

## **J.S. Mackley - Doctor Who: Identity, Time and Terror**

The BBC television series *Doctor Who* needs little introduction. It's the story of an eccentric traveller in a blue box. The first episode, *An Unearthly Child*, was broadcast on 23 November 1963, the day after Kennedy's assassination. The series enjoyed 26 years of unbroken broadcast, changing the lead actor on six occasions. Then, on 6 December 1989, the final episode of what is now referred to as the 'Classic Series' was broadcast—a story that was, ironically, called *Survival*. There followed a 16-year hiatus broken by two charity episodes and the 1996 TV-movie starring Paul McGann. Then, on 26 March 2005, the series was 'rebooted', with Russell T. Davies as Executive Producer and seasoned actor Christopher Eccleston taking the mantle of the Doctor. At the time of writing (2020) five other actors have played the Doctor, with Jodie Whittaker taking over the role in the final scene of the 2017 Christmas Special *Twice Upon a Time*.

With the whole of time and space as a playground, elements of the Gothic are prevalent throughout the worlds of Doctor Who, or the Whoniverse as it is known. A lurking menace can just as easily be found under the bed as it can in the fog-swathed streets of Victorian London or on a planet at the outermost reaches of the universe millions of years in the future or the past. Primarily a series for children at the outset, viewers watched from behind sofas, secretly enjoying being terrified by the imaginative storylines and otherworldly monsters.<sup>1</sup> Other stories consider psychological terrors, making the viewers think twice about looking at statues, their fear of the dark, popping bubble wrap and even blinking. The Doctor, in all of his or her incarnations, often confronts the apparently supernatural or draws on folk motifs such as vampires or the Loch Ness Monster. After the end of the second Classic series, these disturbances and historical events are generally explained through an alien presence or technology.

This chapter will consider elements of the 'Uncanny' and the Gothic in stories from both the Classic and Reboot Series including an uncertainty of identity, being trapped in the labyrinth of time, and elements of horror and terror.

The first uncanny element of the series is an uncertainty of identity with regard to the Doctor in terms of name, face, personality and even gender. The character's name has never been revealed to

the audience, although a few supporting characters have been privy to this information. The series title derives from a question in the first story when schoolteacher Ian Chesterton encounters 'the Doctor' in a junkyard with a sign on the gates proclaiming the proprietor is I. M. Foreman. Ian refers to the elderly man outside a blue Police Box as 'Dr. Foreman', and the old man looks at him bemused as he asks, 'Doctor Who?' In *Let's Kill Hitler* (2011), the Eleventh Doctor is warned of 'the oldest question in the universe ... A question that must never ever be answered', and that question is: 'Doctor Who?' Derrida argues that knowledge of a name implies familiarity, thus the lack of a name distances the viewer from the character.<sup>2</sup> Despite being the protagonist of the series and the self-proclaimed protector of Earth, the Doctor is a character whose origins are shrouded in mystery and someone the viewers, ultimately, cannot get close to.

The concept of one actor replacing another in a film or TV series is now commonplace (for example, the James Bond franchise). Even when *Doctor Who* was the first broadcast, there were examples of actors taking over the lead role such as Johnny Weissmuller and Buster Crabbe who, among others, played Tarzan in a long series of films. The punishing acting schedule and failing health contributed to the decision of the First Doctor, William Hartnell, to retire from *Doctor Who*. In the final scenes of *The Tenth Planet* (1966), the Doctor complains 'this old body of mine is wearing a bit thin', before staggering to the TARDIS to 'change', or 'regenerate' as it later became known.<sup>3</sup> After each of the Doctor's regenerations, the companions who witnessed it are uncertain about how this new incarnation can be the same person. Germanà argues that identity is 'in a continuous state of flux', but the Doctor's lack of fixed identity is very much an extreme case.<sup>4</sup> The Doctor's ability to regenerate, and even, in extreme cases, revisit previous incarnations in stories such as *The Three Doctors* (1972–1973) and *The Five Doctors* (1983), reflects Freud's discussion of the double as a 'preservation against extinction'.<sup>5</sup> However, as Botting notes, a multiple interpretation of identity is 'subject to a dispersion and multiplication of meanings ... that obliterates the possibility of imagining any human order and unity'.<sup>6</sup> In *The Five Doctors*, after suffering what he calls 'cosmic angst', the Fifth Doctor feels 'great chunks of my past, detaching themselves like melting icebergs'. He later observes that 'A man is the sum of his memories ... A Time Lord even more so' and thus within the Doctor there is a multiplicity of personalities and

memories beneath the surface.

The post-regeneration Doctor is confused as to what kind of person they are, and their likes and dislikes, causing further consternation to the mystified companions. Likewise, the age of the Doctor changes: in some incarnations he is older, such as the First and the Twelfth Doctors, others he is significantly younger, such as the Fifth and Eleventh Doctors. Although each incarnation is the same person with the same memories, the Doctor is not always recognised by the characters previously encountered. Sarah Jane Smith, who saw the regeneration of the Third Doctor and travelled with the Fourth Doctor, meets the Tenth Doctor in *School Reunion* (2006). Her interest is piqued as he introduces himself as 'John Smith', an alias used by the Doctor to integrate with human society. He becomes hidden in plain sight, exactly what is supposed to happen if the TARDIS's chameleon circuit, which gives his vessel the ability to change and blend into its surroundings, worked effectively.

