asks if he can help, to which Vincent replies that "it's so clear [the Doctor] cannot" and that when the Doctor and Amy leave, he "will be left once more with an empty heart and no hope". To the Doctor's attempt to encourage him, telling him that his personal "experience is that there is, […] surpris-

ingly, always hope", Vincent reacts by yelling at the Doctor that his "experience is incomplete". Later, Vincent also tells Amy that "sometimes these moods torture [him] for weeks, for months", implying that the helpless crying man in the earlier scene was only a glimpse of the extent of what he is experiencing.

Vincent finds rescue and salvation only in painting. When the Doctor asks him what he is "interested in", Vincent is visibly moved as he points at the paintings around him and delivers a monologue on the importance of art for his life:

> Art. It seems to me there's so much more to the world than the average eye is allowed to see. I believe, if you look hard, there are more wonders in this universe than you could ever have dreamed of. […] It's colour. Colour that holds the key. I can hear the colours. Listen to them. Every time I step outside, I feel nature is shouting at me. Come on. Come and get me. Come on. Come on! Capture my mystery!

As he talks, a fire is audibly burning in the background, the sound edited to be louder than it would be naturally. A close-up of Vincent's hand, the one he paints with, shows the tension in his fingers, as if he was grasping for something he can get close to but never truly touch. Finally, he grabs the Doctor and shakes him, completely moved by what he has been talking about, as if he was trying to keep this passion inside all the time but occasionally is unable to hold back. Before the Doctor, Amy and Vincent leave to go to the church where they suspect the Krafayis, Vincent says, "I'm ready, let's go", and takes a brush, as if he was taking up arms. He carries his arsenal, consisting of easel and palette, to the church, then forcefully sticks the easel into the ground. When the Doctor tries to tell him that "depression is a very complex…", Vincent interrupts him, "shush, I'm working". The passion for painting grasps him just as violently and relentlessly as his desperate sobbing. In the end, Vincent uses his easel as a weapon to defeat the Krafayis, implying on a metaphorical level that painting can lift him out of his darkest moments. The Doctor's visit thus equips Vincent with the *potential* to become a hero fuelled by his true superpower – art.

After the monster is gone, peace settles all around them, quietness and peace of mind alike, and Vincent allows the Doctor, Amy and the audience a glimpse into his extraordinary view of the world which his art is based on. The three of them are lying on the ground, holding hands and looking up at the sky, which Vincent describes while it transforms into his painting "The Starry Night":

> VINCENT: Hold my hand, Doctor. Try to see what I see. We are so lucky we are still alive to see this beautiful world. Look at the sky. It's not dark and black and without character. The black is in fact deep blue. And over there, lighter blue. And blowing through the blueness and the blackness, the wind swirling through the air and then, shining, burning, bursting through, the stars. Can you see how they roar their light? Everywhere we look, the complex magic of nature blazes before our eyes.
>
> DOCTOR: I've seen many things, my friend. But you're right. Nothing quite as wonderful as the things you see.

The suffering of his soul is transformed into a beautiful painting in front of the Doctor's and Amy's eyes to the sound of very soft music, completely calm and fulfilled by what he sees.

Having explored Vincent's emotional complexity in relation to his depression *and* passion for painting, the episode ultimately returns to the Musée d'Orsay where Vincent gets a glimpse of the future and the celebration of van Gogh, the famous artist he will be heroized as posthumously. Vincent walks into 'his' room in the museum. The room itself is filmed from a low angle, creating a hero shot of his *paintings*. In the following, the focus shifts from the museum panel with his name and painted face to his actual face, connecting the man to the myth. Vincent turns for a full circle, looking at all his pictures with the camera emulating his perspective. He has moved from the margins, made fun of by the villagers, to the centre, the world of his works evolving around him. The Doctor then asks Black where he thinks "van Gogh rates in the history of art". Black answers with a eulogy on the painter:

> Well, big question, but to me, van Gogh is the finest painter of them all. Certainly, the most popular great painter of all time. The most beloved. His command of colour, the most magnificent. He transformed the pain of his tormented life into ecstatic beauty. Pain is easy to portray, but to use your passion and pain to portray the ecstasy and joy and magnificence of our world – no one had ever done it before. Perhaps no one ever will again. To my mind, that strange, wild man who roamed the fields of Provence was not only the world's greatest artist, but also one of the greatest men who ever lived.

During this monologue, the music picks up several times, and Vincent keeps turning and cries, looking at both his paintings and all the visitors looking at them. Black portrays him as unprecedented, singular, exceptional, admitting to and incorporating the pain and strangeness of Vincent, the man, into what made him great as a painter. The episode reveals an astonishing amount of self-reflectivity on the impact of cultural production – be it a museum or a TV series – on the construction of heroes. Vincent's extraordinary way of seeing and painting the world equips him with heroic potential but it is only in the museum that van Gogh can be constructed as and turned into an artist hero. Vincent becomes a hero, is made a hero in that moment in the museum, in acknowledging and making him see his genius, his lasting impact.

Charles Dickens and Agatha Christie

"The Unquiet Dead"[159] featuring Charles Dickens and "The Unicorn and the Wasp"[160] featuring Agatha Christie work quite similarly in respect to the episodes' architecture, the interaction between the Doctor and the writers and the way in which the Doctor helps the writers to embrace and act on their heroic potential

[159] Unquiet Dead, 2005.
[160] The Unicorn and the Wasp, Doctor Who, BBC One, 17 May 2008.

both as authors and beyond that. Both Christie and Dickens meet the Doctor at difficult moments in their lives and benefit from the appreciation of both their works and their personalities. Inspired by the Doctor to imagine more than they have dared to so far, they grow in their heroic action facing the supernatural and, at least potentially, in terms of their artistic output. Unlike Vincent van Gogh, both Agatha Christie and Charles Dickens are already established, successful authors at the time the episodes take place, opening up space for the Doctor to inspire them to become heroes not *only* as artists but beyond that, fuelled by their exceptional imaginative powers.

The plot of both episodes is closely linked to the writers' work, modelled on the genre conventions of a ghost and a detective story. "The Unquiet Dead" is set at Christmas in 1869. Charles Dickens is reciting from his famous story *A Christmas Carol* as dead people become reanimated and start walking around. In "The Unicorn and the Wasp", the Doctor and his companion Donna join a 1920s garden party where they meet Agatha Christie, when a professor is murdered in the library. In fact, Donna explicitly states that it is "weird" to encounter "a murder, a mystery, and Agatha Christie" at the same time and place, adding that this is like "meeting Charles Dickens and he's surrounded by ghosts at Christmas". The reference to the earlier episode explicitly links the two stories and self-ironically nods at them being conveniently close to the works of the writers they portray. Modelling the episodes after fictional stories penned by Dickens and Christie positions the writers' work as important and relevant for the episodes. The authors' stories are allowed to shape their *Doctor Who* stories, granting the characters of the authors a great amount of agency.

The status of Dickens and Christie as great writers, potentially even artist heroes, is again juxtaposed with personal feelings of failure. The Doctor meets them at difficult moments in their lives, in which they both feel isolated and alone. Although Dickens is explicitly called a "great, great man", "brilliant" and a "genius", he is feeling lonely, admitting that "Christmas Eve [is] not the best of times to be alone" and telling the man who attends to him that he has been rather "clumsy with family matters".[161] He harbours doubts; not only personally but also as a writer, saying that he is merely going "on and on […], the same old show", that he is "like a ghost, condemned to repeat [himself] for all eternity" because his "imagination grows stale" and he has "thought everything [he']ll ever think". Similarly, the Doctor meets Agatha Christie at a moment of great personal crisis, namely on "the day [she] disappeared".[162] As the Doctor tells Donna, Christie had "just discovered her husband was having an affair" and then she "just vanished. Her car will be found tomorrow morning by the side of a lake. Ten days later, Agatha Christie turns up in a hotel in Harrogate. Said she'd lost her memory. She never spoke about the disappearance till the day she died." Both Dickens and

[161] Unquiet Dead.
[162] Unicorn.

Christie do not look like people likely to turn into the heroes of these episodes – Dickens is old, tired and cynical, and Christie is a grey mouse whose husband had run away, causing a scandal.

Dickens and Christie are both challenged to broaden the scope of their imagination – and it is only by doing so that they can fulfil their heroic potential within the respective episodes. Dickens first calls the ghosts a "morbid fancy", insisting that he "saw nothing but an illusion".[163] When the Doctor catches him inspecting one of the corpses he had seen walking, he asks if Dickens is "checking for strings" and tells him that he has "got one of the best minds in the world". The Doctor asks Dickens to "open [his] mind" and participate in a séance to call the spirits that reanimate corpses. When the ghosts appear, Dickens mutters, "all true […] it's all true". Agatha Christie does not take quite as long to believe in the actual existence of the giant wasp, all the same wondering who exactly the Doctor is and calling him "impossible".[164] During the investigation, when not only dark secrets but also a supernatural story from India surface and someone suspects Agatha would "never believe" what she is about to hear, the author replies that "the Doctor has opened [her] mind to believe many things".

Broadening the scope of their imagination lays the foundation for Dickens and Christie to heroically deal with the threat they are facing. Ultimately, Dickens works out how to beat the supernatural Gelth, stressing the heroic capacities of an artistic genius' imagination. Similarly, Agatha Christie understands that the wasp fed on the stories she had created and so she decides to stop the murderer with her power as an artist: "If my imagination made you kill, then my imagination will find a way to stop you, foul creature."[165] The following scene reveals an alternative narrative about the two weeks of her disappearance: she lures the wasp away from the others, ready to sacrifice herself. Overpowered by the supernatural impact of the fight, she remains unconscious for two weeks and has no active memory of the events thereafter. The episode thereby constructs a narrative for Agatha Christie's disappearance where she, instead of hiding away due to the shame of her unfaithful husband, becomes a hero who saves others by fighting the wasp herself, facing threats she did not even think possible before the Doctor turned up. Even more than Dickens, she rises to the challenge and heroically exceeds herself.

The Doctor, in both episodes, gives Dickens and Christie power by believing in their imaginative capacities and genius as artists, transferring the narrative of them as artist heroes that developed through the decades into their actual and complex lives. In "The Unquiet Dead", the Doctor opens Dickens' mind to the existence of supernatural powers and ensures Dickens of his lasting legacy. When Dickens asks the Doctor if his books last, the Doctor tells him they will, "forever".

---

163 Unquiet Dead.
164 Unicorn.
165 Ibid.

In "The Unicorn and the Wasp", both Donna and the Doctor ensure Agatha of her abilities and qualities both as a writer and a woman, which helps her rise to heroic action in the end. In a moment when Agatha Christie is downcast, admitting to Donna that "the stories are true", that she "found [her] husband with another woman, a younger, prettier woman", Donna encourages her to believe in herself based on her achievements as a writer, telling her that "one day they could turn [the books] into films", that "people love [her] books" and will "be reading them for years to come". Similarly, the Doctor believes in Agatha's skills as a writer, and in her depth as a person, linking both to the situation they are facing:

> DOCTOR: Plenty of people write detective stories, but yours are the best. And why? Why are you so good, Agatha Christie? Because you understand. You've lived, you've fought, you've had your heart broken. You know about people. Their passions, their hope, and despair, and anger. All of those tiny, huge things that can turn the most ordinary person into a killer. Just think, Agatha. If anyone can solve this, it's you.

Reassuring her of her success and ability as a writer, the Doctor helps Agatha Christie embrace her extraordinary skill and prepares her for her heroic act at the end of the episode: because the Doctor and Donna believe she is exceptional, she finds the power to really *be* exceptional and to take agency and control over her narrative. Like "Vincent and the Doctor", these two episodes bridge the gap between Dickens and Christie as actual, complex people and the celebrated artist heroes they would be constructed as. By encouraging them to see their own extraordinary imaginative capacities and greatness, the Doctor helps both to fulfil their heroic potential and take charge of their own narratives.

4.6 Shaping the Present through the Past, and the Past from the Present

The *Doctor Who* historicals generally follow a similar formula with variations on the dynamic between popular memory and the heroic. A historical conflict is clearly portrayed in a hero-villain dynamic (e.g. Giuliano and his reason against Federico's plotting and Hieronymus' superstition, Churchill against the Nazis, Londoners against the Germans during the Blitz, democracy over tyranny, Rosa Parks against the bus driver) that is connected to the concrete historical setting and at the same time negotiates the audience's contemporary values. The Doctor's involvement intensifies this conflict in two ways: firstly, the Doctor adds a consciousness for history. Coming from the future, they know of the implications and effects of that moment in history, which gives it more significance than from the historical characters' limited point of view. In addition, and especially as the historicals develop into pseudo-historicals, the Doctor supplies an additional conflict in the shape of an additional villain to fight. This second conflict often mirrors and universalizes the historical one – and aligns the Doctor's values with those of the historical 'local' heroes.

The dynamic between popular memory versions of the past and the heroic can work with two different trajectories. On the one hand, the historical setting allows for a crystallization (reason vs. superstition, democracy vs. tyranny, race equality vs. racism) that effects the heroic appearance of the local heroes. On the other hand, the Doctor's (and sometimes companions') own fight and conflict infuses the historical situation with yet more heroic potential and thus in turn effects a further crystallization of the historical moment. In some cases, episodes use the symbolic meaning of well-known historical characters such as Winston Churchill, who are already established as hero figures, to provide the audience with an emotional connection to a historical situation that is not explored in detail. In these cases, the historical heroes are used as symbols to crystallize the narrative.

Three developments of the heroic in historicals have become especially clear through the close reading of the case studies. Firstly, the episodes deal with heroic prototypes differently. While some earlier episodes, such as "The Masque of Mandragora" with Giuliano or "The King's Demons" with Geoffrey de Lacey, evoke heroic types ('the good ruler', 'the knight') and embed them into the narrative, more recent episodes such as "The Empty Child" / "The Doctor Dances" and "Rosa" deconstruct the prototype of the physically strong masculine (soldier) hero (Jack Harkness/Krasko). *Doctor Who*, as reflected in these examples, has developed towards granting the heroic more narrative space and engaging with it more actively.

Secondly, the historicals considered here display an interesting curve from 'pure' historical to 'pseudo'-historical and back again that is intertwined with the heroic. The early episodes had a more educational focus that did not allow for the same extent of crystallization that favours an appearance of the heroic as the pseudo-historicals with science-fiction elements. In episodes such as "The King's Demons" to "The Empty Child" / "The Doctor Dances", the heroic moments are largely brought forth by the Doctor, companions and local heroes fighting a science-fiction threat connected *to* the historical moment. However, we can also observe a different development in "Vincent and the Doctor" and "Rosa": these episodes zoom in on individuals in a way that pushes the heroic potential of these characters to the forefront, independent of science-fiction disruptions. Connected to its more complex negotiation of the heroic in historicals, *Doctor Who* has thus also developed different modes of pushing the heroic to the forefront in recent years.

Thirdly, the episodes vary in their self-reflectivity concerning their own part in the process of construction and circulating stories of historical heroes. "Robot of Sherwood" mockingly questions the purpose and legitimacy of historical heroes. The episode is a development from the programme's previous circulation of 'great (British) men', including Churchill and also Dickens, that did not problematize such figures. Not just the depiction of Churchill in "Victory of the Daleks" but also the portrayal of London during the Blitz, and the role that all these heroic

renderings of World War II memory in the post-9/11 years played in the popular-culture contribution to nationalist discourses, reveal conservative notions underpinning the programme's historicals. The shift in the WWII rhetoric in "Spyfall", as well as a more multicultural episode like "Rosa", imply an awareness of the previous conservatism and reflect a reaction to a political climate that has changed in the course of Brexit.

The interplay of popular memory and the heroic unfolds with different dynamics in *Doctor Who* and brings the past – Lowenthal's 'foreign country' – close to home; makes it palpable for the contemporary audience. Thus, the *Doctor Who* historicals considered here manage to "domesticate" (Lowenthal xxv) the past. In its crystallized popular memory form, the content of these episodes speaks of the present just as much as of the past, channelled through the voices of their heroes. While acknowledging the affective dimension of these heroes, the analysis of their heroic moments must problematize the political undercurrents, in particular when the crystallized narratives themselves have no room for such complexities.

5. Heroic Moments in Future Fictions

5.1 Post-Apocalypse, Extreme Fiction and the Futurity of the Present as Heroic Spaces

Past and future are irrevocably linked in *Doctor Who* in ways far more complex and complicated than can be imagined through a linear concept of time; or, to say it with the Tenth Doctor: time is "a big ball of wibbly wobbly, timey wimey stuff" in the *Doctor Who* universe.[1] The TARDIS is the most obvious signpost of this, a machine that can transport the programme's protagonists to any spot in space and time. Furthermore, the continued existence of the universe in *Doctor Who* is constantly threatened from both temporal directions, which means that the integrity of the present moment depends on two factors. Firstly, it needs to be built on a history that runs its course undisturbed by alien forces. The Doctor's heroic efforts in the past generally aim at stabilizing the past so that it remains recognizable to the viewer. Secondly, the present moment must be infused with a justified hope of continued existence or, at least, an uncertainty about when exactly human existence will end. In many of the future narratives, this uncertainty effects the whole world, which shifts the focus from a more national to a more universal perspective, although elements of British politics and societal concerns remain present. The process of crystallizing contemporary issues in a way that leads to an emergence of the heroic is in principal similar to the one observed in narratives of the past, but the ways in which the future and the heroic interact are more variable. The analysis of *Doctor Who*'s depiction of the future across six decades of television will shed light on the relationship between future threats and present values; on stability, instability and transgression from one to the other; on the almost circular movement that links the furthest future to the future just beyond the present; and on how heroic moments function in narratives of futurity. The Doctor's heroic efforts in the future can prevent or delay the ultimate destruction of humanity in a dystopian setting, they can be directed at pushing humankind towards a more utopian future, or they can be employed to face a post-apocalyptic scenario.

Beyond the necessity to keep the present moment stable both through the past and from the future, narratives of a distant past and future can be very similar. As Andrew Tate points out, the "ruined future" of post-apocalyptic narratives "counter-intuitively often resembles our deep past".[2] Whether it is caused by "pandemics that spread so fast only a tiny remnant of human beings survive; […] alien invasion […]; sentient technology that develops a homicidal antipathy for its human creators [or] ecological folly" that leads to "the end of the world that

1 Blink, Doctor Who, BBC One, 9 June 2007.
2 Andrew Tate: Apocalyptic Fiction, London 2017, p. 13.

we know",[3] the resulting wasteland is reminiscent of a pre-historic world. The further we travel into past or future, the more they resemble each other in their simplified, raw and uncivilized nature where survival is key above all else.

While these extreme scenarios are similar to each other in the most obvious way, narratives of a less distant past and future also share an astonishing number of characteristics. Many of the aspects that make the remembering of past times so prone to the presence of heroic figures are also cornerstones of narratives of futurity. This includes, for example, the construction of identity, the crystallization of good and bad, the focus on survival, the heightened ethical dimension of one's actions, the transgressive moment from stability to instability (or vice versa) and the indirect negotiation of challenges of the present moment.

Identity construction, both individual and collective, consists of projecting the future just as much as of remembering the past. Where Jan Assmann argues that cultural memory provides a "kind of identificatory determination in a positive ('We are this') or in a negative ('That's our opposite') sense",[4] one can argue that future fictions do the same thing looking forward. It says: "We want to be this", in the positive or, in the negative: "We do not want to be that." Similar to how we define ourselves "through the past", human beings also "construct themselves from the future".[5] The seemingly distant or far-fetched narratives about the future are in fact tied very closely to the present because "our ideas about the future affect how the present constructs actual bodies, actual genders, real-world politics, and real-world communities".[6] Future fictions can be imagined to work like a slide projector of the present: They enlarge how we define ourselves through our perceived challenges and fears, through the dystopian and utopian potential of our world, until these projections become so large that they go beyond what we can envision to be possible. Science fiction is the "place for the imagination to transgress the boundaries of our own world", especially in the form of "dystopia and utopia, […] fictional technology and apocalyptic scenarios".[7] This borderland, this boundary-area where characters are pushed to the limits of what they can bear, is the home turf of heroes.

The borderland of future fictions stretches further into the future than numbered years can express and at the same time entails the present moment. Science fiction is "also always about its own present […] because [it] resides on the borderland of our current critical condition, addressing the futurity of our present

---

3 Ibid., p. 14.
4 J. Assmann: Collective Memory, p. 130.
5 Hassel / Schärtl: Einleitung, in: Nur Fiktion?, p. 3: "Science Fiction lebt wesentlich davon, dass Menschen Wesen sind, die sich nicht nur von der Vergangenheit her definieren, sondern vor allem von der Zukunft her entwerfen."
6 Hollinger / Gordon: Introduction, in: Edging into the Future, p. 4.
7 Hassel / Schärtl: Einleitung, in: Nur Fiktion?, p. 1: "[…] Ort der Imagination für Grenzüberschreitungen unserer eigenen Welt […]: Dystopie und Utopie, Messianismus und Sendungsbewusstsein, fiktionale Technologie und apokalyptische Szenarien."

moment."[8] The futurity of the present moment can be negotiated by enlarging contemporary issues in a future setting as well as by setting the narrative in a present under such extreme threat that it resembles the future. Depending on how far elements of futurity are pushed, depending on how extreme the setting is made to be, a story set in the present moment can thus be an instance of future fiction. In her reading of the science-fiction novel *Pattern Recognition*, Veronica Hollinger uses the term 'future-present' for a "present infused with futurity, no longer like itself, no longer like the present".[9] Far more than their actual temporal distance to the present moment it is the extent to which contemporary issues and threats are pushed to an extreme, toward a liminal moment that marks a narrative as future fiction and defines its potential for crystallization.

The possibility to narratively engage with the present in the form of future fiction is rooted in the conventions and traditions of science fiction. The genre does not only offer a "direct interaction with contemporary culture"[10] but beyond that "has been deployed as a means to think about […] contemporary social, cultural, political, and technological transformations, fractures and gaps".[11] Especially within the field of popular culture – "media often dismissed as unserious and trivial, such as the comic book and the science fiction film" – narratives are "capable of achieving profound and probing insights into the principal dilemmas of political life".[12] Utopian and dystopian literature has been credited as not merely another way to think about the challenges of the present but as "the epitome of a creative intervention into central socio-political discourses that are negotiated in a given society".[13] It is inscribed into the science-fiction genre's rhetoric to creatively address real-world problems in future or alternative settings that allow for exaggerations and allegorical treatments.

The real-world problems negotiated in future fictions have changed in accordance with the threats perceived as most daunting in each era, which highlights the genre's ability to answer to contemporary issues. While the idea of an atomic catastrophe was "familiar to anybody who grew up with the looming threat of destruction during the Cold War",[14] this anxiety has been replaced with others, most recently climate change, technologically or media-controlled post-humanity, and the war on terror:

> The ruined worlds that they evoke are, it is implied, frequently a product of our current propensities and trajectories: the legacy of the early twenty-first century to these near-

8 Hollinger / Gordon: Introduction, in: Edging into the Future, p. 4.
9 Veronica Hollinger: Stories about the Future. From Patterns of Expectation to Pattern Recognition, in: Science Fiction Studies 33.3, 2006, p. 452.
10 Lars Schmeink: Biopunk Dystopias. Genetic Engineering, Society and Science Fiction, Liverpool 2017, p. 19.
11 Hollinger / Gordon: Introduction, in: Edging into the Future, p. 3.
12 Peter Y. Paik: From Utopia to Apocalypse. Science Fiction and the Politics of Catastrophe, Minneapolis 2011, p. 1.
13 Schmeink: Biopunk, p. 65.
14 Tate: Apocalyptic, p. 9.

future eras is often environmental degradation, consumer greed, the loss of human rights and the exploitation of future generations who will pay a high price for current folly and cruelty.[15]

Climate change seems to be the "fundamental context for addressing twenty-first century apocalyptic anxiety".[16] A technological fix of a daunting environmental catastrophe might lead to another apocalyptic scenario in which this technology overpowers humanity in a scenario reminiscent of Frankenstein's monster. The third dominating threat is that of the war on terror. Andrew Tate has identified 9/11 and the "subsequent 'Global War on Terror'" as a "crucial context for apocalyptic fiction" and as a force informing "more indirectly, the anxieties of much ostensibly future-oriented fiction".[17] While the specific contemporary threats change over time, the genre convention of science fiction allows for an openly political discourse that addresses and negotiates them effectively.

