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Who is Matt Smith?:

Performing the Doctor

Richard Hewett

In terms of lead characters, the Doctor is unique in television drama. Possessed of the ability to physically ‘regenerate’ his body, the nine-centuries-old Time Lord can be portrayed by actors who are both physically dissimilar to and – perhaps more significantly – personologically distinct from each other, each actor cast in the role having provided a marked contrast with his predecessor. However, while each Doctor is a ‘new man’,¹ he simultaneously inherits the life experiences and memories of his predecessors, as made clear by executive producer and lead writer Steven Moffat’s vigorous assertion that ‘there’s no such thing as eleven Doctors; there’s one Doctor with eleven faces. He is the same man.’²

This combination of re-casting and continuity presents a dichotomy in terms of characterisation. For an incoming Doctor such as Matt Smith, the question of which traits remain essential to the character must be of primary consideration, while at the same time seeking to establish those facets which will distinguish his version from what has gone before. Several elements of the Doctor remain unaltered throughout his television incarnations: essentially altruistic, he is a wanderer in time and space who, despite often paying lip service to the fact that he is forbidden to interfere, in practice cannot resist becoming involved in the affairs of other life forms. He is possessed of a huge intellect, vast scientific knowledge, and an insatiable curiosity, and frequently finds himself drawn to the planet Earth and its inhabitants. The Doctor’s status as a humanoid alien – another of the constants throughout the series³ – acts as an additional complicating factor. David Lavery has

argued that, in portraying fantasy characters – or characters involved in fantasy scenarios – any human actor is limited in terms of the personal experiences upon which they can draw, posing the question: ‘How do you prepare, as an actor, for something like that? What instructions could a director give? What method would suffice?’⁴ However, Lavery overlooks an important point; given that the Doctor’s behaviour may seem alien to human viewers, his emotional reactions deriving from entirely different impetuses, they are no less real to him for that. There is no reason that an actor versed, for example, in Stanislavski’s system of emotion memory and adaptation⁵ cannot apply these methods, summoning an appropriate response from their personal history and applying it to the Doctor’s situation to create a character who, in the words of sixth Doctor Colin Baker, ‘[is] not always going to behave in the way human beings would expect him to behave ... like not crying when a person dies, but becoming extremely angry about other things.’⁶

Matt Smith’s succession to the role of the Doctor was first announced in a January 2009 edition of *Doctor Who Confidential* (BBC, 2005-11), Steven Moffat accurately predicting that the ‘brilliant, but not famous’ actor would swiftly be seized upon as an ‘unknown’ by the press.⁷ The success of Moffat’s reign as executive producer hinged to a great extent on his new lead actor, and whether Smith’s performance chimed with the public in the same way as those of David Tennant and Christopher Eccleston under previous show runner Russell T Davies. Drawing on primary source material in the form of interviews conducted by magazines and television documentaries, this chapter will first attempt to situate Smith’s interpretation alongside those of his predecessors, before using textual analysis to identify the approaches he utilises in his performance as the Doctor. Finally, I will offer an examination of the executive producer’s role in the formation of characterisation, partly via comparison with *Sherlock* (BBC, 2010-); the drama production which Steven

Moffat co-helmed alongside *Doctor Who*. In this way the chapter will attempt to negotiate the complex question of authority and authorship in relation to characterisation in television drama, although there is insufficient space to fully examine such complicating factors as the input of other writers, and the role played by individual directors. As to the vexed question of actual intent – either on the part of the actor Matt Smith or executive producer Steven Moffat – this is difficult to state with total certainty; interview material offers a potential indication, but is always open to question. However, the use of performance analysis provides a useful methodological balance, for if we cannot definitively establish authorial aims in the creation of the eleventh Doctor, we are able at least to analyse the on-screen realisation of the character.

‘Being’ the Doctor?