The recognition between the Doctor and a supporting character is reversed in *The Silence in the Library* (2008). Professor River Song intimates she is very well acquainted with the Tenth Doctor's future self and resists telling him 'spoilers' concerning his future on this and other occasions when they meet. Conversely, when the Eleventh Doctor meets with River, she more often than not knows about his future, but the Doctor also knows what will happen to her. In *The Pandorica Opens* (2010), Amy remarks to River that she (River) told the Doctor she would see him again when the Pandorica opens. River replies 'Maybe I did, but I haven't yet'. This exchange is *weird* in the Saxon meaning of the word. The paradox of two characters, each knowing aspects of the other's future but not being in possession of the complete picture, gives the feeling that something is *fated* to happen. Indeed, in *The Husbands of River Song* (2015), River discovers that her diary is finally full and that she and the Doctor have finally caught up with each other's timeline and that her death is immanent.

The regeneration process now has a further element as it allows the Doctor to change gender as well as the physical body. The signals for a change of gender had been presented on several occasions before. In the Comic Relief spoof *The Curse of the Fatal Death* (1999), written by Steven Moffat, the Doctor battles his arch-enemy, the Master, and was seen in five incarnations, including

Rowan Atkinson, Richard E. Grant and Joanna Lumley. Fans believed this short film was trying potential actors and actresses for the role in the future.<sup>7</sup> When the Tenth Doctor regenerated into the Eleventh in *The End of Time* (2010) he questions whether or not he is a girl. In *The Doctor's Wife* (2011), the Doctor speaks of a Time Lord known as the Corsair who changed gender on many occasions, while in the mini-episode *The Night of the Doctor* (2013), the Eighth Doctor is told that his regeneration does not have to be random: 'Fat or thin; young or old; man or woman'. The eighth series has a story arc of a mysterious woman manipulating the Twelfth Doctor and Clara. In *Dark Water* (2014), the woman introduces herself as 'Missy', a female incarnation of the Master. In the season 10 finale, *The Doctor Falls* (2017), the Doctor is confronted by both male and female incarnations of the Master and is asked 'Will the future be all girl?', to which the Doctor replies 'I hope so'. This exchange, fans speculated (correctly), was a suggestion that the doctor's next incarnation would be female. A further example of the change of gender is the Time Lord General Kenosium. She was a woman for ten incarnations but is a man when seen in *The Day of the Doctor* (2013). For the next regeneration, in *Hell Bent* (2014), the General not only changes gender but also ethnicity. A change in ethnicity is also seen in one of River Song's earlier incarnations when she called herself Mels.

The decision to change the Doctor's gender unsettled many fans at the time. That said, despite the new leading actor, the change in gender was not overly emphasised in the series, save for the Twelfth Doctor's wedding ring symbolically falling from his finger during his regeneration and a few comic lines. In *The Woman Who Fell to Earth* (2018), the Thirteenth Doctor is confused when Yasmin refers to her as 'madam', and when she remembers she has regenerated, she asks 'does it suit me?' She further notes she was a white-haired Scotsman half an hour before and indeed retains the Twelfth Doctor's masculine outfit for the majority of her first episode until she asserts herself and *becomes* the Doctor. Likewise, in *Demons of the Punjab* (2018), when the Doctor is invited to Umbreen's pre-wedding celebrations, she comments she never did this when she was a man. To allay any confusion, she says any reference to the body and gender regeneration 'are all in jest'. One major difference that the recent change of cast provides is that the narrative has moved away from the concept of the Doctor as a lonely man who entices (usually young) women and men into his life with the promise of adventure. The Thirteenth

Doctor refers to her companions as 'family' on occasions.

The gender regeneration theme of both the Doctor and the Master opens *Doctor Who* to a new discussion of transgender theory, and particularly echoes Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* (1928), where the character changes gender and lives for centuries interacting with characters from history. Wallace notes that for the Female Gothic, 'texts are haunted by their predecessors and, in turn, haunt their descendants'.<sup>8</sup> This will particularly be the case with the Thirteenth Doctor who represents a turning point in the serial and will always be judged against what has gone before, and she will be judged on what comes after.

The regeneration process creates an uncertainty about sexuality and gender for the Doctor and those who meet him/her; in addition, the Doctor has concealed or repressed aspects of their personality. Morris notes that repression achieves its uncanny effect by forcing us to look into the inescapable aspects of our psyche that we have hitherto refused to acknowledge, but which may actually represent an unexpressed desire.<sup>9</sup> When the Sixth Doctor is put on trial for violating the Time Lords' non-interference policy in *Trial of a Time Lord* (1986), his prosecutor is called the Valeyard. It is later revealed that the Valeyard is made from the darker aspects of the Doctor's future incarnations. The Valeyard acts as the prosecutor with the promise of the Doctor's remaining regenerations should he successfully secure a guilty verdict. Furthermore, the Valeyard manipulates the Matrix - the Time Lords' huge archive to create a false record that presents the Doctor in a negative light. In a Time Lord's paradox, this situation shows the Doctor working against himself as both prosecutor and defendant, self and other, to bring about his own defeat, ironically so his future incarnation can benefit from his past's demise. This is a doubling effect as both present and future incarnations oppose each other, but on this occasion, the presence of the double, as Freud notes, is the harbinger of death.<sup>10</sup>

*The Trial of a Time Lord* shows a hidden facet of the Doctor of which he has hitherto been unaware - because it happens in his own future - there are two further occasions where the Doctor deliberately suppresses aspects of his identity. In *Human Nature* (2007) the Doctor *actually* becomes human and has false memories for his human *alter ego* to conceal himself from the Family of

Blood. Even so, the Doctor's true memories filter back to him through dreams, like a repressed trauma, to the extent that the human facet, 'John Smith', sees the concept of relinquishing his persona and becoming the Doctor as a form of suicide as John Smith will cease to exist.