This genre convention leads to what Peter Paik has called the 'realism' of science fiction. While the worlds represented might differ greatly from our own on the surface, the narratives are realist in the sense that they "confront us with the harsh truths evaded or repressed by liberal and progressive thought".[18] In this sense, realism in reference to science fiction is used in the same way as the concept is "understood in the realm of political philosophy. Realism in this latter sense constitutes a discourse which analyses in an impartial and dispassionate manner the workings of power".[19] This link to power is especially intriguing in reference to the many dystopian scenarios that confront their audience with a world in which the vast majority of the population has lost any agency. In these narratives, people do not have any power over their own existence, be it because they have been deprived of all monetary capital, because their bodies are exploited for medical experiments or because they have become part of a media simulation wherein they are completely controlled by a totalitarian system that, at the same time, has them believe they are 'free'. These narratives make use of science fiction's ability to project a more extreme future version of our own present, which enables us to recognize this heightened inequality of power. The audience can then identify with (potentially heroic) characters who, pushed to the verge of their existence, fight to overrule the system.

Science-fiction narratives shed light on the inequalities and challenges that are already there, that are already real, by enlarging them in a way that makes it impossible to ignore them. Science fiction pushes the present reality to its limits, until it is close to breaking apart. The genre has been understood as "a discourse

15 Ibid., p. 132.
16 Ibid., p. 5.
17 Ibid., p. 7.
18 Paik: Utopia to Apocalypse, p. 22.
19 Ibid., p. 19.

of extensive ethical and societal problems in extreme circumstances",[20] and has been claimed as the "ideal site from which to explore the liminal, the brink, the verge, the frontier, the edge […]".[21] Science-fiction films "develop contemporary fears and bring them to the extreme".[22] Future narratives fuelled by science-fiction elements can thus be called 'extreme fiction'. Narratives of the future allow for a form of crystallization irrevocably leading to the appearance of heroes. The term 'extreme fiction' already implies elements of transcendence, of overcoming boundaries, of survival and the threatened end of all things, inevitable if not prevented by extraordinary and similarly extreme measures.

At the frontier of the possible, the characters are separated into the 'good' and the 'bad'. Depending on the choices they make in response to or denial of moral ideals, they become heroes or villains, with very little space left in between. In reference to Marvel's *Avengers,* the "final battle between Good and Bad" has been framed as the "central apocalyptic force".[23] At the end of the world, the "ethical dimension of consequence", which Csicsery-Ronay identified as one of the two dimensions of science-fictionality, moves to the centre of the narrative, asking characters to reflect on the possible repercussions of their actions.[24] Ultimately, it all comes down to one question: "Would it be good or bad to do this?"[25] By pushing its characters to the edge of their existence, science-fiction narratives force the audience to reflect on "how we deal with such challenges, how our sense of ethics changes, and where the boundaries of being human are".[26] As Lars Schmeink has pointed out in his analysis of the TV series *Heroes*, the "superhero's mission" begins with "the moral decision of acting for the 'greater good'".[27] How a char-

---

20 Isabella Hermann: Science-Fiction-Filme des neuen Jahrtausends unter politologischem Blickwinkel. Identitäts- und Alteritätskonstruktionen im Science-Fiction-Film, in: Jasmin Hassel / Thomas Schärtl (eds.): Nur Fiktion? Religion, Philosophie und Politik im Science-Fiction-Film der Gegenwart, Münster 2015, p. 97: "Wenn wir wie oben beschrieben, Science Fiction als einen Diskurs umfassender ethisch-gesellschaftlicher Problemstellungen unter Extrembedingungen begreifen, dann sind es die Themen Weltende, die menschliche Identität im Gegensatz zum Anderen und mögliche Abgrenzungen zum Anderen in schutzlosen und unberechenbaren Situationen, die im neuen Jahrtausend den Ton angeben."

21 Hollinger / Gordon: Introduction, in: Edging into the Future, p. 4.

22 Hermann: Science-Fiction-Filme, p. 114: "Dabei muss man sich bewusst machen, dass die Filmbeispiele unsere gegenwärtigen Ängste weiterspinnen und auf die Spitze treiben."

23 Joachim Valentin: Mit der Rakete in den Kinohimmel. Apokalyptik und Eschatologie in Science-Fiction-Filmen, in: Jasmin Hassel / Thomas Schärtl (eds.): Nur Fiktion? Religion, Philosophie und Politik im Science-Fiction-Film der Gegenwart, Münster 2015, p. 223: "Als zentrale apokalyptische Kraft ist […] der finale Kampf zwischen Gut und Böse zu nennen."

24 Schmeink: Biopunk, p. 19.

25 Ibid.

26 Hermann: Science-Fiction-Filme, p. 93: "Wie gehen wir als Menschen mit solchen Herausforderungen um, wie verändern sich unsere Moralvorstellungen, was sind die Grenzen unseres Menschseins?"

27 Schmeink: Biopunk, p. 199.

acter uses their power "determine[s] them becoming a hero or a villain".[28] The crystallization of 'good' and 'bad' in these liminal moments shows that science fiction, while playing with technological possibilities on the surface, really negotiates values. Pushing what is (technologically) possible provides the characters with super-human powers. What these narratives explore on a more substantial level, however, is to what end the characters exercise their powers and how they succeed or fail in fulfilling their heroic potential.

Extreme fictions are not narratives of doom per se. Just as the future can be a land of vast chaos, it can also be a realm of endless possibilities. Transcending the present accommodates both great catastrophe and great potential. Extreme fictions can be hopeful and progressive, allowing us to "play […] with the limits of what is possible, […] with our dreams about the future and the question of what *could be*".[29] Heroes in future fictions can thus be agents of stability or instability. They can fight for stability, *against* the destruction of a system deemed valuable (e.g. democracy). They can, however, also fight for instability, *for* the destruction of a system deemed inhumane (e.g. extreme capitalism or slavery). In the latter scenario, "[h]eroes are […] catalysts of change and transformation; they represent the utopian impulse of a society in that they are the individuals that unlock a potential […] which allows for human progress".[30] While contemporary threats play an important role in future fictions, they can also open up space to dream about a better, even utopian world.

While at times, heroes can serve as the catalysts for radical change, they are sometimes 'merely' those characters who most effectively face radical change – often simply by surviving. In post-apocalyptic narratives, survival in itself can be heroic, "involving extraordinary acts of resistance, compassion and, on occasion, something that could be described as forgiveness".[31] This heroic reaction to catastrophe serves as a moral lesson for the audience in a paradoxically entertaining way. Andrew Tate observes that "catastrophe on a global scale remains a curiously popular form of screen entertainment: Nations fall, nature is spoiled and the human race might be on the brink of breathing its last after any number of extinction-level events".[32] The narratives present extraordinary, extreme characters having to deal with a post-apocalypse caused by something that already exists in the audience's present moment. As Tate has pointed out, the "not-too-subtle subtext of many of these end-of-the-world visions seems to be: we only learn when it's absolutely too late".[33] By pushing current threats to an extreme and showing

28 Ibid.
29 Hassel / Schärtl: Einleitung, in: Nur Fiktion?, p. 2: "[Der Science-Fiction-Film] spielt, wie kaum ein anderes Genre, mit den Grenzen des Möglichen und des technisch Machbaren, er spielt mit den Träumen, die sich auf unsere Zukunft richten, mit den Fragen, was sein *könnte*."
30 Schmeink: Biopunk, p. 179.
31 Tate: Apocalytic, p. 131.
32 Ibid., p. 13.
33 Ibid., p. 14.

how characters heroically deal with the outcome of the contemporary ignorance of these very threats, future fictions hold up a mirror that reflects back to us a magnified version of who we are and how we live. In yet another way, heroic moments in post-apocalyptic fictions reveal something fundamental about values and identities.

5.2 Doctor Who*, the Future and the Heroic*

Doctor Who's future fictions feature many general characteristics outlined above as well as elements that are specific to the programme's blueprint and the Doctor's heroic identity. The combination of science-fiction conventions and time travel accommodates both stories set in the far future and stories set in the future-present: with the TARDIS, the Doctor and their companions can penetrate the future. Through the genre potential of science fiction, however, the future can also penetrate the present. Across this wide spectrum of future fictions, *Doctor Who* writers have made use of the possibility to integrate openly political, realist discourse into their science-fiction narratives. As Marc DiPaolo has pointed out, some of the new series' episodes that "emerge […] as thinly veiled allegories condemning American imperialism and consumer culture" are also very much "a continuation of a pacifist, intellectual, and iconoclastic ethic that has been advocated by the series' writers and producers since its inception".[34] This points to two elements specific to *Doctor Who* future fictions: firstly, the Doctor's generally pacifist agenda entangles heroic acts with a heightened consciousness of the ethical and moral dimensions of human survival. Ensuring the continued existence of the human race can only be deemed heroic if it is reached by peaceful means in co-operation (rather than armed conflict) with other intelligent, peaceful species. Secondly, DiPaolo's interpretation of certain episodes as "allegories condemning *American* imperialism and consumer culture"[35] implies that *Doctor Who* looks at the future from a British perspective. The negotiation of national identity is not as dominant as it is in some of the historical episodes, and many of the future fictions deal with universal threats such as pollution and extreme capitalism. However, the narratives often include specifically British elements. *Doctor Who*'s future episodes thus offer extreme fiction with a notably pacifist and specifically British twist.

While *Doctor Who* has never been an entirely unpolitical programme, there were certainly times when the political was more obvious and prominent. Peter Wright has argued that the Doctor "occupies neutral ground from which he can criticize socially, morally, and aesthetically, the mores of his contemporary audience", which reflects "the BBC's self-professed liberal social and political

34 DiPaolo: Political Satire, p. 965.
35 Ibid., my emphasis.

agenda".[36] Wright goes so far as to claim that this makes "the Doctor an extension of their own programming policy".[37] This assessment is certainly not entirely inaccurate but there are strong indications that the extent to which *Doctor Who* had a political agenda at different times depended more on individual producers and writers than on the BBC as an institution. Wright in fact points out that the Third Doctor is "notably more critical of his contemporary context than either of his predecessors",[38] but does not go into any further detail. Future fictions negotiating concrete political issues boomed in certain eras during which writers and editors pushed political agendas more openly than at other times. Hence, some eras (for example the 1970s) are overrepresented in the case studies, while others are slightly underrepresented. The boom of future fictions that combine heroic agendas with political issues depends on the extent to which the individuals on the production team approached *Doctor Who* from an ideological or moralistic perspective.

The 1970s in particular were a decade of heightened political awareness and discourse on the programme. The writers who had "taken over the show […] were far more radical in their desire to make political statements through the vehicle of *Doctor Who*".[39] Writers and producers such as Robert Holmes (who wrote, for example, "The Sun Makers" and "The Ark in Space"), Barry Letts ("The Green Death", "Inferno") or Malcolm Hulke ("Doctor Who and the Silurians") established the leftist, liberal legacy of *Doctor Who.* An obituary in the *Guardian*, for instance, states that "Letts's liberal worldview led him to commission stories with contemporary resonance – eco-parables, critiques on colonialism and apartheid".[40] Malcolm Hulke has similarly been assessed as someone whose "streak of anti-authoritarianism" runs through his writing.[41] The personal political views of Hulke and Letts resulted, for example, in the "eco-radicalism" of the Third Doctor.[42] At the beginning of the 1970s, scripts by older staff had to be adjusted to a new, more political tone; for example, former editor David Whitaker's draft for "The Ambassadors of Death", which "didn't quite work" within the new approach

36 Peter Wright: British Television Science Fiction, in: David Seed (ed.): A Companion to Science Fiction, Hoboken 2005, p. 293.
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid., p. 296.
39 Amit Gupta: Doctor Who and Race. Reflections on the Change of Britain's Status in the International System, in: Round Table 102.1, 2013, pp.41–50. DOI: 10.1080/00358533.2013.764083.
40 Gavin Gaughan: Barry Letts Obituary, The Guardian Online, 12 October 2009, theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2009/oct/12/barry-letts-obituary [5 September 2019].
41 Bernadette Hyland: Seeking out the Socialist Who behind the Doctor, Morning Star Online, 14 January 2015, morningstaronline.co.uk/a-3281-seeking-out-the-socialist-who-behind-the-doctor-1 [15 September 2019].
42 Sean Ledwith: Reds Behind the Sofa. The Radical Politics of Doctor Who, Culture Matters, 1 October 2018, culturematters.org.uk/index.php/culture/tv/item/2900-reds-behind-the-sofa-the-radical-politics-of-doctor-who [15 Sep 2019].

to the series "from a much more realistic point of view".[43] Similarly, the tone shifted again at the beginning of the 1980s: when Peter Davison took over the part of the Doctor in 1982, the programme might not have "retreated from *any* popular social or political argument" as claimed by Brian Robb,[44] but the political discourse was reduced significantly.

The timeline of any narrative involving time travel is complex but that is especially true for the several decades of going back and forth in the TARDIS that *Doctor Who* encompasses. Instead of trying to impose a linear order, the following case studies are therefore ordered into three categories based on the relation between the future and the heroic. Very generally speaking, these three parts of the case studies move from episodes that are set in the future-present towards episodes set in the far future, with the time of production as the implied present. However, the thematic categorization allows to accommodate exceptions to this rule. In many ways, the future is more open and more flexible than the past. While there can be different narrative versions of the past, the possibilities to narrate the future are nearly endless, and the different ways in which the future and the heroic interact mirrors that. This is even reflected in the level of control the Doctor has over the TARDIS. While "planned time travel seems to occur largely where the Doctor wants to visit celebrated historical events",[45] the future (especially the far future) is often an unintended destination. In these instances, the TARDIS takes the Doctor and their companions to a certain future setting because their heroic intervention is needed there. The future comes as a surprise to them and can take many forms. It can be a threat and an opportunity; it can be pre- or post-apocalyptic. Accordingly, heroic moments can be directed against the future, pushing it back out of the present; towards the future, pushing for unprecedented new worlds; or challenged by it in settings so radically different from the present that conventional models of heroism fail and need to be reinvented.

5.3 Heroes Pushing Back Against the Future

When the future invades the present in ways that threaten core values such as democracy and truth or the stability of the environment and thus the habitat of the human race, the Doctor and their companions have to push back against these threats and re-establish the (relative) stability and integrity of the present. The episodes considered in this first part are mostly set in the near future or future-present. These are stories that take place in a present heavily influenced by elements of futurity and thus removed from the actual 'real' present moment of production. James Chapman has suggested that many episodes of the 1970s, of which a number are included in the following case studies, are imagined to be

43 Chapman: Inside the TARDIS, p. 85.
44 Robb: Timeless Adventure, p. 165, my emphasis.
45 Hill: Triumph, p. 104.

"set approximately a decade in the future" and present "an uncomfortably sinister projection of the sort of society that Britain might become".[46] The case studies in this section portray the future as a dangerous invasion of the still relatively acceptable status quo, and heroism as a means to keep these threats at bay and stabilize the environment, democracy and media landscape.

5.3.1 Preventing Environmental Disaster

The destruction of the environment has been a recurring theme in *Doctor Who*. It first came up in the early 1970s. Two case studies, "Inferno"[47] and "The Green Death",[48] are from that time. James Chapman has argued that "The Green Death" was a "manifestation of the series' responsiveness to the topical issues of the day" in that it reflects the early 1970s "growing public awareness of ecological and environmental problems".[49] Both is also true for "Inferno", which preceded it by a few years. The third case study, "Orphan 55",[50] shows how the recent global climate movement Fridays for Future pushed environmental concerns back to the forefront of future threats after *Doctor Who* had treated them more marginally, as represented by the double episode, "The Sontaran Stratagem"[51] / "Poison Sky".[52] The latter is discussed more briefly because it entails environmental aspects but does not negotiate them at the centre of the narrative.

In the early 1970s, environmentalism became a broad social movement for the first time in post-industrial Britain. The movement was influenced by American examples. Friends of the Earth, a network of environmental organizations, for instance, was founded in San Francisco in 1969 and came over to the UK shortly thereafter.[53] Environmentalist organizations had many members,[54] which shows that these issues had momentum. In 1972, the Club of Rome published their report, *Limits of Growth*, which was based on the first computer-generated calculations and which warned of shortage of resources in the case of continuous growth of the Earth's population.[55] At the time, the report earned criticism mostly from economists who had "boundless confidence in new technology" such as "the fast-breeder reactor, or nuclear fusion; new materials from the laboratory".[56] Despite these critical voices, the Club of Rome's findings undoubtedly fed into the envi-

46 Chapman: Inside the TARDIS, p. 82.
47 Inferno, 1970.
48 Green Death, 1973.
49 Chapman: Inside the TARDIS, p. 89.
50 Orphan 55, Doctor Who, BBC One, 12 January 2020.
51 The Sontaran Stratagem, Doctor Who, BBC One, 26 April 2008.
52 Poison Sky, 2008.
53 See Brüggemeier: Geschichte, p. 301.
54 Ibid., p. 302.
55 Ibid.
56 B.W. Clapp: An Environmental History of Britain since the Industrial Revolution, London 1994, p. 250.

ronmentalist movement. The development of a "substantial movement" is what separates the 1970s from the "environmental anxieties of the 1960s" that did not translate into a broad ongoing discourse.[57] It was precisely at the turn of the decade from the 1960s to the 1970s that environmental issues became mainstream, as the coverage of the topic in *The Times* strongly suggests: although *The Times* "began to give more than a minimum of space to environmental issues" towards the end of 1969, the coverage "became much fuller in 1970 and the environment has continued to be newsworthy ever since".[58] This public and medial awareness is reflected in the timing of "Inferno" and "The Green Death", which were first broadcast in 1970 and 1973 respectively.

Inferno *(1970)*

The seven-part story "Inferno" entails elements of futurity on two levels, one more extreme than the other, and negotiates the threat of environmental disaster caused by drilling and nuclear power. Scientists are about to attempt the "first penetration of the Earth's crust".[59] Unexplainable green slime infects workers at the research centre and turns them into aggressive werewolf-like creatures. The Third Doctor, companion Liz Shaw and UNIT, headed by Brigadier Lethbridge-Stewart, are called for help. When the Doctor tries to repair the broken console of his TARDIS, he is transported to an alternative reality in which Great Britain is a fascist totalitarian state because the Nazis won WWII. There, the work in the research centre is much more advanced. The penetration of the Earth's crust in the alternative world results in a terrible catastrophe. The Doctor has to find allies that are ready to sacrifice themselves so that he can go back to his own version of the world and prevent the scientists from making the same mistakes. The narrative setup with two parallel versions of the world, one more extreme than the other, and heroic acts in both of them directed at pushing *back* against 'advancements' that threaten the existence of Earth, make "Inferno" a prime example of futurity as a crystallization of the present that requires heroic moments to stabilize human existence.

The extent of the threat is made obvious both visually and through explicit comment in the first episode. The first images are of a volcano erupting, evidence of the tremendous power beneath the Earth's crust. It does not come as a surprise that "some of the technicians have nicknamed [the research centre] 'the inferno'".[60] The threat consists of a combination of the natural force of the Earth and the fact that the scientists are using nuclear power to drill the crust. This threat is visualized by green slime rising up through a gutter in the lab, infecting and

57 Ibid., p. 8.
58 Ibid.
59 Inferno 1.
60 Ibid.

transforming a technician who then attacks former colleagues. While nuclear power in itself is invisible, the infectious slime makes its daunting effects obvious. The first episode ends with a nuclear power surge at the centre. "It's gone quite mad, the reactor", the Doctor comments, which does not only assess the state of the technical equipment but also, and even more so, the state of mind of the leading scientist, Stahlman.

Stahlman, the designated antagonist of the story, is in both versions of the world opposed by the Doctor and Sutton, a scientist who is able to recognize the extent of the danger the operation poses. The Doctor operates outside of the hierarchies and power structures most other characters adhere to, calling himself a "free agent".[61] Sutton similarly talks back to his superiors, refusing to "become a nice little well-behaved zombie […] like the rest of them".[62] In the absence of the Doctor during parts three to six, Sutton becomes the main opponent of Stahlman along with companion Liz, and the one most openly voicing his different opinions at that. He tells his colleagues that while they "make a little tin God of that Stahlman", Sutton thinks that Stahlman is "a nut".[63] Grouping Sutton along the Doctor and Liz in speaking up against penetrating the Earth's crust marks rebellion against authority, even in the face of personal consequences, as the first heroic act that can prevent the catastrophe.

While the scenario at the research centre is already an extreme version of (ab) using nuclear power, the alternative world the Doctor accidentally travels to presents an even more drastic situation. This is the perfect illustration of futurity: although this alternative world is not further in the future per se, many aspects of the world the Doctor comes from are pushed further: The power structures are even more rigid because of the totalitarian fascist regime ruling Great Britain. The drilling is more advanced. The danger of talking back is greater for Sutton. The countdown to the penetration of the Earth's crust is started in part four, despite the Doctor's protest: "You must stop this countdown before it's too late. […] If you break through the Earth's crust now, you'll release forces you never dreamed could exist! Listen to that! That is the sound of the planet screaming out its rage!"[64] The Doctor warns against the forces of the Earth that were visualized right at the beginning of the first episode. However, he has too little influence and too few allies to prevent the penetration. The alternative world thus goes a step further than the 'original' one.

The Doctor and Sutton fight a losing battle against the destruction of (the alternative version of) the Earth. The Doctor makes the threat explicit by stating that "compared to the forces [they] unleashed, an atomic blast would be like a summer breeze".[65] This puts the events in direct correlation with the viewers' scope of

61 Ibid.
62 Inferno 4.
63 Ibid.
64 Ibid.
65 Inferno 5.

imagination: an atomic blast is the disaster that threatens *their* reality. What the Doctor is facing in "Inferno" becomes monstrous in comparison. Most of episode five further explores the dimensions of the catastrophe. The Doctor and Sutton try to keep the effects at bay. Despite their heroic efforts in (physically) fighting Stahlman, the catastrophe spreads, with "massive seismic disturbances [being] reported throughout the country, Earth tremors reported in the Midlands and as far North as Leeds".[66] The dreadful news result in an apocalyptic atmosphere, which Sutton sums up as "doomsday".

With Liz and Stahlman's assistant Petra Williams joining Sutton and the Doctor, the four try to transport the Doctor back to the 'original' world to save it, while the other three sacrifice themselves. Sutton convinces Petra Williams to "join the rebels", which again marks a revolt against the authorities as heroic.[67] The Doctor tells them that they "could help [him] save a world", the "other one". The Doctor explains that "work on their project is not so advanced" and that he "may be able to stop them before they penetrate the Earth's crust". In the alternative version of Earth, even the greatest heroic action cannot push back against the future. However, the heroism of the doomed may save their counterparts in the 'original' world.

The operation that ultimately enables the Doctor to return to his version of Earth forms the climax and central heroic moment of the serial. Fighting against the heat and a growing number of transformed creatures, amongst them what used to be Stahlman, the Doctor and his allies use fire extinguishers as their primary weapons, a symbolic choice in their attempt to prevent the world from burning. The other antidote at the backbone of their mission is Petra William's calm, composed engineering to fuel the TARDIS with power from the reactor, which is set in stark contrast to the hectic, aimless, aggressive actions of the Brigadier, who remains an ambiguous figure. As with the Doctor and Sutton before, Petra standing up to the authority is portrayed as heroic, and her route of action offers an alternative to using "brute force" when facing any kind of obstacle.[68] While Sutton, Petra and Liz act out of selflessness, the Brigadier insists the Doctor take them with him. Liz ultimately shoots the Brigadier to prevent him from sabotaging the operation and right in the moment when everything around them starts exploding, the Doctor is ready to take off. Intercut with blurry, red images of suffering people in an apocalyptic world flooded by lava, running and screaming amongst explosions, Liz shouts "Go, Doctor, go now!".[69] The seas of lava rolling towards the camera reference back to the beginning of the first episode that depicted an eruption, only this man-made seismic catastrophe is much more extreme, much worse, and ultimately destructive for the whole world.

---

66 Ibid.
67 Ibid.
68 Inferno 6.
69 Ibid.

Back in his version of the Earth, the Doctor uses his knowledge to prevent a similar catastrophe. Still in a delirium, he mumbles, "number two, dangerous, reverse all systems", which Liz, Petra and Sutton then set out to do.[70] When the Doctor has regained his power, he orders everyone in the control room "not to penetrate the Earth's crust".[71] The Doctor fights (and ultimately kills) an already fully transformed Stahlman with a fire extinguisher and at "minus 35 seconds" the "countdown drilling [is] stopped".[72] Although the last minutes of the episode portray the Doctor, Liz, Petra and Sutton as heroically resisting and fighting Stahlman and the progressing countdown, their counterparts' operation to return the Doctor remains the central heroic moment of the serial. The more extreme situation required the more extreme heroic acts, including drastic self-sacrifice. At the same time, the story also suggests that to actually prevent catastrophe, one has to act before the circumstances turn extreme. The 'original' world in the *Doctor Who* universe took its lesson from the more extreme alternative scenario. By analogy, the episodes suggest that the 'real' world of the contemporary audience should learn from the fictional world that only just survived.

