



University of
Salford
MANCHESTER

Who's in charge? Changing character agency in early Doctor Who

Hewett, RJ

<http://dx.doi.org/10.6092/issn.2421-454X/9805>

Title	Who's in charge? Changing character agency in early Doctor Who
Authors	Hewett, RJ
Publication title	SERIES: International Journal of Serial TV Narratives
Publisher	Universitat Politècnica de València (Escola Politècnica Superior de Gandia/DCADHA) and the Università di Bologna
Type	Article
USIR URL	This version is available at: http://usir.salford.ac.uk/id/eprint/56868/
Published Date	2020

USIR is a digital collection of the research output of the University of Salford. Where copyright permits, full text material held in the repository is made freely available online and can be read, downloaded and copied for non-commercial private study or research purposes. Please check the manuscript for any further copyright restrictions.

For more information, including our policy and submission procedure, please contact the Repository Team at: library-research@salford.ac.uk.

WHO'S IN CHARGE?: CHANGING CHARACTER AGENCY IN EARLY DOCTOR WHO

RICHARD HEWETT

Name Richard Hewett

Academic centre University of Salford, UK

E-mail address r.j.hewett@salford.ac.uk

KEYWORDS

Doctor Who; character agency; production context; television narrative.

ABSTRACT

This article investigates the impact of production process upon character agency in early *Doctor Who*, focusing on the period between 1963 and 1966, during which time William Hartnell starred as the Doctor. As originally conceived by Sydney Newman, Verity Lambert and David Whitaker, it is debatable to what extent the Doctor could

be regarded as the 'hero' of the narrative, as this role was often better fulfilled by his human companions, initially represented by teachers Ian Chesterton (William Russell) and Barbara Wright (Jacqueline Hill), who provided a ready point of identification for viewers. This situation changed significantly during Hartnell's tenure, but the shifts in agency that occurred were so radical as to seem almost *ad hoc*, reflecting industry pressures that typified television drama of the time. The extent to which these changes were influenced by the programme's rapid turnaround are examined here via a combination of textual analysis and historical production research, before being briefly contrasted with the modern version of *Doctor Who*, starring Jodie Whittaker, whose production context allows for more considered development of long-term character arcs.

1. INTRODUCTION

Originally launched on the 23rd of November 1963, *Doctor Who* (1963-1989; 1996; 2005-) is one of television's most enduring examples of continuing drama. Focusing on the adventures of a mysterious alien known only as 'the Doctor', who journeys through space and time in a dimensionally transcendental ship known as the TARDIS,¹ the series quickly became a mainstay of the UK's Saturday evening television schedule. The programme's longevity was assured by the introduction of the concept of 'regeneration', through which the actor playing the Doctor could physically transform into another when required. In this manner the programme periodically reinvented itself over the twenty-six years of its initial run, before being 'rested' in 1990. Aside of a US co-production in 1996 the hiatus lasted until 2005, when the programme was successfully re-launched, achieving levels of popularity and critical acclaim that arguably surpassed even those of the original in its heyday.

As a result of its longevity, *Doctor Who* has received extensive academic attention. Two key texts have examined the impact of changing production process upon the programme's development: John Tulloch and Manuel Alvarado's *Doctor Who: The Unfolding Text* (1983), which covers various aspects of the show's production and reception over its first twenty years; and Matt Hills' *Triumph of a Time Lord: Regenerating Doctor Who in the Twenty-First Century* (2010), which examines the 2005 re-launch. These demonstrate the extent to which the 1963 iteration of *Doctor Who* and its 2005 successor were designed by their respective production teams to maximise their appeal to audiences of the day. Perhaps unsurprisingly, there are several commonalities between the two. In each, recognisably contemporary human characters (teachers Ian Chesterton and Barbara Wright in the original; shop assistant Rose Tyler in the re-launch) are initially introduced in their work environments, providing ready-made points of identification for the viewer, before being spirited away at the end of their introductory episode by the Doctor (William Hartnell and Christopher Eccleston, respectively) in the TARDIS. However, the very different production eras in which these versions were made also result in direct contrasts in terms of how stories and characters are conceived, particularly with regard to the type of 'agency' allocated to the Doctor, and the extent to which narratives revolve around this character.

This article will draw upon A.J. Greimas' actantial model to investigate the impact of production context on the type of agency exercised by the character of the Doctor in early *Doctor Who*, focusing on William Hartnell's tenure from November 1963 to October 1966. While any character can possess agency, i.e. the power to influence events, the aim here is to examine how behind-the-scenes production factors influenced the extent to which the Doctor can be regarded, in Greimas' terms, as fulfilling the role of the 'subject': the central agent or protagonist. It is the mystery surrounding the Doctor's identity that provides the programme's title, which ostensibly indicates that s/he² should be regarded as the central character. This interpretation is supported by the fact that, in both 1963 and 2005, William Hartnell's and Christopher Eccleston's names appear first in the on-screen credits. However, the central character need not necessarily equate with the subject in Greimas' sense, and in both versions of the programme the characters of the 'companions' play extremely proactive roles. Although, as custodian and pilot of the TARDIS, the Doctor could be read as the chief narrative driver, it is the companions' curiosity about him and his ship that provides the inciting incident for their adventures together. In the original series the question of which character is being designated as subject is arguably less apparent than in 2005, when Eccleston's Doctor, though enigmatic, is overtly pitched as a heroic figure battling clearly defined antagonists, even if the audience initially experiences these narratives through the eyes of Rose the companion. In the 1960s this positioning of the Doctor as subject is less straightforward, and the type of agency exercised by the character shifts significantly during Hartnell's three years in the role. As will be seen, in the first year of production the subject role was frequently better fulfilled by companions Ian Chesterton (William Russell) and (to a lesser extent) Barbara Wright (Jacqueline Hill), while the second year saw a transition as the Doctor began to adopt a more conventionally heroic position. In the third year the Doctor's agency, despite the character having been more clearly positioned as the subject, was again reduced, due to Hartnell's failing memory and poor overall health, and his heroic duties largely devolved to a new companion, space pilot Steven Taylor (Peter Purves). These shifts in character roles and agency were at times so radical as to seem almost *ad hoc*, reflecting the industrial pressures that characterised television drama production of the time.