A third example of the suppressed 'enemy within' is the climax of the finale of the seventh season, *The Name of the Doctor* (2013). The Doctor reveals that his 'name', 'Doctor' is a *promise*, and there is an incarnation of himself he has repressed: 'the one who broke the promise' and who performed an action that was 'not in the name of the Doctor'. This hidden incarnation is known as the War Doctor. His origins are briefly shown in a mini-episode entitled 'Night of the Doctor' which shows the Eighth Doctor crashing a spaceship into a planet. Temporarily restored by the Elixir of Life, the Doctor is both dead and not dead and in this liminal moment he is open to inspiration as he is no longer shackled by a physical form, time or ambition. He has hitherto avoided participating in the Time War, but if he does not intervene, it will mean the end of the Universe. Drinking from the chalice to trigger a regeneration that will save his life, the Doctor assumes a more cosmic role, quoting from Luke's Gospel 'Physician, heal thyself'. He ceases to be the Doctor and becomes a crusader, the War Doctor, who can end the Time War. In *Dalek* (2006), the Ninth Doctor laments that the Time War ended with the destruction of both the Daleks and the Time Lords, claiming 'I had no choice' and 'everyone lost', further underscoring the repression of trauma through his survivor's guilt. It is only the collaboration of three doctors - the Tenth, Eleventh and War Doctor - in *Day of the Doctor* that finds a solution to destroy the Daleks but to place Gallifrey in a temporal stasis to remove it from the Time War. The War Doctor's later incarnations have suppressed this moment through shame. Initially it is their unity in ending the war 'neither through fear or hatred' that begins the healing as the War Doctor was alone when he originally performed this deed. As the moment replays, he stands with two others who justify his actions. Through their confrontation with the past trauma, the later incarnations begin to accept the role the War Doctor played in their lives, shaping the people they will become - the Warrior, the Hero and the *Doctor*. They agree the War Doctor earned the right to be a Doctor more than any other incarnation as he was the Doctor 'on the day it was *impossible* to get it right'.

The TARDIS is a machine that can travel anywhere in time and

space, and the first thing someone notices is that it is bigger on the inside. It is designed with a Chameleon circuit so it can change its form to blend in with its new environment, although this has malfunctioned and it is stuck in the shape of the blue Police box which was a familiar sight in 1960s England. The TARDIS is able to travel any *where* and any *when* with pinpoint accuracy, although there are many occasions where the Doctor and his companions may find themselves eons away or on the opposite side of the universe from their intended destination. Thus, from the outset, there is a sense of uncertainty and slippage focused around the TARDIS. An apparently familiar object is not as it appears, both in terms of size and purpose as well as the uncertainty as to whether it will arrive at its intended destination.

Time has many layers. We see this particularly in *The Pandorica Opens* when the Eleventh Doctor, Amy and River Song visit Stonehenge in Roman times. Amy wonders how the stones 'are not new'; River tells her 'Because it's already old. It's been here thousands of years'. This layering of history is also seen in the Third Doctor stories *Doctor Who and the Silurians* (1970) and *The Sea Devils* (1972). Both stories feature technologically advanced creatures from Earth's prehistory that are woken in the present day and as Freud notes: something secret and hidden has been brought to light.<sup>11</sup>

In many of the stories featuring an historical event, the Doctor stresses the paramount importance of not interfering in history. This makes the environment psychologically oppressive as the characters, or the audience, see a moment in time they cannot escape, that something is fated to happen. This is the 'fearful sense of inheritance' and the 'claustrophobic sense of enclosure' that Baldick describes, except that on this occasion the confinement is not physical but both *psychological* and *temporal*.<sup>12</sup> When *Doctor Who* first started, it was very much a part of the BBC's mission to educate, inform and entertain. Although visiting alien planets on many occasions, the First Doctor and his companions (two of them school teachers) also visited eras of history, purely as observers. They cannot change the course of events, thus, at the end of *The Aztecs* (1964), Barbara laments she is unable to stop a ritual human sacrifice. She wonders what benefit there is in being able to travel through time if they are unable to prevent events from occurring, but the Doctor explains they cannot change time, but they can change the attitudes of a

single person. Barbara has understood this lesson by the end of the season. In *The Reign of Terror* (1964), Ian attempts to prevent Maximilien Robespierre's imprisonment to stop Napoleon from becoming emperor. Barbara realises the irony and futility of his efforts as it runs contrary to the history she knows.

Although trapped by the progression of time, the characters are not free from the *consequences* of visiting an era. They are often placed in danger, and the story then revolves around the characters either needing to escape from their predicament without unravelling the fabric of time, or being in danger of changing history. In *The Romans* (1965), the Doctor assumes the identity of Maximus Pettulian, a lyre player who planned to assassinate emperor Nero. Ian is captured by slavers and is to be trained as a gladiator while Barbara is sold at a slave auction. On the other hand, Vicki sees poisoned goblets intended for Barbara and switches them, although she realises these are now being sent to Nero and the Doctor sees Vicki's actions may have the effect of altering time. The accidental poisoning is prevented, but the Doctor inadvertently gives Nero the idea of burning Rome, setting time on the path that is recorded for us.