Doctor Who's production turnaround has always been rapid. In the days of the original series, one 25-minute episode would be rehearsed and recorded every week (in the 1960s up to eleven months of the year), while the modern production – in which each 50-minute episode is allocated a fortnight, usually as one half of monthly production ‘blocks’ – has dispensed altogether with the rehearsal process which typified the old multi-camera studio drama process. Such pressures leave little time for actors and directors to work together on characterisation, and it could be argued that it is in fact the role of the script editor and producer (in the original series) and the lead writer (in the re-launch) to maintain continuity of character and plot developments. However, I contend that this is only half the case; rather, in *Doctor Who* the input of the lead actor has always been the central contributing factor in the depiction of the main character. This could take various forms; several of the actors to have played the Doctor have either subsequently been identified as, or have freely admitted

to, drawing upon aspects of their own personality when creating their characterisation. Original series actor William Russell has claimed that William Hartnell, when playing the first Doctor, was ‘in his own character: a bit scratchy, and a bit unpredictable; and these things came over, and he used them,’⁸ while comedian Jon Pertwee confounded viewer expectations by providing a ‘straight’ characterisation of the third Doctor which he later confessed was ‘more or less me,’⁹ even wearing items from his own wardrobe. In the case of fourth Doctor Tom Baker this process seems to have worked in reverse, the actor admitting to having carried the persona of the Doctor into his personal life, never allowing himself to be seen with a cigarette or pint of beer while in the presence of children for fear of destroying their perception of the character.¹⁰

Doctor Who’s lead actors drawing on aspects of themselves in performance could be seen as a direct result of the programme’s tight production schedule, but it was not an approach employed by all. Second Doctor Patrick Troughton avoided any discussion of his own personality in relation to his acting, stating simply: ‘I’m a character actor and I play a lot of characters ... in the end it’s still just a job.’¹¹ Troughton claimed to have created a character separate from himself, while still injecting aspects of his own choosing when planning with the production team what form this character would take: ‘I have a wicked glint in my eye for comedy and so we decided on that.’¹²

The extent to which viewers identify actors with a particular role or type can also be a factor in characterisation. Prior to becoming the Doctor, Troughton had largely avoided playing any one character for longer than the duration of a finite serial, but later leads Peter Davison and Colin Baker were already well known to television viewers when they embarked upon their respective tenures: Davison as vet Tristan Farnon in *All Creatures Great and Small* (BBC, 1978-91), and Baker as ruthless accountant Paul Merroney in *The Brothers*

(BBC, 1972-76). Rather than battle such strong audience associations, their interpretations could be read as having subtly incorporated aspects of their existing television personae alongside the established characteristics of previous Doctors. Davison later admitted that an early influence on his portrayal was the suggestion by a young fan that he play his Doctor ‘like Tristan, but brave,’¹³ while Colin Baker’s creation of an initially darker, less accessible Doctor, if not a deliberate extension of Merroney – the man viewers ‘loved to hate’ – might well have struck audiences of the time as similarly unsympathetic. Significantly, Davison and Colin Baker were the first leads to have watched the programme regularly prior to becoming actors, and upon being cast both actively conducted research by watching recordings of their predecessors.¹⁴ Each could be seen as having incorporated Pertwee’s physicality into their characterisations, though while Davison tended towards the seeming fallibility of Troughton, Baker’s performance recalled much of Hartnell’s irascibility. By the time Sylvester McCoy took over the role in 1987 there was less of a preparation period, and though the actor watched some old episodes he admitted that ‘the only time there’s been is to learn the lines and try not to bump into the ... furniture.’¹⁵ In the event, the production team’s initial decision to base McCoy’s Doctor on aspects of Troughton’s template gave way to a deliberately darker, more mysterious characterisation when the actor returned for his second year.

Like Tom Baker, whose few high profile roles had been in film rather than television, Matt Smith was not well known to viewers when his appointment was announced. Despite appearances in *The Ruby in the Smoke* (BBC, 2006), *Party Animals* (BBC, 2007) and *The Shadow in the North* (BBC, 2007), Smith’s lack of an established small screen persona with which audiences could identify or draw comparisons provided him with a blank canvas upon which to create. Interviewed by *Doctor Who Magazine* in the months leading up to Smith’s

first series, Steven Moffat was keen to align his star with actors such as Tom Baker who had utilised their own personalities, while positioning predecessor David Tennant alongside those who kept characterisation and personal identity separate: ‘David Tennant is a brilliant, vibrant, *huge*, quite theatrical Doctor, but in reality he’s a kindly, modest man. He’s not at all like that, he’s quite gentle. He’s not ‘Doctor-y’ at all’ [emphasis his].¹⁶ According to Moffat, Matt Smith represented the opposing part of the binary; contrasting the actor’s performance as career detective Dan Twentyman in *Moses Jones* (BBC, 2009) – broadcast shortly after the announcement of Smith’s appointment – with his acting as the Doctor, Moffat observed: ‘He’s brilliant in *Moses Jones*, but he’s trying to play a geezer. Matt’s so *not* a geezer. When you see him play the Doctor, you’ll just see him let that part of himself out to play.’¹⁷ In support, Moffat cites aspects of Smith the man which are also instantly recognisable in Smith the Doctor, such as the actor’s now infamous clumsiness:

Sometimes you can’t take your eyes off him cos [sic] you think there’s a sense of incipient disaster about him ... You think he’s about to fall over or bump into something. And generally speaking ... you’re right! He’s the clumsiest man I’ve ever seen! I mean, despite the fact that he’s a superb athlete, he knocks over coffees, falls over and breaks props!¹⁸

However, while Smith concurs that he is somewhat accident-prone as an individual, he sees a clear distinction between his own clumsiness and that of the Doctor: ‘There’s an elegance to his clumsiness! He just has an absent-mindedness about his body. He’s still getting used to it! ... His hands are very interesting – there’s a weird fluidity about the way he moves them.’¹⁹ Smith’s identification of a physical characteristic, endemic to him personally, which he chooses to utilise in his performance and to justify for narrative or dramatic reasons, makes Moffat’s assertions regarding the actor’s characterisation difficult to sustain, and it is

probable that they were intended as a form of interest-generating promotion rather than serious analysis. It is difficult if not impossible to ascertain to what extent any actor may or may not be ‘playing themselves’ in a role. Even the glimpses of Smith ‘the man’ that viewers are given in *Doctor Who Confidential* comprise another form of performance, the actor shown indulging in time-filling games and conducting impromptu ‘interviews’ with cast and crew members between takes.

Certainly Smith’s at times mesmerising use of his hands – arcing, fluttering and swooping to emphasise or illustrate what he is saying – is a trait present both in his performance as the Doctor and when the actor is being interviewed on screen. His reflection on the Doctor’s ‘weird fluidity’ shows that he is clearly aware of this element to his characterisation, suggesting either that it is a deliberate choice or that he has noted it while watching himself in playback. His comment while making his opening episode, ‘The Eleventh Hour’, that ‘hopefully, physically, it’s all quite kind of sporadic and weird’²⁰ to describe the Doctor’s acclimatisation to his new body indicates a calculated performance choice; how such choices inform Smith’s performance will now be investigated further.

Creating the Doctor

One factor which definitively sets Smith apart from his predecessors is that, born in October 1982 – just seven years before the original series’ cancellation – he had little prior knowledge of the programme when he accepted the role: ‘You always remember the Doctor you grew up with – which makes it terrible that *Doctor Who* wasn’t on TV when I was a kid. But I’m experiencing it now, as an adult – and I get to be a kid every day!’²¹ Like Davison and Colin

Baker, however, Smith embarked on a period of research, and in his first *Doctor Who Confidential* he clearly relishes the process of investigation that is to come:

I love that part of being an actor; I love the discovery of it, the being a detective bit ... This next six months for me is about preparation and learning ... about the history of the show, the world of the show, and soaking it all up.²²

Smith subsequently spoke enthusiastically of original series serials including Patrick Troughton's 'The Tomb of the Cybermen' (1967) and Tom Baker's 'City of Death' (1979),²³ and it is possible to detect elements of each – Troughton's impishness, Baker's other-worldliness – in his characterisation. The research the actor conducted represents a clear desire to retain a core consistency of character, and the elements outlined earlier are all present in the eleventh Doctor. However, Smith also emphasised that 'you can only ever be true to your identity as an actor,'²⁴ and this is ultimately key to distinguishing his characterisation from what has gone before – as the actor confirmed when discussing his initial audition: 'I just think it's important ... to be brave enough to make my own choices ... choices that are based on me and my personality, and my life.'²⁵

One of the most important of these choices was the eleventh Doctor's costume, the finished version of which Smith described as: 'a bit of Indiana Jones, a bit of a professor, and a bit of the explorer ... I think it has to feel like an extension of your personality, and this does, for me.'²⁶ As Moffat has said, with the addition of a bow tie 'you could tell that [Matt Smith] ... for the first time since the costume fitting started, was leaping around the room pretending his pen was a sonic screwdriver, and absolutely believing it!'²⁷ Again, Smith's description – while centring round his own personality – neatly includes several of the key, unchanging elements to the Doctor's character: the adventurer, the scientist, and the curiosity

of the explorer. The actor's suggestion of braces and a bow tie could be seen as a direct result of his research into past episodes and a particular liking for Troughton, but Smith did not limit himself to the series' history when formulating his character:

I had six months to kill, so I felt I needed to connect with the Doctor in some way ... So I thought, "Who's been the most intelligent human being on the planet?" ... Then I saw that photograph of Albert Einstein poking his tongue out and it just clicked. I found this book of quotes by Einstein ... and I started writing stories about Einstein and the Doctor.²⁸

It is intriguing that the image Smith latched onto when considering his characterisation – the elderly Einstein famously indulging in a playful, childish gesture – is the inverse of a quality particular to the eleventh Doctor: that of an aged individual, most often described in the new series as being around nine hundred years old, personified in the body of a man in his late twenties. Much was made in the media of the fact that, at 27, Smith was the youngest actor to have been cast in the role,²⁹ but his Doctor is portrayed as anything but a youth. Matthew Sweet was one of the first to note this performance potential aspect to Smith: '[He] has got a fascinating face. It's long and bony, with a commanding jaw ... He has a quality of the old man trapped in the young man's body.'³⁰

This element provides the cornerstone of Smith's performance, but when questioned as to how he manages to convey the weight of nine-hundred-plus years' experience on his twenty-something shoulders, he frustratingly relies on the actor's common standby: 'You just play the truth – the Doctor's a ... 907-year-old guy ... So I just play the truth via me. And then, whatever gravitas a 907-year-old man has, will reveal itself.'³¹ Such a deceptively simple response would seem to contradict Lavery's assertions regarding the impossibility of realising the fantastic through the Stanislavskian technique of employing personal

experience, without providing evidence of a concrete process or approach on the part of Smith, who as the youngest actor in the role arguably had the least experience upon which to draw. The idea that his performance is a purely instinctive response to the text, however, is challenged by the amount of consideration which the actor evidently gives to his portrayal; when pondering the Time Lord's motivation for his travels, the implications of his longevity, and the amount of suffering that he has seen in his life, Smith reflects:

I think the Doctor ignores death and keeps going and moving and never really dwells on it, to be honest. He recognises it, but I think he moves on quite quickly, because if he didn't, think of all the death that is on his hands.³²

Performing the Doctor

As noted by Matthew Sweet, Matt Smith's physiognomy is a definite advantage in his portrayal of an old man 'trapped' in a young body. However, Smith's own comments suggest an actor very aware of his own physicality and presence, and the ways in which he employs his face in performance are notable in several respects. The 'long, bony jaw' is made use of in moments of confusion or pondering, mouth often hanging slackly open as the Doctor processes a new piece of information or considers his next move. This expression, which lengthens and seemingly ages Smith's face, is in marked opposition to the Cheshire cat grin that more often splits and widens it when he is seen 'off duty'³³ in *Doctor Who Confidential*, giving him a more youthful aspect. Smith also makes use of his prominent brow, often keeping his eyebrows slightly raised and so creating furrows and wrinkles which belie his late twenty-something years.

However, such factors are grace notes to the overall use Smith makes of his body when playing the Doctor. One trope consistently utilised in his portrayal from 'The Eleventh

Hour' onward is a habit of craning his body forward when engaged in one-to-one conversation, head slightly lowered so that his eyes are raised upwards to peer into the face of his fellow actor. This 'peer' is used variously in moments of concentration, interrogation and – occasionally – anger, but is always suggestive of other-worldly intensity, and it is noticeable that directors have increasingly favoured shots from slightly above Smith's eye-level to maximise the effect.

Such moments usually arrive as the calm between the various storms of Smith's more physical performance, his diffuse energy often dominating the screen. This is seen most obviously in the spasmodic scenes in 'The Eleventh Hour' as the post-regenerative Doctor struggles to adapt to his new body, and the paroxysms he undergoes in 'Let's Kill Hitler' as he succumbs to River Song's poison. These are examples of the Doctor in extremis, but Smith's frequently unconventional use of his body – Steven Moffat observing that he walks 'like a drunk giraffe'³⁴ – is suggestive both of the Doctor's alien-ness and the fact that, although his mind may be centuries-old, it is currently housed in a body that possesses all the vigour of youth.³⁵ Moffat's comment that 'the lovely thing you get with Matt is a hot young bloke – a very, very handsome young man – who is nonetheless just genetically a little bit like Magnus Pike [sic] ... There's an immediate tension,'³⁶ while again redolent of promotional hyperbole, ties in with my earlier description of the actor's conscious use of his hands in performance. Moffat's comparison of Smith with British scientist Magnus Pyke, whose enthusiastic waving of his arms when explaining science for a lay audience made him a popular television figure in the 1970s, supports his assertion that, 'of the three new Doctors, he's the most convincing boffin.'³⁷