The Green Death *(1973)*

"The Green Death" explores one aspect that "Inferno" does not: it presents an environmentalist community's sustainable ideas as an alternative way forward rather than exclusively pushing back against the harmful advancement promoted by corporations. The story deals with a futuristic mining operation, similarly to "Inferno". The Third Doctor, companion Jo Grant and UNIT find themselves in a Welsh mining village where a miner mysteriously died. The story pits the corporation 'Global Chemicals' against a group of hippies around the renowned Professor Clifford Jones. The real-world company "Gamlen Chemicals" suffered from "a number of […] comparisons between [their] Company [sic] and a chemical Company [sic] featured in [the] DR WHO series", as a letter sent to the BBC by their sales manager reveals.[73] The wish for the BBC to "indicate that Gamlen Chemicals is a reputable world wide [sic] company and in no way associated to [the] ficticious 'Global Chemicals'"[74] remained unfulfilled. The BBC's reply states that *Doctor Who* "does not attempt to portray reality" and that "[a]nyone watching the programme would realize that any organization depicted was part of this fantasy and did not relate in any way to reality".[75] Gamlen Chemical's worries

70 Inferno 7.
71 Ibid.
72 Ibid.
73 J.K. Barron: Letter to the Director of Programmes at the BBC, 25 June 1973, TV Drama Doctor Who General, T5/647/1, BBC Written Archive.
74 Ibid.
75 John Keeble: Reply to J.K. Barron, Gamlen Chemical Company, 29 June 1973, in: TV Drama Doctor Who General, T5/647/1, BBC Written Archive.

about their reputation show that *Doctor Who*'s treatment of real-world concerns, however allegorical and fictional that treatment might be, did not go unnoticed by the audience, and that viewers were inclined to interpret the programme in relation to the world they live in. Despite the BBC's insistence on its purely fictional nature, "The Green Death" *does* address acutely contemporary issues, such as miners going on strike,[76] as well as presenting a view of ecology that seems ahead of its time, from a twenty-first-century perspective, thus encompassing the local as well as global implications of corporate pollution.

The story pushes the environmental threat – pollution caused by a conglomerate striving for advancements of its technology – to an extreme both through visualization of the effects of pollution and the presence of a ruthless non-human entity, the computer BOSS,[77] which has the executive of Global Chemicals under its control. The first episode makes the threat of pollution explicit various times. Jo reacts negatively to the announcement of a new technology Global Chemicals is introducing, asking if they do not "realize the pollution it will cause" and telling the Doctor that it is "time the world awake to the alarm bells of pollution".[78] While UNIT-Brigadier Lethbridge-Stewart initially shows more sympathy to the company's objective of producing "cheap petrol and lots of it" because that is "exactly what the world needs", he begins to find Global Chemical's promise of "no pollution from [their] oil refinery […] difficult to believe" by the end of the episode.[79] The pollution is visualized through giant maggots that crawl out of the ground as a result of Global Chemicals dumping their oil waste into the mines. The Brigadier fears that "within hours, they could be all over the countryside",[80] which enforces the idea that such pollution is not a locally contained problem but one that affects the whole country and beyond. The second element of the narrative that pushes the threat to an extreme is the presence of BOSS controlling Global Chemical's executive Stevens. Both the maggots and BOSS make abstract threats – the effects of pollution and greed for profit and power – visually tangible.

Through all episodes, Professor Jones' efforts to establish a more sustainable lifestyle is portrayed as the better alternative for Global Chemical's idea of 'advancement', and Jones himself serves as the heroic figure at the head of the

---

76 In 1972, miners all over the UK went on strike for almost two months. It was the first official miners' strike since 1926, and it impacted all of Great Britain. Private homes as well as factories suffered from severe power cuts. (See UK Miners' Strike (1972); 1972. Miners' Strike Turns Off the Lights.) The number of jobs in mining had gone down from 900,000 in 1957 to 300,000 in 1972, with pay rises too low to keep up with inflation levels (see Brüggemeier: Geschichte, pp. 264–265). Imperial Chemical Industries, one the UK's leading industries in the 1970s, was hugely affected by the power shortage caused by the 1972 miners' strike, resulting in the corporation giving a "week's notice to all its 60,000 weekly-paid staff as a precautionary measure" in mid-February 1972 (1972. Miners' Strike Turns Off the Lights).

77 BOSS is the acronym of "Biomorphic Organizational Systems Supervisor".

78 Green Death 1.

79 Ibid.

80 Green Death 6.

movement. In the opening scene, the professor and his disciples are demonstrating in front of the "Global Chemicals Research Centre", standing up to the 'bad' corporation. Opposed to Global Chemical's attempt to keep drilling for oil as a source of energy, Jones proclaims that "the world has got to find a way to start using the energy the sun is giving us now […] using the movement of the tides and the winds and the rivers".[81] In his laboratory, he researches a high-protein fungus that could replace meat as a protein source, an idea that (especially from a twenty-first century perspective) is indeed, as the Doctor tells Jones, "promising for the age [he lives] in".[82] The story ends with Jones planning to head to the Amazon region (taking Jo with him) to research protein fungi with the aim to find "food for all the world".[83] This highlights his inclusive approach to progress that pays attention to the needs of all of humanity as well as the environment they live in. While Jones' sexist and macho tendencies[84] cannot be called anything but backward, his ideas of environmentalism and ecologically aware progress are nothing short of visionary.

The Doctor has his own heroic quest alongside the overall struggle against pollution, fighting and ultimately beating BOSS in a struggle for humanity against machines. Although BOSS believes that "the human brain is a very poor computer indeed", the Doctor argues that "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts" and that humans are "more than machines".[85] This scene sets up the computer and the human, represented by the Doctor, as opponents on what kinds of ideas create progress. While BOSS believes in logic only, the Doctor stands for creativity and humanity. During the final showdown in the last episode, the Doctor calls on the humanity of Global Chemicals CEO Stevens. While BOSS tries to keep Stevens under its spell, the Doctor tells him that he is "the one in control" and urges him, "fight it, you're a human being".[86] Stevens ultimately choses his humanity and destroys BOSS by sacrificing himself. The Doctor's ideas of humanity and empathy triumph over the greed and power hunger represented by BOSS.

"The Green Death" continues to have a lasting impact within the *Doctor Who* canon. Categorized as an "eco-catastrophe",[87] it has been called "perhaps the most politically radical of all of *Doctor Who* stories".[88] Mark Braxton writes in his review for the *Radio Times* in 2010 that the episode is "entertaining, frightening, poignant and important" and asks: "How often does *Doctor Who* get it that right?"[89] What makes "The Green Death" such an effective narrative is that is

81 Green Death 1.
82 Green Death 2.
83 Green Death 6.
84 See Chapter 3, p. 106–107.
85 Green Death 5.
86 Green Death 6.
87 Chapman: Inside the TARDIS, p. 89.
88 Ibid., p. 90.
89 Mark Braxton: The Green Death, Radio Times Online, 13 February 2010, radiotimes.com/news/2010-02-13/the-green-death/ [15 August 2019].

operates along a clear binary opposition: on one side, Global Chemicals enforces technological 'advancements' but hurts the environment and human beings; on the other, Professor Jones seeks a more sustainable, environment-friendly way forward. Similarly, the computer BOSS, a machine striving for perfection, is opposed to the Doctor, who strives for creative innovation based on humanitarian ideas. In both cases, individual figures heroically rise up against ruthless non-human entities and thus make the serial's issues of environmentalism and humanity emotionally tangible.

The Sontaran Stratagem / The Poison Sky *(2008)*

Engineered by the alien race of the Sontarans, a markedly violent people, and invented by a Mark Zuckerberg-type genius, Luke Rattigan, the device ATMOS, disguised as a navigation system installed into 400 million cars, poisons the air world-wide in "The Sontaran Stratagem" / "The Poison Sky". News call the catastrophe a "biblical plague" that signals the "end of days".[90] The supposedly progressive invention of a genius who lacks empathy threatens humanity. A futuristic technical advancement invades the present moment, pushing a contemporary real-world problem to an extreme. The crystallization of the threat forces average people like companion Donna's mother to realize, "all these things they said about pollution, they're true",[91] which reflects an implied reaction on part of the audience. The desperate situation pushes the Tenth Doctor to excel heroically. He is ultimately ready to sacrifice himself, which is only prevented by a reformed Luke stepping in the Doctor's place. "The Poison Sky" ends with a shot of London under a blue sky. Through the heroic intervention of the Doctor, Donna and, in the very end, Luke, the futuristic threat of a technical 'advancement' could be pushed out of the present moment.

The heroic actions of the Doctor in response to pollution emotionally engage the audience despite an overall lack of substantial environmentalist discourse. This implies that 'green' issues, while not having disappeared from the British public's radar completely, were not as much at the forefront of society's concerns as they were when they first came up in the 1970s. In 2008, London introduced "more stringent monitoring" of air quality across the city by putting up stations across the city to measure particulate matter (PM) levels.[92] Clean air *was* a concern at the time – just not the most pressing one. This is reflected in the more superficial way that the episodes engage with the issue. Matt Hills has ascribed a certain level of "emotional realism" to the two-parter, while remarking that it

90 Poison Sky.
91 Ibid.
92 Adam Vaughan: London Air Pollution at Record High, The Guardian Online, 15 March 2011, theguardian.com/environment/2012/mar/15/london-air-pollution-record-high [24 October 2019].

does not really tackle "issues of actual climate change".[93] The narrative focuses on "*feeling empowered to make a difference* rather than actually contesting […] environmentalism".[94] Hills is not wrong in diagnosing the episodes' shortcomings taking pollution seriously as a political matter. The Doctor's heroic moment in "Poison Sky" is indeed not environmentalist in the stricter sense. He does not, for example, convince humanity to abolish cars in order to disable ATMOS and the extreme air-pollution caused by the device. Rather, the Doctor puts a halt to the Sontarans' alien invasion and ends the pollution with a *deus-ex-machina* solution.

The lack of environmentalist political action, however, does not take away from the narrative's affective power. The Doctor's heroic acts are an integral part of the emotional realism that makes the episodes enjoyable to watch. Future fictions do not necessarily offer their viewers to-do-manuals. They have no didactic mission in the narrow sense. Rather, they serve as impulses for their audience to reflect on the real-world implications of their crystallized, metaphorical treatment of pollution so suffocating that only out-of-the-world heroic acts can rescue humanity.

Orphan *55 (2020)*

When "Orphan *55*"[95] was broadcast, Dan Martin wrote in his *Guardian* review: "It's Thunberg Time".[96] The reference to Greta Thunberg, Swedish climate activist whom the *TIME* magazine named 'Person of the Year 2019', situated the episode within the context of the global movement Fridays for Future, which Thunberg started in 2018. Since her first 'climate strike', millions of people, many of her own generation (Thunberg was born in 2003), have joined her. The movement peaked on 20 September 2019, when four million people gathered all around the globe in "what was the largest climate demonstration in human history".[97] In the rhetoric of the Fridays for Future movement, science and fiction meet: Thunberg repeats "the unassailable science: Oceans will rise. Cities will flood. Millions of people will suffer"; the demonstrations feature signs with slogans such as "Every Disaster Movie Starts with a Scientist Being Ignored" and "The Dinosaurs Thought They Had Time, Too".[98] With "Orphan *55*", *Doctor Who* translates the movement back into the science-fiction genre that the dark prophecies of Thunberg and her followers are reminiscent of.

---

93 Hills: Triumph, p. 102.
94 Ibid., emphasis in original.
95 Unless otherwise noted, all quotes that follow in this subchapter refer to this episode.
96 Dan Martin: Doctor Who Recap. Series 38, Episode Three – Orphan 55, The Guardian Online, 12 January 2020, theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2020/jan/12/doctor-who-recap-series-38-episode-three-orphan-55 [20 February 2020].
97 Charlotte Alter et al.: TIME 2019 Person of the Year: Greta Thunberg, TIME Online, time.com/person-of-the-year-2019-greta-thunberg [1 March 2020].
98 Ibid.

At the beginning of the episode, the Thirteenth Doctor and her companions Graham, Yaz and Ryan travel to the futuristic planet Orphan 55 for an all-inclusive spa holiday. Soon after their arrival, they find out that the spa is surrounded by a dystopic wasteland without any oxygen. Monstrous creatures, the 'Dreg', roam this wasteland. When another guest at the spa is abducted by the Dreg, the Doctor, her companions and a few other characters set out on a rescue mission. While running from the Dreg in an underground system with Russian writing on the wall, Yaz realizes that "this is Earth". When the Doctor accesses a Dreg's memory, she (and with her the audience) sees images of a devastating eco-catastrophe. Ryan asks how Earth "end[ed] up like this" and the Doctor replies: "You had warnings from every scientist alive." She later adds that the "people who used to have this planet could have changed, but they didn't", which resulted in "the food chain collaps[ing], mass migration and war". Orphan 55 is the apocalyptic future version of humanity's planet after a collapse of the global climate; the Dreg are transformed humans who have adapted to the hostile environment. The episode thus reveals the humans to be the 'real' monsters.

The episode features both heroic moments of several characters in the extreme setting on Orphan 55 and an explicit appeal of the Doctor that calls the audience to action. Several guest characters (Vilma, Bella, Kane) sacrifice their lives to enable the Doctor and her companions to escape. The self-sacrifice of Vilma, Bella and Kane is affectively charged, similar to the heroic intervention of Liz in the parallel universe in "Inferno". After escaping the wasteland of Orphan 55, the companions are devastated, which animates the Doctor to deliver a speech that calls on her companions and, by extension, the contemporaneous audience, to change their behaviour in order to avoid an eco-catastrophe. The Doctor tells them that what they saw on Orphan 55 is "one possible future" and while she cannot "tell [them] that Earth is going to be okay", there is hope yet:

> In your time, humanity is busy arguing over the washing-up while the house burns down. Unless people face facts and change, catastrophe is coming. But […] the future is not fixed. It depends on billions of decisions, and actions, and people stepping up. Humans. I think you forget how powerful you are. Lives change worlds. People can save planets, or wreck them. That's the choice. Be the best of humanity. Or...

The Doctor's speech, ending with "or…", is followed by a shot of a Dreg that screams at the audience. The Doctor gives the humans in the present moment an either-or-choice. In comparison to the previous case studies in this section, "Orphan 55" depicts the present moment as closer to the looming eco-disaster although, paradoxically, "Orphan 55" is set much further in the future than the other environmentalist case studies. The episode implies that heroically pushing back against the apocalyptic environmental collapse can no longer be limited to the future. The either-or choice the Doctor suggests constructs the present as a decisive moment in which humanity can either react heroically ("be the best") or be doomed.

The mixed reception of the episode reflects the affective dimension of the Doctor's speech. Dan Martin, while admitting that "Orphan 55 is not exactly subtle about its climate crisis message", gives the episode an overall positive review.[99] Michael Hogan, however, accuses the episode of "clumsy moral lessons" and asks the Doctor to "please stop sermonising" in his review for the *Telegraph*, calling "politically correct preaching" a "bugbear".[100] The reception of many viewers was similarly negative; they were "very upset indeed that a series that they go to for pure escapism, where a magical alien whisks humans away in a blue box for adventures in time and space, hammered in a message that directly addressed climate change".[101] Reminding his readers that *Doctor Who* "has always been political", Silliman comes to the conclusion that in the political and environmental climate of 2020, the episode's drastic message is on point: "It was definitely blunt and transparent, no question, but several portions of the Earth are currently on fire. The subtle approach is not working, so I'm surprised that The [sic] Doctor didn't grab the damn camera and shout these lines directly to the audience."[102] Both the blunt nature of the Doctor's speech and the episode's reception show that environmentalist issues, which had not been completely absent but dormant on *Doctor Who*, as the limited engagement with the threat of pollution in "The Sontaran Stratagem" / "Poison Sky" indicated, moved back to the forefront of the programme's political agenda in response to the global 'climate strikes'. In "Orphan 55", the threat of environmental destruction is at the heart of the narrative, provoking heroic moments in the future settings and explicitly calling for heroic action in the present moment of the real-world context.

5.3.2 Protecting Democracy and Truth in a Digital World

The threat of alternative versions of history or post-truth discourses is one that mainly developed during the New *Who* era, although some aspects of it can be found in earlier episodes. In "The Enemy of the World",[103] for example, the megalomaniac Salamander "engineer[s] natural disasters and political coups in a bid for world domination" in the then-future setting of 2018,[104] constructing his own post-truth version of reality to gain power until the Doctor stops him. "Frontier in

99 Martin: Orphan 55.
100 Michael Hogan: Doctor Who: Orphan 55, Series 12 Episode 3 Recap. Let Down by False Jeopardy, a Seriously Overstuffed Story and Clumsy Moral Lessons, The Telegraph Online, 12 January 2020, telegraph.co.uk/tv/2020/01/12/doctor-orphan-55-series-12-episode-3-recap-let-false-jeopardy/ [20 February 2020].
101 Brian Silliman: Doctor Who Has Always Been Political, and It Has the Right to Be, SYFY Wire, 3 February 2020, syfy.com/syfywire/doctor-who-has-always-been-political-and-it-has-the-right-to-be [20 February 2020].
102 Ibid.
103 The Enemy of the World, 1968.
104 Patrick Mulkern: The Enemy of the World, Radio Times Online, 29 June 2009, radiotimes.com/news/2009-06-29/the-enemy-of-the-world/ [15 September 2019].

Space"[105] presents a post-democratic setting where Earth and Draconia are "both expanding, colonizing one planet after another",[106] while anyone who dares to question the heads of state is sent to the 'Lunar Penal Colony' that is somewhat reminiscent of a Soviet work camp. The Ogrons, an alien race, create alternative versions of the 'truth' for the governments of both Earth and Draconia to keep them fighting with each other while the Master and the Daleks, who employ the Ogrons for their ploy, take over the universe. These two future narratives from the old series contain elements of post-truth regimes that threaten democratic systems. However, it was only the shift in political communication and the media landscape in a wider sense in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century that pushed these issues to the foreground.

The following case studies deal with dangerous political rhetoric that threatens democracy and a whole society under the influence of a media conglomerate. "Turn Left" and "Sound of Drums" / "Last of the Time Lords" negotiate trends in British politics to communicate emotions rather than facts, which in both cases leads to the collapse of democracy. In these two narratives, heroic acts do not merely push back against a dystopian future but explicitly *turn back* time altogether, reversing futuristic developments that invade and threaten the stability of the present. "The Long Game" and "Bad Wolf" depict media conglomerates rather than governments as the cause of post-truth regimes changing people's perception of what is 'real'.

Turn Left *(2008)*

"Turn Left" pushes the threat of (far) right-wing politics to an extreme. In this episode, Great Britain is governed by the military, foreign citizens are deported into camps and the lights are about to go out completely. All this is happening because a fortune teller convinced companion Donna Noble to make an alternative life choice by turning right instead of left, which resulted in a world without the Doctor. "Turn Left" chronicles the dystopian future scenario caused by Donna's alternative choice. The absence of the Doctor results in "a radical deterioration in national life" and the country "quickly slips into dystopian mode, as we are given glimpses into a Britain that rounds up immigrants and interns them in 'labor camps'".[107] The "perhaps […] most dystopian episode *Doctor Who* has ever done […] is all too plausible" in the light of "the success of the British National Party in some local elections and the rise of organizations like the English Defence League [which] were fuelled by hysteria around immigration".[108] Donna's 'turn

105 Frontier in Space, 1973.
106 Frontier 3.
107 Andrew Crome: "Ready to Outsit Eternity". Human Responses to the Apocalypse, in: Gillian I. Leitch (ed.): Doctor Who in Time and Space. Essays on Themes, Characters, History and Fandom, 1963–2012, Jefferson 2013, p. 187.
108 Chapman: Inside the TARDIS, p. 233.

right' resulting in a totalitarian, xenophobic dystopia allegorically points to the threat of a right turn in real-world British politics.

The 2008 local elections indeed marked a shift in the British political landscape, of which people were acutely aware at the time. Boris Johnson became mayor of London with a "message of stoking up fear and dissatisfaction".[109] Even further right on the political spectrum, the BNP campaigned with the emotionally charged "odious far-right idea that immigrants are the root cause of every social ill".[110] Immediately after the local elections, Labour MP Jon Cruddas and Nick Lowles, then editor of the left-wing magazine *Searchlight*, wrote in a piece for the *New Statesman* that a "more fundamental shift [rather] than midterm blues" were behind the rise of the (far) right.[111] The fear of immigration is grounded in emotional rhetoric that resonates with frustrated citizens rather than in facts. "Turn Left" negotiates this rhetoric with governmental slogans such as "England for the English" while portraying the Italian family that share a house with Donna's family as warm, open and essentially not any 'different'.

In a Doctor-lite episode, it is up to companions Rose and especially Donna to save the world.[112] In the context of the analysis of future narratives in the series, it is important to note that Donna's heroic action ultimately reverses the events that threaten the collapse of reality and allows the world to go back to a present where the Doctor still exists, Great Britain still has a democratic government and the country has not been severely damaged by xenophobia and an atomic catastrophe.

The Sound of Drums / Last of the Time Lords *(2007)*

In "The Sound of Drums"[113] and "Last of the Time Lords",[114] the Tenth Doctor and companion Martha Jones push the future out of the present again. They return the dystopic anti-democratic and post-truth rule of the Master to democracy. In "The Sound of Drums", the Master literally penetrates the present from the future and becomes Prime Minister in Great Britain after inventing the persona of Harold Saxon. Actor John Simm has stated that he "used a bit of Caligula and a bit of Tony Blair" for the portrayal of Saxon.[115] Incidentally, "The Sound

---

109 Tara Hamilton-Miller: A Tale of Two Campaigns, in: New Statesman, 7 April 2008, pp. 14–15.
110 Brandon O'Neill: What's Driving the BNP?, in: New Statesman, 5 May 2008, pp. 16–17.
111 Jon Cruddas / Nick Lowles: The Rise of the Far Right, in: New Statesman, 23 June 2008, p. 18.
112 See Chapter 3, pp. 122–123.
113 The Sound of Drums, Doctor Who, BBC One, 23 June 2007.
114 Last of the Time Lords, 2007.
115 Mayer Nissim: John Simm: "My Master is Unhinged", Digital Spy, 13 November 2009, digitalspy.com/tv/cult/a186711/john-simm-my-master-is-unhinged/ [22 October 2019].

of Drums" premiered on television just days before "Blair finally resigned".[116] The campaign of Saxon, who has "mesmerized the entire world", who "always sound[s] good, like you could trust him",[117] is an extreme version of the use of spin doctors, a fairly new development in politics that helped Blair into office. The Doctor calls Saxon "a hypnotist" before figuring out that the Master has actually created a phone network called 'Archangel' that influences the citizens to approve of him.[118] Like Tony Blair, Saxon is "elected on a landslide" and "everyone thinks [he] is a great guy but no one can recall why they voted for him",[119] a sentiment that many Britons might have shared in respect to Blair as his approval rates were sinking.

The episode combines an allusion to Blair's success based on people sympathizing with him on an emotional level (rather than knowing about and agreeing with his political agenda) with an extreme version of his spin doctors in the shape of mobile phones that influence their owners without them noticing it. The end of "Sound of Drums" drastically illustrates the danger of electing someone into power without knowing what exactly he stands for: Saxon is Prime Minister, the American President gets shot, and the hostile Toclafane descend upon Earth to kill, with Saxon's consent, one tenth of its population. Jack Harkness and the Doctor, forcefully aged by a hundred years, are held prisoners on the Master's spaceship and only Martha Jones is left to save everyone.

The second part, "Last of the Time Lords", essentially narrates Martha Jones' hero's journey through all of planet Earth in a quest to *revert* time to the moment before the assassination of the president and Saxon's ultimate ascent to power. Martha is explicitly marked as exceptional, "a bit of a legend", and her mission as almost impossible to fulfil. Martha's cover story is that she is hunting down a powerful gun in four parts that is scattered across the continents to bring down the Master and his mobile phone-fuelled empire. This is what the Master thinks Martha has been doing when she returns to the spaceship. Martha asks him if he "really believe[d] that" story, with the Doctor adding: "As if I would ask her to kill." In reality, Martha has been sharing a story across the world, a story of the Doctor as a source of hope. As she tells the Master, she "went across the continent all on [her] own, spreading the word so that everyone would know about the Doctor". Her heroism relied on "no weapon, just words". Martha's heroic journey did not consist of gathering the parts of a weapon to counter the Master's post-truth totalitarian regime with violence but of spreading a story, countering the Master's new media power with the power of a much older medium, that of oral storytelling.