1 Time And Relative Dimensions In Space.

2 From 2018 the Doctor was played by female actor Jodie Whittaker.

2. DEFINING THE SUBJECT: AGENCY AND CHARACTER ACTANTS

H. Porter Abbott defines agency as “the capacity of an entity to cause events (that is, to engage in acts). Characters by and large are entities with agency” (2002: 187). Elsewhere, semi-otician A.J. Greimas’ actantial narrative model provides six fundamental character ‘actants’, which are outlined in three binary pairings: subject/object; sender/receiver; and helper/opposer (1983: 197-221). The subject is typically the hero, who embarks on a quest at the behest of the sender. The opposer, opposition or opponent is a character or entity that attempts to hinder the subject, and the helper the person or entity that assists the subject in achieving their object; the receiver is the beneficiary of the subject’s successfully completed action. When that action is complete, the subject can be seen to have ultimately exerted a greater degree of agency than the opposer, even if they were reliant on the agency of a helper to achieve this. *Doctor Who* seldom features a clearly demarked sender in Greimas’ sense,³ but though the subject, opponent, helper, object and receiver functions can be applied to early episodes, their allocation is not always along the lines that might be expected. The central focus here will be on the question of whether the character of the Doctor can be regarded as the subject in *Doctor Who* when compared with the companion characters, and the extent to which his position as central agent (or otherwise) was influenced by production factors.

3. PRODUCTION CONTEXT

Doctor Who was originally produced by BBC Drama’s Serials department, and the on-going nature of both its television narratives, which are best understood today as a series of serials, and its production process provide a marked contrast with the more carefully managed schema of the modern production, which follows more of an episodic series format.⁴

In the 1960s each 25-minute episode of *Doctor Who* was pre-recorded on videotape, usually around a month prior to transmission. Episodes were broadcast on a weekly basis for more than ten months of the year. If an actor was unavailable

3 An exception is the “The Key to Time” series (16.01-26), which sees the Doctor dispatched on a mission by the White Guardian.

4 While individual *Doctor Who* serials were not given titles until ‘The Savages’ in 1966, this article refers to them by the names under which they were subsequently released on DVD.

for studio recording days due to illness or being away on holiday, the character could be written out for the episode(s) in question, or their scenes pre-recorded on 16mm film (typically used for location work and special effects sequences) that would then be inserted during the studio videotape recording.⁵ This means that in some 1960s episodes the Doctor is entirely absent, due to Hartnell being unavailable for recording.⁶ This situation is difficult to imagine in the modern era, when episodes are recorded much further in advance of transmission, and actor schedules can be more carefully planned around. Following the 2005 re-launch it was not unusual to include ‘Doctor-lite’ episodes in which the Doctor featured less prominently, in order to allow the lead actor some respite from the production schedule without removing the character entirely. For example, in “Father’s Day” (1.08) and “Turn Left” (4.11) the narrative is largely driven by, respectively, the companions Rose and Donna Noble (Catherine Tate), while in “Love & Monsters” (2.10) and “Blink” (3.10) the guest character of Elton (Marc Warren) takes on the subject role for the majority of the episode, before the Doctor appears towards the close as a *deus ex machina* to facilitate episodic resolution.

The rapid production turnaround and high number of episodes recorded in the 1960s, although extremely pressurised by modern standards, were typical of their time, and provide a marked contrast with the 2005 production, for which just thirteen 50-minute episodes and one feature-length Christmas special were recorded in a single year. The 1963 production team consisted of Head of Drama Sydney Newman, producer Verity Lambert, associate producer Mervyn Pinfield and story editor David Whitaker, though Newman adopted more of a watching brief after the first two serials, leaving Lambert and Whitaker to commission scripts from a pool of freelance writers. In 2005 the series was re-launched by executive producers Julie Gardner and Mal Young and producer Phil Collinson who, along with fellow

5 Examples include Carole Ann Ford’s appearance in “The Warriors of Death” (1.28) and “The Bride of Sacrifice” (1.29) (“The Aztecs”), and William Russell’s in “Guests of Madame Guillotine” (1.38) and “A Change of Identity” (1.39) (“The Reign of Terror”).

6 Hartnell was on holiday during recording of: “The Screaming Jungle” (1.23); “The Snows of Terror” (1.24); “The Search” (2.28); “The Meddling Monk” (2.37); “The Sea Beggar” (3.23); “The Hall of Dolls” (3.31); and “The Dancing Floor” (3.32). He also missed “The End of Tomorrow” (2.07) due to injury and “The Tenth Planet: Episode 3” (4.07) due to illness. His appearance in “The Singing Sands” (1.15) was reduced due to being ill during rehearsals. Other episodes in which he was present for recording but did not, for reasons unknown, feature prominently are episodes “The Abandoned Planet” (3.20) and “Destruction of Time” (3.21) of “The Daleks’ Master Plan” and episode three (3.40) of “The Savages”.

executive and 'showrunner' Russell T. Davies, were responsible for the commissioning of stories and overall shaping of series (also known as 'seasons'). The modern showrunner also writes the majority of the stories, arguably resulting in an increased sense of authorial 'voice' and greater opportunity for the long-term crafting of characters than was possible in 1963.