Gradually, the character of the Doctor develops from observer to participant. In the final story of series 2, *The Time Meddler* (1965), the Doctor encounters the Monk - a renegade of his own race - who attempts to give the Saxons an advantage in the Battle of Hastings. Although the Time Lords are not named until *The War Games* (1969), *The Time Meddler* underscores their policy of non-interference in history. However, when the Sixth Doctor is accused of interfering by the Time Lords themselves in *The Trial of a Time Lord*, the Doctor defends himself by pointing out instances when he was asked to intervene in the story 'Terror of the Vervoids'.

There is an Arabic adage: Time doesn't change, it reveals for the characters in the Whoniverse, this can be interpreted that they cannot change events from the past, but their actions can explain why events happen. In *The Visitation* (1982), the dramatic irony is subtle: accidentally landing in the seventeenth century, the Fifth Doctor defeats the alien creatures in London by fire but is challenged by his companion, Tegan, as to why he left the scene rather than extinguishing the blaze. Despite it being a result of the Doctor's actions, he suggests this fire should 'run its course'. As the TARDIS dematerialises, it reveals the location as Pudding Lane

and the start of the Great Fire of London. In *Rosa* (2018), the Thirteenth Doctor and her companions try to engineer Rosa Parks's refusal to give up her seat when an alien presence tries to disrupt her role in history. Here the Gothic is particularly unsettling: the fear of racial prejudice and violence, directed not only at the black community but also on members of the TARDIS crew. However, at the pivotal moment, the Doctor and her companions are unable to leave the bus and Rosa is told move to the segregated area for Graham. Not only is Graham a character who would give up his seat for another, but he also demonstrates his racial equality through his marriage to Grace and his evident, but unreciprocated, love for his step-grandson, Ryan. Graham finds it unsettling that he has caused this event to happen when the catalyst runs contrary to his moral fibre.

Conversely, in *Demons of the Punjab*, set in 1947 during the Partition of India, another of the Thirteenth Doctor's companions, Yasmin, witnesses historical events that reveal the emotionally painful omissions in her grandmother's oral history. Throughout the story, the Doctor cautions Yaz about travelling back in time to meet her own family as any changes to the timeline has the potential of wiping Yaz out of existence. The Doctor and her companions participate in these events, allowing them to play out, and Yaz understands the truth about her family. Yaz's family view the ultimately benevolent aliens as 'demons' as they can only interpret them in terms of their own cultural frames of reference. Their misconception generates a sense of fear for the locals as they face their literal and allegorical demons, which, as Freud notes, are 'projections of man's own emotional impulses'.<sup>13</sup> However, there are rituals for protection from and for banishing demons. Aliens, however misunderstood, are not covered by these rites.

The Doctor's unwillingness to change time is sometimes at an emotional cost. The end of *Earthshock* (1982) saw one of the companions, Adric, killed while attempting to prevent a freighter from crashing into Earth (stopping the crash would have prevented the extinction event that wiped out the dinosaurs). In the following episode, *Time-Flight* (1982), one of the surviving companions, Tegan, begs the Fifth Doctor to use the TARDIS to travel back in time to save Adric. Despite his own grief, the Doctor refuses, noting, even with the TARDIS, there are laws which govern time, and which cannot be broken. This was the first death of a TARDIS companion since Sara Kingdom in *The Daleks' Masterplan* (1966).

Grief is often an integral part of gothic literature more generally, but the Doctor is unable to process his grief and more particularly he is bound by the consequences of his actions. In *The Fires of Pompeii* (2008), Donna begs the Tenth Doctor to warn the inhabitants of Pompeii before it is too late, but the Doctor explains about allowing time and its catastrophic events—to run their course. However, the Doctor and Donna are faced with a grizzly choice, to allow the Earth to burn in the invasion of the Piroviles, or to trigger the eruption of Vesuvius which would destroy the Pyrovillian ship, but which would also kill the residents of Pompeii. The Doctor chooses the latter option as the lesser evil, but acknowledges that the eruption of Vesuvius is something that *he* has instigated, rather than a random moment of history, and holds himself accountable, saying ‘It’s not just history ... it’s me’. Thus, at this stage, the Doctor is a hostage to time as much as anyone else.

Towards the end of the Tenth Doctor’s tenure, in *The Waters of Mars* (2009) set in 2059, the Doctor travels to a human colony on Mars where he meets Adelaide Brooke, whose granddaughter pilots the Earth’s first lightspeed ship. The Doctor also knows the colonists will be killed on Mars. Yet, he also realises he is the only survivor of the Time War as now the Time Lords are all dead. Consequently, the Doctor becomes misguided by megalomania and as the ‘Time Lord Victorious’ believes he can alter *fixed* events, as there are no Time Lords to stop him. In this instance, his intervention is to prevent the destruction of the Mars colony and the deaths of ‘influential people’ such as the colonists. Such fixed events from our own timeline might include the Kennedy Assassination and 9/11, moments when the passage of history is apparently derailed and forced onto a new course. The Doctor crosses a psychological and moral boundary when he saves Brooke and returns her to Earth, telling her she can inspire her granddaughter in person.<sup>14</sup> However, Brooke realises it is her *death* on Mars which inspires and she commits suicide, while the Doctor is left to consider the ramifications of his actions.

It is usually the case that time does not change in the stories, or if it did, then it showed how events that were now recorded by history came about. However, in *The Last of the Time Lords* (2007), some fans were outraged when the companions manage to *reverse* time so the year of the Master’s domination over the Earth was erased. Likewise, in *The Big Bang* (2010), the Eleventh Doctor ‘resets’ the universe, but in doing so, he wipes himself out of existence.

