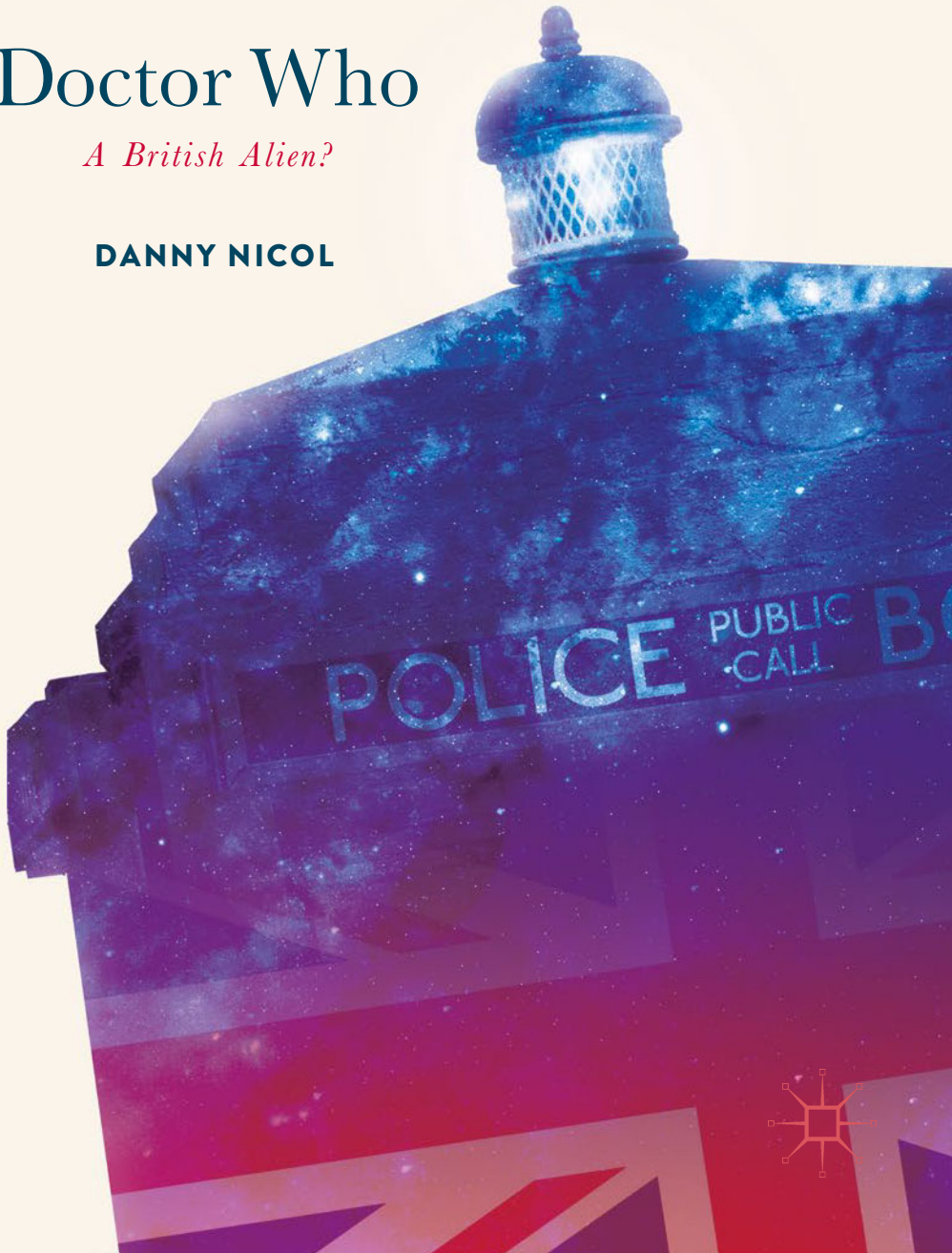


Doctor Who

A British Alien?

DANNY NICOL



Doctor Who: A British Alien?

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To my mother

PREFACE

In the *Doctor Who* Christmas special “The Voyage of the Damned” (2007), Mr Copper, a pleasant ignoramus from another planet who fancies himself an expert on Earth, pronounces that Great Britain is part of “Europey” and that across the British Channel lie Great France and Great Germany. The Doctor corrects him: “no, no, it’s just France and Germany: only Britain is Great”.

The idea of *Doctor Who* as a love-letter to Britain has become a commonplace. In some ways, *Doctor Who* is simply *like* Britain: as a constitutional scholar, it is easy to see the parallels between *Doctor Who* and Britain’s rules of governance. Unlike most American science fiction programmes, there was no grand design of the *Whoniverse*—no sacred written constitution for the series—solemnly enshrined at the show’s outset. Instead, like Britain’s constitution, the production team have made it up as they went along. The British constitution is what happens: it lives on, changing from day to day. The same could be said of *Doctor Who*’s overarching narrative.

Since *Doctor Who* returned to our screens in 2005, I have been writing this book in my head. I had become an academic lawyer during the “hiatus” between classic-series *Doctor Who* (1963–1989) and new-series *Doctor Who* (2005–present), and when the show returned, I noticed that I was watching it without removing my academic hat. There was no book-length study of the way in which *Doctor Who* captures Britishness, politics and law, and so this book just *had* to be written.

I am grateful to the following for their advice, inspiration and encouragement: Steph Berns, Tony Bradney, Liz Duff, John Flood, Steve Greenfield, Matt Hills, Paresh Kathrani, Joan Mahoney, Chris McCorkindale, Frances Nicol, Sophie Nicol, Guy Osborn, Craig Owen Jones, Keith Say, Micky Silver, Alison L. Young and David Yuratic. Any errors remain my own. I am particularly grateful for the constant support I have received from my colleagues at Westminster Law School's Centre for Law, Society and Popular Culture in various *Doctor Who* projects: writing this book, guest-editing a special issue of the *Journal of Popular Television* on the law and politics of *Doctor Who*, and maintaining a blog on the same subject (politicsandlawofdoctorwho.blogspot.co.uk). I have benefitted greatly from the academic literature on *Doctor Who*, much of it strikingly recent.