---

116 Steven Fielding: The Ghost of Tony Blair, The Guardian Online, 16 April 2010, theguardian.com/commentisfree/2010/apr/16/film-the-ghost-tony-blair [24 October 2019].
117 Sound of Drums, 2007.
118 Ibid.
119 Fielding: Ghost of Tony Blair.

The story Martha has been spreading is, in itself, a heroic tale that constructs the Doctor as the ultimate saviour who can rescue them all. Halfway through "Last of the Time Lords", we see Martha sharing a version of that hero story in a medical convoy: "If Martha Jones became a legend, my name isn't important. There's someone else. […] And his name is the Doctor. He has saved your lives so many times and you never even knew he was there. He never stops, he never stays, he never asks to be thanked." Martha supplements this hero story of the Doctor with an instruction for the people across the Earth. She tells them that "if everyone thinks of one word, at one specific time […] right across the world, one word, just one thought", multiplied by the satellites that make up the Archangel network, that would result in "a telepathic field binding the whole human race together" and break the Master's hold over them. When that moment has arrived, the telepathic field undoes the forced ageing of the Doctor, and time starts to *reverse*. Missiles disappear and the sun is shining over London again. They have "reverted back, one year and one day", and Jack Harkness calls everything that happened under the Master's rule "the year that never was". The double episode thus presents a two-fold heroic journey, that of Martha herself and the one she tells of the Doctor as her 'weapon'. Combined, they push back against the invasion of the present from the future, reacting to an extreme version of the world subjected to the post-truth totalitarian regime of a charismatic politician who subtly influenced them to elect him based on a vague feeling rather than hard political facts and agendas.

The Long Game / Bad Wolf *(2005)*

Various New *Who* episodes negotiate the rise of the influence of media conglomerates and the threat these pose for democracy and personal freedom. The scandals involving news outlets owned by Rupert Murdoch resulted in a heightened awareness of the subtle but monumental influence media can have on political processes. As Mahler and Rutenberg of the *New York Times* wrote in 2019, the Murdoch "family's outlets have helped elevate marginal demagogues, mainstream ethnonationalism and politicize the very notion of truth".[120] The phone hacking scandal in the early 2000s, involving for example the British Royal family in 2005, led to public investigations into Murdoch's empire on a large scale. Mahler and Rutenberg write about Murdoch's influence in Great Britain:

> The resulting document, the Leveson Report, depicted a country in which a single family had amassed so much power that it had come to feel that the rules did not apply to them. "Sometimes the very greatest power is exercised without having to ask," the report

[120] Jonathan Mahler / Jim Rutenberg: How Rupert Murdoch's Empire of Influence Remade the World, The New York Times Online, 3 April 2019, nytimes.com/interactive/2019/04/03/magazine/rupert-murdoch-fox-news-trump.html [15 September 2019].

said. In their discussions with Murdoch, "politicians knew that the prize was personal and political support in his mass-circulation newspapers."[121]

The indirect yet seemingly endless influence of such media conglomerates on democratic societies, and their power to threaten the core of these very democracies, resonate in different ways in a number of *Doctor Who* episodes. Some allusions to Murdoch are very straightforward, as for example the Doctor calling a media outlet which has undermined Great Britain by presenting the people with an alternative history "Fake News Central".[122] In the age of Brexit and Trump, so-called 'fake news' has been perceived as one of the greatest threats to democracy in real-world politics. "Fake News Central" might just as well be a description used for Murdoch's American news outlet Fox News. "The Long Game" similarly references the media mogul by incorporating "one of the most infamous UK tabloid headlines from the Rupert Murdoch-owned *Sun* newspaper of 1982, 'Gotcha'":[123] During the Falklands conflict, the *Sun* "gleefully reported the first deaths of the war (368 conscripts, many in their teens) with the cold-blooded headline 'GOTCHA'".[124] In "The Long Game", the Doctor's antagonist, called the 'Editor', echoes the headline, saying "Gotcha" when he uncovers that one of the employees, Suki, is working against his regime.

In combination with "Bad Wolf" from the same series, the episode focuses on worlds that have been taken over by post-truth media regimes. The two-parter, set one hundred years apart on Satellite 5, presents a society living in a post-truth scenario created by media-generated content, in one case factual and in the other fictional. In both episodes, the Ninth Doctor and companion Rose Tyler expect a future utopia but instead walk into a dire setting upon exiting the TARDIS. Instead of a more extreme version of everything good that exists in Earth in the present, however, they find a more extreme version of everything bad.

The world that they find in "The Long Game"[125] is ruled by a news conglomerate. The news broadcast is predominantly daunting and offers a glimpse of the state of Earth ("sandstorms on the new Venus archipelago, two hundred dead, Glasgow water riots into their third day"). Even worse, the world consists of nothing else *but* news. "We are the news", says Cathica whom they meet in one of the corridors, "we write it, package it and sell it – six hundred channels". The ultimate goal of everyone working for the news conglomerate Satellite Five is to get to "Floor 500", where "walls are made of gold". The reality revealed later on looks very different yet again. Floor 500 is a world of ice where everything is blue, cold

121 Ibid.
122 The Lie of the Land, Doctor Who, BBC One, 3 June 2017.
123 Hills: Triumph, p. 168.
124 Chris Horrie: Gotcha! How the Sun Reaped Spoils of War. The Guardian Online, 7 April 2002, www.theguardian.com/business/2002/apr/07/pressandpublishing.media [31 August 2021].
125 The Long Game, 2005. Unless otherwise noted, all quotes in the following close reading refer to this episode.

and dead. The news outlet sells its workers an alternative truth that inspires them to work extremely hard and ruthlessly step on each other for promotions. When the workers make it to the top floor, they are turned into zombies that collect everybody's personal information

The story contrasts two reactions to this setting; one ignorant and greedy, the other one self-aware and heroic. Adam Mitchell, whom the Doctor brought as a companion alongside Rose, terminates his travels through time and space by falling for the post-factual promises of the media outlet. Thinking that the "technology is amazing", he agrees to have a device implanted into his brain that allows him to access all information and knowledge available in this future setting because he plans to use it to his advantage back in the present day to become rich with innovations. Adam's greed results in the Doctor's identity being revealed to the 'editor' on the top floor, which puts the Doctor and Rose in great danger. Adams serves to illustrate how easy it is to fall for the false promises of a shiny, media-controlled world, *despite* the knowledge that it is a dystopia. Adam never gets to travel with the Doctor again.

The alternative reaction to the world encountered in "The Long Game", which pushes back against a future that subdues people to a media-controlled anti-democratic regime, is portrayed as a heroic one. The Doctor and Rose, along with the 'local' characters Suki and Cathica, do not fall victim to the greed for knowledge and power; instead, they stand up to the editor and ultimately bring him down. Suki, who seemed like a normal employee before, turns out to be a member of the 'Freedom Foundation', and when she gets to Floor 500, she wants to know who controls Satellite Five. She claims to "have absolute proof that the facts are being manipulated", that the media is "lying to the people" and "this whole system is corrupt". When the Doctor challenges the editor, the editor admits that "for almost a hundred years, mankind has been shaped and guided, his knowledge and ambition strictly controlled by its broadcast news". The construction of alternative facts and a post-truth anti-democratic society serves the economic interest of the owner of Satellite Five, a monster overlooking everything from the ceiling: "Create a climate of fear and it's easy to keep the borders closed. It's just a matter of emphasis. The right word in the right broadcast repeated often enough can destabilize an economy, invent an enemy, change a vote." The editor handcuffs and tortures the Doctor and Rose, which is depicted from an extremely low angle with the monster above them. However, Cathica discovers her free will and capacity to think for herself, "disengage[s] safety" and helps the Doctor and Rose bring down the editor and the monster. In doing so, they collectively manage to push back against an extreme version of media conglomerates taking over a whole society.

When the Doctor and Rose return to Satellite Five one hundred years later, however, it turns out that the society stumbled from one media-fuelled dystopia into the next one. The Doctor finds out that he is actually responsible for the

development. After "The Long Game", the news corporation with "all the news channels […] just shut down overnight" and "there was nothing left in their place, no information, the whole planet froze".[126] As a result, government and economy collapsed and "one hundred years of hell" began. During his last visit, the Doctor and Rose *did* push back against a dystopic future successfully, but they also left a vacuum in which the next "hell" could develop.

Media still controls Satellite Five, only this time it is a different kind of media. Instead of feeding the population an alternative version of reality and truth via the news (a factual, information-based media source), the inhabitants live in extreme versions of reality and game shows (entertainment-based media). Upon landing, the Doctor ends up in an extreme version of "Big Brother", Jack Harkness in a make-over show that uses cosmetic operations to give people a new style and Rose in a version of "The Weakest Link", where the loser of each round is killed ("play or die"). All these are based on actual television programmes that the contemporary audience is familiar with, and possibly even enjoys watching despite the fact that even the 'regular' twenty-first-century versions are humiliating and feast on people's failure. The extreme versions of these same shows in "Bad Wolf" make it impossible to think of them as 'harmless' entertainment.

The Doctor, Jack and Rose fight back against the shows, which is unheard of on Satellite Five and, pushing back against the extreme game show conventions, all manage to get out alive. The Doctor proclaims in the beginning that he is "getting out" and "going to find [his] friends" before taking on whoever runs the entertainment conglomerate. Jack Harkness fights his way out of "What Not to Wear" at the same time and they reunite to rescue Rose, who has made it to the last round of "The Weakest Link", all the while protesting about the killing of her less fortunate co-contestants. As the Doctor and Jack go up in the elevator to get Rose, they are filmed from a low angle. The Doctor is standing in the middle of the elevator, holding a gun. He gets rid of the gun as soon as they step out of the elevator but, for a moment, they visually evoke action heroes. They manage to rescue Rose *although* she loses "The Weakest Link" and thus they break the power of the game shows. The events of "Bad Wolf" result in the series finale "The Parting of the Ways", in which the Doctor and his allies fight a combined Dalek and Cybermen invasion of Earth but, in a moment of triumph, the Doctor, Jack and Rose manage to defy the system of Satellite Five, pushing back against the extreme versions of 'real' television programmes. Rather than succeeding in their respective shows, and thus complying with the rules the media conglomerate set up, they break the rules and refuse to play along.

[126] Bad Wolf, 2005. Unless otherwise noted, all quotes in the following close reading refer to this episode.

Refusing to play according to the rules turns out to be the one element that recurs in many episodes considered in this part of the future fiction case studies. Heroic moments occur when courageous individuals stand up to despots – whether they stand up to a direct superior (Sutton to Stahlman in "Inferno"), the head of a corporation that threatens to push society into a dystopic future ("Green Death" and "The Long Game" / "Bad Wolf"), or a totalitarian government subduing humanity ("Turn Left" and "Last of the Time Lords"). The threats they are facing (nuclear, environmental, post-truth, totalitarian) – in other words, what the heroic act is directed against – negotiate issues prevalent at the time of production. That the heroic action is directed *against* the rule of authorities, however, remains a constant.

While all case studies feature heroic moments that push back against the future, the relation between those heroic acts and stability turned out to be surprisingly varied. In some episodes, the invasion of futurity is a recent event and still reversable (as in "Inferno", "Turn Left" and "The Sound of Drums" / "Last of the Time Lords"). In these episodes, the heroic action results in a return to the stability of (relative) environmental and democratic integrity of the present moment. These are the narratives that push futurity out of the present completely. In "The Long Game" / "Bad Wolf", however, the setting is further removed from the present and, as a result, a complete return is not possible. Here, pushing back against the extremely anti-democratic post-truth media regime is portrayed as heroic in the moment but it leaves behind a vacuum of instability. One stability, that of the dystopic regime, is removed, but the stability of the present is not available any longer. The heroic acts thus create instability that is vulnerable and results in *another* dystopic media regime.

Finally, "The Green Death" and "Orphan 55" present a two-fold reaction: the protagonists push back against the (looming) threat of an eco-catastrophe while the narratives also encourage a different kind of behaviour going forward. In "The Green Death", Professor Jones serves as an example of how to lead a more eco-friendly life; in "Orphan 55", the Doctor explicitly appeals to her companions and the audience to do precisely that: to radically change their lifestyle in order to prevent a climate catastrophe. Both reactions hint at a possible alternative relation between heroic action and the future: rather than heroically reversing a catastrophic future to return to the relative stability of the present and thus protecting the present against futurity, heroic action could also be directed at finding a revolutionary, radically different way forward, a leap of faith and courage into a world yet unheard of.

5.4 Heroes Pushing Towards the Future

The future is not only a realm of threat, it also presents possibilities. Theoretically, anything is possible in future fictions. The following case studies therefore turn to episodes where the heroic is directed towards the future, pressing onwards, rather than pushing back or preventing the worst dystopias and fighting for a return to a present that is not yet ruined. The heroic in these stories is a force for change and revolution, for chances and possibilities. The episodes discussed are divided into two categories: some are stories of revolutions against (mostly economically) oppressive systems; the others advocate peace between different races across the human-alien-divide.

5.4.1 It's a Revolution!

In all three revolutionary episodes, the heroic acts consist of fighting *for* the breakdown of the (faulty and suppressive) economic system. In "The Sun Makers"[127] as well as "Oxygen",[128] the Doctor and their companions start a revolution that potentially leads the people towards a post-capitalist society. "Paradise Towers"[129] works similarly, and in addition openly addresses questions of heroism, mocking a young man's ideas of what it means to act heroically.

The Sun Makers *(1977)*

In "The Sun Makers", the Fourth Doctor sets off a revolution with a Marxist touch. Upon arriving on Pluto, where the human race was transported after both Earth and Mars had become 'unprofitable' for the 'Company', the Fourth Doctor, his companion Leela and the robotic dog K9 meet Cordo, who is facing financial ruin because he cannot pay the various taxes after his father's death. They all descend to the 'Undercity' where a group of out-law tax evaders live outside the ultra-capitalist system controlled by the 'Collector' and his 'Gatherer' Hade, whose name clearly alludes to the ruler of the underworld in Greek mythology. The Doctor and Leela are repeatedly captured but manage to escape, all the while gathering information about the conglomerate that rules Pluto and humankind. Ultimately, they spark a rebellion in which Cordo plays a central role, their heroic intervention directed at moving beyond the corporate regime and its ridiculous regulations and taxes, towards a free and potentially Marxist society.

The story is an excellent example of a real-world problem transferred into a future scenario in such an extreme form that it calls for heroic action. Myth has it that Robert Holmes was "clearly angry" when writing the episodes because he

127 Sun Makers, 1977.
128 Oxygen, Doctor Who, BBC One, 13 May 2017.
129 Paradise Towers, Doctor Who, BBC One, 5–26 October 1987.

had just had "a sour experience with the British taxation system" which "spurred him to savage its bureaucracy, arbitrariness and dismissiveness".[130] The BBC episode guide justifiably states that Holmes uses a

> fairly straightforward, even cliched [sic] science-fiction backdrop – that of a group of oppressed humans struggling to free themselves from the tyranny of their alien masters – to make what is in essence a wickedly barbed attack on bureaucracy and, in particular, the UK tax system as administered by the Inland Revenue.[131]

Holmes' "control and his imperious way with words",[132] however, makes the story effective. Besides, the ideological underpinning of "The Sun Makers" is not as straightforwardly socialist as the BBC episode guide suggests. The population of Pluto, after all, rises up against a ruling elite that forces them to pay too many taxes. This resonates with the growing economic crisis in Great Britain in the 1970s, which the Labour government, elected in 1974, did not manage to the satisfaction of the voting public. Despite tax raises in the mid-70s, the economic crises culminated in the 'Winter of Discontent' in 1978 and the election of a Conservative government in 1979 under the new PM Margret Thatcher.[133] The revolt of the working class in "The Sun Makers" is at its heart anti-capitalist but it also negotiates discontent with a leftist government.

One of the strengths of the episodes is that Holmes effectively combines satirical humour and palpable desperation. While the suffering of the citizens is depicted in a realist mode, countless references to the British tax system (for example, the corridor codes P45, P60 etc. reference well-known tax forms), capitalism and even Marx' *Communist Manifesto* provide inside jokes for the informed audience.[134] Against the backdrop of "the Budgets of 1974 and 1975 imposing big rises in income tax and VAT (Value Added Tax), in response to price inflation",[135] the contemporaneous audience was certainly receptive to these references. According to the BBC Audience Research Report, the viewers "warmly welcomed the more realistic nature of the theme" that was "widely interpreted as an 'expose of super monopoly capitalism'".[136] This assessment on part of the audience shows

---

130 Mark Braxton: The Sun Makers, Radio Times Online, 6 November 2011, radiotimes.com/news/2010-11-06/the-sun-makers/ [12 August 2019].

131 The Sun Makers, BBC Episode Guide, bbc.co.uk/doctorwho/classic/episodeguide/sunmakers/detail.shtml [12 August 2019].

132 Braxton: The Sun Makers.

133 See Brüggemeier: Geschichte, pp. 274–276.

134 In the third episode, the Doctor replies to a character's question what they have to lose: "Only your claims." This has been read as a nod to The Communist Manifesto, where Marx and Engels write at the very end: "The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains." (See Workers of the World, Unite, Wikipedia. The Free Encyclopedia, Wikimedia Foundation, 21 February 2020, 10:15 am, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Workers_of_the_world,_unite! [29 February 2020].)

135 Chapman: Inside the TARDIS, p. 128.

136 An Audience Research Report. Dr. Who – The Sun Makers – Part 2, BBC Audience Research Department, 31 January 1978, VR/77/664, BBC Written Archive.

that Holmes' message about their 'real' world packaged in an exaggerated future satire clearly came across.

The view of the system from below, from Cordo's perspective, allows the audience to understand the full extent of the cruelty and impossible living conditions the people suffer from. At the same time, the information remains incomplete, as it is not yet revealed what exactly the system looks like, who exactly is in power and what their aims are. Significantly, when the Doctor asks in the third episode what the 'Company' is, no one has an answer. This set-up suggests that the first significant problem of a society ruled by corporate capitalism is that the citizens are ignorant of the power structures despite significantly suffering from them.

The Doctor, in contrast to many of the 'locals', asks questions about the system in place and thus provides a 'top-down' view of the environment that complements the 'bottom-up' impressions. Immediately after arriving and meeting Cordo, the Doctor assesses that there are "probably too many economists in the government".[137] When he is brought to a 'Correction Centre', the Doctor learns from a fellow inmate, Bisham, that patients are given medication that "eliminates air-borne infection". The Doctor replies that it "also eliminates freedom".[138] From the government's point of view, the Doctor is, because of his inquisitive nature, perceived as a threat. The Collector fears that the Doctor, who "has a long history of violence and economic subversion" will not be "sympathetic to [his] business method".[139] The Doctor's investigation and refusal to remain ignorant is not only the first step towards rebellion but also allows a more systematic (and in a sense historical) understanding of the society depicted. When the Doctor asks the Collector how he got "control over humanity", the latter describes the process as "a normal business operation": "The Company was looking for property in this sector, Earth was running down, its people dying. We made a deal".[140] This deal resulted in the 'evacuation' of humankind first to Mars and then to Pluto, where the people were subdued and put to work for the 'Company'. The nonchalance of the Collector when describing the 'business operation' is in stark contrast to the Doctor's rage about the cruel conditions the population suffers under.

> DOCTOR: You blood-sucking leech! You won't stop until you own the entire galaxy, will you. Don't you think commercial imperialism is as bad as military conquest?
>
> COLLECTOR: We have tried war, but the use of economic power is far more effective.[141]

The explicit opposition to the ruling class is the first aspect of the Doctor's heroic intervention in "The Sun Makers". By contrasting his systematic understanding of the power structures to the local population's subdued suffering and ignorance, he is marked as exceptional. Confronting the Collector and calling him out on

137 Sun Makers 1.
138 Sun Makers 2.
139 Sun Makers 3.
140 Sun Makers 4.
141 Ibid.

his crimes against humankind not only helps to make the episode's capitalist critique explicit, it also sets up a hero-villain-binary.

Rather than directly starting a revolution himself, and thus replacing one hierarchical system with another, the Doctor descends to the 'Undercity' and sparks a bottom-up rebellion. The 'Undercity' is located in tunnels and caves, visibly set apart from the 'regular' world by almost complete darkness, which mirrors the descriptions of its inhabitants as the 'Others'. Those are the outcasts of capitalism, without any financial means, forced to live on robbery. The Doctor puts the responsibility for change into the hands of the citizens, telling them that "nothing will change around here unless [they] change it" themselves. When they object that they are powerless, the Doctor reminds them that "there are fifty million people in this city" and that "given the chance to breathe clean air for a few hours", fellow citizens might support a rebellion.[142] Cordo, Bisham, the outlaw-leader Mandrell and others start to believe that a rebellion lies indeed within their power. They act together, quickly overcoming initial challenges and, not without threat of violence, more citizens join their cause. Through Mandrell's contacts, word is spreading in the "work units", which alludes to a proletarian rebellion. Their hope is that "if just one District joins the resistance, the word'll spread through the whole City".[143] Workers start going on strike. Meanwhile, the outlaw characters take over the central computers and send a message to all citizens:

> Attention all Citizens. Attention all Citizens. Stand by for an important public bulletin. Megropolis One is now under the management of the Citizen's Revolution. The Director, the Tax Gatherer and all other Company officials are to be arrested on sight. […] The rule of the Company is ended. All workplaces will remain closed until further notice. Long live the Revolution.[144]

The Gatherer is thrown down from a rooftop and the citizens are in power. Visually, the successful rebellion is supported by the stark contrast of the dark 'Undercity' that the citizens have risen from and the sunlit, wide rooftop where the last scenes take place. The Doctor has fulfilled his mission of pushing the Citizens into a brighter future. While he acknowledges that establishing a new order will be "hard work", he reminds Bisham that they are used to that, only "this time, [they]'ll be free".[145]

"The Sun Makers" depicts a more extreme version of corporate capitalism and taxation and a heroic bottom-up rebellion. The realist mode used to depict the tax outlaws in the Undercity and their rebellion counters the satirical representation of the 'Collector' and the 'Gatherer'. The revolution is started by those who suffer most from the system, who live on the extreme edge of an already extreme setting.

---

142 Sun Makers 3.
143 Sun Makers 4.
144 Ibid.
145 Ibid.

While the assessment of the episode as a "satire of corporate greed"[146] is certainly correct, looking at "The Sun Makers" as purely satirical dismisses its overt and very realist political agenda. On the other end of the spectrum, Jeremy Bentham has accused the episode to be "heavily laced with left-wing propaganda".[147] To do Holmes' story justice, both aspects have to be reconciled. The ruling class in "The Sun Makers" and their policies are satirically ridiculed, and the references to the British tax system add to that. The humorous undertone affords Holmes to stick to his "signature" of a "light-hearted rebuke of any system which has lost sight of its democratic function".[148] On the other hand, the realism used to portray the desperation and extreme living conditions in the 'Undercity' make the impulse to rebel believable. As a result, the revolution works as an act of heroism that remains largely unaffected by the satire.

Paradise Towers *(1987)*

"Paradise Towers"[149] offers a punk-themed variation on the topic of revolution against an oppressive system and, along the way, challenges conventional ideas of heroism. The Seventh Doctor and companion Mel travel to the Paradise Towers, a supposed "architectural achievement" of the twenty-second century that, according to the Doctor, "won all sorts of awards back in the twenty-first century".[150] The Paradise Towers turn out to be a desolate high-rise where punk-inspired girl gangs (the "Kangs") battle each other on the corridors while stereotypical old British ladies (the "Rezzies") enjoy their knitting and scones in denial of the dystopian scenario they live in. Meanwhile, robots (the "Cleaners") try to keep all hallways free from humans by making them "unalive" because the architect Kroagnon prefers his precious building without inhabitants. "Paradise Towers" has been read as an "allegory of urban decay and social alienation in 1980s Britain".[151] Indeed, the contrast between the Doctor's high expectation for the architectural wonder of Paradise Towers and the dire reality reflects how the "tower blocks of the 1960s, conceptualized in near-utopian terms as combining modern conveniences with a re-created community […] began to rot" by the 1980s.[152]

This episode, like many broadcast in the late 1980s when *Doctor Who* was moving towards the end of its first era on television, suffers from some logical holes and lack of coherence. It is, as Patrick Mulkern writes in his review for the *Radio Times*, an "'almost' story" because it "almost works – if you stick with it and are in

146 Chapman: Inside the TARDIS, p. 128.
147 Tulloch / Alvaro: Unfolding, p. 149.
148 Ibid., p. 148.
149 Paradise Towers, 1987.
150 Paradise Towers 1.
151 Chapman: Inside the TARDIS, p. 169.
152 Peter Mandler: Two Cultures – One – or Many?, in: Kathleen Burk (ed.): The British Isles since 1945, Oxford 2003, p. 146.

a forgiving mood".[153] Nevertheless, it offers some interesting aspects of reframing conventional ideas of heroism and inspiring an uprising to move a future society beyond its dystopian constraints.