In the examples of Brooke and the Eleventh Doctor, the acts of suicide or self-annihilation are a means of returning time to the course that it should follow. The details surrounding Brooke's death have changed, but her granddaughter still undertakes her pioneering journey. The Eleventh Doctor had planted clues for Amy to interpret so that she can *remember* him back into existence (although the ending feels like a *dea ex machina*, like Rose suddenly discovering the power to wipe out the Daleks in the 2005 season finale *The Parting of the Ways*). In *The Day of the Doctor*, when three Doctors meet, the Tenth Doctor asks if the Eleventh is suggesting they change their own history, to which the Eleventh replies 'We change history all the time'. Although the later Doctors will forget their intervention in their own pasts, they are released from their traumas, and all three Doctors regenerate shortly afterwards.

In the Whoniverse, time provides the enclosure and the weight of inheritance that Baldick suggests is necessary for the gothic effect.<sup>15</sup> The characters are trapped with the knowledge that events must happen, people will die, but progress will be made. In effect, time is a labyrinth without walls that they have to follow, just as much as tunnels under the Castle of Otranto or the slums and backstreets of Victorian London. Sometimes the characters have foreknowledge, the equivalent of a map which will sometimes lead them towards a terrifying inevitability; sometimes they are unaware of what course time must take. They know they are unable to change the passage of time, but they can influence events, often unknowingly, so that time in the way that later history records it.

As mentioned above, one of the appeals of Doctor Who is the audiences' anticipation of being scared. The variety of aliens is one of the attractions of the Whoniverse. Some are benign, some are malevolent, while others appear horrendous, but are simply misunderstood. The second ever story of the serial featured the best known (and most commonly returning) of the Doctor's enemies: *The Daleks* (1963–1964). These killing machines, bent on universal supremacy, were inspired by the Nazis. Although characterised their merciless domination, the metal, tank-like shells contain an organic host, the once-humanoid form of the Kaled, mutated by a neutronic war and now a mechanised organic entity. No doubt the descriptions of the neutronic war generated anxious

reminders of the ongoing conflict in Vietnam as well as the comparatively recent Cuban Missile Crisis and the Cold War. The Daleks' abrasive electronic voices and the ability to kill without compunction served to terrorise the viewers, but in an enjoyable way. Onscreen deaths caused by the Daleks generally involved the sound of an electronic pulse for the laser, a flash and then a negative image of the victim screaming and falling. Arguably, when the stories were first transmitted, they were more innocent times, but such deaths were understated: the BBC would not show graphic violence. Consequently, the terror of these stories is psychological as the viewer must *imagine* what has happened. In addition, the Daleks evolve as the series progresses: when first seen, the Daleks' movement is limited to their city, as the static electricity conducted through the metal floors powers them. In later stories such as *The Dalek Invasion of Earth* (1964), the Daleks have developed the technology so they do not need metal floors to conduct energy and can travel through London unaided. More recent stories, including *Remembrance of the Daleks* (1988) and *Resolution* (2019), show that the Daleks have developed the ability to fly. The earlier Dalek stories served to suggest the threat was no longer in distant space but had come to Earth, and, more specifically, to London, albeit a future London (2167 AD). The invasion would not occur in the lifetime of the viewers, but it *would* happen. Viewers had seen a glimpse of the future, and it was an event that could not be changed, just as the characters were bound by the passage of time.

Just as the Daleks used the metal casings to survive, the series' other major recurring villains are the Cybermen first seen in the First Doctor's final story *The Tenth Planet*. Set in an isolated Antarctic base, the Cybermen arrive from Mondas, the Earth's 'twin' planet, to steal Earth's energy for themselves. There are some truly sinister moments: silent scenes set in the Antarctic wilderness where the Cybermen club the humans to death with a single blow. The whole feeling of these creatures attacking the claustrophobic base has echoes of H. P. Lovecraft's *At the Mountains of Madness* (1931) and anticipates John Carpenter's movie *The Thing* (1982).

The Cybermen use technology to upgrade themselves cybernetically, irradiating any organic humanity as well as 'weaknesses' such as feelings and emotions. The beginning of this process is shown to the Twelfth Doctor in *World Enough and Time*

(2017) where he encounters the Mondasian Cybermen who have been 'upgraded' to avoid the contamination of the lower decks of the ships. Rebuilding or upgrading an organic entity is reminiscent of Victor Frankenstein's creature in *Frankenstein* (1818) who also delivers death without mercy. Furthermore, showing the Mondasian Cybermen before their arrival at Earth, and yet these are beings with whom the viewer is already familiar, is a form of Derridean *hauntology* where the viewer is presented with the paradox that the event is both a repetition and the first time it has been experienced.<sup>16</sup> A scene that truly encapsulates the gothic mood is in the *Tomb of the Cybermen* (1967) when the Cybermen are awakened and tear their way out of the tomb, their jerky movements being closer to the undead rather than robotics, or, as Freud describes it, the uncanny feeling generated by a sentience within automata.<sup>17</sup>

In addition to upgrading themselves, Cybermen partially upgrade or assimilate humanity: like Frankenstein's creature, these characters are pieced together, and they are feared by humanity. In *The Invasion* (1968), the human collaborator with the Cybermen, Tobias Vaughan, had only parts of his body modified: his mind and his humanity remain unchanged. In *World Enough and Time*, the Doctor's companion, Bill Potts, is assimilated into a Cybermen and is seen crying within the facemask. The viewer is no longer sure whether Bill is alive or whether she has become a fully mechanised organic.<sup>18</sup> If the latter, does she retain any humanity, or will she become part of the merciless conquering force of the Cybermen? The episode's title refers to Marvell's 'To His Coy Mistress' where the narrator reflects on the transience of life, but what the Cybermen offer is an eradication of illness and old age, in essence a form of immortality, which is, as Adorno notes, a form of utopian consciousness.<sup>19</sup>