I am not sure whether the word “fan” quite captures how I feel about *Doctor Who*. Certain scholars have argued that viewers tend to interpret *Doctor Who* to accord with their own political beliefs, yet some aspects of *Doctor Who*'s portrayal of Britishness delight me whilst others do not. Personally, I like contemporary *Doctor Who*'s suspicion of big business, cynicism over globalisation and casting of doubts on the merits of the Doctor's interventions. I am also rather partial to new *Who*'s edgy, more egalitarian version of unionism. I am less fond of the programme's slowness to escape its template of male domination, and hope that the long-awaited casting of a woman, Jodie Whittaker, to play the Doctor from 2018 onwards, will help remedy this. I also wish its admirable projection of a multi-racial Britain went hand-in-hand with less undervaluing of non-white characters and a more robust vision of racial equality. That said, I hope that this book will be equally useful for readers whose politics are entirely different from my own. More broadly, readers may not agree with all my interpretations of *Doctor Who*, but if my book makes people think about *Doctor Who* and the way it projects national identity, the effort will have been worthwhile.

London, UK

Danny Nicol

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Whonited Kingdom

Doctor Who, the British Broadcasting Corporation's (BBC's) longest-running television drama series, constantly projects imaginings of Britain and Britishness; the aim of this book is to explore them. Ostensibly, *Doctor Who* is a science fiction series (indeed, it is the world's longest-running science fiction programme), but it is as much a programme about what it means to be British. *Doctor Who*'s Britishness raises an array of questions: can a long-running and multi-authored programme like *Doctor Who* project a coherent vision of Britishness over time? Is the show's Britishness descriptive or normative, smug or critical, reactionary or progressive? How does *Doctor Who*'s Britishness confront pressing social issues such as class, gender, race and sexuality, as well as the tensions between the country's four nations? How does the presentation of Britishness respond to globalisation and to the rise of the transnational corporation? What impact have Britain's controversial military interventions made on *Doctor Who*'s depiction of national identity? These are the questions that this book seeks to answer.

This opening chapter has several objectives: first, it locates this study within the literature on national identity, politics and popular culture. It draws on John Street's and Liesbet van Zoonen's insights regarding the inseparability of political communication from popular culture.¹

¹John Street, *Politics and Popular Culture* (London: Polity, 1997), 57; Liesbet van Zoonen, *Entertaining the Citizen: When Politics and Popular Culture Converge* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers Inc, 2004).

The chapter also draws support from Michael Billig's and Tim Edensor's work on the relationship between national identity and popular culture.² The close interconnections highlighted by these writings show that programmes such as *Doctor Who* are in the business of national identity and politics and, as such, their contribution merits scholarly analysis just as much as the narratives advanced by politicians.

Secondly, the chapter shows why *Doctor Who* is a particularly fruitful source of commentary on national identity. The programme's template and tropes provide a multiplicity of avenues for its political output, and a wealth of opportunities for satire, allegory and metaphor.

Thirdly, this chapter aims to demonstrate how the exploration of national identity is pivotal to *Doctor Who*. Britishness is no peripheral matter. Rather, regardless of whether the Doctor's escapades are set in contemporary Britain, foreign climes, faraway planets or dystopian futures, *Doctor Who*'s characters are frequently coded as British and a judgement is handed down as to the merits or demerits of their British qualities.

Finally, the chapter considers the book's interpretative methodology, engaging with Alan McKee's well-known article "Is *Doctor Who* political?" and drawing upon the nature of legal interpretation.

NATIONAL IDENTITY: POLITICS, LAW AND POPULAR CULTURE

Doctor Who merits study because it makes a substantial contribution to debate surrounding British national identity and to the political controversies connected to it. The objection might be made that *Doctor Who* is a family-orientated and not particularly highbrow science fiction television programme, hardly deserving scholarly analysis. Yet in fact, there are sound reasons why works of popular culture such as *Doctor Who* warrant attention on matters of national identity, just as much as the pronouncements made about Britishness by the country's politicians. First, the importance of popular culture in a general sense has now been recognised by the academy. As Jim McGuigan observes, there is an increasing intellectual assumption that the symbolic experiences and practices of ordinary people are more important analytically and politically than

²Tim Edensor, *National Identity, Popular Culture and Everyday Life* (Oxford: Berg, 2002); Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London: Sage, 1995).

Culture with a capital “C”. Writing in 1992, McGuigan identified as a great academic advance the fact that scholars were taking an appreciative, non-judgemental attitude to ordinary tastes and pleasures.³ We should welcome academia treating popular culture more seriously because it impacts so deeply on the lives of millions of people.

Against this backdrop, there is a strong case to claim that the worlds of politics, national identity and popular culture, far from being discrete, are in fact intimately connected. A number of scholars have drawn attention to this close relationship. John Street, for instance, argues that both the popular media and politicians are engaged in creating works of popular fiction which portray credible worlds that resonate with people’s experience.⁴ To this extent, he maintains, political performance should be understood in similar terms to those which apply to popular culture. He further contends that popular culture plays a part in politics not so much through its explanatory power but rather by its ability to articulate the feelings and passions that drive politics.⁵ In other words, for Street, the division between the pleasures and passions of politics and those of popular culture is almost entirely artificial. Furthermore, Street sees popular culture as being able to produce and articulate feelings which can become the basis of an *identity*. Popular culture, he argues, can become involved in politics through the way it offers forms of identity. Street contends that both within and between politics and popular culture, there is a constant struggle to articulate identities; that is, a battle is fought over the claim to represent competing identities, not least national identity.⁶

Liesbet van Zoonen goes further by arguing that works of popular culture actually *are* politics. This, she holds, is because politics is more than just what politicians do; politics is also a “field” existing independently from its own practitioners, one which accommodates the continuous struggle about power relations in society.⁷ Politics, she contends, *has* to be connected to the everyday culture of the citizen, lest it become an alien sphere, dominated by strangers about whom no-one cares or

³Jim McGuigan, *Cultural Populism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 4.

⁴Street, *Politics and Popular Culture*, 60.

⁵Street, *Politics and Popular Culture*, 191.