The only young male character, Pex, has failed to fulfil ideals of male warrior heroism and is in a constant battle with feelings of unworthiness. Rezzie Tabby reveals that "all the youngsters and all the oldsters were moved" to Paradise Towers while the "in-betweens" had "some else to do – a war to fight or something".[154] Pex smuggled himself to the Towers, thus deserting from the (unspecified) military efforts. He is obviously suffering from guilt, constantly trying to make up for his 'cowardice'. His hero complex is further explored in the second part (which the streaming platform Britbox ironically advertises with the question "Is Pex going to be the true hero of Paradise Towers?"). "I'm a finely tuned fighting machine", Pex boasts, "I work out every day, practice martial arts."[155] It becomes clear that all these empty practices of heroic patterns are Pex's attempts to "make up" for his desertion, to be "brave" and "a hero".[156] When he saves Mel in the third part, he cannot believe that he "really helped save someone for the first time".[157] Despite his show of physical strength and desperation to prove his heroism, Pex remains constantly afraid throughout the story. When Mel is attacked in the rooftop pool in part four, Pex hands her the gun so that she can save herself, which turns out to be far more effective than his efforts.

In the fourth and last part of the story, Pex finally has his heroic moment, sacrificing himself to kill the villain. Pex offers the Doctor to execute a crucial part of their plan to topple the Chief Caretaker controlled by Kroagnon and free the inhabitants of the Towers from the "power-crazed psychopath".[158] Pex promises that he "won't be unbrave again", upon which the Doctor reminds him: "We need time. No heroics, just a cool clear head."[159] Unfortunately, the Doctor's plan to lure the Chief Caretaker into a trap does not work. Pex has to throw himself and the villain into the trap, sacrificing himself to rid the others of the insane villain. In the end, his heroic deed is acknowledged by the Kangs, who had called him a coward before: "Hail Pex. Hail the unalive who gave his life for the Towers. In life he was not a Kang but in death he was brave and bold as a Kang should be."[160] Though framed as involving "no heroics" by the Doctor before, Pex ultimately lives up to his heroic ambitions and does his part in the combined efforts of the inhabitants to take control over their own Towers. His sacrifice, however, is not

153 Patrick Mulkern: Paradise Towers, Radio Times Online, 17 July 2012, radiotimes.com/news/2012-07-17/paradise-towers/ [15 August 2019].
154 Paradise Towers 1.
155 Paradise Towers 2.
156 Ibid.
157 Paradise Towers 3.
158 Ibid.
159 Paradise Towers 4.
160 Ibid.

the singular heroic act of a male warrior but a messy part of a chaotic operation that also involves almost the whole cast of the episode.

The overall mission only works because all inhabitants work together, which offers an alternative concept of collective heroism that ultimately ends the dystopic dictatorship and allows Kangs and Rezzies to truly claim the Towers as their space. In guiding the residents of Paradise Towers to work together and reclaim their environment, the Doctor fulfils the function of the parent generation that is absent in the extreme, dystopic future version of 1980s British housing estates. While the Chief Caretaker, representative of the government, fails to "respond to social dislocation",[161] the Doctor comes in like some kind of social worker, who the Kangs think is "ice-hot" and not at all a "yawny Oldster".[162] Nevertheless, it is the Doctor's realization that the "very existence [of the Paradise Towers] is at stake"[163] that unites the residents and unlocks especially the Kangs' potential for unconventional punk-inspired heroism by convincing them to fight against the oppressing government, rather than against each other. In the end, the Doctor says: "Look Mel, they're all here. The Caretakers, the Rezzies, the Kangs. This would never have happened before. Perhaps now they'll all start working together."[164] All of them have to move beyond the prejudices they had been harbouring and instead trust each other. As in "The Sun Makers", the Doctor's purpose is not to carry out the rebellion himself but to enable the 'local' population to work together and take control over their own lives.

Oxygen *(2017)*

The idea of what a (late) capitalist world looks like has changed tremendously since the 1970s of "The Sun Makers", and so has *Doctor Who*'s narrative treatment of it. New discourses around the ideas of late capitalism and post-capitalism are one of the (delayed) effects of the 2008 economic crash. The term 'late capitalism' was first popularized in the mid-twentieth century by Ernest Mandel to describe the economic period between WWII and the early 1970s, "a time that saw the rise of multinational corporations, mass communication, and international finance".[165] Since then, Marxist critics such as Frederic Jameson have adapted the term for their own uses. In the post-2008 economic climate that "Oxygen" stems from, 'late capitalism' has become "a catchall phrase for the indignities and absurdities of our contemporary economy, with its yawning inequality and super-powered

161 Chapman: Inside the TARDIS, p. 169.
162 Paradise Towers 4.
163 Paradise Towers 2.
164 Paradise Towers 4.
165 Annie Lowrey: Why the Phrase 'Late Capitalism' is Suddenly Everywhere, The Atlantic Online, 1 May 2017, theatlantic.com/business/archive/2017/05/late-capitalism/524943/ [24 October 2019].

corporations and shrinking middle class".[166] Writing in 2017, Lowrey observes that the number of Google searches containing 'late capitalism' more than doubled within the previous year, echoing a drastic increase in the use of the term across social media since the early 2010s. While the "yawning inequality" and the "super-powered corporations and shrinking middle class" paint a dark picture of late capitalism, Lowrey also identifies the "potential for revolution" that would move the economy beyond capitalism and into post-capitalism.[167] Paul Mason outlines the utopia of an "ideal life, built out of abundant information, non-hierarchical work and the dissociation of work from wages" in an article for the *Guardian* in 2015 upon publication of his book *PostCapitalism: A Guide to our Future*.[168] A review of the book, while admitting that Mason does not have all the answers, salutes this new form of "socialism as a root-and-branch challenge to capitalism, the market and the very idea of private ownership".[169] These discourses of late-capitalist and post-capitalist economy are still unfolding and, at times, there are still debates over how these terms should be used. These debates oscillate between late-capitalist desperation and post-capitalist utopian ideas and attempt to grasp the clash of, on the one hand, the huge economic disaster of 2008 and the years of austerity thereafter and, on the other hand, the digital revolution. "Oxygen" is situated right at the verge of late- to post-capitalism, presenting an extreme future fiction of the economic reality.

The episode negotiates the idea of an economic system on the verge of collapse in the form of "capitalism in space", as the Twelfth Doctor sums up a world where air is a consumer good and breathing something you must be able to afford. Oxygen as a consumer good pushes late-capitalist absurdities to an extreme; it is a big step further from real-world examples such as "Nordstrom selling jeans with fake mud on them for $425" and "prisoners' phone calls costing $14 a minute".[170] Having to pay for *oxygen*, potentially with one's life, could very well be the climax of Lowrey's list of "incidents that capture the tragicomic inanity and inequity of contemporary capitalism". Departing from the university the Doctor is temporarily teaching at, he takes his new companion Bill to a space station. They are following the distress call of four survivors, which the Doctor describes as his "theme tune".[171] He explains to Bill that "you only see the real face of the universe when it's asking for your help". Later he adds: "The universe shows its true face

166 Ibid.
167 Ibid.
168 Paul Mason: The End of Capitalism Has Begun, The Guardian Online, 17 July 2015, theguardian.com/books/2015/jul/17/postcapitalism-end-of-capitalism-begun [24 October 2019].
169 David Runciman: PostCapitalism by Paul Mason Review – A Worthy Successor to Marx?, The Guardian Online, 15 August 2015, theguardian.com/books/2015/aug/15/postcapitalism-by-paul-mason-review-worthy-successor-to-marx [25 October 2019].
170 Lowrey: Late Capitalism.
171 Oxygen, 2017. Unless otherwise noted, all quotes in the following close reading refer to this episode.

when it asks for help. We show ours by how we respond." Extreme situations, the Doctor suggests, uncover the true nature of people and show how far they are willing to go and how much they are willing to sacrifice, for their own survival and that of others.

As in "The Sun Makers", human life has no value in itself any longer but is equated to the capital value humans can add to a corporation through their work force. While the survivors at the station experience their suits as failing, the Doctor corrects them: "The suits are doing exactly what they were designed to do." While normally, space suits ensure the survival of humans, the suits in "Oxygen" are dangerous: they are programmed to destroy the people that wear them after a certain number of breaths. When the humans become 'unprofitable' for the corporation, the suits kill them off. The dead bodies are then replaced by new ones, perversely reversing the replacement of broken machines by humans. New people arriving at the space station are thus "not […] rescuers, they're […] replacements", as the Doctor points out. This, he says, is "the end point of capitalism. A bottom line where human life has no value at all. We're fighting an algorithm, a spreadsheet. Like every worker, everywhere, we're fighting the suits." The "endpoint" is capitalism in its most extreme form, far removed from the 2017 reality of the audience but at the same time explicitly connected to their world when the Doctor says that they are just like "every worker, everywhere", in their fight against the "suits". The term 'suits' not only refers to the actual, killing space suits of the episode but also to high-ranking white-collar workers such as corporate lawyers in the contemporary capitalist world. Only in "Oxygen", the suppression of the working class has become so extreme that it literally endangers their life, requiring heroic intervention on the part of the Doctor.

In a setting where oxygen is strictly rationed to keep up its market value, the Doctor's mission is to save as many lives as possible and destroy the extreme capitalist system that endangers them. The Doctor establishes himself as the leader of the mission, telling the others that he is "here to save [their] lives". When Bill's suit is not working and she has to remove her helmet as they are walking outside of the station, the Doctor gives her his helmet, risking his own life despite the fact that Time Lords can survive longer in a vacuum than humans. While the vacuum does not kill him, the self-sacrifice leaves the Doctor blind. Bill, too, has to "go through hell" for the overall mission to work. The Doctor trusts that her malfunctioning suit will not have enough power to kill her and is proven right in the end. Both Bill and the Doctor have to go through lethal situations that crystallize the cruelty of capitalism into a question of life and death.

At the end of the episode, the Doctor ensures their survival by making their deaths so economically harmful for the corporation that it decides not to kill them. The Doctor changes the programming of the station so that it will automatically destroy itself completely in the event of their deaths. Making their

deaths more expensive than their survival, the Doctor tricks the capitalist system. This is how he responds to the universe's distress call:

> Let's send them a message. Let's teach them a lesson they will never forget. If they take our lives, we take their station and every penny they will ever make from it. Die well! It's the finish line! […] Hello, suits. Our deaths will be brave and brilliant and unafraid. But above all, suits, our deaths will be… expensive! […] A moment ago, we were too expensive to live. Now we're more expensive dead. Welcome to the rest of your lives.

The Doctor responds to the extreme capitalism with the readiness to sacrifice himself, first for Bill and then to bring down the 'suits'. "Brave and brilliant and unafraid", they face the corporation. As the Doctor tells Bill when they are back in the TARDIS, standing up to capitalism led to its end: "As far as I remember, there's a successful rebellion six months later. Corporate dominance in space is history, and that about wraps it for capitalism." Although he reassures Bill that the "human race finds a whole new mistake", this specific mistake was brought to an end with the Doctor's help. Overall, the episode illustrates how an already existing problem has to be pushed to its furthest extreme in order to spark a revolution. Only when things cannot get worse, the episode suggests, do people find the courage to go beyond themselves and strive for a new and better world.

5.4.2 Peace between the Races

The second utopia the Doctor and their companions push towards is a truly post-colonial society. The heroic struggles are directed towards the destabilization of colonial orders and toward a post-colonial, post-racial world. "Doctor Who and the Silurians"[172] focuses the protagonists' efforts to establish new relations between races. In "The Planet of the Ood",[173] the Tenth Doctor and Donna Noble liberate the enslaved Ood. The two-parter "The Zygon Invasion"[174] / "The Zygon Inversion"[175] critically examines the rhetoric of 'invasion' and motions for peaceful co-existence of human and non-human life forms. In all of these episodes, heroic acts serve the aim to move beyond scenarios of colonization and racism and towards a peaceful, equal co-existence of different races across the human/non-human divide.

Doctor Who and the Silurians *(1970)*

Various episodes from the early 1970s negotiate racial tensions in Great Britain caused by immigration from the former empire and the political push-back against it. The Immigration Acts of 1962 and 1968 had sought to restrict entry

172 Doctor Who and the Silurians, 1970.
173 Planet of the Ood, 2008.
174 Zygon Invasion, 2015.
175 Zygon Inversion, 2015.

from (former) colonies.[176] Despite these efforts, immigrant numbers remained high "as husbands, wives, and other dependants came to join the first generation of immigrants".[177] While the Race Relation Acts of 1965 and 1968 "aimed to remove racial discrimination from housing, employment, social welfare, and all legal procedures",[178] British politics were far from being free of racial hatred and anti-immigrant sentiments. These tendencies manifested themselves, for example, in the 'Rivers of Blood' speech by MP Enoch Powell. On April 20, 1968, a few days before Parliament would debate the Race Relations Bill, Powell warned his conservative audience about the consequences of continued immigration and expressed his fear that in a few years, people of colour could make up the majority of the population in some regions or cities.[179] The speech resulted in massive protests and Powell was sacked from the Shadow Cabinet.[180] The fear of a hostile take-over of Great Britain by a group fundamentally different and 'Other' resonates in a number of *Doctor Who* serials of the time, for example "Spearhead from Space"[181] and "Terror of the Autons",[182] which both deal with attempted invasions of Earth by the alien race of the Autons. These episodes, however, merely *depict* such invasions and do not engage in any anti-racist discourse.

"Doctor Who and the Silurians" goes a step further and features a Doctor who heroically promotes peaceful co-existence between the humans and an alien race. Patrick Mulkern accurately identified "xenophobia and destructiveness" as the story's central topics in his *RT* review,[183] and the episode certainly needs to be placed within the context of general racial discourses of the time. However, the serial, while it features anti-racist rhetoric, is not a straightforward narrative of immigration. Rather, it features two 'indigenous' populations that *both* believe they have the right to supress and even eliminate the other. Indeed, the alien species is not represented as "a single, undifferentiated mass" but rather as divided into those who strive for peace and those who aim for the "annihilation" of the humans.[184] Nicholas Cull, without going into any details, has suggested that the Silurian episode could be read as a fictional treatment of tensions in the Middle East and Northern Ireland at the time, similar to another Malcom Hulke story,

176 John Turner: Governors, Governance, and Governed. British Politics since 1945, in: Kathleen Burk (ed.): The British Isles since 1945, Oxford 2003, p. 51.
177 Jose Harris: Tradition and Transformation. Society and Civil Society in Britain, 1945–2001, in: Kathleen Burk (ed.): The British Isles since 1945, Oxford 2003, p. 111.
178 Ibid., p. 107.
179 See Brüggemeier: Geschichte, p. 272.
180 See ibid.
181 Spearhead from Space, 1970.
182 Terror of the Autons, 1971.
183 Patrick Mulkern: Doctor Who and the Silurians, Radio Times Online, 20 September 2009, radiotimes.com/news/2009-09-20/doctor-who-and-the-silurians/ [28 October 2019].
184 Chapman: Inside the TARDIS, p. 86.

"The Sea Devils",[185] which also features the clash of two 'indigenous' populations over the same space they both believe to be theirs.[186]

In respect to "Doctor Who and the Silurians", the unfolding Troubles in Northern Ireland are indeed a very immediate point of reference. Preceding the filming of the episode by a few months only, the "summer of 1969 was one of the most violent in the history of Northern Ireland".[187] The "climate of uncertainty" proved to be a fruitful ground for the IRA, who started to recruit new members and embarked on a "new revolutionary direction".[188] Sinn Féin, the IRA's political wing, split into two in January 1970, forming a radical and a less radical fraction. "Doctor Who and the Silurians" was broadcast during the same month, eerily reminiscent of the real-world politics in Northern Ireland. The Conservative government's "emphasis on conventional military action", which "played right into the hands of the Provisional IRA who exploited the growing alienation in besieged nationalist areas",[189] is translated into the realm of the fictional narrative. The Doctor's attempts to broker a peace treaty between humans and Silurians remain futile, reflecting a pessimistic outlook on the situation in Northern Ireland and the seemingly inevitable violent escalation of the conflict that would indeed ensue in the following years. The Silurian episode was produced and broadcast in the middle of unfolding political and societal unrest.

"Doctor Who and the Silurians" depicts a Doctor who rigorously roots for peaceful co-existence between two races, the humans and the Silurians, both reluctant to acknowledge each other's right to inhabit the Earth. By analogy, the Silurians represent the Catholic in Northern Ireland, the 'original' population. After a period of remaining dormant, they demand their 'rights' and want to throw out the now dominant group, the humans representing protestant Unionists. UNIT takes the place of the British army who in the end takes the side of the humans and, in a more extreme version of the escalation of the Troubles, blows the Silurians to atoms.

The contemporary issue in its fictional form is pushed to an extreme by the atomic threat, which enlarges the consequences of any decision (as in "Inferno"). The Third Doctor and his companion Liz are summoned to an atomic research centre where scientists are working on a proton accelerator and reckon themselves "on the verge of discovering a way to provide cheap, safe, atomic energy for virtually every kind of use".[190] The Doctor, as usual, warns against the catastrophic potential of nuclear power: "Your nuclear reactor could turn into a mas-

185 The Sea Devils, Doctor Who, BBC One, 26 February – 1 April 1972.
186 Nicholas Cull: "Bigger on the Inside…" Doctor Who as British Cultural History, in: Graham Roberts / Philip M. Taylor (eds.): The Historian, Television and Television History, Luton 2001, p. 103.
187 Dermot Keogh: Ireland 1945–2001. Between "Hope and History", in: Kathleen Burk (ed.): The British Isles since 1945, Oxford 2003, p. 202.
188 Ibid.
189 Ibid., pp. 203–204.
190 Silurians 1.

sive atomic bomb."[191] The presence of such an atomic reactor blows the effects of everyone's actions out of real-world proportions. Against this backdrop, the reaction to the actual conflict between human and Silurian population has much greater, more vital (or lethal) consequences.

The episodes portray humans and Silurians as equal: equally intelligent, equally stubborn in their refusal to recognize the other race's worth, equally ready to take violent action and equally ignorant to the Doctor's quest for peace. Throughout the story, Silurians and humans are shown having the same conversations about the other race: Are they intelligent beings? Should we kill them all? The Doctor recognizes the Silurians' equality, telling Liz after she has been attacked that "they're not necessarily hostile", that they attacked "only to escape", only "for survival".[192] The Doctor observes that "human beings behave in very much the same way".[193] On both the human and the Silurian side, the Doctor is able to convince individuals of the other race's worth but neither group unites behind the Doctor's pacifist quest. The Doctor's challenge is thus to ensure peace on his own, going back and forth between the two races and trying to negotiate with whoever will listen to him. When the humans insist on a military strategy, the Doctor seeks out the Silurians, warning them of the attack and offering to help them motion for a peace treaty. The Silurians, however, are distrustful of the Doctor's honest intentions and at the same time, like the humans, have no interest in sharing the space on Earth but want to claim it for themselves – violently if need be, just like the humans.

While both humans and Silurians are ready to use brute force to extinguish the other, the Doctor keeps refusing to turn to violent means. In response to a General's suggestion to take more firepower into the caves to beat the Silurians, he says: "That's typical of the military mind, isn't it? Present them with a new problem, and they start shooting at it. […] It's not the only way, you know, blasting away at things."[194] When he faces a Silurian for the first time himself, he offers his hand instead of attacking: "Hello, are you a Silurian? Look. Do you understand me? Well, what do your people want? How can we help you? […] Tell us what we can do."[195] Although the Doctor is alone and the Silurian approaches him aggressively, the Doctor meets the Silurian peacefully and makes himself vulnerable in his attempt to find a non-violent path. Indeed, the Silurian does not attack the Doctor. Despite these efforts, the Doctor cannot convince all Silurians to join him in his pacifist efforts. Ultimately, the Doctor and Liz are the only ones who are interested in establishing peace, which leaves them as the lone opponents to violent escalation.

---

191 Ibid.
192 Silurians 4.
193 Ibid.
194 Silurians 2.
195 Silurians 4.

The Doctor and Liz operate mostly on their own, outside the established hierarchies, jumping back and forth between the camps of the humans and Silurians. The Doctor quite characteristically refuses to accept formal authority, telling one member of the military for example that he has "no time to chat to undersecretaries, permanent or otherwise".[196] When the Silurians infect humans with a deadly virus that spreads rapidly across Great Britain, the Doctor and Liz work on their own in a lab to find a cure, proceeding calmly. Shots of their reasoned work are intercut with disturbing images of mass panics in London, people dying in an epidemic, which soon even spreads abroad. The Doctor's heroism in this story consists of a balancing act between two races. His borderline manoeuvre is explicitly marked as pacifist, a fact that is amplified by his refusal to use any violence while he is surrounded by two races ready to destroy each other.

The sombre end of the story turns Doctor and Liz into tragic heroes who found a cure for the Silurian virus spreading amongst humans but ultimately do not manage to push the two groups into a post-racial future. The Doctor does manage to save the humans from extinction. However, and despite an opposing promise, the military blows up the caves and thus the whole Silurian race. The Doctor and Liz see the attack from the distance. "That's murder," says the Doctor. "They were intelligent alien beings. A whole race of them. He's just wiped them out."[197] The Brigadier goes down the violent route in the end. He pushes *against* a possible post-racial future and, by eliminating the Silurians altogether, wipes out the threat in a more regressive move, re-establishing the positions of humans as the only intelligent life-form in an anthropocentric world.

Planet of the Ood *(2008)*

The notion that humans can be just as monstrous and just as opposed to the Doctor's vision of a peaceful world as any other (alien) race is further explored in "Planet of the Ood".[198] Here, the roles of aliens as monstrous threats and humans as worthy of the Doctor's protection are reversed: the humans are the monsters, and the Tenth Doctor and his companion Donna liberate the Ood from slavery. Set in the year 4126, the episode combines post-capitalist and post-racial discourses in an allegory of colonial slave-trade as well as the twenty-first century exploitation of the workforces in underdeveloped countries by industrialized Western societies. The Doctor and Donna confront and fight the human perpetrators. Individual humans and many of the Ood rise to non-violent heroic action as well, culminating in an overall peaceful revolution that pushes the universe's

196 Ibid.
197 Silurians 7.
198 Planet of the Ood, 2008. Unless otherwise noted, all quotes in the following close reading refer to this episode.

population further towards a post-colonial and, to some extent, a post-human future.

Through both self- and altero-characterization, the Ood are introduced as a race of voluntary servants. When Donna asks the Doctor what the 'Ood' are, he tells her "they're servants of the human race in the forty-second century". Donna later asks an Ood if there were any "free Ood", any "Ood running wild somewhere", upon which an Ood replies that they are "born to serve, otherwise they would die". Presenting the enterprise to a group of humans visiting, a human PR-representative of 'Ood Operations', Solana, tells them that the "Ood are happy to serve" and that they are "[kept] in facilities of the highest standard". The difference in phrasing – although Ood and Solana both describe that serving is in the nature of the Ood – already shows a discrepancy between the perception of the Ood's purpose. While the Ood simply suggests that serving is something that comes naturally to their race, Solana's pride in the high standard of the 'facilities' evokes the keeping of farm animals and implies that she sees the Ood as a life form inferior to humans.

The episode soon replaces the label 'servant' with that of 'slaves' and presents the Oods' miserable position as an extreme version of the exploited human workers in developing countries of the twenty-first century. When the Doctor and Donna witness a group of Ood that are being marched around a yard like prisoners, with a watchman using a whip on one Ood that stumbles, Donna exclaims: "Servants? They're slaves!" Donna is visibly shocked by the situation of the Ood and voices this both in conversation with the Doctor and Solana. Only then does it become clear to her that the Ood's conditions are similar to her twenty-first century reality on Earth:

> DONNA: A great big empire built on slavery.
>
> DOCTOR: It's not so different from your time.
>
> DONNA: We haven't got slaves!
>
> DOCTOR: Who do you think made your clothes?