When the first Cybermen story was broadcast, the costumes were limited. In *The Tenth Planet*, their facemasks are made from fabric - the shape of the nose is visible - but of particular note is the exaggerated features of the eyes and mouth. These characteristics are reminiscent of a popular entertainment show at the time, *The Black and White Minstrel Show* (1958–1978) and suggest an anxiety against the ethnic other coming to Britain and stealing resources. By the time of the Cybermen's second appearance in *The Moonbase* (1967) such racist parallels have been erased. The masks are metal over featureless faces, grotesque expressions of

terror and inhumanity. They are the death masks of the *revenant*. These masks find their gothic roots in the masque balls of the eighteenth century, where, as Spooner notes, they 'simultaneously reveal and conceal'.<sup>20</sup> In *The Tenth Planet*, they might be seen as further dehumanising the colonial 'other', or perhaps concealing the 'other within'.

The arrival of the Daleks in Britain can be read in terms of the early major gothic novels: texts such as *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and *The Monk* (1796) are set in Continental Europe and in the past. By the time we reach *Frankenstein* (1818), Victor passes through England on his way to Scotland; by the end of the century, the 'other' was firmly established in England, through the external threat of the Count in *Dracula* (1897), and the enemy within, seen in *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886). The alien other comes ever closer and nearer in time. The first story featuring the Cybermen brought the threat of invasion by an emotionless killing machine much closer - *The Tenth Planet* was set in 1986 - less than two decades away from the time of the viewers. Their final encounter with the Second Doctor, *The Invasion*, is set in 1979 bringing the menace to just over a decade away from the viewers.

The Daleks and the Cybermen have created their own mythologies in the Whoniverse as well as popular culture more generally. The first audiences, who had never seen anything like them before, must have found them truly terrifying, but at least the stories were set on distant planets or, if on the Earth, they were set in the future. However, the change of direction in 1970 brought the enemy much closer to home. In the Second Doctor's final story, *The War Games*, the Time Lords note the Doctor's penchant for meddling in affairs, but accept such action is justified on occasions. The Doctor's punishment is to regenerate and to be exiled on Earth towards the end of the twentieth century. There are recognisably futuristic motifs such as manned missions to Mars; however, many of the Third Doctor's stories focus on elements from the real-world of the contemporary viewer. An example of this is the Nestenes, seen in the Third Doctor stories *Spearhead from Space* (1970) and *Terror of the Autons* (1971) where department store mannequins become animated and replace principal military and government personnel (and this story shares many similarities with the TV serial *Quatermass II*). The ways that *Doctor Who* defamiliarise the familiar will be further explored later in this chapter.

Along with the new Doctor and the first episodes broadcast in colour in 1970, there was a new recurring villain. He was one of the Doctor's own race who said he was known as the 'Master'. The producers had said they wanted a character who looked like the Devil himself; he was to be the Moriarty to challenge the Doctor's Holmes with looks and the powers of Svengali. The Master's motivation was to control the universe—to become the Master of all Masters. He claimed to want to destroy the Doctor, but in doing so he would destroy the only being in the universe like him, his only worthy adversary. Consequently, in *The Sea Devils*, the Master redefines his motivations as seeking the pleasure of destroying the human race of which the Doctor is so fond. While the Master is said to be the embodiment of evil in all that he does, it is in *The Dæmons* (1971) where he assumes the role of the clergyman leading a black mass and where he summons a devil-like form, Azal. This creature is not the Devil, of course, but the last survivor of an alien race that has intervened at principal points in history to inspire humanity to evolve from its present state, for example, Homo Sapiens overcoming the Neanderthals; the Renaissance and the Industrial Revolution. The inspiration for alien races intervening with human evolution is drawn from the BBC TV serial *Quatermass and the Pit* and seen again in *The Ark in Space* (1975). *The Dæmons* also echoes the mood of Dennis Wheatley novels and Hammer Horror films. Among the gothic motifs in this story is the suggestion that the folk rituals are not as innocent as they first appear: it is seen again in films such as *The Wicker Man* (1973). In *The Dæmons*, the Morris Dancers capture the Doctor and plan to sacrifice him at the maypole. As Trubshaw argues, horror is derived from rituals that, to the modern viewer, appear innocent but which recall England's ancient history and the suggestion something is hidden in the landscape, and in the Whoniverse, this history can (and does) come to the surface.<sup>21</sup>

Just as Azal in *The Dæmons* is shown to be an alien in the form of the Devil, the Tenth Doctor encounters a creature called the Beast in *The Satan Pit* (2006) who appears to be the embodiment of the Devil, indeed it is suggested it may be the inspiration for the horned devils in a multitude of religions. Facing the Beast forces the Doctor to confront his own beliefs. He feels the concept of a single Devil for all religions is an impossibility and makes a conscious choice not to understand the nature and the influence of the Beast. Later, in *The Pilot* (2017), the Twelfth Doctor explains

that evil is a matter of perspective, just as ‘hunger looks like evil from the wrong end of the cutlery’. Often what is perceived as evil is something that is misunderstood and scares us.