⁶Street, *Politics and Popular Culture*, 21–22.

⁷Van Zoonen, *Entertaining the Citizen*, 5.

bothers.⁸ She suggests that the style of popular culture may offer a way into politics for people otherwise excluded or bored. She proposes that popular culture be acknowledged as a relevant resource for political citizenship, one which can make politics more engaging and more inclusive. On these readings, popular culture is politics pursued by other means. As such, it is as worthy of academic attention as the constant efforts of politicians to fashion national identities which resonate with voters.⁹

The relevance of popular culture to constructing a sense of Britishness is reinforced by Tim Edensor's work on national identity. Edensor argues that, until recently, "the masses" uncritically accepted "high" or "official" culture as the dominant signifier of national identity. He observes that of late, however, various accounts have suggested that popular culture has become important.¹⁰ These accounts suggest that we now use a huge and proliferating resource of popular culture which operates to form a sense of national identity that is both dialogic and dynamic.¹¹ Television programmes have, therefore, become a most potent way of representing the nation. Furthermore, the globalisation of television has, he observes, unleashed a torrent of national representations, including some dissenting and dissonant ones.¹² Edensor also posits that national identities are fragmented. There are, he contends, multiple, chaotic ideas of Britishness, and this renders anachronistic any grand attempts to herd people around a single coherent vision.¹³ In a similar vein, Michael Billig, in his book *Banal Nationalism*, argues that the ideological habits that reproduce and reinforce national identity are not removed from everyday life but are "flagged up" daily in the lives of citizens as part of the reassuring normality of life.¹⁴ Billig highlights the constant nationality-flagging of British newspapers, which contributes daily to banal nationalism.¹⁵ Moreover, he points out that we citizens participate in the priming of ourselves by reading, watching and interpreting the mass

⁸Van Zoonen, *Entertaining the Citizen*, 3.

⁹Van Zoonen, *Entertaining the Citizen*, 150–151.

¹⁰Edensor, *National Identity*, 10–11.

¹¹Edensor, *National Identity*, 17.

¹²Edensor, *National Identity*, 141–142.

¹³Edensor, *National Identity*, 171–172.

¹⁴Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, 6.

¹⁵Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, 95.

media's assertions regarding national identity.¹⁶ Billig's observations about Britain's newspapers apply just as much to a television drama such as *Doctor Who*.

Law, a secondary topic of this book, is also intimately connected to popular culture and to national identity. There are compelling arguments that law is inseparable from politics, indeed that law is *part* of politics.¹⁷ If this be accepted, then the same arguments for envisaging a close link between politics, popular culture and national identity would apply as well to law, popular culture and national identity. In this regard, Steve Greenfield and Guy Osborn have argued that the relationship between law and popular culture is a valuable one, worthy of charting. They propose that understanding that relationship might enable more rigorous thinking about the relationship between law, politics and social change.¹⁸ Law as an academic discipline tends to focus on the judgements of the courts and on legislation. Yet increasingly, legal scholars have come to accept that the social context of law is important. As Anthony Bradney has observed, what people think about law and about the content of legal rules helps to determine their behaviour.¹⁹ To this end, he has analysed *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997–2003) and its spin-off *Angel* (1999–2004) to explore, through a study of their two leading characters, the radically different attitudes to law that those subject to it may hold.²⁰ Through research like this, popular culture can give us important insights into legal philosophy. In this book, we engage with law's relationship with national identity in assessing *Doctor Who*'s treatment of the globalisation of law (Chap. 4), and the question of whether the Doctor is a war criminal (Chap. 5).

¹⁶Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, 127.

¹⁷See e.g. J.A.G. Griffith, *The Politics of the Judiciary* (London: Fontana Press, 1997); Danny Nicol, "Law and Politics after the Human Rights Act", *Public Law* (2006): 722–751.

¹⁸Steve Greenfield and Guy Osborn, "Law, Legal Education and Popular Culture", in *Readings in Law and Popular Culture*, eds. Steve Greenfield and Guy Osborn (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), 8.

¹⁹Anthony Bradney, "The Case of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and the Politics of Legal Education", in *Readings in Law and Popular Culture*, eds. Steve Greenfield and Guy Osborn (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), 17–21.

²⁰Anthony Bradney, "For and Against the Law: 'Buffy the Vampire Slayer', 'Angel' and the Academy", *Entertainment and Sports Law Journal*, 9 (2011): 1.

Popular culture's potential to express and define Britishness was clearly demonstrated by the London 2012 Olympics opening ceremony, *Isles of Wonder*, directed by Danny Boyle. Indeed, the ceremony's resemblance to *Doctor Who* in terms of being a medium for projecting the nation was underlined by the fleeting appearance of the TARDIS (*Doctor Who*'s time-and-space machine) in the proceedings. *Isles of Wonder* sends up Britain's pre-industrial past by imagining a rural idyll being brutally uprooted by the country's energetic capitalists as the Industrial Revolution made Britain the workshop of the world. The ceremony is teasingly ambiguous as to whether this thrusting capitalism is a good or bad thing. In any event, the ceremony balances this narrative with a fulsome tribute to Britain's National Health Service (NHS) created in 1948 to provide, through general taxation, healthcare free at the point of need. In *Doctor Who* fashion, this segment combines the reassurance that the NHS offers its children patients with the frightening monsters of children's fiction (*Doctor Who* did something rather similar in "Smith and Jones" (2007) in which an NHS hospital is transported to the moon, where it suffers an alien incursion). The ceremony thereby places the NHS centre-stage as part of British national identity.

The opening ceremony certainly constituted popular culture, and to emphasise the point, it devoted a segment to celebrating British popular music and television. Furthermore, the event bore some striking parallels to *Doctor Who*.²¹ For instance, the ceremony's memorable fantasy of the Queen jumping with James Bond from a helicopter matches *Doctor Who*'s light-hearted use of the Queen in "Silver Nemesis (1988) and "Voyage of the Damned" (2007). The Queen and Bond descend on Union Jack parachutes, an idea subsequently used by *Doctor Who* in "The Zygon Inversion" (2015). Similarly, the ceremony's heavy emphasis of Britain's multi-racial nature, expressed in the ceremony through a romance sequence between a black British boy and mixed-race British girl, mirrors contemporary *Doctor Who*'s persistent projection of Britishness as a multi-racial nationality, something we explore in Chap. 2. The response to the opening ceremony served as a reminder that portraying national identity is an unequivocally political act.