4. YEAR 1: 1963-1964

For the first series of *Doctor Who*, broadcast from November 1963 to September 1964, the regular cast comprises (in typical order of billing): the Doctor, Ian, Barbara, and Susan (Carole Ann Ford), the Doctor's granddaughter, who it is indicated is also an alien. According to Stephen Heath's interpretation of Greimas' model, a single actant function can be performed by more than one agent, while one character can perform multiple actant roles (1981: 179). This is useful when considering which of the regular quartet can be considered the main subject (or subjects). While it has since become an established trend in *Doctor Who* lore to refer to any regular other than the Doctor as either a 'companion' or an 'assistant' – literally a 'helper' – it is debatable to what extent Ian and Barbara are confined to this role in the early adventures, which also see the Doctor frequently acting in opposition to them. The title of the first episode, "An Unearthly Child" (1.01), suggests that the otherworldly Susan will be the focus, yet Susan has little or no agency in the story; a pattern that continues for much of Ford's time on the series. It is Susan's advanced academic abilities – and occasional lack thereof – that spark her teachers Barbara and Ian's curiosity, prompting them to follow her home one evening in the hope of meeting her mysterious grandfather. When Susan seems to disappear inside a junkyard owned (according to a sign on the door) by an I.M. Foreman, the teachers follow her inside, only to encounter the Doctor, who caustically evinces ignorance of Susan's existence until her voice is heard from inside a police telephone box in the yard. The Doctor's attempts to prevent Ian entering the box are unsuccessful, and he and Barbara force their way into what transpires to be the TARDIS. The Doctor refuses Susan's entreaties to release her teachers, and instead sets the craft in motion, taking the quartet away from twentieth century London and into Earth's prehistoric past.

Character agency in this episode is divided primarily between Barbara and Ian, characters conceived by the produc-

tion team to provide the viewers' entry into the time travellers' world and chief point of identification, and the irascible and condescending Doctor. As the audience first encounters the teachers in their reassuringly normal school environment, it is they who can most clearly be recognised as the subjects – at least for this first adventure – with Susan and the Doctor cast as mysterious outsiders; the 'other' or uncanny. It is, after all, the teachers' attempt to uncover the mystery surrounding Susan that leads them into the TARDIS, and ultimately to a series of wanderings through time and space. When first introduced the Doctor is playing the role of opponent, attempting (unsuccessfully) to deflect the teachers' curiosity in the junkyard, and mocking their lack of comprehension after they force their way into his craft. The Doctor's agency as opponent is limited to giving Ian a brief electric shock when he attempts to touch the TARDIS control console, and then setting the machine in flight when he decides against releasing the teachers. However, this act is partially sabotaged when Susan tussles with her grandfather in an attempt to stop him, resulting in a turbulent take-off.

There is little indication in "An Unearthly Child" (1.01-04) that the Doctor is intended to be read as a heroic figure, and while it is his control of the TARDIS – or lack thereof – that drives the majority of subsequent narratives, it is debatable whether this represents the agency of a subject. In addition, a brief overview of the early stories makes it clear that the Doctor's efforts to influence events frequently produce results opposite to his intention. In the second serial, "The Daleks" (1.05-11), the Doctor's ruse of pretending to have run out of mercury in order to engineer a visit to the alien city discovered by the crew results in them becoming genuinely stranded when its inhabitants, the eponymous Daleks, relieve him of the fluid link: a vital component of the TARDIS's drive. In "The Keys of Marinus" (1.21-26), the Doctor's more altruistic defence of Ian on a murder charge merely serves to further convince the court of his guilt. In contrast, when examining the roles of companions Ian and Barbara, it becomes clear that in series one it is often their efforts to resolve the situations in which the Doctor has placed them that are most effective, arguably situating them as the subjects, and the Doctor as either their opponent or helper.

This trend first appears in the second episode of "An Unearthly Child", "The Cave of Skulls" (1.02), in which the TARDIS crew are captured by cavemen. Whereas the Doctor seems ready to surrender to their fate as captives, Ian takes the initiative and strives to free them from their bindings. Only after a terse exchange with Ian does the Doctor begin

contributing suggestions that might aid him. Throughout this adventure it is Ian's and to a lesser extent Barbara's decisions and actions that achieve the group's goal of escape and return to the TARDIS, the Doctor only reluctantly acquiescing in order to ensure his and Susan's safety. At times the Doctor also acts (albeit ineffectually) to frustrate the teachers, once more fulfilling the role of opponent. When Ian and Barbara interrupt their escape to help the wounded tribe leader Za (Derek Newark), it is implied that the Doctor is prepared to murder the caveman to effect a getaway. Ian blocks this move, and the bond that is consequently formed between Za and the travellers ensures their survival, albeit as his prisoners. It is also Ian's decision to share the secret of fire with Za that enables the latter to regain leadership of his people, making him the story's primary receiver and once again guaranteeing the continued safety of the TARDIS crew. Interestingly, the act of agency that facilitates a return to the ship comes from Susan, who suggests lighting a fire under the skulls in their cave prison to deceive the tribe into thinking they have died. This inspiration, which positions Susan as helper to subjects Ian and Barbara, allows all four travellers to escape in the resulting commotion, but is of a type that will prove increasingly rare for Susan.