There is insufficient space here to unpack Smith's performance style in full, but hopefully this brief description shows how its various components comprise different facets

of the eleventh Doctor's character, from his alien-ness to his boundless energy. However, the actor's input, while crucial to the realisation of the on-screen character, is also dependent on the text itself, as Smith made clear when first embarking on his period of preparation: 'I'm just going to concentrate on the words in the page, and let the rest unfold.'³⁸ As lead writer and executive producer of the series, Steven Moffat can legitimately be considered the co-creator, with Smith, of the eleventh Doctor. His role will now be examined partly via comparison with the other series on which he was working simultaneously with the first year of *Doctor Who*: his twenty-first century re-imagining of Arthur Conan Doyle's *Sherlock*.

The Role of the Executive Producer

Co-conceived with Mark Gatiss, *Sherlock* reached British television screens in the summer of 2010, shortly after the conclusion of Matt Smith's opening series as the Doctor. First to be cast was Benedict Cumberbatch, previously BAFTA-nominated for his lead performance in *Hawking* (BBC, 2004), who took up the mantle of the Baker Street sleuth. However, the search for a suitable foil proved more problematic:

We'd already cast Benedict Cumberbatch and the very first person we saw for Dr Watson was Matt [Smith], who came in and gave a very good audition. But he didn't have a chance in hell of getting it cos [sic] he was clearly more of a Sherlock Holmes than a Dr Watson. There was also something a bit barmy about him – and you don't want that for Dr Watson, you want somebody a bit straighter. But he gave a very good account of himself and you could feel the effort in him clamping down on his barminess, you know, in order to do the audition! ... Then I saw him about a week later, for *Doctor Who*, on our first day, the third person through the door. And, you know, as much as he was a struggling, but brilliantly accomplishing, Dr Watson, he just utterly *got* the Doctor ... It was like he could just act in the way he always *wanted* to, as opposed to the way he always *tried* to. [emphasis his]³⁹

The idea of Smith as Watson to Cumberbatch's Holmes is as intriguing as the possibility, subsequently hinted at by the latter,⁴⁰ of Cumberbatch playing the Doctor; however, the role of Watson ultimately went to Martin Freeman, whose on-screen chemistry with Cumberbatch became an integral part of *Sherlock*'s success.

Steven Moffat was involved in pre-production and production on *Doctor Who* and *Sherlock* over the same period. An un-broadcast pilot for the latter was made in January 2009, with filming for the initial series of three episodes eventually taking place in early 2010; work on Matt Smith's first series had begun in July 2009, not concluding until March the following year. Moffat's authorial hand can therefore be detected in both series; as executive producer he was chiefly responsible for casting the lead actors for each, and as lead writer on *Doctor Who* and author of the opening episode of *Sherlock* he also created the initial character templates. There are certainly elements common to both Time Lord and detective, not least their enormous intellect; in their respective introductory adventures both the Doctor and Sherlock encounter a companion who is impressed by their abilities and, although less cerebral, helps compensate for their 'lack' in terms of humanity. Mentally, both men exist in a world inaccessible to those around them, and behave in a manner that, while seeming eccentric to others, is normality itself to them. Each is an animated talker in moments of excitement – words tumbling over themselves faster than their thoughts can form – and both frequently converse with themselves; they are usually the only people capable of understanding their train of thought. Indeed, some sections of script from the two series are almost interchangeable; Sherlock's gabbled line: 'Oh that was clever. Was it clever? Why was it clever?' might just as easily have emerged from the mouth of the eleventh Doctor, and both respond to newly discovered challenges and perils alike with the delighted exclamation: 'This is Christmas!'

However, there are also several points of departure. While the Doctor is other-worldly yet amiable, often literally embracing those around him, Sherlock is by turns unworldly – unaware, for example, that the Earth revolves around the sun – and isolated, disdainful of a world to which he feels superior. However, he is also capable of at least playing at normality, as for instance when bluffing his way into a flat, or feigning sympathy with the wife of a presumed murder victim; a feat of which the Doctor would be quite incapable. Perhaps surprisingly given the amount of time that his former selves have spent on Earth,⁴¹ the eleventh Doctor at times displays a notable naïveté regarding its inhabitants and their foibles; in ‘The Lodger’ it is the Doctor’s inability to blend in as a ‘normal’ human being which provides the impetus for much of the narrative, and in that episode and ‘Night Terrors’ the Doctor’s adoption of ‘air kissing’ as a mode of greeting is used to comedic effect.⁴² Equally, while the eleventh Doctor is increasingly depicted as a man prepared to condone and even resort to physical violence to defend his friends, exhibiting a certain ruthlessness if removed from their steadying influence for any length of time, it is difficult to imagine him torturing a dying man for information, as Sherlock does in ‘A Study in Pink’. There are clearly similarities and divergences in Moffat’s conception of each which extend into and influence the actors’ characterisations; Moffat’s were, after all, the scripts from which Smith and Cumberbatch read for their auditions.