²¹It is noteworthy that Frank Cottrell Boyce, who worked on the ceremony, subsequently wrote two *Doctor Who* episodes: "In the Forest of the Night" (2014) and "Smile" (2017).

The ceremony's black-British romance and its putting the NHS at the heart of the nation attracted considerable hostility from some on the right of British politics, who found this version of the country's self-image too left-wing for their tastes.²²

If, therefore, we are fully to chart the disagreements over Britishness, we cannot afford to limit ourselves to the generalisations advanced by the nation's political leaders: we should also examine important works of popular culture such as *Doctor Who*.

THE RICHNESS OF *DOCTOR WHO*

But why *Doctor Who* in particular? There are good reasons why *Doctor Who* is particularly fruitful in terms of projecting national identity. *Doctor Who* is a flagship BBC programme and the BBC is charged with developing a sense of British identity: over the years *Doctor Who* has come to play a special role in this regard, because its structure provides such ample scope for expressing the national story. In particular, *Doctor Who* is science fiction and it is widely accepted that science fiction tends to deal in metaphors.²³ For its part, *Doctor Who* has certainly demonstrated the genre's potential for allegory,²⁴ and has indeed used science fiction as a sustained means of satire.²⁵ Maura Grady and Cassie Hemstrom observe that regardless of whether *Doctor Who* covers historically themed, monster-driven or outer-space narratives, these are often thinly veiled allegories for British politics: the programme thereby holds a mirror to what is going on in British society.²⁶ In an assessment of classic-series *Doctor Who*, John Tulloch and Manuel Alvarado argue

²²For instance, "Olympics opening ceremony was multi-cultural crap, Tory MP tweets", *The Guardian*, July 28, 2012; "Ministers 'pushed for changes' in opening ceremony", *The Sunday Telegraph*, July 29, 2012.

²³Bernadette Casey et al., *Television Studies: The Key Concepts* (London: Routledge, 2002), 207–209.

²⁴James Chapman, *Inside the TARDIS: The Worlds of Doctor Who*, 2nd ed. (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013), 5.

²⁵Matt Hills, *Triumph of a Time Lord: Regenerating Doctor Who in the Twenty-First Century* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 167.

²⁶Maura Grady and Cassie Hemstrom, "Nostalgia for Empire, 1963–1974", in *Doctor Who in Time and Space: Essays on Themes, Characters, History and Fandom, 1963–2012*, ed. Gillian I. Leitch (Jefferson, NC and London: McFarland, 2013), 125–143.

that political external references have long been part of the show. This conclusion is no less valid with regard to post-2005 *Doctor Who*.²⁷ Additionally, the programme constantly asserts its Britishness and articulates a British identity.²⁸

So what are the basic assumptions of the programme? *Doctor Who*'s hero is a character known as the Doctor, who—though humanoid—is not human. He comes from another world, another time. Six years into the show we discover that he is a Time Lord, a humanoid species with great powers over time travel. The Doctor lives in a time and space machine called the TARDIS, which is bigger on the inside than the outside and which looks like a 1960s police telephone box. For company, he acquires a series of mainly human companions with whom he has adventures. These adventures can take place at any point in time and space. Finally, the Doctor—when his body gets worn out or damaged—is able to regenerate, an ingenious device for refreshing the show with new lead actors. *Doctor Who* was broadcast from 1963 to 1989, and from 2005 to the present day. (In this book, I refer to the former as “the classic series” or “classic *Who*” and the latter “the new series” or “new *Who*”.²⁹) The sixteen-year period in which *Doctor Who* was largely absent from the screen (save for a one-off film *Doctor Who: The Movie* (1996)) provides additional academic interest, allowing scholars to identify changes in the projection of British identity over time. This gap is known as the “hiatus”, yet as Miles Booy has shown, it actually proved to be a period in which fandom’s creative energies thrived in the void created by the programme’s absence.³⁰

Doctor Who's template offers ample opportunity for metaphor, allegory and satire. Andrew O'Day, in a piece entitled “Towards a Definition of Satire in *Doctor Who*”, draws attention to the variety of

²⁷John Tulloch and Manuel Alvarado, *Doctor Who: The Unfolding Text* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1983).

²⁸Hills, *Triumph of a Time Lord*, 30; Chapman, *Inside the TARDIS*, 8.

²⁹I adopt these terms because they are widely used but do so reluctantly: the 1963–1989 series hardly seems old enough to be called classic, nor is it classic in terms of being of higher quality than the new series.

³⁰Miles Booy, *Love and Monsters: The Doctor Who Experience, 1979 to the Present* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012), 152.

outlets for satire in the show.³¹ He argues, for instance, that the figure of the monster is key, functioning allegorically to demonstrate human traits. One might add that sometimes the idea of the monstrous is used to say something about British identity. This chimes with Tim Edensor's argument that a key element of fashioning national identity is to draw the boundaries between the self and the other. All forms of social identity involve an "Other", whether explicitly or implicitly³²; and monsters of course represent "the Other" *par excellence*. Graham Sleight observes that in *Doctor Who*, the monstrous typically stands for something else: indeed, the portrayal of monsters is a kind of moral parable, an argument between competing systems of values.³³ For example, Sleight lists several *Doctor Who* monsters that are characterised by their warlike nature. Yet, in the wake of Britain's multiple interventions in Arab countries in the twenty-first century, it might be argued that the British political elite is itself warlike. Such self-doubt is reflected by *Doctor Who* sometimes portraying humans as being worse than monsters; for instance, in "The Curse of Fenric" (1989), a serial with a rich political content, a British military leader, Commander Millington, epitomises human monstrosity as he machinates to bring about the mass destruction of the Soviet people, at the British government's behest. Another example is "The Ambassadors of Death" (1970), where another British military figure, General Carrington, tries to start a war between humans and a non-belligerent species from Mars. Against this backdrop, Matt Hills is surely right to argue that the show's representation of monstrosity challenges assumptions about the monstrous, calling into question how we define and identify monstrosity.³⁴

O'Day also contends that, from a satirical point of view, the recurring figures of rebels are significant. O'Day observes that, as a time traveller, the Doctor frequently arrives in a time and place where an initial equilibrium has already been disrupted and he must join with rebels to

³¹Andrew O'Day, "Towards a Definition of Satire in *Doctor Who*", in *Ruminations, Peregrinations and Regenerations: A Critical Approach to Doctor Who*, ed. Chris Hansen (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010).