Here, the Doctor points out that the workforces in poorer countries are suffering from similarly horrible conditions. Later, Solana suggests another parallel between twenty-first and forty-second century humans regarding their deliberate ignorance of the suffering of others:

> DONNA: If people back on Earth knew what was going on here…
>
> SOLANA: Oh, don't be so stupid. Of course they know.
>
> DONNA: They know how you treat the Ood?
>
> SOLANA: They don't ask. Same thing.

With these parallels between the Ood in the forty-second century and underprivileged workers exploited by Western capitalism in the twenty-first, the episode

pushes to an extreme the exploitation of intelligent beings and the willing ignorance of those who profit from it.

The humans in charge of 'Ood Operations' are portrayed as self-righteous perpetrators who use the rhetoric of colonizers to degrade the Ood and 'justify' their own actions. Klineman Halpen, the CEO of 'Ood Operations', engages in colonizers' rhetoric, claiming that the Ood "were nothing without [the humans], just animals roaming around on the ice. […] They welcomed it. It's not as if they put up a fight." He then refers to the Ood as "livestock" that should be "kill[ed]" when they do not meet the economic expectations of their 'owners'. He degrades the Ood – similar to how colonizers on Earth justified their 'conquests' – to uncivilized beings who 'profit' from the arrival and rule of the 'superior' race.

The Doctor's and Donna's view of the Ood is radically different from Halpen's. They recognize the Ood as an intelligent life form, as peaceful and suffering, captured against their will despite their natural inclination to serve. When they first arrive, they find an Ood dying in the snow because the Doctor hears his song (the Ood is a "he", not an "it", as the Doctor immediately teaches Donna). Donna initially cannot hear the Oods' song, which the Doctor calls the "song of captivity". When he enables her to hear it, she can hardly bear it and has to cry, asking the Doctor to take it away again. When she asks him if he can still hear it, the Doctor says: "All the time." This marks the Doctor as an exceptionally empathetic creature who has an ear for all beings, and who constantly bears the overwhelming injustice of oppression. Donna is similarly understanding and protective of the Ood. She talks back to Halpen when he tries to portray the Ood as a subordinate form of life whom he has the right to oppress because they did not fight back: "You idiot. They're born with their brains in their hands. Don't you see? That makes them peaceful. They've got to be, because a creature like that would have to trust anyone it meets." Showing the Ood as an inherently peaceful race inclined to help aligns them with the Doctor who constantly fights for a universe where all beings are peaceful.

The Doctor and Donna join the Ood in their fight for liberation, helping to ensure that it is ultimately a peaceful revolution – although some of the Ood are temporarily violent as a result of inhumane treatment and torture. All Ood are naturally connected to a large brain. Halpen has been torturing that brain, and 'Ood Operations' furthermore 'cultivated' the Ood for service by replacing their secondary brain (the one they carry in their hand) with a translation device, thus basically cutting off half of their brain. The torture has turned enough Ood violent to start a revolution. The Doctor and Donna find the brain, the "shared mind, connecting all Ood in song", which the company has been torturing. Facing Halpen, the Doctor, Donna and the Ood join forces to end the oppression.

In the end, the revolution takes a surprising form, binding together different kinds of peaceful, constant, non-violent resistance against the enslavement of the Ood. A man by the name of Ryder, who works for 'Ood Operations', outs himself

as a "friend of the Ood" who "infiltrated the company", lowering the level of torture of the shared brain, which allowed the Ood to rise up in the first place. When Halpen hears of Ryder's betrayal, he kills him. The second individual contributing to the peaceful resistance is Ood Sigma, who serves Halpen. Sigma has been giving Halpen "Ood graft" concealed as a hair-growing serum. When Halpen asks if he has been poisoned, Sigma replies that "natural Ood must never kill". Halpen starts transforming into an Ood in front of everyone's eyes and Sigma ensures him that they "will take care of him" because he has "become Oodkind". The Doctor explicitly remarks on all the different "sorts of shapes" that contributed to the revolution, including the "revenge" of the violent Ood but also the "patience, all that intelligence and mercy focused on Ood Sigma". Ultimately, the combined and mostly non-violent heroic acts of Ood, Ryder, Doctor and Donna result in breaking the cycle – both the literal one of the torture instruments around the shared brain and the metaphorical one of slavery. When the electric current around the brain is broken, the Ood's song starts, different from the 'song of slavery' that Donna could not bear before. Listening to the new song, Donna, the Doctor and Sigma all look up to the sky, all Ood stop fighting and raise their hands, joining in as the song changes from minor to major key, transforming the song of slavery into a song of freedom.

The idea that collective heroism can lead to a revolution is also reflected in the transformation of the Doctor and Donna into one entity to be celebrated as heroic in future Ood memory. In the episode's final scene, the Doctor is shown in the middle of an Ood circle – a circle of unity that has replaced one of torture – with the TARDIS in the background of the long shot of an endless icescape. The Ood working as slaves across the universe are "coming home", and Sigma says: "And know this Doctor-Donna. You will never be forgotten. Our children will sing of the Doctor-Donna and our children's children, and the wind and the ice, and the snow will carry on your names forever." The Doctor and Donna will turn into mythical heroes in the shared Ood memory – or rather, *a* mythical hero because the Ood perceive of them as one entity, a collective heroic configuration.

The Zygon Invasion / The Zygon Inversion *(2015)*

The double episode "The Zygon Invasion" / "The Zygon Inversion" has been read as an allegorical treatment of the immigrant crisis and the fear of Islamist terrorism and it has received overwhelmingly positive reviews for that. The majority of reviews explicitly pointed to the real-world relevance of the episodes and even called on real-world politics to follow the Doctor's example in missions for peace. Patrick Mulkern wrote in the *Radio Times* that with "allusions to Isis and direct mentions of radicalization, terrorist training camps and splinter groups, *The Zygon Invasion* is the closest *Doctor Who* has ever dared come to commenting

on the woes of the world".[199] Mulkern states that scriptwriters Peter Harness and Steven Moffat "are wearing their hearts and political colours on their sleeves" but qualifies that as a positive thing: "It's wonderful to watch and absorb. Real-world self-appointed 'peacemakers' take note."[200] Dan Martin's admits in his *Guardian* that "it was a risky game to attempt the sort of contemporary allegory that *The Zygon Inversion* knocked out of the park" and lamented that the "episode will likely not be used in any real-life peace talks any time soon".[201] The positive reception of the episodes underlines the capacities of extreme fiction to address contemporary problems through crystallized heroic moments.

The episodes humanize the 'Other' of immigrants perceived as a threat in Western society and suggest a very different way of thinking about 'us' and 'them' – one that is based on people's behaviour rather than their racial attributes and thus moves towards the ideal of a post-racial society. The Zygons, an alien race that lives peacefully and in disguise amongst humans, are on the verge of being radicalized by a splinter group that threatens to go to war against the human population. The Twelfth Doctor has to ensure peace, navigating prejudice, the hostile take-over of his companion Clara Oswald by Zygon terrorist leader Bonnie, and his own bias.

The first of the two episodes, "The Zygon Invasion", translates the so-called immigrant crisis and the fear of Islamist terrorism to the *Doctor Who* universe. Taking up an earlier *Who* story, the opening scenes show the Osgood twins – originally one human and one Zygon, keepers of a peace treaty between the two races. In a video that is to be released if the peace is threatened, they provide a re-cap of the situation: "Twenty million Zygons have been allowed to take human form and are now living amongst us." Now, however, peace is threatened by a radical terrorist splinter group. They kill one of the Osgoods and kidnap the other. They "demand the right to be [themselves]". Their aim is to recover a gas in the possession of the Doctor that will force all the Zygons in the world to show their 'real' appearance, a process of radical Othering that could result in a war between humans and Zygons. The Doctor explicitly identifies the Zygons who are responsible for the attack as terrorist: "This is a splinter group. The rest of the Zygons, the vast majority, they want to live in peace. You start bombing then, you radicalize the lot." Combined with the optics of the video message of the kidnapped Osgood and the Zygon terrorist camp in Turkmenistan, this very bluntly adapts real-world politics into a science-fiction narrative. The Zygon terrorists are *Doctor Who*'s version of Islamist terrorist groups such as ISIS; the other Zygons represent

---

199 Patrick Mulkern: Doctor Who. The Zygon Invasion/The Zygon Inversion, Radio Times Online, 7 November 2015, radiotimes.com/news/2015-11-07/the-zygon-invasion-the-zygon-inversion/ [19 August 2019].

200 Ibid.

201 Dan Martin: Doctor Who Series 35, Episode Eight. The Zygon Inversion, The Guardian Online, 7 November 2015, theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2015/nov/07/doctor-who-series-35-episode-eight-the-zygon-inversion [19 August 2019].

the vast majority of Muslim immigrants who live peacefully in Western countries, whose own homes have been destroyed and who suffer racism and processes of Othering because they share the religion or nationality of some extremists or terrorists.

While on the surface, the terrorist threat is the main issue, the underlying problem is more complicated. The actual source of the conflict is that people are judged based on their appearance and that we principally tend to think of the familiar as 'good' and the 'Other' as 'bad'. Since appearance has such a central place within the narrative, it is certainly no coincidence that the Zygons are shape-shifting beings. In a scene early on, a UNIT troop is supposed to take back a village in Turkmenistan from Zygon terrorists. However, the mission fails because the Zygons take the form of the soldiers' loved ones. The soldiers are shown to be unable to fire drones at what looks like their families, and they even follow the family-shaped Zygons into a church where they are destroyed because the 'mother' of one of the soldiers has promised them proof of their identity. The soldiers ignore the commands of their leader, who tells them to ask specific questions ("Where was I born?", "What was the name of my favourite teddy bear?"). Although the Zygon 'mother' fails to answer these question, the soldiers walk into their own deaths. This illustrates that the soldiers base their judgement of good and bad on appearance over behaviour.

The episode does not merely treat this issue for the audience to watch passively; in fact, it implies the viewers' own participation by means of a quite clever narrative set-up. In the aforementioned sequence with the soldiers, the audience is guided by the Doctor's evaluation of the situation and led to think that, unlike the soldiers, they are able to see through the Zygons' plot – and they do in this instance. However, at the end of "The Zygon Invasion", it turns out that the viewers have fallen victim to a very similar false belief: that the character who looks like Clara actually *is* Clara and thus 'good', when in reality, the hostile Zygon leader Bonnie has been abusing Clara's shape since very early on in the episode. This realization, intelligently inserted into the narrative construction, forces the audience to admit that their default assumptions about 'good' and 'bad' are just as much based on appearance as that of the soldiers. Upon re-watching, one will then notice a number of instances where "Clara" (really: Bonnie) behaves in an odd way – for example the very detailed questions about numbers of soldiers and weapons that UNIT has. The episode thus challenges the connection of familiar and other appearance with good and bad both on an intradiegetic story level and on the reception level.

A scene from the second episode, "The Zygon Inversion", combines both story level and reception. At a closed-down supermarket, in itself a very apocalyptic setting, the Doctor and Osgood meet a man who is transforming into his Zygon body, forced by Bonnie. It is made explicit that the man has no bad intentions and that he does not want to harm anyone. He is desperate because of his situation:

"Why? I was happy. […] I'm not part of your fight. […] Why can't I just live? […] I'm not on anyone's side. This is my home." In his Zygon form, however, it is not possible for him to live in this home because he is met with the same repulsion and disgust the audience cannot help to react with when watching the scene. In the end, he sees no other way out than killing himself. Once again, a Zygon is judged by his appearance rather than his actions – only this time, it is not to his advantage.

This scene shows the capacity of futurity narratives to visually drive a contemporary societal challenge to such extremes that it is impossible to ignore. The radical Zygon terrorists are a fictionalized version of ISIS, the rest of the Zygon race by analogy represent Muslim immigrants who have lost their own home. The man in the supermarket is in fact the only one who cannot be blamed for his miserable situation: The radicals want to force everyone to stress their otherness to provoke a resentful reaction from the human population that leads to open conflict. This, however, only works because the humans readily base their judgement of good and bad, of "belongs here with us" and "is too different from us to be here" on appearance. The extradiegetic audience, directed by the Doctor's sympathy for the man in the supermarket, takes his side and thus moves beyond judging the man based on his appearance. By depicting exclusion and discrimination based on looks in an extreme way and thus translating a real-world societal problem into shocking imagery that we cannot deny reacting to, the narrative forces the audience to reflect on their own behaviour.

In his final speech that ultimately ensures peace again, the Doctor forcefully follows through with basing 'good' and 'bad' on behaviour rather than appearance by offering forgiveness to Bonnie if she changes her course of action. When he asks Bonnie what she wants, she answers, "war". However, upon the Doctor's follow-up questions of what she imagines the world that follows the war to be like, she cannot give any answer. It turns out that Bonnie does not have a radically different image of the world in mind. In fact, she does not have any specific image in mind at all. What really differentiates her from the Doctor is that she wants war. Peter Capaldi performs a forceful, at the same time angry and compassionate rhetoric fight for a world without war. The *Guardian* review of the episode called this scene his "defining 'Doctor moment'".[202] The speech presents the Twelfth Doctor's overall heroic mission and, as a battle in extreme circumstances that is fought with words rather than weapons, is in itself one of his most heroic moments.

> DOCTOR: This is a scale model of war. Every war ever fought, right there in front of you. […] You're all the same, you screaming kids. You know that? Look at me, I'm unforgivable. Well, here's the unforeseeable: I forgive you. After all you've done, I forgive you. […] I fought in a bigger war than you will ever know. I did worse things than you could ever imagine. And when I close my eyes, I hear more screams than anyone could ever be

[202] Ibid.

> able to count! And do you know what you do with all that pain? […] You hold it tight till it burns your hand, and you say this: No one else will ever have to live like this. […] Not on my watch!

Rather than drawing a line between different life forms, or origins, or appearances, the Doctor draws a line between those who ensure peace and those who endanger it. This is the hero-villain divide the Doctor projects. In this extreme situation, everyone has to choose what side of the story they want to be on when everything is over – that of war, or that of peace. The categorization is based on the decision someone makes in the critical moment of this extreme pre-apocalyptic setting. The hero-villain-divide set up by the Doctor echoes Csicsery-Ronay's idea of the "ethical dimension of consequence"[203] in that the "the moral decision of acting for the 'greater good' [i.e. peace …] determine[s] them becoming a hero or a villain".[204]

While at the beginning of this scene, Bonnie explicitly states that she "won't change [her] mind", she begins to doubt herself one and a half minutes later. To her surprise, the Doctor stresses the similarities between himself and Bonnie rather than their differences. Instead of claiming that he is fundamentally good and she is fundamentally bad because she is different, the Doctor shares his past, telling her that he, too, fought a war, that he, too, had to make a choice once and that he, too, has had to change his behaviour for the better. He even claims that all his 'goodness' was sourced from the same kind of pain Bonnie is experiencing right now. Ultimately, his rhetoric of peace and forgiveness succeeds and Bonnie switches sides, taking up the vacant spot of the second Osgood.

Despite the mainly positive reviews, the story provoked some critical comments as well, which point to the limitations of such an extreme narrative when it comes to creating a nuanced allegory of real-world issues. Kelly Connolly wrote in her review of the double episode: "There's a reason why *Doctor Who* doesn't tend to comment on current events: The Doctor's view of the human experience is too broad to capture that kind of nuance. […] There are some issues too complex to be solved by a rousing speech from the Doctor."[205] She argues that the scene in the supermarket discussed above suggests that those who are different in terms of their origin, or their sexual orientation, should *hide* that Otherness. While this criticism is based on an appearance-based model of the 'Other', which I have argued the episodes deconstruct, Connolly's thoughts still point to the limitations of crystallizing contemporary challenges in extreme fictional narratives. The futurity setting of the episode certainly brushes over nuances, and the allegory is not consistent in every possible way. However, the Doctor's heroic stance for pacifism requires that kind of extreme setting. In a scenario where the world is not on the edge of destruction, his speech would not have had the same impact

---

203 Schmeink: Biopunk, p. 19.
204 Ibid., p. 199.
205 Kelly Connolly: Doctor Who Recap. The Zygon Inversion, Entertainment Weekly Online, 8 November 2015, ew.com/recap/doctor-who-season-9-episode-8/ [19 August 2019].

and significance. In addition, such a speech as the climax of the story requires momentum, an acceleration in the pace of the narrative that a more nuanced allegory could not reach. This does not make the episode's suggestion to hide apparent Otherness that Connolly points to less problematic, nor does it excuse these shortcomings. Rather, it points to a shortcoming concerning nuance that heroic representations might always entail.

The overwhelming praise and the criticism show that narrating real-world challenges through extreme fiction and resolving them through heroic action is simultaneously effective and problematic. The Doctor's speech drives home a point about peace as a central value, and presenting this speech as an act of heroism is what grants the words their undeniable force. However, the prerequisite for this still is a crystallized setting with a clear hero-villain-binary. "The Zygon Invasion" / "The Zygon Inversion" forces us to look at what we so often can afford to ignore. It forces us to critically question what we base our own judgement of good and evil on, and it asks us to stay vigilant to the discriminating tendencies we all have. The narrative detaches the hero-villain divide from the bias between the familiar and the 'other' based on appearance. Instead of separating 'us' and 'them' along the lines of appearance, the narrative suggests *behaviour* as a denominator for whether any individual is considered 'good' or 'evil', friend or foe. The 'new' binary, however, is still clear-cut. The narrative irrevocably runs towards that moment of decision: which side will Bonnie fall on, the heroic or the villainous one? Thus is the nature of extreme fiction, its intriguing spell and its shortcomings to depicting nuances.

The episodes discussed negotiate some of *Doctor Who*'s core values and political ideologies. Collective heroism as a driving force towards a better future resonates in all stories. While the Doctor and their companions as individuals play crucial roles in replying to the 'distress calls' of the universe, bringing in new perspectives and asking questions no one has thought to ask, the revolutions that push all creatures further into a brighter future only succeed if they are supported and carried out by a collective. Markedly, the one story that does not have a good ending, "Doctor Who and the Silurians", also happens to be the one episode where the Doctor fails to unite a large group of people (or rather, beings) behind the cause for a more peaceful, equal and free world. Pushing for post-racial and post-capitalist societies resonates with the leftist positioning that these future fictions developed over the course of *Doctor Who*'s existence. The references to real-world issues are always specific, such as narratives of extreme taxation ("The Sun Makers") or fear of Islamic immigration ("The Zygon Invasion" / "The Zygon Inversion") at times when these were prominent topics in public British discourse. At the same time, all these specific political and societal references feed into an overarching system of leftist and liberal values. Narratives of heroic moments pushing for a brighter future are thus effective vessels of the pacifist, post-capitalist, post-racial utopia that the Doctor represents.

5.5 Post-Apocalypse: New Heroes for a New Age

In the post-apocalyptic scenarios, the relationship between the future and the heroic changes fundamentally. In these episodes, the heroic cannot be employed to push back the future or push the world further into it because the future is already and irrevocably there. In post-apocalyptic scenarios, the future has 'happened'. The catastrophe that the Doctor keeps pushing back against in the aforementioned episodes has destroyed the Earth and the human race is seeking refuge somewhere else – a spaceship or a new planet. These episodes are not about fighting a threat or embracing the possibility of transformation but rather about dealing with a worst-case scenario that has become reality. In these post-apocalyptic settings, we see a radical reduction of conventional heroism. The imperative of 'saving' is reduced to the imperative of 'surviving' which, at the outer limits of time, can constitute a heroic act in itself. Significantly, the Doctor is in awe of the human race's ability to persevere and to survive in many of the post-apocalyptic episodes, calling them for example "indomitable" in both "The Ark in Space"[206] and "Utopia".[207] In the rebuilding of society in the wake of total destruction and chaos, the post-apocalyptic episodes explore catastrophe as a chance for the human race to reinvent itself, including what it means to act heroically. The following case studies will consider, firstly, the incompatibility of conventional individual heroic acts and the post-apocalypse; secondly, the exploration of collective heroism (even with a post-human twist) as an alternative and, thirdly, the Doctor as a quintessentially post-apocalyptic figure whose accepting, peaceful, healing and encompassing approach to heroism is the result of being the lone survivor of the total destruction of his own civilization.

5.5.1 The Failure of (Conventional) Heroism in the Post-Apocalypse

In the far, post-apocalyptic future, conventional heroism is no longer successful. Three very different episodes from both the old and the new *Doctor Who*, all taking place in extremely liminal settings, display that in very different ways. In "Frontios",[208] the Doctor lands on a post-apocalyptic planet at the edge of the galaxy, where a new order is establishing itself and acts of conventional heroism seem weirdly out of place. "Planet of Evil"[209] pushes Doctor and companion to the very edge of existence and their heroic agency is limited to not falling into the nothingness beyond. In "Utopia",[210] the Doctor *does* act heroically in rather con-

206 Ark in Space, 1975.
207 Utopia, Doctor Who, BBC One, 16 June 2007.
208 Frontios, Doctor Who, BBC One, 26 January – 3 February 1984.
209 Planet of Evil, Doctor Who, BBC One, 27 September – 18 October 1975.
210 Utopia, 2007.

ventional ways, which ultimately results in the catastrophe of the Master violently invading the present from the far future.

Frontios *(1984)*

In "Frontios", the Doctor and his companions Tegan and Turlough travel far into the future to a post-apocalyptic colony that has been established so recently that the Doctor does not want to interfere. Before they land, the TARDIS consoles display the message "Boundary Error. Time Parameters Exceeded".[211] The Doctor comments that they "must be on the outer limits" because the TARDIS "has drifted too far in the future".[212] Turlough reads from the TARDIS screens that "a group of refugees from the doomed planet Earth" has settled there, "fleeing from the imminence of a catastrophic collision with the sun".[213] The "last humans" inhabit the isolated and desolate planet that the TARDIS materializes on. Before they get out, the Doctor reminds them that they "mustn't interfere" because the "colony's too new, one generation at the most, the future hangs in the balance".[214] This episode shows the Doctor at one of the furthest points in the future he has travelled to. Combined, the post-apocalyptic setting and the new society that is in the process of establishing itself render the Doctor's heroic interference impossible and thus result in a loss of his agency.

The new civilization, however, is in need of some form of help because it is already threatened by extinction. Upon landing, they "lost all [their] technology".[215] The day of their arrival is known amongst the survivors as the "Day of Catastrophe",[216] which explicitly marks the society as post-catastrophic or post-apocalyptic. The planet is made up of bare rocks, the environment is hostile even without the bombardment the colony is facing from an unknown outside enemy. The Doctor gives the inhabitants a dire diagnosis of their chances of survival: "I think your colony of Earth people is in grave danger of extinction."[217] Facing complete extinction is one of the most extreme situations the human race could find itself in. The survivors desperately need exceptional leadership but any attempts to provide it fail.

The designated leader, Plantagenet,[218] tries to project himself as a strong head of state using heroic rhetoric, but these conventional formulas do not work any longer. Plantagenet is shown to be completely discouraged by the situation. He

---

211 Frontios 1.
212 Ibid.
213 Ibid.
214 Ibid.
215 Ibid.
216 Frontios 2.
217 Frontios 1.
218 The name references the House of Plantagenet, the family that held the English throne from 1154 to 1485.

tells the Doctor that "Frontios is not the easiest planet to rule" after thirty years of bombardment.[219] Despite his desperation, Plantagenet still uses heroic rhetoric:

> I am the son of Captain Revere. The people of Frontios will not be cowed by these mewling words of defeat, Doctor. We may lack the outward appurtenances of might, but we carry our strength within us. We will win the war with the invisible aggressors whose missiles batter on our planet, and we will win the greater battle, the struggle for the future of our race.[220]

This short speech contains many conventional heroic elements: Plantagenet stresses his legacy and uses phrases associated with strength, endurance and victory in the face of a seemingly superior enemy. However, this heroic rhetoric remains an empty container. The speech seems out of place with only a small audience listening to it and obvious desolation in every direction. Plantagenet even reveals later that he is aware of the limitation of his agency, as the following conversation between him and the Doctor shows:

> PLANTAGENET: I must stay here with my people.
>
> DOCTOR: The democratic touch, eh?
>
> PLANTAGENET: Hardly democracy, Doctor. I must remain in public sight. If the people of Frontios think for one moment that I am dead, there will be anarchy.[221]

Plantagenet knows that his own power is barely enough to prevent open rebellion. His self-projection as a leader is doomed to fail in an environment so desolate that any attempts to act in a conventionally heroic way by showing strength, courage and perseverance crumble to pieces.