Matt Smith at least admits that much of his creative impetus derives from Moffat. Speaking of the moment in one of his first recorded episodes, ‘Flesh and Stone’, when the Doctor threatens the Weeping Angels should they kill his imperilled companion Amy Pond, he observed: ‘All of that vulnerability, and the rage of this Doctor as well which is in there somewhere, is all Steven.’⁴³ The fact that, under Moffat, a new dimension to the Time Lord’s characterisation has fed into Smith’s performance has been recognised by those who worked

on the programme in its previous incarnation, Alex Kingston observing of Matt Smith's performance in the same episode:

There were moments where I could see that he had tears in his eyes, and he was so angry; it was quite shocking because I've never seen any former Doctors be quite that angry and passionate and vulnerable all at the same time, and slightly lost.⁴⁴

The character's use of the word 'cool' in 'The Eleventh Hour' to describe and defend his choice of bow tie – subsequently extended to include a variety of head-gear, including a fez and a Stetson – also raises the problematic notion of whether the eleventh Doctor's defining and often comedic traits derive from Moffat or Smith. The fact that it is difficult to imagine the adjective being used by any of the previous incarnations⁴⁵ makes it particular to Smith's version, but while it could be argued that the word sprang from Moffat's pen, it is also possible that, given Matt Smith's frequent use of it 'in person' as seen on *Doctor Who Confidential*, the writer included it after observing his lead in conversation. Its continuing incorporation as a key element of the character – in much the same vein as the second Doctor's 'When I say run, run!', the ninth's use of 'Fantastic!', or indeed the eleventh's 'Geronimo!' – indicates a scripting choice, as with the repetition in 'Closing Time' of the Doctor's earlier claim to be fluent in 'baby'.⁴⁶ However, it is also possible that it was a more organic development, similar to the third Doctor's references to 'reversed polarity'; an easily remembered phrase which Jon Pertwee chose to substitute for any more complex scripted technological terminology.

Under Steven Moffat there have been a greater number of overt references in *Doctor Who* to the programme's past. Visual material has been incorporated from both the original series (including a flashback sequence in 'The Eleventh Hour', and a photograph of William

Hartnell in 'Vincent and the Doctor') and the programme's more recent history (holograms of Rose, Martha and Donna appearing in 'Let's Kill Hitler'). This trope has also been extended to performance, as when Matt Smith mimes to Tom Baker's voice issuing from the Flesh Doctor's mouth in 'The Almost People'. However, there are also less explicit moments, some of which once again raise the question of authorial intention. The eleventh Doctor's habit of referring to Amy Pond by her last name is reminiscent of the first Doctor's (frequently incorrect) mode of address to companion Ian Chesterton, while his use of a jammy dodger to threaten the Daleks in 'Victory of the Daleks' recalls the fourth's similarly menacing employment of a jelly baby in 'The Face of Evil' (1977). Whether the latter was a deliberate intra-textual reference is difficult to ascertain, and it is as likely to have originated with episode writer Mark Gatiss (like Moffat, a long-time fan of the original series) as with the executive producer.

However, the increased prominence of the lead writer, based on the American show runner model, is one of the most notable distinguishing features between 'new' *Doctor Who* and the original series. Since the programme's return in 2005 there has been a more structured development of character, as evidenced in the process of healing that took place in Russell T Davies' first year as executive producer between Rose Tyler and the 'damaged' ninth Doctor, still raw from the Time War, and maintained through the tenth's subsequent relationships with his various companions. In the Steven Moffat era such development has been taken a stage further; the Doctor is evidently still learning about himself as much as others in episodes such as 'The Almost People', and is by turns delighted and intrigued to discover that he can experience new feelings and emotions in 'The Doctor's Wife', 'A Good Man Goes to War' and 'The Doctor, the Widow and the Wardrobe'. One feature particular to the eleventh Doctor is an element of self-loathing, as revealed by his alter ego the Dream

Lord in 'Amy's Choice', while in 'Let's Kill Hitler' it becomes clear that he in fact regards himself as a somewhat negative force in the lives of his companions: 'There must be someone left in the universe I haven't screwed up yet.' In addition, this Doctor finds it much harder than his predecessors to let his companions go when their time together reaches a natural conclusion, as evidenced throughout the first half of his third series. Perhaps the most obvious example of the Doctor's continuing character development as conceived by Moffat is the process of discovery that is his relationship with River Song, commenced even before Matt Smith took over the role of the Time Lord.