³²David McCrone and Frank Bechofer, *Understanding National Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 2.

³³Graham Sleight, *The Doctor's Monsters: Meanings of the Monstrous in Doctor Who* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012), 2–3.

³⁴Hills, *Triumph of a Time Lord*, 13.

bring about a new equilibrium. This scenario provides fertile ground for satire.³⁵ Whilst the Doctor's help may not be uncritical (for example, in "The Monster of Peladon" (1974), he favours moderate rebels against extremist ones, a metaphor for the internal conflicts within the National Union of Mineworkers during the miners' strikes of the 1970s), he normally sides with rebels against the source of their oppression, be that a government, corporation or supraplanetary organisation. These oppressive institutions in *Doctor Who* may represent a source of oppression in Britain.

There are other metaphors which O'Day does not mention. Most importantly, planets often act as metaphors for single states, allowing the show to satirise different forms of government, with an eye to the sort of country Britain risks becoming. Thus, the planet Terra Alpha in "The Happiness Patrol" (1988) is run as an authoritarian dictatorship, the Ood-Sphere in "Planet of the Ood" (2008) is a slave colony governed by a corporation, whereas in "Vengeance on Varos" (1985), the government of the planet Varos—whilst ostensibly independent and democratic—is under the thumb of a giant alien company. Occasionally, too, *Doctor Who* has played around with the idea of parallel universes. As Aidan Byrne and Mark Jones have observed, the mirror universe is an ideal vehicle for television shows to question the ethos, morality and politics of a given society, for the purpose either of self-congratulation or self-examination.³⁶ In *Doctor Who*, the idea of a parallel Britain has been used to advance cautionary tales about British politics. In "Inferno" (1970), for example, Britain has become a dictatorship, whereas in "Rise of the Cybermen"/"The Age of Steel" (2006), the corporate domination of Britain has reached new heights.

An allegory is an extended metaphor. Some *Doctor Who* stories are unequivocally allegorical in that they contain a multiplicity of metaphors linking the adventure to contemporary politics. For example, "The Curse of Peladon" (1972) is widely seen as an allegory for Britain joining the European Communities (EC; later the European Union). The serial was broadcast in the year that the British government signed the UK-EC accession treaty. The Doctor and companion Jo Grant

³⁵O'Day, "Towards a Definition of Satire", 264–282.

³⁶Aidan Byrne and Mark Jones, "Worlds Turned Back to Front: The Politics of the Mirror Universe in *Doctor Who* and *Star Trek*", *Journal of Popular Television*, 6(2) (2018).

visit the insular planet of Peladon, which is on the verge of joining the Galactic Federation, an organisation of planets which (like the EC) have relinquished war in favour of peaceful trade. Peladon (like Britain) is a monarchy whose political elite are split on the merits of pooling sovereignty. The Doctor is suspicious of one particular delegation: that of the Ice Warriors, who (like the Germans in the EC) have previously started wars but now vow to have rejected violence except in self-defence. The law of the Federation is (like EC law) supreme within its member planets but only within limited fields. Ultimately, the Doctor (like the British government of the day) thwarts those who want to sabotage accession to the organisation.

Another example of full-blown allegory in *Doctor Who* is “Warriors of the Deep” (1984). Set in Earth’s near future in an underwater base (Britain’s nuclear deterrent is submarine based), it imagines two human power blocs, fingers poised to annihilate each other. The sea base is run by one of the two power blocs but is invaded by Earth’s earlier, reptilian inhabitants the Silurians and their aquatic cousins the Sea Devils. The reptiles’ plan, which they perceive as merely a “defensive war”, is to induce the two human blocs to use their nuclear arsenals to destroy each other. The tale contains an array of Cold War signifiers: brain control; secret agents; the oriental costumes of the Sea Devils (and mention of “triads”), which codes them as the Chinese cousins of the presumably Soviet Silurians; a weapon of mass destruction in the form of the Myrka, an electrocuting dinosaur; a missile which destroys organic tissue but leaves property intact; a successful bid by the Doctor at unilateral disarmament (he earns trust by surrendering his firearm); and at the end (unusually in a *Doctor Who* adventure) everyone dies, reptiles and humans alike, apart from the Doctor and his two companions. The Doctor’s closing comment, “there should have been another way”, serves as the show’s verdict on “mutually assured destruction”.

Other *Doctor Who* adventures may contain a single pivotal metaphor rather than a coherent collection of metaphors. For instance, “Aliens of London”/“World War Three” (2005) involves a takeover of the British government by the alien Slitheen, who are disguised as overweight humans. The idea of politicians being an alien race corresponds to perceptions which developed during the New Labour government 1997–2010 that they were indeed something of a species apart. Peter Osborne explores this idea in his book *The Triumph of the Political Class*, in which he argues that the British party system has collapsed in favour of

a ruling elite estranged from civil society. Politicians, Osborne contends, have ceased to represent the voters and instead represent themselves. As a result, the real political divide is no longer between the main political parties but between the political class and the rest.³⁷ The likening of the Slitheen to the Blair government is consolidated when the Slitheen leader tries to start a nuclear strike on the grounds that there are “massive weapons of destruction capable of being deployed within 45 seconds”, a satire on Tony Blair’s justification for the invasion of Iraq (that Iraqi president Saddam Hussein could deploy weapons of mass destruction against British forces within 45 minutes of an order to use them). Terse witticisms such as this are an important part of *Doctor Who*’s satire, and we ought not to belittle their significance merely because of their brevity.