The pattern of the companions taking the initiative while the Doctor hinders them – or does little to provide effective assistance unless his or Susan's safety comes under threat – is continued in “The Daleks”. This story revolves around a binary between the ‘evil’ Daleks and the ‘good’ Thals, offering a seemingly straightforward opponent/helper structure⁷ in which the Thals' battle against the Daleks is triggered by the arrival of the Doctor et al, who convince them that an attack on the Dalek city is necessary to rid them of their oppressors. Here, Ian is clearly cast as subject/hero. Significantly, he attempts to inspire the Thals to take up arms against their enemies even before the loss of the fluid link is discovered. The Doctor, however, acts first as opponent, mocking Ian's initial failure to win them over, and then reluctant helper, devising a plan of attack only when he realises that the travellers will need the Thals' assistance to retrieve the fluid link. Throughout the serial, Ian and Barbara demonstrate the agency of subjects; while their arduous mission to infiltrate the Dalek city is a success, the frontal assault led by the Doctor and Susan only results in them being taken hostage.

7 This opponent/helper binary can be applied to the various characters encountered by the TARDIS crew, whether visiting alien worlds or scenarios from Earth's history.

The differing agency accorded to the regulars in these early stories is reflected in the casting of the male leads, which was in turn influenced by the initial series concept. Written in March 1963, BBC Script Department writer C.E. ‘Bunny’ Webber's earliest notes for what would evolve into *Doctor Who* list just three main characters: “THE HANDSOME YOUNG MAN HERO (first character) ... THE HANDSOME WELL-DRESSED HEROINE AGED ABOUT 30 (Second character) ... THE MATURER MAN, 35-40, WITH SOME ‘CHARACTER’ TWIST (Third character)” (Howe et al. 1994: 169-70). By May Sydney Newman had significantly revised this list, which now comprised ‘Dr. Who’ (who had clearly become the main character in Newman's mind) (Howe et al. 1994: 43), 15-year-old Bidy (later Sue, then Susan, included at Newman's behest), Miss McGovern/Lola (later Barbara) and Cliff (later Ian) (Howe et al. 1994: 174). The primacy given here to the male characters is not untypical of the time, other popular evening drama productions of the day being focused around male protagonists, e.g. *Maigret* (1960-1963); *Dr Finlay's Casebook* (1962-1970); *Z-Cars* (1962-1978). However, there is clearly already a conceptual tension between the central character and the ‘hero’. While ‘Dr. Who’ is “senile but with extraordinary flashes of intellectual brilliance”, Cliff/Ian is “physically perfect, strong and courageous, a gorgeous dish” (Howe et al. 1994: 43). This contrast is reflected in the casting of Williams Hartnell and Russell. Although Hartnell, who as already stated received top billing, had a higher profile in terms of film roles, he had not truly been a ‘leading man’ since appearing in a series of light comedy shorts in the 1930s, and was seldom cast in a traditional heroic mould. His film work in the 1940s and 1950s largely consisted of second leads and supporting character roles, whether playing police detective Harris, tracking down Rex Harrison's ‘innocent on the run’ in *Escape* (1948), or gangster Darrow, villainous second fiddle to Richard Attenborough's Pinkie Brown in *Brighton Rock* (1948). On television, Hartnell was best known as the short-tempered Sergeant Major Bullimore in the first and last series of *The Army Game* (1957-1960). Here he received top billing on screen as a member of a sitcom ensemble, but his status as lead actor is compromised by the fact that, when he opted not to appear in series two, the programme continued successfully without him. By contrast, while William Russell lacked Hartnell's extensive film experience, his television work consisted of leading roles in popular series and serials such as *The Adventures of Sir Lancelot* (1956-1957), *Nicholas Nickleby* (1957) and *St Ives* (1955; 1960). If Hartnell was a respected character actor, Russell represented a more typical

heroic lead, and it could be argued that this status is reflected in their respective characters' agency in the initial stages of *Doctor Who's* production. Even if the Doctor was the main character, Ian was clearly conceived as the subject/hero.

Playing Barbara, Jacqueline Hill was also a well-established television actor, having had major (though not leading) roles in serials such as *Joyous Errand* (1957) and *The Six Proud Walkers* (1962). She had also starred in a number of acclaimed single dramas, including the British version of *Requiem for a Heavyweight* (*BBC Sunday-Night Theatre*, 8.13, 1957), opposite a young Sean Connery. Perhaps reflecting this range, the character of Barbara is accorded greater agency in some stories than others, her background as a history teacher proving useful during adventures set in the past. She is also arguably given greater depth of characterisation than most other original series characters. There are, for example, hints of a romance with Ganatus (Philip Bond), a Thal helper, in "The Daleks", followed by an implied attraction to Leon Colbert (Edward Brayshaw), a French Revolution opponent posing as a helper, in "The Reign of Terror" (1.37-42). However, these character subtleties largely disappear in the second series, when Barbara and Ian begin sharing subject agency more equally with the Doctor. The series one serial in which Barbara is given the greatest scope for subject agency is "The Aztecs" (1.27-30). After landing in fifteenth century Mexico, Barbara is mistaken for the human incarnation of the goddess Yetaxa. Drawing upon her extensive knowledge of the period, Barbara determines to use her newfound influence to encourage the Aztec people to break away from the tradition of human sacrifice. Throughout the serial it is Barbara's determination to pursue this aim, despite the Doctor (now acting as helper) warning her of its futility, which drives the narrative. Barbara ultimately fails to achieve her goals, despite the potential agency her knowledge gives her, and at the close of the story she is seen to acknowledge that the Doctor in fact knows best. It is interesting to consider the allocation of agency in this story from a gender perspective. Despite the fact that Barbara is given the lion's share of narrative action in "The Aztecs" and – like the Doctor in earlier stories – is unable to influence events in the way she would wish, her failure here is predestined; a fact the Doctor is first to point out.