The eleventh Doctor's character arc, as conceived and planned by Moffat and realised by Smith, sets this particular era of the programme apart both from the original series, when such character development was seldom attempted,⁴⁷ and even the Russell T Davies era, in which the Doctor's mourning for his lost home world, once established as a basis for the ninth's rehabilitation, was seldom developed under the tenth other than being used as a default dramatic counterpoint to his more manic moments. Smith's Doctor is superficially offhand when referencing the destruction of Gallifrey in 'The Beast Below', but his controlled anger at Silurian Alaya's pretence that she is the last of her species in 'The Hungry Earth' gives the lie to this seeming indifference. Such character beats are developed further in 'The Doctor's Wife', the Doctor's barely-contained excitement at the possibility that fellow Time Lord the Corsair may be alive turning to cold anger when he discovers the truth. The frequent Davies era positioning of the Doctor as the much-feared 'Oncoming Storm' is deflated in 'A Good Man Goes to War', River Song poignantly pointing out that his doctoral title has now become synonymous on some worlds with 'mighty warrior': 'When you began all those years ago, sailing off to see the universe, did you ever think you'd become this?' In 'The Wedding of River Song' Moffat's script has the Doctor admitting that he has become

‘too big’, the faking of his death allowing him to return to the comparative anonymity of becoming once again a simple wanderer in time and space, while reinstating the air of mystery that first surrounded William Hartnell’s incarnation in 1963: ‘Doctor *who?*’

Conclusion

Each actor to have played the Doctor has brought a new dimension to the character while maintaining the essential continuities outlined at the outset of this chapter, and from the evidence presented here Matt Smith could certainly be seen as continuing in that tradition. The development of the Doctor in the era of Moffat and Smith has in one sense seen the character brought full circle, while simultaneously adding layers and complexities not possible in the classic series due to the limitations imposed by its relentless production cycle. As a result of changes in the climate of television drama which have taken place over the last two decades, such character considerations are now virtually *de rigueur* for a continuing drama such as *Doctor Who*, and form a primary consideration for production team and lead actor alike. As Smith states:

I’ve come to think that this role is a bit like Hamlet: your own personality has to go into it, in a way. And it takes a whole process for it to come out clearly. There’s an evolution to the way I’m playing the Doctor. A gradient. I hope the Doctor’s identity will become clearer and clearer throughout the series.⁴⁸

As has been shown, the formation of the Doctor’s on-screen persona, although complicated by various contributing factors, represents a combination of inputs, drawing upon previously established traits while simultaneously exploring new aspects and areas of the character. At

the time of writing it remains to be seen what final revelations will be made regarding the true nature of the eleventh Doctor, but in light of the evidence provided here it seems probable that further significant developments will take place under the combined aegis of actor and executive producer.

¹ However, the ability of a Time Lord to switch gender was established by the Doctor's reference to the Corsair having changed sex in 'The Doctor's Wife'.

² Moffat, Steven, *Doctor Who Confidential: Call Me the Doctor*, BBC, 3 April 2010.

³ In the 2006 television movie (BBC/Fox) it was established that the Doctor is in fact half-human, though this has never been referenced subsequently.

⁴ Lavery, David, 'What's My Motivation?: The Method Goes Fantastic in Television Acting'. Online. Available <http://cstonline.tv/telegenic-method>

⁵ Stanislavski, Constantin, *An Actor Prepares*, trans. Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood (London, 2008).

⁶ Baker, Colin, 'Colin Baker Interview', *Doctor Who Magazine* 118 (1986), p.18.

⁷ Moffat, Steven, *Doctor Who Confidential: The Eleventh Doctor*, BBC, 3 January 2009.

⁸ Russell, William, 'Commentary on An Unearthly Child', *Doctor Who: The Beginning* (BBCDVD1882, 2009).

⁹ Pertwee, Jon. Online. Available <http://drwho-interviews.wordpress.com/2009/09/18/jon-pertwee-1990/>.