Despite *Doctor Who*’s constant satire, its treatment of British identity and politics has yet to be explored in depth. There has certainly been a welcome expansion of the academic literature on *Doctor Who*, particularly since 2010; yet few extended works have focused on the programme’s engagement with national identity and its political and legal ramifications. To be sure, there have been some valuable chapters on *Doctor Who*’s Britishness in edited collections—by Barbara Selznick, Matt Jones and J.P.T. Brown³⁸—but until the present monograph, there has been nothing of book length, which this multi-faceted subject surely merits. Among the books of collected essays, the only major work with a wholly political focus is the excellent *Doctor Who and Race*.³⁹ However, this book covers only one aspect of politics—race—and does not concentrate on Britain. There have also been a series of outstanding sole-authored monographs on *Doctor Who* in recent years, all of which have political content, but these books have tended not to have Britishness, politics and law as their primary focus. For example, John Tulloch and Manuel Alvarado’s *Doctor Who: The Unfolding Text* explores the

³⁷Peter Osborne, *The Triumph of the Political Class* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2007).

³⁸Barbara Selznick, “Rebooting and Rebranding; the Changing Brands of *Doctor Who*’s Britishness”; Matthew Jones, “Aliens of London: (Re)Reading National Identity in *Doctor Who*”, in *Ruminations, Peregrinations and Regenerations: A Critical Approach to Doctor Who*, ed. Chris Hansen (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010); J.P.C. Brown, “*Doctor Who*: A Very British Alien”, in *The Galaxy is Rated G: Essays on Children’s Science Fiction Film and Television*, eds. R.C. Neighbors and Sandy Rankin (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2011).

³⁹Lindy Orthia, ed., *Doctor Who and Race* (Bristol: Intellect, 2013).

programme from a variety of perspectives and engages with the political aspects pervasively but not extensively; Matt Hills' *Triumph of a Time Lord* concentrates on the success of new-series *Doctor Who*, again with recurring analysis of political discourses; James Chapman's *Inside the TARDIS* combines an account of *Doctor Who*'s evolution as a successful television series with a cultural history of the programme, Britishness being a pervasive theme rather than the overwhelming focus; Piers Britton's *TARDISbound* engages with the social rather than political aspects of *Doctor Who* and does not have a specifically British dimension; Lorna Jowett's *Dancing with the Doctor* critiques the show's treatment of one aspect of politics—gender—and, to a lesser extent, sexuality, in new *Who* and its spin-offs. Britishness is a theme of her book but the main theme is gender.⁴⁰ The present book attempts to fill the gap in the *Doctor Who* literature by offering an analysis of the programme that definitively gives pride of place to the show's presentation of Britishness and to the politics and law which underpin that identity.

This is a good time for such a study, because we live in an era in which the existence of Britain as a political entity and the nature of Britishness as a national identity have rarely been so contested. Pressure for—and resistance to—supranational governance on the one hand and for Scottish and Welsh independence on the other have cast doubt on Britain's viability as a united, self-governing state. In particular, the British electorate's historic decision in 2016 to leave the European Union both contributes to national identity whilst creating difficulties for that identity owing to the closeness and divisiveness of the referendum vote (52% leave, 48% remain). The EU vote also split the four nations of the United Kingdom, with England and Wales voting to leave and Scotland and Northern Ireland voting to remain. Differences over secession, European integration and globalisation make it problematic to define British national identity, as has the rise of alternative identities, including those associated with "Islamic" extremism. These questions of

⁴⁰John Tulloch and Manuel Alvarado, *Doctor Who: The Unfolding Text* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1983); Hills, *Triumph of a Time Lord*; Chapman, *Inside the TARDIS*; Piers Britton, *TARDISbound: Navigating the Universes of Doctor Who* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011); Lorna Jowett, *Dancing with the Doctor: Dimensions of Gender in the Doctor Who Universe* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2017).



Fig. 1.1 Brit by association. The Doctor is implicated by companion Rose Tyler’s Union Jack t-shirt. *Doctor Who* (new series), “The Empty Child”/“The Doctor Dances”, series 1, episodes 9 and 10, British Broadcasting Corporation, 2005

national viability are significant to the country at large, not just the academy. At such a time of crisis, the study of attempts to define the nation, including those attempts made by popular culture, become still more important.

CENTRALITY OF *DOCTOR WHO*'S BRITISHNESS

That Britishness is a central and pervasive theme of *Doctor Who* should be readily apparent to even the casual viewer. Russell T. Davies, showrunner of the revived post-2005 *Doctor Who*, explicitly intended it to be “very, very British”.⁴¹ The Doctor himself is a thoroughly British alien, invariably eccentric, often fond of tea and prone to “muddling through” his adventures, relying on brainpower more than firepower. When in *Doctor Who: The Movie* (1996), his one-off companion Dr Grace Holloway is seeking to reassure an American policeman that the Doctor is not reaching for a gun, she blurts out “he’s, er, he’s British”, prompting the Time Lord’s significant reply: “yes, I suppose I am”. For good measure, the Time Lord’s accents—most often southern English but sometimes northern English (ninth Doctor) and Scottish (seventh Doctor, twelfth Doctor)—mark him out as representing the United Kingdom.⁴² Particularly striking is the Doctor’s speech in “The Empty Child” (2005), set in London during World War Two, where he describes Britain as “one tiny, damp little island” single-handedly resisting Nazi domination, “a mouse in front of a lion”. In the same episode, companion Rose Tyler sports a Union Jack t-shirt. Figure 1.1 shows how Rose’s physical proximity to the Doctor is cleverly utilised to associate him too with the sense of Britishness signified by her t-shirt. Drawing the bodies of the Doctor and Rose together in this way serves to “Britishise” the Doctor, thereby setting the scene for his stirring patriotic speech. In a similar vein, in “The Idiots’ Lantern” (2006), Rose lectures others on how to display the national flag. Companion Amy Pond’s first couple of trips in the TARDIS involve meeting a future British queen and a past British prime minister, each adventure bedecked with Union Jacks.⁴³ Indeed, on occasion, the show seems to be satirising its own obsession with Britishness. For example, in “The Christmas Invasion” (2005), the Doctor completes one of his regenerations by dint of a flask of tea: it leaks into the inner workings of the TARDIS and he is revived by its vapours. In “The Zygon Inversion” (2015), the Doctor escapes a doomed plane in a Union Jack parachute. And in “Empress of Mars”

⁴¹ Steve Clarke, “‘Who’ Dunnit Once...”, *Variety* (March 21, 2005), 20.