As stated earlier, Susan was conceived as a character for younger viewers to identify with and 'get into trouble' and is seldom allowed a significant degree of subject agency by writers. Although she is, like the Doctor, an extra-terrestrial, possessed of far greater technological knowledge than Ian

or Barbara, hers is the character most frequently placed in jeopardy, either through curiosity, a reluctance to follow advice/instructions, or physical weakness or injury. Only in "The Sensorites" (1.31-36) does Susan's latent telepathy provide her with a significant degree of influence over events, due to her ability to communicate with the titular aliens. However, this power is later revealed to be largely a result of her proximity to the Sense Sphere, and deserts her at the serial's conclusion. In these ways Susan, who arguably has greater potential as a subject than either Ian or Barbara, is instead frequently positioned as a less than entirely competent helper, and thus sets a precedent for many of the female juveniles that would succeed her in the original series run. Again, this provides a contrast with the 2005 production, in which the character of Rose is conceived by Russell T Davies as a far more proactive and independently minded female character than was seen in the 1960s.

Although the Doctor is given a less clearly heroic role than Ian and Barbara in early stories, he possesses far greater agency than his granddaughter. The teachers often rely on the more knowledgeable Doctor as helper to provide the resolution to their dilemma, as in "The Aztecs" where he eventually devises a means of gaining access to the tomb containing the TARDIS. On some occasions the Doctor alone is able to take the lead; in "The Edge of Destruction" (1.11-12), he is first to understand the cause of the jeopardy in which the TARDIS has placed the crew. It is notable that in the later stories of series one the Doctor begins to take a more consistently proactive subject role. In "The Sensorites" it is he, not Ian, that makes the vital discovery of who has been poisoning the aliens' water supply when they visit the Sense Sphere. "The Reign of Terror", the final story of the series, sees him working capably and independently of his companions, and one of the pleasures of this adventure is the comparative ease with which the Doctor, posing (significantly) as an authority figure, a Regional Officer of the Provinces, manages escapes and disguises with ease while the other regular characters spend much of the story as prisoners and refugees. In hindsight, these later series one stories pave the way for the future development of the Doctor's actantial role.

It is important here to highlight the fact that the writers commissioned for the first series of *Doctor Who* would have been working initially to the original character briefs, along with whatever guidance was provided by the production team, particularly story editor David Whitaker. As early as the unscreened 'pilot' of "An Unearthly Child", Sydney Newman had provided notes on the need for the Doctor to

be more humorous and less abrasive. While there is no surviving written evidence that the production team deliberately chose to make the Doctor into more of a helper than opponent after “The Edge of Destruction”, it is this story, scripted by Whitaker, that provides a clear turning point. However, later incoming writers such as Louis Marks, Bill Strutton and Glyn Jones had the opportunity to watch those stories from series one in which Hartnell’s character was both more altruistic and proactive, making it more likely they would write to this ‘template’. Therefore, while a character ‘arc’ of sorts emerges for the Doctor over series one, it is not the carefully pre-planned type of the 2005 re-launch, in which Russell T Davies conceived the gradual mellowing of Eccleston’s Doctor as a process that unfolds gradually over thirteen episodes. While Davies’ journal *Doctor Who: The Writer’s Tale: The Final Chapter* (2010) makes it clear that the conception of characters in the ‘new’ series can also be subject to unforeseen pressures, these are typically dealt with long before episodes go into production; a far cry from the rapid turnaround of the 1960s series.

5. YEAR 2: 1964-1965

The second series of *Doctor Who* was broadcast between October 1964 and July 1965. In the on-screen narrative the character of Susan departs at the conclusion of “The Dalek Invasion of Earth” (2.04-09), to be swiftly replaced in “The Rescue” (2.10-11) by Vicki (Maureen O’Brien), Ford’s contract not having been renewed.⁸ The penultimate serial of the year, “The Chase” (2.30-35), then sees Ian and Barbara depart, Steven Taylor joining Vicki as the Doctor’s companion.

In this series the emphasis on Ian and Barbara as subjects is significantly lessened, and many of the subtleties of characterisation seen in earlier stories are lost, as for example the occasional romantic attractions between Barbara and supporting characters. In addition, stories increasingly feature a more equal division of narrative labour between the Doctor, Ian and Barbara – though not Susan or her replacement, Vicki. It now becomes more common for characters to separate early in each adventure, leaving the Doctor to

follow his own narrative thread instead of accompanying Ian and/or Barbara. As a result, the Doctor takes an increasingly prominent subject role. While still irascible and flawed, by the time of Ian and Barbara’s departure he has become the heroic protagonist, with new companions Vicki and Steven clearly fulfilling the role of helpers.

The reasons underpinning these changes could be two-fold. Carole Ann Ford’s departure was an early indication of the many cast changes that would subsequently occur with increasing frequency. While William Russell and Jacqueline Hill opted to remain for the majority of the second series, when they left they were replaced with a single character, Steven Taylor, played by Peter Purves. Although Purves later achieved fame as a long-serving *Blue Peter* (1958-) presenter, at this time he was not a high-profile television performer, and it could be argued that – unlike Russell and Hill – he was no match for William Hartnell in terms of ‘star’ reputation. The actor/character hierarchy, less clear during the first year of production, was now more comprehensibly defined. The Doctor was not only the central character, but also the subject/hero. For his part, Hartnell showed no indication of wishing to leave a high-profile role in what had become an extremely popular series. With this in mind, the gradual shift in narrative focus onto the Doctor is understandable.