¹⁰ Baker, Tom, 'Interview: Tom Baker', *Doctor Who Magazine* 92 (1984), p.20.

¹¹ Troughton, Patrick, 'Patrick Troughton Interview', *Doctor Who Magazine* 102 (1985), p.10.

¹² Troughton, Patrick, 'Doctor Who Interview: Patrick Troughton', *Doctor Who Monthly* 78 (1983), p.18.

¹³ Davison, Peter, 'New TV Comedy: It's Sink or Swim for Dr. Who', *The Listener* (1983), p.13.

¹⁴ Davison commented in *Doctor Who Magazine* 106 (1986) that 'I decided that I'd like to take elements of all the previous Doctors and mould them into one (p.9), while in *Doctor Who Magazine* 97 (1985), Colin Baker admitted to having watched 'between twenty and thirty old stories' (p.21).

¹⁵ McCoy, Sylvester, 'Sylvester McCoy Interview', *Doctor Who Magazine* 130 (1987), p.8.

¹⁶ Moffat, Steven, 'The Time is Now! The DWM Interview: Steven Moffat', *Doctor Who Magazine* 418 (2010), p.18.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Moffat: 'The Time is Now!', p.20.

¹⁹ Smith, Matt, 'Eleven Plus! The DWM Interview: Matt Smith', *Doctor Who Magazine* 420 (2010), p.25.

²⁰ Smith, Matt, *Doctor Who Confidential: Call Me the Doctor* (BBC), 3 April 2010.

²¹ Smith: 'Eleven Plus!', p.24.

²² Smith, Matt, *Doctor Who Confidential: The Eleventh Doctor* (BBC), 3 January 2009.

²³ Smith, Matt, 'Just Like Starting Over', *Doctor Who Magazine Special Edition: The Doctor Who Companion – The Eleventh Doctor: Volume 1*, p.12.

²⁴ Smith: *Doctor Who Confidential: Call Me the Doctor*.

²⁵ Smith: *Doctor Who Confidential: The Eleventh Doctor*.

²⁶ Smith: *Doctor Who Confidential: Call Me the Doctor*.

²⁷ Moffat: 'The Time is Now!', p.21.

²⁸ Smith, Matt, *The One Show* (BBC), 1 April 2010.

²⁹ In fact Peter Davison was only two years older when his appointment was announced in late 1980.

³⁰ Davies, Caroline and David Smith, 'Dr Who? Big Names Lose Out to Matt Smith', *The Guardian*, 3 January 2009. Online. Available., <http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2009/jan/03/doctor-who-matt-smith>.

³¹ Smith: 'Eleven Plus!', p.25.

³² Smith, Matt, *Doctor Who Confidential: Take Two* (BBC), 28 May 2011.

³³ However, as noted earlier, the actor at these moments is still very much 'giving a performance' for the cameras.

³⁴ Moffat: 'The Time is Now!', p.20.

³⁵ The fact that the Doctor's body can grow both younger and older is established in 'The Power of the Daleks' (1966), where Patrick Troughton's Doctor discovers that he no longer requires the more elderly William Hartnell's spectacles.

³⁶ Moffat: 'The Time is Now!', p.18.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Smith: *Doctor Who Confidential: The Eleventh Doctor*.

³⁹ Moffat: 'The Time is Now!', p.18.

⁴⁰ Wightman, Catriona, 'Cumberbatch Hints at *Dr Who* Role', *Digital Spy*, 22 July 2010. Online. Available <http://www.digitalspy.co.uk/tv/s7/doctor-who/news/a248556/cumberbatch-hints-at-doctor-who-role.html>.

⁴¹ The third Doctor was exiled to the planet for the majority of Jon Pertwee's first three years with the programme.

⁴² By the later episode he has at least learned to apply it only to females.

⁴³ Smith, Matt, *Doctor Who Confidential: Blinded by the Light* (BBC), 1 May 2010.

⁴⁴ Kingston, Alex, *Doctor Who Confidential: Blinded by the Light* (BBC), 1 May 2010.

⁴⁵ David Tennant's Doctor is a possible exception.

⁴⁶ In 'A Town Called Mercy' it is revealed that the Doctor can also speak 'horse'.

⁴⁷ Colin Baker's 'seven year plan' to mellow his initially unsympathetic sixth Doctor was ultimately frustrated by his sacking from the programme after just two seasons.

⁴⁸ Smith: 'Eleven Plus!', p.24.