As soon as Plantagenet disappears, the order breaks down completely, resulting in anarchy and a further reduction of any potential heroism to the need to survive. With the leader gone, "the looting start[s]" quickly[222] and outlaws roam the planet. One of them, Cockerill, says: "It's all over, can't you see that? […] For Frontios. Plantagenet's been eaten by the Earth. […] The leadership has been destroyed. And now it's every man for himself."[223] The ability to survive replaces heroic action. Cockerill, who gets 'eaten' by the Earth but then reappears, gains the status of exceptionality. "A man who can do that can do anything", one of the men following him says.[224] Another follower similarly remembers Cockerill's survival as exceptional: "Look, the Earth began to suck him down and then returned him. Cockerill's the man to save this planet."[225] Every man fights for himself, there is little loyalty between them and all conventionally heroic values have disappeared – chivalry, self-sacrifice and courage to meet and fight the enemy.

---

219 Frontios 2.
220 Frontios 1.
221 Frontios 2.
222 Ibid.
223 Frontios 3.
224 Ibid.
225 Frontios 4.

The only place where conventional heroic acts are still possible is beneath the ground, out of sight, and not to be spoken about afterward. The Doctor and his companions find out that what looks like people being sucked in by the Earth is in fact the work of the Tractators, an insect race that wants to take over the universe. The Tractators operate underground, the place from which the Doctor, his companions and the colony's 'Security Chief' Brazen must rescue Plantagenet. Brazen sacrifices himself, and the Doctor ensures that everyone else returns safely to the planet's surface. However, the Doctor's involvement breaks the laws of time, and so the Doctor forbids Plantagenet and his allies to talk about any of what he has done. The very few acts of conventional heroism that the episode contains will thus never become stories or myths. The narrativization of exceptional acts, however, is an integral part of heroization. In that sense, too, the planet is beyond conventional heroism. By the end of the episode, the Doctor and his companions leave "the last of mankind […] quite alone"[226] on their planet to continue attempting to build a new civilization, post-apocalypse and, potentially, post conventional heroism.

Planet of Evil *(1975)*

Set more than 30,000 years in the future, "Planet of Evil"[227] pushes the Fourth Doctor and companion Sarah Jane Smith to the edge of existence in an episode in which heroism is not merely reduced to but rather pushed aside for the sake of survival. The story is set on Zeta Minor, the "last planet of the known universe" according to the Doctor, where they are looking for survivors of a "lost expedition".[228] Zeta Minor is located right at the edge of the universe, and the characters must direct almost all of their efforts at not falling off that edge. The scientist Sorensen, the one character in this episode who has heroic ambitions and who says of himself that he "came to Zeta Minor to prove a theory that could save our civilization"[229], turns out to be the *threat*. To ensure the survival of the 'lost expedition', the Doctor must prevent Sorensen from taking anti-matter from Zeta Minor. He tells another scientist, Vishinsky, that "Zeta Minor is the boundary between existence as you know it and the other universe, which you just don't understand" and which has "existed side by side with the known universe", each the "antithesis of the other".[230] Coming to Zeta Minor means that humankind has "crossed the boundary into that other universe to plunder it – dangerous".[231] Sorensen's heroic ambition is to cross that boundary, jeopardizing everybody's survival. The episode thus suggests that in the post-apocalyptic setting of Zeta

226 Ibid.
227 Planet of Evil, 1975.
228 Planet of Evil 1.
229 Planet of Evil 2.
230 Ibid.
231 Ibid.

Minor, individual heroic acts fuelled by personal ambitions stand in the way of collective survival.

Utopia *(2007)*

"Utopia"[232] explores a very similar idea to "Planet of Evil", albeit in a very different way. Here, the Doctor's *own* conventionally heroic acts result in a catastrophic threat. Similar to the previous two post-apocalyptic episodes, this one is set at the very edge of time, the "end of the universe", a place where the Doctor feels he should not be: "Not even the Time Lords have ever come this far. We should leave. We should go. We should really, really go." Nevertheless, he alights the TARDIS with companion Martha Jones. An extreme long shot of the TARDIS in front of dark cliffs stresses that they have arrived at a desolate and potentially dangerous place. They then face Jack Harkness, who had been holding on to the TARDIS. Their mutual greeting is shown in alternating hero shots of the two characters, visually setting them up for the heroic action toward the end of the episode.

"Utopia" focuses its narrative energy on the survival of the human race at the edge of time. Escaping dangerous mutants (the 'Futurekind'), the Doctor, Martha and Jack make it to a fenced-in place that looks "like a refugee camp" where the last humans hope for an escape to 'Utopia'. The people's will to survive clearly impresses the Doctor: "End of the universe and here you humans are. Indomitable, that's the word. Indomitable!" Survival is presented as people's strongest and most basic instinct, an instinct so strong that they are trying to "find a way of surviving beyond the collapse of reality itself". The whole operation to get humans to Utopia is led by Professor Yana who, once he regains his own memory of his true identity and intentions, turns out to be the Doctor's arch-enemy, the Master, looking for a way to invade the present.

Without knowing Yana's true identity, the Doctor and Jack are ready to heroically sacrifice themselves to enable the rocket to take off and, supposedly, take the refugees to 'Utopia'. Jack Harkness, who at this point has understood that he is "the man who can never die" agrees to enter a room poisoned with radiation to fix the rocket for take-off. Jack and the Doctor are shown running down a poorly lit corridor, shot from below with a hand-held camera that moves along with them, giving the scene the tone of an action-hero movie. However, their heroic efforts ultimately result in one thing: 'Yana' regenerates into a younger Master and takes off in the TARDIS, back to the present moment on Earth, which he attempts to take over in the following two episodes, "The Sound of Drums" and "Last of the Time Lords". Ultimately, the Doctor's conventionally heroic act at the edge of time results in the destructive Master violently invading the present from the far future.

---

[232] Utopia, 2007. Unless otherwise noted, all quotes in the following close reading refer to this episode.

Through different means, "Frontios", "Planet of Evil" and "Utopia" show that conventional heroism has no place in post-apocalyptic settings. In "Frontios", Plantagenet's attempts to act heroically look ridiculous, while Cockerill's mere survival is celebrated. The only genuinely heroic acts happen underground, unseen, and remain untold. "Planet of Evil" vilifies the heroic ambitions of Sorensen to cross the boundary to the 'other' universe. In "Utopia", finally, the heroic acts of the Doctor and Jack lead to an invasion of the present through the far future. All these episodes imply that post-apocalyptic settings do not offer fruitful ground for conventional heroism. That, however, does not mean that the post-apocalyptic era is a post-heroic one. Heroism must merely adapt, reinvent and renew.

5.5.2 The Reinvention of Heroism for the Post-Apocalypse

Out of all future scenarios, the post-apocalypse is most radically different from the present. These episodes put even the Doctor into an entirely unfamiliar environment. The liminality of these borderlands, where Doctor and companions move towards the edge of existence, is often already reflected in the episode titles ("Frontier in Space", "Frontios", "The End of the World" etc.). The environment has dramatically changed; planet Earth is not the home of the human race any more. People need to adapt to a new way of life, and that includes the ideas of what it means to act heroically. Any attempt to continue in the 'old' heroic mode of exceptional individual acts of courage, leadership and exemplarity no longer work. In the following, we will turn to three episodes that reinvent heroic action in the age of the post-apocalypse. These narratives promote acceptance as a heroic value, privilege peace over fighting, pick up and intensify the shift from individual to collective heroism that we already saw in the case studies dealing with episodes where heroic action was directed at pushing towards the future, and offer glimpses of how that collective heroism could include non-human life forms.

The Ark in Space *(1975)*

"The Ark in Space",[233] a story that granted *Doctor Who* the largest audience since 1965, explores the opportunity that a post-apocalyptic scenario offers to rebuild a society on ideals of humanity fuelled by a more collective form of heroism. With a focus on survival – not only of the human race but also of the traits of humanity that distinguish it from other species –, the episode portrays the collective fight for the continuing existence of the spirit of humanity as heroic. Although not free of doubt, various individuals sacrifice themselves not for their own sake but for that of the collective they identify with. The Fourth Doctor's own heroic acts are

[233] Ark in Space, 1975.

part of the bigger, collective operation aimed at returning the human race to a 'purified' Earth after hundreds of years of conservation on a spaceship that alludes to the biblical Noah's Ark.

Set in the early thirtieth century, the episode starts at a point in time when the human race has already *survived* the biggest threat to its existence much more successfully than in the episodes considered before. While in "Frontios", the humans had lost all technical equipment, and in both "Utopia" and "Planet of Evil", the most basic survival of the apocalypse itself had not been ensured yet, the situation at the beginning of "Ark in Space" is more promising. The human race has managed to secure, in a "cryogenic repository", the whole "body of human thought and achievement", as well as individual human beings trusted with returning all of humanity to Earth once the planet becomes inhabitable again.[234] When the Doctor and his companions Sarah Jane Smith and Harry Sullivan arrive on the spaceship, the humans are still asleep, "awaiting the trumpet blast".[235] Similar to his wonder in "Utopia", the Doctor expresses his amazement at the humans' ability to persevere, even using the same word, 'indomitable':

> *Homo sapiens*. What an inventive, invincible species. […] They've survived flood, famine and plague. They've survived cosmic wars and holocausts, and now here they are amongst the stars, waiting to begin a new life, ready to outsit eternity. They're indomitable. Indomitable![236]

The speech explicitly mentions survival several times and paints human history as a history of progress, hinting at evolution (learning to walk), Biblical stories (surviving flood) and history (holocausts) and thus establishing an idea of the human species that already entails aspects of culture and knowledge.

One of the central heroic moments of the episode revolves around living up to the spirit of humanity and the collective hope the human race had placed in the team manning the spaceship Nerva. After the humans wake up from their century-long sleep, their leader, Noah ("a name from mythology"[237]) is infected with a mutant virus by the Wirrn, a hostile insect race. Noah is about to turn on his fellow humans when a message from the past on Earth is activated. The 'Earth High Minister' (markedly, a woman) speaks to the team on the spaceship. The speech is loaded with pathos. The "salvation of the human race" is marked as a "great undertaking" and yet seems small to the "vast" challenge ahead, the "enormous" task.[238] At this "dawn of a new age", nothing short of the heroic will suffice to meet the obstacles ahead. The team on Nerva, however, is portrayed as predestined to fulfil the heroic potential, they are "the proud standard bearers of [the] entire race" and the "chosen survivors".[239] The speech resonates immediately and

234 Ark 1.
235 Ibid.
236 Ibid.
237 Ark 2.
238 Ark 3.
239 Ibid.

inspires Noah, whose mind is possessed by the Wirrn and who is slowly transforming into a green alien life form, to resist the 'other' within himself. He beats his already transformed green arm onto the metal desk and fights the power overtaking his brain to send a message to his colleague Vira, telling her that they are "in great danger" and urging her to "take command" and "save [their] people".[240] Noah's fight against the Wirrn possessing him is the first of several sacrifices made by the team on Nerva.

Every heroic moment of the episode is a sacrifice for the collective. The Doctor remarks early on that with "the entire race in one room, all colours, all creeds, all differences [are] finally forgotten".[241] The future, which heroic action in other episodes seeks to prevent, namely an environmental catastrophe on Earth, has become a reality – but so has a human civilization that has moved beyond conflicts based on ethnicity or gender. Some of the team members on Nerva harbour doubts about the operation but ultimately still sacrifice themselves for the survival of humanity. Rogin tells Lycett that they "should have stayed on Earth",[242] and later hesitates for a moment over whether he should take off alone and save his own life but then decides against it and instead sacrifices himself. The Doctor remarks on "Rogin's bravery" and the "vestige of human spirit" in Noah that saved the others.[243] The Doctor himself also contributes a heroic moment to the collective action, offering his own "exceptional" brain to be linked into the system to fight the Wirrn.[244] Again and again throughout the episode, the importance of individual acts for the sake of the collective is stressed. Only as a collective can the humans (and the Doctor) on Nerva save the day, deciding "the fate of all humanity".[245] In the end, "mankind is safe" and it remains the task of Vira, the new leader, to "get [her] people back to Earth".[246] The post-apocalypse thus offers the opportunity for a new beginning, combining the positive aspects of humanity (knowledge and culture accumulated over time) with more collective heroism.

The Beast Below *(2010)*

At the beginning of the episode,[247] the Eleventh Doctor and companion Amy Pond land on the so-called 'Starship UK', where Great Britain evacuated to in order to escape the destruction of planet Earth (Scotland is missing because they "wanted their own ship"). The main heroic character of the episode turns out

240 Ibid.
241 Ark 1.
242 Ark 3.
243 Ark 4.
244 Ark 3.
245 Ibid.
246 Ark 4.
247 Beast Below, 2010. Unless otherwise noted, all quotes in the following close reading refer to this episode.

to be a giant star whale who selflessly and voluntarily came to the rescue of the human race, carrying the starship through space on its back. The human population, however, is not aware of that because they collectively and repeatedly choose to forget what happened, which results amongst other things in the torture of the star whale. Remembering their history is ultimately portrayed as the heroic act that returns the UK to democratic principles and pushes the society towards a post-human understanding of the relation between themselves and other life-forms.

The episode opens in a very dystopian setting, posing the question of the cost at which the survival of the human race has come. While travelling to the twenty-ninth century setting, the Doctor tells Amy that the ship contains the UK "bolted together and floating in the sky"; the "whole country, living and laughing and shopping". Upon their arrival, the reality on Starship UK looks much grimmer. There are "secrets and shadows, lives led in fear", and the hopeful utopia turns out to be a "society bent out of shape, on the brink of collapse, a police state". The Doctor and Amy find a human society that has survived at the cost of losing many achievements of humanity highlighted in "The Ark in Space": knowledge of the past and with it a part of human culture, democracy and faith.

The main threat in "The Beast Below" is the erosion of democracy caused by people's 'choice' to forget about their past and their legacy. When temporarily separated from the Doctor, Amy wakes up in "voting cubicle 333" where a man, Morgan, who looks like a BBC news anchor, addresses her with the following message:

> You are here because you want to know the truth about this Starship, and I am talking to you because you're entitled to know. When this presentation has finished, you will have a choice. You may either protest or forget. […] Here then, is the truth about 'Starship UK', and the price that has been paid for the safety of the British people. May God have mercy on our souls.

Amy then watches a film about the UK's past that leaves her in shock. Despite these horrors, the public has voted to forget for centuries, as Morgen advises them to do, in order to preserve the existence of the star ship. The democratic rights of the population on Starship UK have been reduced to seeing that film once every five years and then "everyone chooses to forget what they've learned", which the Doctor laconically calls "democracy in action". With the episode broadcast less than a month before the 2010 British general election, this remark was certainly also directed at the voting public amongst the audience, a plea to take their democratic rights seriously. The fictional scenario portrays an extreme form of a population ignoring the facts and undermining democratic processes in the misguided hope that it will ensure their safety.

Privileging human safety above all else is questioned later in the episode. The Doctor figures out that a giant whale, a "poor, trapped, terrified creature" is what they "have instead of an engine", torturing it "day after day just to keep it mov-

ing". Like her population, the queen, Liz, repeatedly makes the choice to privilege the wellbeing of humans over the wellbeing of the animal. Every ten years, she watches a video where her past self tells her the truth:

> The creature you are looking at is called a star whale. Once, there were millions of them. […] This one, as far as we are aware, is the last of its kind. And what we have done to it breaks my heart. The Earth was burning. […] Our children screamed as the skies grew hotter. And then it came, like a miracle. The last of the star whales. We trapped it, we built our ship around it, and we rode on its back to safety. If you wish our voyage to continue, then you must press the 'forget' button.

Ironically, the video suggests to the queen that repeatedly pressing the 'forget' button is a sign of "strength" and "the right decision". Furthermore, this version of the events grants humans all agency, objectifying the whale. While the Doctor calls it an "impossible choice" to decide whether to rescue "humanity or the alien", the "worst thing [he has] ever done", he is still stuck within a binary way of thinking about human and non-human life at this point. He questions the choice humans have made for centuries but nevertheless assumes a choice *must* be made.

The resolution of "The Beast Below" offers a different take on the matter that highlights cooperation between life forms over hierarchy and grants the non-human creature, the star whale, agency of its own and thus heroic potential exceeding that of any other being in the narrative. Amy, in a gamble that her presumptions about the peaceful nature of the whale are correct, pushes Liz's hand down on the 'abdicate' button and surprisingly, the whale keeps floating. Pushing the 'abdicate' button can be read as a symbol of giving up the regent's claim to rule, and humankind's monopoly on agency. Amy then presents a quite different version of how the British population was rescued from the burning Earth, a story that heroizes the star whale rather than victimizing it:

> The star whale didn't come like a miracle all those years ago. It volunteered. […] It came because it couldn't stand to watch your children cry. What if […] you were that old, and that kind, and the very last of your kind, you couldn't just stand there and watch children cry.

The heroization of the star whale, besides granting the creature agency, is based on its courage but also empathy, selflessness and service for the collective. These values, the episode implies, cannot be destroyed by the continuous torture the creature has to suffer from. The end of the torture brings about the end of lying to the population and restores a democratic, open society. Acknowledging the co-operation between human and non-human beings, and the whale's agency and heroism based on very humanitarian values, transforms the dystopia of 'Starship UK' into a more egalitarian, open and post-human society.

The idea of a post-human society is pushed even further in "Smile",[248] in which the Twelfth Doctor saves the human race, liberates the non-human race of the Vardy, establishes peace and reforms race-relations between the two, all in one heroic act. The story picks up a few elements that we have already encountered in the preceding case studies: the Earth has become increasingly inhabitable, which is why the humans have set out to make an alternative space habitable. While most people are kept asleep (as in "Ark in Space"), the bravest and most accomplished ones are tasked with preparing the new world. These chosen few impersonate and act on 'old' models of heroism that, again, clash with the post-apocalyptic setting. The Vardy, enslaved post-human robots that communicate via emojis, seem at first to threaten the human population. The Doctor, however, figures out that the conflict is merely a communication problem and urges the human colonizers to take a peaceful approach. The episode thus addresses issues of colonization, technological progress and a new model of non-violent heroism for a post-anthropocentric world.

The Doctor and his new companion Bill land in a place that at first sight looks like Utopia, but on closer inspection, it turns out to be a graveyard of the human explorers who set out to build this shiny new world. When they step out of the TARDIS, they are surprised about where they have landed. As the Doctor explains, "you don't steer the TARDIS, you negotiate" and land at the "still point between where you want to go and where you need to be". The Vardy take care of everything from gardening to serving nutritious super-food in the shape of blue jelly cubes, and their futuristic city, where communication occurs through emojis, looks like the "utopia of vacuous teens". However, it soon turns out that, indeed, "someone has to do something". Bill first suggests to "call the police", a "helpline or something", but soon understands that the Doctor "[doesn't] call the helpline because [he *is*] the helpline". The Doctor protests, telling Bill not to "sentimentalize" him because he does not "just fly around helping people out" but he nevertheless is set up as the central heroic figure of the story early on. This differentiates "Smile" from "Ark in Space" and "The Beast Below", where the Doctor took on a more passive, facilitating role.

The humans are portrayed as (too) self-confident, verging on aggressive, while the Vardy only become self-aware and discover their agency in the course of the episode. When the spacecraft escaping Earth landed, only "a few, the ones with skills", the "best ones, the brave ones" set out to "shepherd the little flocks of Vardy robots" to prepare the city for human settlement. The endeavour went well overall until one of the pioneers died of old age and her friends and family were struck by grief. The Vardy are programmed to keep the humans happy at all

[248] Smile, Doctor Who, BBC One, 22 April 2017. Unless otherwise noted, all quotes in the following close reading refer to this episode.

times and were not able to distinguish 'unhappiness' from 'grief'. To handle the problem, the Vardy started to kill off the 'unhappy' humans, which resulted in a mass extinction of the pioneers. The Doctor and Bill figure out the unfortunate course of events and try to make the humans understand that "the Vardy think different […] not bad, not good, just […] different". Acknowledging the Vardy's uniqueness, without considering them to be a subordinate life form, the Doctor states that "like every slave class in history, the Vardy are beginning to have ideas on their own" and "identify as a species"; they are "self-aware" and "alive". The Vardy are a different but equal life-form.

Granting the Vardy agency and the ability to reflect and become self-aware changes the dynamic between human and non-human race. At first sight it seems as if the Vardy were inferior in their emotional intelligence because their reading of emotions is limited to emoji. The aggressive reaction of the humans, who want to destroy the Vardy violently (which they clearly think would be a heroic reaction to the crisis at hand), suggests that their emotional intelligence is not more developed at all. They turn out to be similarly limited in their emotional response because they do not reflect on their grief transforming into anger and aggression and they act on these emotions without any impulse control. The episode thus levels the ground between humans and Vardy in a twofold manner: it elevates the Vardy to a self-aware life form and shows that humans are limited in their emotional intelligence, too.

Based on this presentation of human and Vardy as equal in a post-human scenario, the Doctor's central heroic act consists of ensuring peace between the races in a non-violent fashion, using parable and story instead of firearms and thus establishing a new heroic mode for the post-apocalyptic setting. The Doctor states that the "opposite of a massacre [is] a lecture" and embarks on that course of action. He presses "the reset button" and tells the humans the parable of a fisherman who was presented with three wishes by a "magic haddock". The first two wishes resulted in the "heroic death" of his son during a war, so the fisherman used the third wish to undo the first two, thus "in a way, he pressed the reset button". The Doctor then draws a parallel by telling the humans that if their "city proves anything, it is that granting all your wishes is not a good idea". The parable presents war and violence as senseless, questions the value of conventionally heroic actions such as sacrificing oneself in armed conflict. Furthermore, it presents the Vardy as a race that is both powerful (in analogy to the 'magic' haddock) *and* different. In solving the conflict with a story and a reset of the relation between human and Vardy, the Doctor suggests a different model for heroic action: one that is based on the understanding, communication and recognition of the equality of other life forms.

The ending of the episode elaborates on the idea of a post-apocalyptic, post-human world and simultaneously connects back to human history of colonizing, implying that the Doctor's new model of heroic action can lead to a more peace-

ful and ultimately better outcome than the conventional heroism of exploring, warring colonizers. The humans think that this is "[their] city" and the Vardy are "[their] robots" but the Doctor tells them that the Vardy are, in fact, "the indigenous life form" that the humans "best make friends with" because they "have absolute power over this city". The Doctor offers himself as a "negotiator", apologizing to the Vardy that "a few hours ago [he] made the mistake of not recognizing [their] status as an emergent lifeform" and introducing the humans as "a migratory conglomerate known as the human race" who are "looking for a place to stay". While some of the older humans have a hard time accepting the Doctor's view of the world and insist that the Vardy "killed [their] people", a little boy peacefully shares a drink with a Vardy in the background, which suggests that the Doctor's idea of peaceful and respectful co-existence and even friendship is indeed the most promising path (further) into the future.

The three case studies show that in the far, post-apocalyptic future, humans must reinvent what it means to be heroic in order to find their way to a new life beyond mere survival. All three episodes contain a speech about values such as kindness, faith, peace and non-violence, suggesting a moral compass that alternative routes for heroic actions can follow. The solution of dramatic situations in all stories is based on co-operation amongst humans and other lifeforms. The human survivors and explorers are portrayed as inventive and 'indomitable' but also as partly stuck in their old ways. The episodes, all highlighting alternative modes for heroic action in their own way, suggest that there is only hope if the humans overcome their old ideas and find an entirely new way forward – based on values of humanity but without necessarily limiting them to the human race in increasingly post-anthropocentric settings.

5.5.3 The Doctor as a Post-Apocalyptic Hero

On the one hand, post-apocalyptic settings put the Doctor into an environment that is unfamiliar even to them; on the other hand, they are also very much at home there. The Doctor is an inherently post-apocalyptic character. As Andrew Tate has pointed out, the Doctor is "the last of his species as his own world was destroyed after a long war. He is an exile with a guilty secret, regarded as a hero by many whom he encounters but, he believes, also the person responsible for the annihilation of his people".[249] Driven by the urge to do better this time, to not fail humanity as they failed their own people, the Doctor not only recognizes the heroic potential of apocalyptic scenarios but also bases their definition of self on how they react: "The universe shows its true face when it asks for help. We show ours by how we respond."[250] The Doctor rises to apocalyptic challenge by

[249] Tate: Apocalyptic, p. 14.
[250] Oxygen, 2017.

allowing "characters to survive apocalyptic events".[251] Based on John R. Hall's assumption that the "apocalypse interrupts into our normal world of diachronic time", it has been argued that the Doctor is inherently 'apocalyptic', "suddenly interrupting into the regular world of diachronic time, helping oppressed groups […] regroup around new strategic goals […], pulling back the curtain of the established world to reveal the true nature of the societies that he visits".[252] The (post-) apocalyptic is a point of origin for the Doctor, something inherent to their interaction with the world, and a setting in which their own heroism is most at home.