Secondly, the departure of story editor David Whitaker after “The Dalek Invasion of Earth”, combined with Sydney Newman’s gradual withdrawal as he focused on other areas of BBC Drama, meant two key figures in terms of shaping the original characters were no longer involved. While producer Verity Lambert remained with the show for another year, she did not take a direct role in the writing process, and Whitaker’s replacement, Dennis Spooner, brought a more populist approach. It is notable that, under his aegis, the series also became more generically fluid. The historical adventures began venturing into the realms of comedy with “The Romans” (2.12-15) and “The Time Meddler” (2.36-39), and while viewing figures indicate that *Doctor Who* continued to be a family favourite, much of the gravitas and depth of characterisation found in series one gradually dissipated. This can clearly be observed in relation to new companion Vicki. Following a strong introduction in “The Rescue”, in which Maureen O’Brien offers subtle shades of characterisation, the character is thereafter frequently positioned as the Doctor’s acquiescent helper, and like Susan is rarely accorded subject agency.

Following Dennis Spooner’s arrival *Doctor Who* arguably becomes a more formulaic adventure serial, while still

8 Ford has claimed she left the series due to frustration at Susan’s lack of character development: “I don’t think they knew how to write for me as they did for Jackie and Russ [William Russell]. And in a way I lost my direction too when all my lovely ideas about what I hoped to do were smashed down, leaving only a shell: a two-dimensional character instead of a many-faceted character, which would have been more interesting to watch and more interesting to do” (cited in Bentham 1986: 205-206).

retaining certain of the basic patterns established in the first year. The balance between science fiction serials and historical stories continues, and the Doctor's inability to pilot the TARDIS remains the inciting incident for each story. However, the model of Ian and Barbara as subject/heroes, embroiled in a situation for which the Doctor's knowledge or ingenuity is required to extricate them, is largely replaced by one in which the Doctor, Ian and Barbara each become involved in a central story strand, taking the role of separate subjects. This pattern of the TARDIS crew splitting up early in the narrative first appears in Susan's final two stories, "Planet of Giants" (2.01-03) and 'The Dalek Invasion of Earth', and can later be seen in "The Romans", "The Web Planet" (2.16-21) and "The Crusade" (2.22-25). In each of these the Doctor follows his own narrative path, usually apart from Ian and Barbara, before the regulars reunite in the final episode. Whereas series one typically featured characters working together to resolve narrative enigmas, perhaps with one split away from the others, in series two they spend less time as a team. An exception is "The Space Museum" (2.26-29), in which the crew remain together throughout the opening instalment. However, after the first episode the pattern of division and re-pairing is then repeated.

The result of this separation of the regulars is that the Doctor is not relegated to the position of helper as often as in series one. This role is instead fulfilled either by Susan, who is paired with the Doctor for much of "Planet of Giants" and "The Dalek Invasion of Earth", or Vicki, who accompanies the Doctor in "The Romans", "The Crusade" and, in its latter segment, "The Web Planet". Even those episodes from which the Doctor is absent still demonstrate his agency. In episode three of "The Space Museum" he is removed for preparation as an exhibit after resisting Morok governor Lobos's (Richard Shaw) attempt to cross-examine him, thus preventing his antagonist from obtaining access to the TARDIS, and so directly influencing the course of events. These stories also typically see Ian and Barbara separated early on, as in "The Romans", "The Web Planet" and "The Crusade". These companions are now rarely paired with the Doctor, who now has his own narrative to follow, whether maintaining his imposture of lyre player Maximus Pettulian in "The Romans" or counselling King Richard in "The Crusade". Only in "The Web Planet" does the Doctor become reliant on his companions after he and Vicki are captured by the Animus, necessitating their rescue by Barbara and Ian.

In this way, the subject agency previously accorded to Ian and Barbara is now shared equally between them and the

Doctor. Only in their final adventure together, "The Chase", do the travellers again work together for the majority of the story, in which the TARDIS crew is pursued by the Daleks. This story is notable for the fact that the Doctor's piloting of the TARDIS for once takes centre stage, rushing from one planet and time period to another in order to elude their pursuers. Given that writer Terry Nation would have been aware of the need to provide Ian and Barbara with a definitive exit at the end of the serial, it is perhaps not surprising that in "The Chase" they primarily play the role of helpers, and the Doctor is now clearly positioned as the central subject. Even Ian and Barbara's return to their own time using the Dalek time capsule can only be facilitated by the Doctor reluctantly programming it; his companions, formerly the subject/heroes, are now wholly reliant on his agency.

In 'The Time Meddler', the final story in the second series, the character of Steven replaces Ian and Barbara, and the TARDIS crew becomes a trio; a pattern that would be maintained for the next four years.⁹ Theoretically this reduction in the number of core characters allows for a more equal allocation of narrative action, but in fact the decrease only serves to reinforce the centrality of the Doctor. Steven, initially positioned as a brash 'action man' figure, soon clashes with the Doctor, who is irritated by his refusal to believe they have travelled in time. As a result, the Doctor spends little time in this story with his new companion, who is instead paired with Vicki. Although the Doctor is absent from episode two due to Hartnell being on holiday, he is again the main narrative driver of the serial, vigorously uncovering a plot by the Monk (Peter Butterworth), a member of his own race, to alter the Battle of Hastings. While the Doctor is foiling this plan, helpers Steven and Vicki spend the majority of the serial either attempting to locate him or being outfoxed by the Monk. Their actions have little impact on the final outcome, in which the Doctor strands his rival in the eleventh century. This scenario would be difficult to imagine for the more proactive Ian and Barbara just one year earlier, and it demonstrates the extent to which the Doctor has been repositioned as subject at the expense of his companion/helpers.