⁴² Jones, “Aliens of London”, 98.

⁴³ “The Beast Below” (2010), “Victory of the Daleks” (2010).

(2017) the Doctor cannot resist a grin when, surrounded by Americans at NASA headquarters, he sees a picture relayed from Mars of the words “God Save the Queen” marked in boulders on the planet surface, indicating that the British had already visited the Red Planet. This somewhat relentless coding marks the Doctor, as well as *Doctor Who* as a programme, as representing Britishness.

Unsurprisingly, there is consensus among *Doctor Who* scholars that Britishness is indeed central to the show. Nicholas J. Cull observes that the supposedly alien Doctor’s manners and adventures are deeply imbued with stories that the British people tell themselves about themselves.⁴⁴ Lorna Jowett characterises the Doctor as not a traditional hero but a very *British* one, tending to prevail through ingenuity and persuasion rather than firepower.⁴⁵ Maura Grady and Cassie Hemstrom judge *Doctor Who* to be “quintessentially British”.⁴⁶ Matthew Jones sees the relationship between *Doctor Who* and Britain as “a defining element of the series”, with “a British identity written into the very construction of the programme, beginning at its very roots”: “a product of the UK, about the UK”.⁴⁷ Barbara Selznick notes that whilst the programme can be analysed across an array of disciplines, including historically and philosophically, one common element with cuts across all these different studies is that *Doctor Who* is undeniably British, in its themes, style and character.⁴⁸ James Chapman observes that in an increasingly globalised television culture, *Doctor Who*’s insistence upon an almost parochial sense of Britishness is unusual.⁴⁹ Chapman also argues that the cultural politics and narrative ideologies of *Doctor Who* are unmistakably British in fostering toleration, non-conformity and difference.⁵⁰ Simone Knox notes that *Doctor Who* is marked by signifiers of Britishness in a whole

⁴⁴Nicholas J. Cull, “TARDIS at the OK Corral: *Doctor Who* and the USA”, in *British Science Fiction Television*, eds. John R. Cook and Peter Wright (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 55.

⁴⁵Jowett, *Dancing with the Doctor*, 11.

⁴⁶Grady and Hemstrom, “Nostalgia”, 125, 139.

⁴⁷Jones, “Aliens of London”, 86, 89, 99.

⁴⁸Selznick, “Rebooting and Rebranding”, 68.

⁴⁹Chapman, *Inside the TARDIS*, 8.

⁵⁰Chapman, *Inside the TARDIS*, 7.

range of ways.⁵¹ Matt Hills discusses the role of classic-series *Doctor Who* as an emblem of Britishness, articulating a British identity.⁵² If anything, new-series *Doctor Who* appears to pursue Britishness with even greater gusto than the classic series, as evidenced by the critical mass of Union Jacks, Scots, the Welsh, cups of tea, prime ministers and queens. Indeed, new *Who* projects its image of Britishness in a more brazen fashion than classic *Who*.

Some commentators connect *Doctor Who*'s Britishness to the country's imperialism and neo-imperialism. In this regard, J.P.C. Brown argues that post-2005 *Doctor Who* is less preoccupied with Britishness as an animating *problem* than was the case in the programme's earlier years.⁵³ To be sure, the loss of the Empire has been receding into the country's past. However, there is ample evidence that the new series engages in sustained debate as to whether Britishness should embrace post-1979 neoliberalism at home and post-9/11 interventionism abroad. Dominic Sandbrook has attributed the show's success to the British loving stories of crusading heroes taking British values to the furthest reaches of the universe, characterising the Doctor as every inch the Victorian adventurer, an ideal hero for the post-imperial age.⁵⁴

So pervasive is the Britishness metaphor in *Doctor Who* that it transcends time and space. Irrespective of whether a *Doctor Who* story is set in contemporary Britain, elsewhere in the world, or on some faraway world or space station, the culture is repeatedly earmarked as British.⁵⁵ Furthermore, there are a great many non-Earth humanoids in *Doctor Who*'s adventures.⁵⁶ These humanoids are frequently coded as British, regardless of whether their species is identified as human. An example is "Kinda" (1982). The Doctor and his companions land on the planet Deva Loka where they meet a small team of humanoid colonists. The dialogue and costumes of the two male colonists, Sanders and Hindle,

⁵¹ Simone Knox, "The Transatlantic Dimensions of the Time Lord: *Doctor Who* and the Relationships between British and North American Television", in *Doctor Who: The Eleventh Hour*, ed. Andrew O'Day (London: I.B. Tauris, 2014), 112.

⁵² Hills, *Triumph of a Time Lord*, 30.

⁵³ Brown, "Doctor Who", 179.

⁵⁴ Dominic Sandbrook: *Let Us Entertain You*. BBC Two, November 18, 2015.

⁵⁵ Tulloch and Alvarado, *Doctor Who*, 288.

⁵⁶ Indeed, only one *Doctor Who* story, "The Web Planet" (1965), has been bereft of humanoids (the Doctor and companions apart), an experiment that was not repeated.

match ideas of nineteenth-century British colonialism: they even wear the pith helmets of the British Empire. Subsequently, the time travellers encounter the Kinda, the native people of the planet. At first, the Doctor considers the Kinda to be primitive but, as John Tulloch and Manuel Alvarado observe, they actually form a highly advanced culture in terms of eliminating divisive aggression and individualistic assertion. Tulloch and Alvarado suggest that “Kinda” represents a debate about the superiority of individualist achievement and linear progress in contrast to communal harmony and a static history.⁵⁷ This in turn reflects arguments over the paternalistic assumptions of the British Empire. “Planet of the Ood” (2008) provides another example of a *Doctor Who* story set on a distant planet in a future epoch yet tackling aspects of contemporary Britishness. The Ood are the slave race of the Second Glorious and Bountiful Human Empire (an empire in which almost everyone has a British accent) and the story, set in the year 4126, can be interpreted as pitting “entrepreneurial, buccaneering Britain”, in the form of the company Ood Operations which enslaves the Ood, against “fair-play Britain”, in the shape of the Doctor, companion Donna and a political group Friends of the Ood which plots the Ood’s liberation. Like the Kinda, the Ood seemingly resist the notion that everyone must emulate the West. Left to their own devices, they appear to eschew science, capitalism and individualism. *Doctor Who* has been accused of too often denigrating non-Western cultures and of assuming that societies should proceed in fixed stages towards the technologically and intellectually “superior” Western way of life, but this is not always the case.⁵⁸