Freud speaks of silence, solitude and darkness as infantile anxieties of which we have never truly become free.<sup>22</sup> These are elements particularly explored in the Reboot Series. In *Silence in the Library*, the Doctor notes ‘Almost every species in the Universe has an irrational fear of the dark. But they’re wrong. Cause it’s not irrational’. They discover a conscious (and hungry) entity lurking *within* the shadows. In *Deep Breath* (2014), Clara and the Twelfth Doctor must emulate robots and hold their breaths to avoid detection. In *Listen* (2014), the Doctor considers whether one is ever truly alone, or whether a creature which has perfected camouflage is *always with us*. *Listen* plays on the childish fear of the creature under the bed, as well as exploring the Doctor’s own fear of the dark, but it uses these devices to demonstrate fear can be enabling if managed appropriately.

It is one thing to be scared by Daleks, Cybermen and apparent manifestations of the Devil, but part of the power of Doctor Who is the ability to make commonplace objects terrifying. We have seen an example of this when shop mannequins come to life and become homicidal - these are the creatures the Ninth Doctor faces in the first episode of the Reboot Series, *Rose* (2005), and likewise Roboforms dressed as murderous Santa Clauses smell the Tenth Doctor’s regeneration energy and use Christmas trees and explosive ornaments as weapons in *The Christmas Invasion* (2005). Other examples of making the familiar an object of terror include: the possibility of the Royal Family being lycanthropes after a werewolf attacks Queen Victoria in *Tooth and Claw* (2006); a little girl’s drawings trap the subject on the page in *Fear Her* (2006); television sets which become possessed by an alien presence, sucking viewers’ brainwaves and faces into the television in *The Idiot’s Lantern* (2006); a crack in the wall which turns out to be a crack in the universe in *The Eleventh Hour* (2010); the wi-fi which uploads souls for food in *The Bells of St John* (2013) and in *The Pilot*, Bill notices something wrong with her image in a mysterious puddle where her friend has disappeared, but cannot work out what until the Twelfth Doctor points out ‘It’s not reflecting you, it’s mimicking you’: the puddle is *sentient*. More recently, the story *Kerblam!* (2018) showed how the innocent action of popping bubble wrap has deadly effects. Adding a threat to commonplace

objects serves to defamiliarise them for the viewers.<sup>23</sup>

Understandably, one of the most frightening episodes contains many gothic elements. The terror generated in *Blink* (2007) comes from a fear of familiar objects—statues—as well as danger in the simple act of blinking. In this episode, a young photographer, Sally Sparrow, explores an old house. The house was once a home, but now it is derelict, not a place where anyone could live. It is therefore ‘unhomely’ or *unheimlich*. Sally tears away wallpaper—literally stripping away the layers of the past—to discover a message written by the Tenth Doctor in 1969 specifically for her: *Beware the Weeping Angels*. This creates the sense that something has been fated to happen, and has the hallmarks of an ancient prophecy. When Sally returns to the house the following day with her friend Kathy, they are distracted by a man who claims he was told by his grandmother to deliver a letter to her at this particular day and time. In the meantime, Kathy has been touched by an Angel and sent back in time. Kathy is the messenger’s grandmother.

The Weeping Angels have the form of angels who cover their faces with their hands, appearing as statues from a graveyard. With their faces covered in grief, they appear benevolent, lamenting and watching over the dead. However, their purpose is the opposite. They are alien assassins. Unwatched, the Angels move at a lightning-fast speed, touching their victim and sending them back into the past, feeding off the energy of the lives they never had. They cannot move when they are observed and their hands cover their faces as a means of defence, so they do not look at each other. Their movement is a form of animism, an uncanny feeling generated by the irrational belief that a statue, an inanimate object, is possessed with the ability to move and even with consciousness.

In *Blink*, rain is used as a metonym to underscore the oppressive mood, but it is also poignant: it is raining when Sally meets the young and handsome police officer, Billy, immediately before he is touched by the Angel. A short time later, when Sally next sees him, he is an old man, knowing the end of the rain is the herald of his death. He remarks that it was raining on the day that they met, and Sally replies ‘It’s the same rain’. For Sally it has been a matter of minutes; for Billy, it has been a whole lifetime. Despite Billy’s happy memories, his life is one that he should not have lived, and all of his aspirations from the time before he was touched by the Angel

remain unfulfilled. He essentially becomes a ghost haunting himself.

Another method the Doctor uses to communicate with Sally is through Easter Eggs - hidden content on DVDs. This content refuses to stay paused, startling the characters as it almost seems sentient; this unbidden movement echoes as the Angels move when they should stay still. Initially only hearing one side of the conversation, later Sally and the Doctor seem to have a conversation across time, although, unnervingly, the Doctor already knows what Sally is going to say. But, entreating Sally for help, he delivers a chilling warning: 'Blink and you're dead'.

As *Blink* reaches its conclusion, Sally and her friend Larry are trapped in the house with the Angels closing in on them. The house becomes a graveyard filled with these tombstone effigies. Sally becomes the gothic heroine, the woman in distress, but even though she is frightened, she is not the trembling, defenceless victim that Moers describes.<sup>24</sup> Instead, she remains strong in the face of adversity. In the final scenes, the terror becomes paramount as the characters, surrounded by Angels, attempt to keep their eyes open, knowing if they look away or blink, they will die. But even this isn't enough to keep them safe. Trapping Sally and Larry in the cellar, the Angels cause the lights to flicker so they can advance on them, revealing their terrifying countenances, fangs and claws. Sally and Larry manage to reach the TARDIS which dematerialises around them, and the Angels, who have all looked at each other, are unable to move again. Sally and Larry escape, but the final shots of the episode show many statues around the city, any of which could be Angels, with the repeated voice-over of the Doctor's warning.