By the conclusion of series two the Doctor has clearly become the primary subject in *Doctor Who*, not only in terms of providing the central enigma, but also as an agent capable of independently overcoming narrative obstacles and influ-

9 A reduction of the regular cast had been considered in May 1964, when Head of Script Department Donald Wilson suggested dropping Barbara and replacing Susan with a younger character (cited in Howe et al 1994: 258). From 1970 the Doctor was typically accompanied/assisted by a single female companion.

encing events. Whether this was a deliberate narrative innovation on the parts of Dennis Spooner and Verity Lambert, or a pragmatic response to the departures of Ford, Russell and Hill, it was a pattern that seemed set to continue into the third series. However, the question of character agency soon became complicated due to further developments behind the scenes.

6. YEAR 3: 1965-1966

The third series of *Doctor Who* was broadcast between November 1965 and July 1966, and proved to be an unsettled one, numerous personnel changes taking place both on-screen and behind the scenes. After the third series, Hartnell then appeared in two stories from series four, “The Smugglers” (4.01-04) and “The Tenth Planet” (4.05-08), before being replaced by Patrick Troughton in November 1966.

In narrative terms, the early departure of Vicki in “The Myth Makers” (3.06-09) is followed by the introduction and near-instantaneous removal of companions Katarina (Adrienne Hill) and Sara (Jean Marsh), followed by the arrival of Dodo (Jackie Lane) in “The Daleks’ Master Plan” (3.10-21). Both Steven and Dodo are then written out before the end of the year, to be replaced in “The War Machines” (3.42-45) by Ben (Michael Craze) and Polly (Anneke Wills), who oversee the transition from Hartnell to Troughton; the first example of ‘regeneration’ (though it is not yet referred to as such).

This period also saw Verity Lambert step down as producer, replaced first by John Wiles and later by Innes Lloyd. Dennis Spooner had handed the story editing reins for “The Time Meddler” to Donald Tosh, who was then replaced by Gerry Davis. Both the Wiles/Tosh and Lloyd/Davis teams had definite (and contrasting) ideas about the direction the programme should take, resulting in a high turnover of new companions. These changes proved a source of irritation to William Hartnell (Carney 1996: 163), while the arteriosclerosis that would eventually curtail his career had also begun to impair his ability to memorise lines, making him increasingly difficult to work with. Verity Lambert sent director Richard Martin a memo protesting at the substantial changing of lines in rehearsals as early as February 1965, though Hartnell is not specifically named as a culprit (cited in Howe et al 1994: 283-284). However, her successor later recalled problems in this area: “It may well have been that [Hartnell] was physically not in the best of health and so could not learn the lines. Consequently studio days could be absolute purgatory for ev-

eryone” (Wiles 1983: 7). The idea of recasting the Doctor was first mooted by Wiles for “The Celestial Toymaker” (3.30-33), in which the Doctor was temporarily made invisible. Wiles was overruled on this occasion, but replacement producer Innes Lloyd, while enjoying a better working relationship with Hartnell, soon decided that it was time for his tenure to end (Howe et al. 1994: 316).

As a result, the type of agency allocated to the regular characters varies significantly over series three, and it is at this point that the pressures of the programme’s weekly production turnaround become most apparent. At the outset, it seems clear that the production team intend the Doctor to continue as subject. He is accorded a significant share of the action in “The Myth Makers”, and in “The Daleks’ Master Plan” takes, if anything, a more proactive role than has formerly been the case. Until now the Doctor’s function has been to respond to the peril in which he and his companions find themselves – a reactive role – but here it is he who decides to take the fight to the Daleks, announcing his intention to warn Earth of the galactic alliance that he has uncovered on the planet Kembel, and stealing the core of their Time Destructor in a bid to thwart their plans. This incident demonstrates the change that has taken place since “The Daleks”, when the Doctor was prepared to abandon the Thals to their fate. In the next story, “The Massacre of St Bartholomew’s Eve” (3.22-25), the Doctor is absent for two episodes. It is in this serial that Steven first takes on the role of subject, driving the narrative from episode one onwards. However, this is not due to Hartnell being incapacitated or unavailable, as the actor instead plays the Doctor’s villainous double, the Abbott of Ambois, whom Steven believes to be the Doctor in disguise. Then, in “The Celestial Toymaker”, the Doctor literally disappears while playing the Trilogic Game with the titular mandarin (Michael Gough). Although the narrative retains the character as mute and invisible while Hartnell is away on holiday, there is now a more obvious absence at the story’s core, meaning that Steven and Dodo transcend their usual helper roles to become subjects, forced to play the Toymaker’s games in order to retrieve the TARDIS. While the Doctor is reasonably proactive in “The Ark” (3.26-29), “The Gunfighters” (3.34-37) sees him deprived of agency by the characters of Wyatt Earp (John Alderson) and Doc Holliday (Anthony Jacobs), who adopt subject roles as they take on the Clanton gang for the infamous gunfight at the OK Corral. As a result, the Doctor is forced, like Steven and Dodo, into a combined role of helper and provider of light comic relief (which former comedy star Hartnell capably

performs). In “The Savages” (3.38-41) the Doctor is again absent from much of the narrative after being subjected to an energy transfer process, and Steven once more takes on the subject role – perhaps naturally, this being Purves’ final story. “The War Machines” then introduces Ben and Polly as the Doctor’s new helpers, and the former carries much of the narrative as he assists the Doctor in battling super-computer WOTAN.

This gradual diminution of the Doctor’s subject role is perhaps best explained by Donald Tosh’s claim that Hartnell was increasingly unable to cope with lengthy dialogue, which meant much of his exposition now devolved to Peter Purves: “[Peter] was absolutely solid as a rock, frequently at the last minute, because Bill would suddenly cut something, and you’d think ‘Nobody is going to understand the next episode at all unless this line goes in.’ So one would slide down onto the floor and very quietly slip a note to Peter” (Tosh 2011).