By the same token, *Doctor Who* stories set in foreign countries on Earth are often dominated by Britishness. “City of Death” (1979) takes place in Paris, yet any “Frenchness” in the story is at best marginal. By contrast, as Alan McKee rightly observes, Britishness is constantly expressed, in terms of amateurishness and playfulness.⁵⁹ Indeed, one

⁵⁷Tulloch and Alvarado, *Doctor Who*, 269.

⁵⁸Lindy A. Orthia, “Savages, Science, Stagism and the Naturalized Ascendancy of the Not-We in *Doctor Who*”, in *Doctor Who and Race*, ed. Lindy Orthia (Bristol: Intellect, 2013), 269–288. Orthia herself instances “State of Decay” (1980) as a *Doctor Who* story that rejects a stagist or linear view of human development.

⁵⁹Alan McKee, “Why is ‘City of Death’ the Best *Doctor Who* Story?”, in *Time and Relative Dissertations in Space: Critical Perspectives on Doctor Who*, ed. David Butler (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 243.

seminal aspect of the Britishness of this adventure slips under McKee's radar: "City of Death" is to a significant extent the story of Duggan, a pleasant yet physically aggressive British police officer who accompanies the Doctor and companion Romana throughout the escapade, strikes the killer blow that thwarts the alien menace and receives the goodbye waves of the Doctor and Romana from the Eiffel Tower at the end of the story. The stocky Duggan can easily be read as a diminutive Britain punching above its weight in the international scene.⁶⁰ Another example of *Doctor Who* articulating Britishness in a foreign location is "The Impossible Astronaut"/"Day of the Moon" (2011), where an American setting is used to draw a pointed contrast between British reliance on brains and American reliance on guns.

The Doctor's succession of companions presents another way of telling the national story. In the classic series, all Earth companions bar two (Tegan Jovanka and Peri Brown) were British. Most companions acquired in outer space (Vicki, Steven Taylor, Zoe Heriot, Romana, Adric, Nyssa) were coded as British too. Romana, Nyssa and Turlough as non-human humanoids were afforded a mild degree of "Otherness" by being portrayed as upper-class British. All new-series companions have been British apart from Captain Jack Harkness. Indeed, in new *Who*, the use of companions as symbols of Britishness is even more pointed. For instance, Rose Tyler and Amy Pond are repeatedly filmed in proximity with the Union Jack; white companions often have black or mixed-race boyfriends to emphasise British pride in a multiracial society; and Martha Jones, Clara Oswald and Clara's boyfriend Danny Pink work for the country's great public services, the NHS and education, thereby highlighting the more egalitarian aspects of British identity. Even companions' choices of food and drink may serve to accentuate Britishness: it is Rose's mother who provides the tea which helps the Doctor regenerate in "The Christmas Invasion", whilst partly robotic companion Nardole also proffers tea and, in "Oxygen" (2017), urges the Doctor and companion Bill Potts to return to the "nice and cosy" TARDIS rather than risk a perilous adventure—a pointedly British invocation of the comforts and safety of home. Chips emerge as another signifier of national identity: much loved by Rose and family, savoured by Martha Jones and Captain Jack on their return to contemporary Britain, and

⁶⁰"City of Death" was broadcast at a time of increasing supranationalism, with the first direct elections to the European Parliament taking place the same year.

served by Bill Potts in her job at a university canteen. (Their being called “fries” in the USA serves to make the term more exclusively British-and-Commonwealth.)

On occasion, *Doctor Who*'s writers even herd the Doctor's enemies into the British fold. “Victory of the Daleks” (2010) sees the Daleks recruited into the British army in the Second World War. They wear Union Jack insignia and ask their human colleagues whether they would care for some tea. Similarly, the Doctor's long-term Time Lord adversary, the Master, first appears in “Terror of the Autons” (1971) as a swarthy, bearded foreigner sporting a Nehru suit, only to regenerate into a British prime minister in “The Sound of Drums” (2007), a Britishness consolidated in “Death in Heaven” (2014) by a further transformation into the Scottish-accented Missy, who wears the attire of a Victorian governess.

Doctor Who's emphasis on Britishness is hardly surprising given that it is the flagship product of the British Broadcasting Corporation. According to Brian McNair, the Corporation was established partly to play the role, consciously articulated, of promoting a sense of Britishness and of national community.⁶¹ For Linda Colley, the BBC is probably still the most reliable medium for creating some image of communion across the United Kingdom, having consistently and actively provided a cultural image of Britain.⁶² Jean Seaton observes that the BBC has an obligation *to* the nation because it is *for* the nation. It therefore has to endlessly try and sort out what the nation is. Seaton argues that the BBC mainly metabolises the nation by worrying about it, thereby adding a reflexive anxiety and creative imagination to the problems it confronts. However, she contends, the BBC also trumpets Britain's good points.⁶³ As we shall see, *Doctor Who* does indeed project a combination of concern over British vices and pride in British virtue.

⁶¹Brian McNair, *News and Journalism in the UK*, 5th ed. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), 108.

⁶²Linda Colley, “Does Britishness Still Matter in the 21st Century, and How Much/How Well do the Politicians Care?,” in *Britishness: Perspectives on the British Question*, eds. Andrew Gamble and Tony Wright (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 25.

⁶³Jean Seaton, “The BBC and Metabolising Britishness: Critical Patriotism,” in *Britishness: Perspectives on the British Question*, eds. Andrew Gamble and Tony Wright (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 78.