It is impossible to cover all the gothic elements on a serial that has run for nearly 60 years. If space had allowed, this chapter would have explored elements of the Victorian Gothic, such as the Fourth Doctor stories *The Talons of Weng-Chiang* (1977) in which the Doctor dons a Sherlock Holmes outfit to investigate the disappearance of women following a stage show, his adversaries include an animated ventriloquist's dummy, and the setting is the foggy, labyrinthine London streets and the sewers beneath the theatre. Another aspect I should have liked to cover are the stories that are a pastiche of Hammer films such as *Pyramids of Mars* (1975) and *The Brain of Morbius* (1976) as well as the depictions

of vampires encountered by the Fourth Doctor in *State of Decay* (1980) and which he also links to Gallifreyan mythology; they are presented as haemovores in *The Curse of Fenric* (1989), while in *The Vampires of Venice* (2010), the fishlike Saturnyns drain humans of their blood and replace it with Saturnyn blood. A further topic would be the use of abstract space, particular the Escher-style corridors in *Castrovalva* (1982) on the fact that Amy's house has too many rooms in *The Eleventh Hour*, or how many stories return to the location where the series started, Coal Hill School and the junkyard at 76 Trotter's Lane.

This discussion has demonstrated that the devices that have sustained *Doctor Who's* longevity are also those that contribute to the 'Uncanny' effect. Once a mysterious, crotchety old man in a time machine, the Doctor has changed face, body, age, personality and gender, and is now an amiable and compassionate young woman with a familial relationship with her companions. With *Doctor Who* being a cornerstone of British popular culture, each viewer will have their favourite incarnation of the Doctor. Faithful viewers of the Reboot series realise that the Doctor has a long mythology from before 2005, but even in this, the Doctor's name and origins are unknown. The signature blue box, bigger on the inside, has the ability to travel anywhere in time and space, which should be the ultimate freedom. Yet, the characters are confined by time - the consequences are that they must either observe or set events into motion. Equally familiar are some of the villains - Daleks and Cybermen are mechanised organics who have their own mythology within the Whoniverse. They are familiar, and yet terrifying in that familiarity. The same can be said of the Master who has been reinvented to catch viewers by surprise including a change of gender and even ethnicity as seen in *Spyfall Part 1* (2020). The Master is as inhuman as the Daleks and yet the character shares an as yet unrevealed origin with the Doctor. However, we have moved away from the days of watching the programme from behind the sofa. One of the messages is that fear can be enabling, but even so, the programme subtly takes familiar objects and actions and injects them with terror, making us think twice about popping bubble wrap, being alone (or, more distressingly, *never* being alone), or finding ourselves in the dark. Or being given a warning: *Don't Blink. Good luck.*

## Notes

1. Jonathan Rigby, *English Gothic: Classic Horror Cinema 1897–2015* (Cambridge, Signum, 2015), 360.
2. Jacques Derrida, 'Otobiographies: The Teaching of Nietzsche and the Politics of the Proper Name', *The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation*, ed. Christie v. McDonald, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1988), 7.
3. The term 'regenerate' is not used until the Third Doctor's final story *The Planet of the Spiders* (1974).
4. Monica Germanà, 'In and Outside Post-devolution Scotland: Scottish National Identity and Contemporary Woman Writers', *Re-visioning Scotland*, ed. Lyndsay Lunan, Kirsty v. Macdonald, and Carla Sassi (Bern, Peter Lang, 2008), 84.
5. Sigmund Freud, 'The "Uncanny"', *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 17 (1917–1919): An Infantile Neurosis and Other Works, trans. James Strachley (London, Random House, 1955), 235.
6. Fred Botting, *Gothic* (London, Routledge, 1995), 157.
7. Richard E. Grant would voice the Doctor in the BBC animated story *Scream of the Shalka* (2003) and played Dr Walter Simeon in *The Snowmen* (2012) and *The Name of the Doctor* (2013), and the Great Intelligence in *The Bells of Saint John* (2013).
8. Diana Wallace, *Female Gothic Histories* (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 2013), 132.
9. David B. Morris, 'Gothic Sublimity', *New Literary History*, vol. 16, no. 2 (1985), 307.
10. Freud, 'The "Uncanny"', 235.
11. Freud, 'The "Uncanny"', 225.
12. Chris Baldick, 'Introduction', *The Oxford Book of Gothic Tales*, ed. Chris Baldick (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1992), xix.
13. Freud, 'The "Uncanny"', 243.
14. Jerrold E Hogle, 'Introduction: The Gothic in Western Culture', *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, ed. Jerrold E. Hogle (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002), 3.
15. Baldick, 'Introduction', xix.
16. Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (London, Routledge, 1994), 10.
17. Freud, 'The "Uncanny"', 226.
18. Freud, 'The "Uncanny"', 227, 233.

19. Ernst Bloch, 'Something's Missing: A Discussion Between Ernst Bloch and Theodor  
v. Adorno on the Contradictions of Utopian Longing', *The Utopian Function of Art and Literature*, trans. Jack Zipes and Frank Mecklenberg (Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 1988), 8.
20. Catherine Spooner, 'Masks, Veils, and Disguises', *The Encyclopedia of the Gothic: L-Z*, 2nd vol., ed. William Hughes, David Punter, and Andrew Smith, *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Literature* (Chichester, Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 424.
21. Bob Trubshaw, *Explore Folklore* (Wymeswold, Heart of Albion Press, 2010), 85.
22. Freud, 'The "Uncanny"', 252.
23. Freud, 'The "Uncanny"', 221.
24. Ellen Moers, *Literary Women* (London, The Women's Press, 1978), 137.

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