It could be argued that, while ostensibly positioned as the Doctor’s ‘helper’, in series three Steven begins to assume a subject status similar to that of Ian and Barbara in the early stories. This trend continues with the arrival of Ben and Polly, and in “The Tenth Planet”, Hartnell’s final story, Michael Craze and Anneke Wills are left to drive the narrative throughout episode three, as the ailing Hartnell was unable to attend rehearsals and recording. It is clear here that Hartnell’s absence is unplanned, as some of the Doctor’s dialogue is awkwardly parcelled out to other characters.

7. AN ALTERNATIVE AGENT?

Before concluding, there is another aspect of agency in early *Doctor Who* deserving of consideration. As already stated, much of the Doctor’s agency, either as opponent, helper or subject, derives from his piloting of the TARDIS. However, the fact that the Doctor is unable to accurately control his craft is regularly reinforced, and his efforts to return Ian and Barbara to twentieth century Earth usually result in them arriving in the wrong time zone, whether past (“The Aztecs”, “The Reign of Terror”, “The Romans”, “The Crusade”) or future (“The Dalek Invasion of Earth”). This still represents agency, in that the Doctor is able to influence events; however, it is not in the manner he intends. Perhaps as significantly, it is the TARDIS’s arrival at each new location that provides the trigger for subsequent narrative developments, and many adventures in the first series revolve around the fact that the Doctor and his friends have either been physical separated from their ship

(“The Aztecs”, “The Reign of Terror”) or deprived of access to it (“Marco Polo” [1.14-20], “The Keys of Marinus”). Drawing on Heath’s assertion that an agent need not be visible, present, or even a human being (1981: 179), it could be argued that the TARDIS in fact possesses the greatest degree of agency in *Doctor Who*. In Greimas’ terms, this makes the TARDIS the sender, regularly dispatching the Doctor subject and his companion helpers on their latest adventures, and while the concept of the TARDIS as a sentient being, later made evident in stories such as “The Doctor’s Wife” (6.4), is not fully developed at this stage, it is interesting to consider that this element was implicit from the outset.

8. CONCLUSION

At the time of writing, the re-launched *Doctor Who*, now with Chris Chibnall as showrunner, is launching its twelfth series. The thirteenth Doctor, played by Jodie Whittaker, is accompanied by three ‘friends’ (as opposed to ‘companions’ or ‘assistants’), Graham O’Brien (Bradley Walsh), Ryan Sinclair (Tosin Cole) and Yaz Khan (Mandip Gill), on whom she has proved more than usually reliant – again raising questions with regard to the allocation of subject and helper roles. While the developing relationship between Graham and step-grandson Ryan provided series eleven’s emotional spine, fan protest at the perceived under-use of Yaz has resulted in Chibnall promising the character a more prominent role (Jeffery 2018). While in modern *Doctor Who* this kind of character arc can be carefully planned more than a year in advance of transmission, the production context of the 1960s meant such considered developments were simply not possible, as reflected in the on-going adjustments to the type of agency accorded to the Doctor. Hartnell’s character began as an antagonistic opponent to subjects Ian and Barbara, before then becoming their helper, and ultimately taking on a subject role that continued throughout his second series. In his third year, while still ostensibly signalled as subject, his agency diminished, meaning companions Steven and Ben increasingly undertook responsibility for carrying the narrative. This article has aimed to demonstrate that this fluctuation in agency type was due primarily to the production pressures that typified the UK television industry of the day, and provides a fascinating historical snapshot of a programme that evolved character and narrative on an almost impromptu basis – particularly when compared to the more considered, long-term approach employed in the twenty-first century.

9. REFERENCES

- Bentham, Jeremy (1986). *Doctor Who: The Early Years*. London: W.H. Allen.
- Carney, Jessica (1996). *Who's There?: The Life and Career of William Hartnell*. London: Virgin.
- Davies, Russell T (2010). *Doctor Who: The Writer's Tale*. London: Random House.
- Greimas, Algirdas Julien (1983). *Structural Semantics: An Attempt at a Method*, trans. Daniele McDowell, Ronald Schleifer and Alan Velie. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Heath, Stephen (1981). *Questions of Cinema*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hills, Matt (2010). *Triumph of a Time Lord: Regenerating Doctor Who in the Twenty-First Century*. London: I.B. Tauris.
- Howe, David J., Stammers, Mark and Walker, Stephen James (1994). *Doctor Who The Handbook: The First Doctor*. London: Virgin.
- Jeffery, Morgan (2018). Doctor Who boss says three companions keeps show “surprising” – and hints at big Yaz plot for series 12, Digital Spy <https://www.digitalspy.com/tv/a25651803/doctor-who-companions-series-12-yaz/> (last accessed 15-08-19).
- Porter Abbott, Horace (2002). *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tosh, Donald (2011). “The End of the Line.” In *Doctor Who: The Gunfighters* (DVD). London: BBC.
- Tulloch, John and Alvarado, Manuel (1983). *Doctor Who: The Unfolding Text*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Wiles, John (1983). “John Wiles.” *Doctor Who Winter Special 1983/84*: 7-9.

Films cited

- Brighton Rock* (1948)
Escape (1948)

TV series cited

- The Adventures of Sir Lancelot* (1956-1957)
The Army Game (1957-1961)
BBC Sunday-Night Theatre (1950-1959)
Dr Finlay's Casebook (1962-1970)
Doctor Who (1963-1989)
Doctor Who (2005-)
Joyous Errand (1957)
Maigret (1960-1963)
Nicholas Nickleby (1957)
The Six Proud Walkers (1962)
St Ives (1955)
St. Ives (1960)
Z-Cars (1962-1978)