The post-apocalypse is marked by an openness that affords the Doctor to unfold their full heroic potential. Many aspects of the kind of heroic action that works within the episodes discussed are integral to the Doctor's character: The post-apocalyptic settings are marked by a hierarchical openness, which allows the Doctor to redirect the energy he would usually have to devote to rebelling against authority in other settings. Conventional heroism that relies to considerable extents on force and violence no longer works, which opens space for new kinds of heroic action that are founded on values of peace, co-operation and empathy. These values have become central to the Doctor's character over the decades. The following analysis goes beyond using individual case studies to highlight heroic moments; instead, it shifts the focus to the (overarching) processes of narrating the Doctor as a post-apocalyptic hero. Three of the four episodes considered feature a new companion, which allows the writers to (re)introduce central characteristics of the Doctor. Combining their own past and the far future settings that suit the Doctor's heroic configuration so well, these episodes construct the Doctor as an essentially post-apocalyptic hero.

"The Beast Below"[253] connects a heroic moment, extended by allegory to the Doctor, and the narrative construction of the Doctor as an inherently post-apocalyptic character whose heroic potential is a direct result of being the sole survivor of an extinct race. By characterising the star whale as "really old, and really kind" and "the very last of [its] kind", companion Amy draws an analogy between the star whale and the Doctor.[254] The notion that the whale "couldn't just stand there and watch children cry" echoes Amy's observation that the Doctor "never interfere[s] in the affairs of other peoples or planets, unless there's children crying". The episode thus characterizes the Doctor, by analogy to the star whale, as a solitary figure who selflessly and heroically comes to the rescue of the human race. The way he explains his heritage to Amy, who travels with him for the first time, furthers the construction of the Doctor as a post-apocalyptic figure:

> There were [other Time Lords], but there aren't [any now]. Just me now. Long story. There was a bad day. Bad stuff happened. And you know what? I'd love to forget it all,

[251] Crome: Outsit Eternity, p. 188.
[252] Ibid., p. 187.
[253] Beast Below, 2010.
[254] Ibid.

every last bit of it, but I don't. Not ever. Because this is what I do, every time, every day, every second. This. Hold tight.[255]

The Doctor self-identifies as the solitary survivor of an apocalypse. This part of his past is presented as having a major influence on his behaviour and motivation to save the human race from their extinction, which naturally draws him to any moment of (post-)apocalypse where the right kind of heroic action is crucial to ensure the survival and continued existence of humanity.

The characterization of the Doctor as a solitary figure who continuously endures the memory of the destruction of his own people and uses this daunting experience to peacefully and non-violently prevent the same destiny for other races forms the backbone of the lose trilogy exploring a post-apocalyptic human world through the first three series of New *Who*. The trilogy repeatedly constructs the Doctor as a solitary figure enduring unimaginable suffering. In "The End of the World",[256] the tree-woman Jabe says to the Doctor that it is "remarkable that [he] even exist[s]" and just "want[s] to say how sorry [she is]". The Doctor silently cries, which shows the emotional impact it still has on him. This also resonates in the fact that he refuses to answer companion Rose's earlier question about where he is from, instead just replying that he is "right here right now". It is only at the end of the episode that he tells Rose that "there was a war and [the Time Lords] lost, that he is "the last of the time lords, […] the only one [who is] travelling on [his] own because there's no one else". In "New Earth",[257] the Doctor self-characterizes as "a wanderer", a "man without a home", a "lonely guard". At the end of "Gridlock",[258] finally, he reveals to his new companion Martha that he "lied" about his race because he wanted to "just for a bit […] imagine they were still alive, underneath a burnt orange sky". Full of remorse and longing, he tells Martha about his planet, Gallifrey, and that he is "the last of the Time Lords":

There was a war. A Time War. The last Great Time War. My people fought a race called the Daleks, for the sake of all creation. And they lost. They lost. Everyone lost. They're all gone now. My family, my friends, even that sky. Oh, you should have seen it, that old planet. The second sun would rise in the south, and the mountains would shine.[259]

The repetition of "they lost, they lost, everyone lost" gives his story a sense of definitiveness and irreversibility, which in combination with the climax "war", "time war", "last great time war" serves as a strong motive for the Doctor's strictly non-violent and anti-war approach to heroic action.

The combination of acceptance, endurance and re-definition of heroism as healing instead of destructive resonates through the whole trilogy. In "The End of the World", the destruction of the Earth is presented as a 'fun' event. All

255 Ibid.
256 The End of the World, Doctor Who, BBC One, 2 April 2005.
257 New Earth, Doctor Who, BBC One, 15 April 2006.
258 Gridlock, 2007.
259 Ibid.

kinds of creatures "have gathered to watch the planet burn […] for fun". Even the Doctor is "not saving [Earth]". The following two episodes, "New Earth" and "Gridlock", show the new spaces populated by humankind after the catastrophe. The episodes, very much in the post-apocalyptic spirit found in the previous case studies, accept the end of the world because it has become detached from the survival of the human race. As seen before, humans are portrayed as indomitable. In "The End of the World", the Doctor remarks that humans are only afraid of the destruction of Earth because they "never take time to imagine the impossible, that maybe [they] survive". In "New World", the Doctor similarly points out that "the human race just keeps on going, keeps on changing". Ultimately, it is not human life on planet Earth that these episodes promote as worth saving, but humanity as a way of life and a set of values.

Central values of humanity – shielding, healing, embracing and inspiring others – are represented throughout the trilogy in the Doctor's heroic acts. In "The End of the World", the survival of humanity is decided in a crystallized moment of heroic action on the part of the Doctor and the tree-woman Jabe, who manage to raise the shields protecting the spaceship everyone is on from burning in the expanding sun. In "New Earth", where thousands of humans are kept in cells for medical experiments, infected by a multitude of diseases, the Doctor saves by healing rather than by destroying. He is infuriated when he learns that these humans are not considered "real people" but are "specially grown" and therefore "have no proper existence". When the sick people escape their cells, putting all others at the danger of infection, the Doctor requests that all the cures are made available to him. He then spreads the medicine through the air conditioning system, telling the infected people to "pass it on". When asked if he rescued everyone by killing the infected, he replies, "No. That's your way of doing things. I'm the Doctor, I cured them."

"Gridlock", finally, goes furthest in combining acceptance, endurance and a completely violence-free course of action as the kind of heroism that prevails in the post-apocalypse. The Doctor meets the Face of Boe and the cat-woman Novice Hame from "New Earth" again. The population of New Earth is stuck in a giant traffic jam underground. It turns out that the people "on the motorway aren't lost [but] were saved", as Novice Hame tells the Doctor. When a mutated virus became airborne, she and Boe confined the people underground in an "automatic quarantine". The interior of every car is a world of its own, and the entire episode portrays the population's endurance and acceptance of their situation, their optimism, faith and even happiness as a heroic reaction to disaster. When the Doctor jumps from car to car, the passengers call him "insane" and "magnificent", a "complete stranger" who is "the only hope" as the air underground becomes thinner and thinner. The Doctor, however, thrives in this environment, and companion Martha reassures everyone: "You haven't seen the things he can do. Honestly, just trust me […]. You've got your faith, you've got your songs and your hymns,

and I've got the Doctor." When the Doctor does rescue everyone ordering them to "drive up", one passenger calls him "a magician". "Gridlock" shows a society that cherishes humanitarian values, where everyone supports each other through tough days and tries to make the best of it. However, this humanity is not limited to humans; it includes all creatures of this post-human post-apocalypse.

The Doctor, ultimately, personifies a heroism that is driven by humanity but executed by non-humans. The post-apocalyptic worlds grant the Doctor settings where their non-violent, anti-war and empathetic heroism flourishes. The Doctor acts in heroic collectives with the tree-woman Jabe, the cat-woman Novice Hame and the out-of-the-world Face of Boe. The settings at the edge of existence resonate strongly with the tragedy of the Time Lord's own people and serve as a reminder of where the Doctor's motivation to save and heal comes from. The openness of the post-apocalypse allows the Doctor to re-define what it means to be a hero: to heal, to make peace, to bear as much as you can and to show empathy for all living, peaceful creatures. The traces of post-human equality and peaceful co-existence that could already be found in episodes where heroic action was pushing towards the future (e.g. in "Planet of the Ood") further crystallize and come to the forefront in post-apocalyptic settings, as we saw in all case studies in this section.

5.6 Facing the Present from the Future

This exploration of the future has come full circle. The future in *Doctor Who* is by no means linear. The post-apocalyptic episode "Utopia", pushing against the edge of time, closes with events that lead to the two-parter "The Sound of Drums" / "Last of the Time Lords", with elements from the furthest future violently pushing into the present. At the same time, no matter how far removed any given setting is from the present moment of the audience, the present and its woes are somehow always part of the future narratives as well. All of the episodes discussed are ideologically and politically charged in one way or another. The heroic acts in all of these narratives are extreme responses to extreme versions of problems, threats, discourses and values the audience is all too familiar with.

For politically minded writers and producers, future fictions offer the opportunity to explore their often leftist, liberal ideas from a safe distance, allowing for a polarization of contemporary issues through crystallization, allegory, at times satire, and heroic action. The presence of future fictions negotiating contemporary issues across the *Doctor Who* canon has varied throughout the years. It has very much depended on the interest of writers and producers to explore the political dimension of the programme. Quite possibly, this inclination to negotiate contemporary issues through heroic moments in future fictions stemmed not purely from an intrinsic personal preference of these writers but also from a certain kind of environment they lived in – one that asked for heroic responses to a climate

of uncertainty. James Chapman has pointed to such a correlation in reference to the early 1970s when "*Doctor Who* was at its most critical of British society".[260] He argues that these episodes transmit "an acute sense of Britain's increased insecurity and vulnerability" which is "evident not only in the frequency with which the country is invaded, but also by the reliance on outside help to combat the invaders", such as UNIT or the Doctor and their companions.[261]

The over-representation of heroic moments in future fictions in the 1970s as well as the last decade, 2008 to 2018, can be read as a fictional response to very real perceptions of heightened insecurities across British society. The 1970s witnessed a difficult economic climate, the decline of old industries, backlash against immigration from the former colonies, political crisis on a national level (especially the Troubles in Northern Ireland) and a global level (the Cold War) as well as a rising awareness of environmental questions. The decade following the global financial crisis of 2007 and 2008 saw insecurities around astonishingly similar issues such as the economic strain of late/post-capitalism, immigration and environment and, in addition, the perils of global media conglomerates and their interference with democracies. All these issues found their way into *Doctor Who* episodes in one way or another, where they are pushed to an extreme and then dealt with through the heroic action of the Doctor and their allies.

The contemporary issues are blown out of proportion in future fictions, and while the representations tend to be reductionist rather than nuanced, the narratives offer an emotional accuracy that is in line with the realism of science fiction. A number of the episodes discussed received criticism for lacking nuance (e.g. the "Zygon" double episode) or creating the *feeling* of being able to change something for the positive rather than offering an actual guideline of what to do (e.g. "The Sontaran Stratagem" / "Poison Sky"). These shortcomings are the result of the crystallization strategies that future fictions employ to translate contemporary issues into compelling, accessible and heroically charged narratives.

One aspect that is, however, fairly nuanced, coherent and complex is the Doctor's moral compass that developed across the decades and became an integral part of the figure's heroic potential. No matter if the heroic action is a push-back against a dystopian future development or a push *toward* a more utopian one, the motivation for those deeds always ties in to the Doctor's pacifist, co-operative and encompassing worldview. Heroic moments in future fictions are directed against the destruction of the environment and free societies, or towards post-capitalist, post-racial, at times post-human worlds. These ideas are often explored through speech acts that make the moral compass of the Doctor explicit and that are presented as heroic acts in themselves. The further we move towards post-apocalyptic settings, the more acts of heroism become collective, co-operative and peaceful. Just as the mode of heroic action becomes vaster and more inclusive, so do the

[260] Chapman: Inside the TARDIS, p. 82.
[261] Ibid.

values attached. The further the episodes move into the future, the more basic the questions that are negotiated become, moving from more national discourses of economic and political systems to questions of what defines humanity. The further we move into the future, the more evident it becomes that we are indeed defined not only by how we remember our past but also by how we envision our future, by who we want to be at our very core.

6. Heroism in *Doctor Who*

A television programme such as *Doctor Who* is the ideal medium to satisfy the never-ending hunger for heroic figures who face contemporary threats and fears, who follow desires and aspirations, and who negotiate memory and identity. In the twenty-first century in particular, television series have become central to our lives and to how we imagine ourselves, both individually and collectively. Analysing *Doctor Who* through a heroic lens has led to insights about the programme itself – concerning its narrative structure and formula, its characters and its negotiation of socio-economic concerns, identity politics and societal change – and about the heroic in popular culture generally, regarding the dynamic between heroic moments and processes of heroization, the representation of heroes through televisual codes, the affordances of crystallized narratives for the appearance of the heroic and the integration of production and reception into the processes of heroization.

Heroic moments in *Doctor Who*'s narratives of the past and the future negotiate political, economic and societal realities that are contemporaneous to these episodes' production contexts. The present is complex; crystallized settings of past and future offer more suitable narrative space to deal with our values, fears and nostalgic longing through exploring who we have been and who we want to be. The narrativization of the past through coherent story arcs that lead up to decisive heroic moments in history represents questions of identity and belonging and contributes to the popular memory of British history in particular. Similarly, in heroic moments in future settings, the Doctor and their companions face more extreme versions of the threats that are already present in the viewers' reality, reminding the audience of their responsibility to prevent an apocalyptic future, as well as bringing their attention to the potential in their present moment to create another, more favourable future.

This analysis of crystallized narratives of past and future also showed that such story arcs afford affective heroic moments but often lack room for nuances. Narratives of the past constructed singular events such as King John signing Magna Carta[1] or Rosa Parks refusing to get up from a 'white' seat on a bus[2] as heroic acts that single-handedly changed history, neglecting the complexity of multicausal processes that led to the development of Western democracy and the civil rights movement. As the analysis of the reception of "Rosa" showed, the episode was highly successful in affecting the audience. Circulating and further constructing the popular memory of these events, such episodes are marked by emotional truth rather than by factual accuracy. The crystallization of contemporary challenges in future fictions leads to a similar effect, as has been observed for example in "The

1 The King's Demons, 1983.
2 Rosa, 2018.

Zygon Invasion" / "The Zygon Inversion": while the Doctor's heroic stance against discrimination of Otherness was mostly praised as an antidote to the hostile climate towards refugees in Great Britain, the episodes are not nuanced enough to reflect on the question of whether or not minorities should hide their Otherness.

Many of these *Doctor Who* episodes engage in openly political discourse; narratives of the future lean towards leftist politics, while narratives of the past have tended to be more conservative until very recently. The future fictions promote, often explicitly, progressive politics; they are environmentalist,[3] anti-capitalist,[4] anti-authoritarian,[5] anti-racist[6] and post-anthropocentric.[7] In these episodes, the Doctor and their companions fight heroically *against* the erosion of existing progressive structures, and *for* a more egalitarian world.

The historical episodes are more conservative in comparison. First of all, the Doctor's obligation to keep history stable is conservative in the pure sense of the word: it conserves history and perpetuates the heroes who are constructed as having 'made' that history. The need to have history remain unimpaired and protected from alien forces metaphorically mirrors the need to create a coherent, undisturbed narrative as the basis for one's individual or shared (national) identity. In *Doctor Who*'s historicals, the coherent narrative of collective identity often features nationalist discourses based on 'us vs. them' rhetoric[8] and participates in the construction of 'national hero' figures, portraying for instance Winston Churchill as a heroic symbol of resistance without reflecting on his imperialist and racist tendencies.[9] Even episodes about artist heroes like Charles Dickens[10] promote the idea of 'great (British) men in history'.

During the early years of the New *Who* in particular, the programme's historicals engaged in conservative identity politics and nationalist discourses reflective of that era's sociocultural landscape. During Russell T Davies' time as showrunner (2005–2010), temporally close to 9/11 and the July 2005 bombings in London, historicals were often 'unifying' national(ist) narratives. The episode featuring Robin Hood[11] is the earliest of the case studies that self-reflectively and mockingly questions these kinds of heroes and their accompanying myths that are used for national identity-construction. Ultimately, however, Robin Hood does convince the Twelfth Doctor of the need for heroes as points of orientation and inspiration.

Only the Thirteenth Doctor began to introduce more progressive elements into historical settings; she shifted the previously prevalent connection of future and progressiveness, past and conservatism. The first female Doctor marks gen-

3 From Green Death, 1973 to Orphan 55, 2020.
4 From The Sun Makers, 1977 to Oxygen, 2017.
5 From Inferno, 1970 to Turn Left, 2008.
6 From Silurians, 1970 to Planet of the Ood, 2008.
7 Beast Below, 2010 and Smile, 2017.
8 See Empty Child / Doctor Dances, 2005.
9 Victory of the Daleks, 2010.
10 Unquiet Dead, 2005.
11 Robot of Sherwood, 2014.

dered power structures and introduces an element of progressive futurity simply by operating in historical settings as a woman hero. She intrudes into male-dominated spaces of the past and makes gender boundaries visible in a way the male Doctors before her could not. The presence of one woman, or so the introduction of more female characters in historical settings of recent episodes suggests,[12] led to greater awareness in the production team regarding the imbalanced gender representation and to a subsequent levelling thereof. The change is especially evident in comparison to classic serials such as "The Masque of Mandragora",[13] which does not feature a single female character besides the Doctor's (very passive) companion Sarah Jane Smith; and "The King's Demons",[14] where the only 'local' female character, the King's wife, merely utters a handful of lines.

Rather than perpetuating male-dominated and conservative narratives of the past, the Thirteenth Doctor's journeys into history offer the opportunity for feminist re-interpretations of the past. The two-parter "Spyfall",[15] for instance, introduces historic female characters, computer-algorithm visionary Ada Lovelace and British spy Nora Inayat Khan, as instrumental for progress. The episodes thus participate in a re-reading of history with women at the centre. The 2018 episode "Rosa" reverses the links between both history and conservatism, and the future and progressiveness: the story features an ultra-conservative white supremacist from the future while simultaneously portraying a heroic moment, set in the past, of a woman fighting for progress and equality. The trend towards more inclusive narratives of both the past[16] *and* the future[17] imply that *Doctor Who*'s position within the sociocultural landscape has shifted from using nationalist hero narratives as a response to post-9/11 insecurities and towards portraying nationalist tendencies as a threat during the pre- and post-Brexit years (2015–2020).

Despite the differences regarding their degree of progressiveness, most of the past and future fictions share one central quality: they contribute to the overall narrative portraying human existence as a series of individual heroic acts that define who we were (in the past) and who we want to be (in the future). One type of episode, however, presents itself as the notable exception: the post-apocalyptical narratives. In these stories, all certainty is gone, and with it, any predisposed notion of what it means to act heroically. In the far future, conventional heroism fails. The post-apocalyptic settings shift all boundaries – of time and space but also between human and non-human entities; and they do so in such a radical way that conventional, familiar forms of overcoming boundaries no longer work . In the post-apocalyptic stories where heroic acts are successful, they display entirely new qualities: post-apocalyptic heroism is always collective and, moving

12 See Rosa, 2018; Spyfall, 2020.
13 Masque of Mandragora, 1976.
14 King's Demons, 1983.
15 Spyfall, 2020.
16 See Rosa, 2018; Spyfall, 2020.
17 See Zygon Invasion, 2015; Zygon Inversion, 2015; Smile, 2017.

from Classic to New *Who*, increasingly post-human; it uses lectures instead of weapons and requires the human race to reinvent itself. What makes the heroic acts recognizable as such is the processual, relational boundary work they entail. In the post-apocalyptic narratives, the analysis of momentary heroic acts on the one hand and that of processes of heroization on the other are thus most closely entertwined.

The two overarching processes of heroization of *Doctor Who* – that of the Doctor and that of the female characters – both required shifts in the narrative structure of the programme. Heroic and narrative agency are deeply intertwined in the construction and sustainable establishment of heroes, which reconciles the concepts of 'hero as protagonist' and 'hero as character with heroic qualities' beyond sharing the same linguistic signifier. In *Doctor Who*, heroic potential cannot fully unfold at the periphery of the narrative. Female characters on *Who* becoming heroes in their own right was connected to claiming narrative space and agency as much as to claiming heroic agency. Narrative agency – being allowed to take up space and break out of the constraining conservative and sexist narrative formula that originated in the early 1960s – was a prerequisite to sustaining heroic agency. Donna Noble, for instance, is momentarily heroic when she saves the world; she does not, however, have narrative agency and is thus forced to return to her ordinary life with her memory wiped. Her lack of narrative agency obliterates her heroic agency. Clara Oswald, in contrast, was the first female character to combine heroic and narrative agency and thus made a female Doctor possible. The heroization of the Doctor in the first place required a similar claim of narrative agency: originally conceptualized as the sidekick to the 'young male hero' and thus as a secondary character, the transference of both narrative and heroic agency from the 'young male hero' to the Doctor through the omission of the male companion was the first step in the process of the Doctor's heroization.

My analysis of the further heroization of the Doctor highlighted two aspects that are crucial for the study of heroes in popular culture: to consider not only the cultural product itself but also the intertwined processes of production and reception, and to pay attention to the exemplarity of heroes as well as to their exceptionality. Collective nostalgia for the Doctor during the years of the production gap (1989–2005) led to a return of the Doctor as a hero, brought back by the people for whom the Doctor had been their childhood hero. Complementing the exceptionality of the character's heroic moments, the Doctor's exemplarity was of at least equal importance in the process. Contributors to *Behind the Sofa: Celebrity Memories of* Doctor Who, for instance, often based the Doctor's impact on their lives on the moral compass the character provided and on the orientation the Doctor offered for navigating the world with kindness. The retrospective reception data reflected the Doctor's exemplarity on an extradiegetic level; the development of female characters mirrored the potential of the Doctor as an inspirational example on an intradiegetic level: the women in *Doctor Who* serve

as identificatory figures for the audience, they travel with the Doctor, they try to imitate the Time Lord but, for a long time, could never quite match the Doctor's amount of agency. The process of heroization in their own right ultimately led to female characters in the programme achieving what remains out of reach for the audience: becoming the Doctor.

Remarkably, the representation of the first female Doctor does not differ from the representation of her twelve male predecessors. While in some regard, the (narrative) legacy of the programme prevented and delayed the heroization of women for a long time, *Doctor Who*'s legacy of televisual heroic code affords a representation of the Thirteenth Doctor that is not gendered. Beyond naturalized audio-visual signs such as the hero shot, certain *Doctor Who*-specific elements have come to foreshadow heroic moments of the Doctor. The sound of the TARDIS, fidgeting with the sonic screwdriver and taking a deep breath to deliver a speech about pacifism and kindness, as well as companions explicitly expressing their trust in the Doctor's ability to save the day have become recognizable codes that signal the appearance of the heroic on *Doctor Who*. Using these same heroic codes for the female incarnation of the Time Lord – whose first heroic acts include building a new sonic screwdriver and finding her TARDIS – the programme represents her as the quintessential woman hero: a character who happens to be a woman *and* a hero, with male and female qualities, endlessly fixing the universe because she is the Doctor.

From family series to self-referential niche programme and back; from weirdo to hero, from an old white man to what may well be the most heroic woman of contemporary popular culture; from quintessentially British to world-wide export, from London to the borders of the universe, from prehistoric settings to the post-apocalyptic edge of time: *Doctor Who* and its eponymous hero have travelled further than anyone could have anticipated in 1963 – or even in 2005. It has long become impossible to tackle the programme's ever-expanding corpus in its entirety. The heroic lens, however, has afforded a comprehensive window into the architecture of *Doctor Who*. The programme has, in turn, been extremely fruitful ground for the study of the heroic. What unites the two – *Doctor Who* and the heroic – is their endless capacity to evolve and adapt: to new production contexts, media landscapes and changing socio-economic environments in Britain and the world. The only thing that can ever be certain with regards to heroism in *Doctor Who* is its continued transformation.