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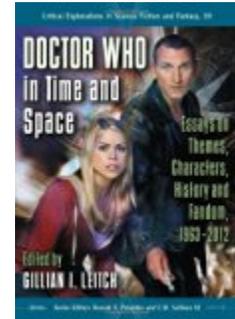
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Gillian I. Leitch, ed. *Doctor Who in Time and Space: Essays on Themes, Characters, History and Fandom, 1963-2012*. Critical Explorations in Science Fiction and Fantasy Series. Jefferson: McFarland, 2013. 300 pp. \$45.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7864-6549-1.

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In less than a month, millions of fans around the world will join in the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of *Doctor Who*—the longest-running science fiction TV series in the world. Anniversary parties have been scheduled, tickets for special events and screenings have been long sold out, and the rumors abound as the show approaches the anniversary episode. Therefore the publication of Gillian I. Leitch’s collection, *Doctor Who in Time and Space*, could not have been timelier.

The Doctor is an alien from Gallifrey, a now-extinct planet populated by Time Lords—humanoid beings that can see time in a nonlinear way and are able to time travel. The Doctor travels in the TARDIS—an advanced ship, which possesses a degree of sentience and can transport its occupier to any point in time and space. From the outside, the TARDIS looks like a 1960s London police box, but it is much bigger on the inside. In most cases, the Doctor travels around the universe with a human companion, or companions, most of whom are female and British. In each adventure (which sometimes span across two or more episodes), the Doctor and his companions discover new destinations, overcome dangers, and avert disasters. The show first aired on the BBC on November 23, 1963, and ran to 1989. It gained a cult following in Great Britain and around the world, and developed a parallel universe of books, magazines, and radio shows that explores the Doctor’s adventures off the screen. The BBC relaunched the series in 2005 and since then *Doctor Who* has gained millions of new followers and led to the creation of two spin-off series. Eleven actors have played the role of the Doctor so far. The transition from one incarnation of the Doctor to another happens through regeneration—a biological ability of the Time Lords to un-

dergo a transformation into a new physical body (and new personality) when they are old or mortally wounded.

Leitch’s collection contains sixteen essays exploring different aspects of the *Doctor Who* phenomenon. No justice can be done to the variety of theoretical, thematic, and methodological approaches of the contributions in the short space of a single review. Therefore I will focus on several recurring themes and will conclude with comments on the volume as a whole. The opening section of the collection focuses on the “Whovians”—the committed fans of the series who watch the show; follow off-screen plot developments; and socialize with each other through fan groups, fanzines, conventions, and the Internet. The first two contributions, authored by Andrew O’Day, are based on scores of interviews with *Doctor Who* fans and trace how the “social spaces of fandom” have changed from the 1960s to the Internet age. O’Day explores how the technological developments altered how fans come together to view the series, exchange views, and celebrate their favorite characters. Aaron Gulyas examines fan culture in the years between 1990 and 2005, when the BBC did not produce new television installments of *Doctor Who*. He argues that during this period the fandom of the show grew even stronger, as fans helped the Doctor to gain a life of his own by creating an independent universe of fanzines, books, and magazines, and took ownership of the character.

The lion’s share of the volume is dedicated to analyzing the series’ narrative aspects. Taken together, these contributions reflect the myriad ideas in *Doctor Who* and suggest that the series’ strength and continuous success reside in its ability to address complicated contemporary

and universal issues in a meaningful way. Kieran Tranter's contribution contends that one of the main reasons behind the series' success is its treatment of the idea of time. The character of the Doctor does not belong to any particular time, but also has a personal history, which is closely linked to the personal history of his fans, who remember following the Doctor's adventures at specific instances in their lives. Tranter argues that in being both "timeless and timefull," the Doctor represents the notions of Western time and conveys to his audiences the tension and the hope embodied in life "gifted with memory and chronology" (p. 83). Paul Booth shows that since the return of the series in 2005, the idea of time travel came to play a central role in its narrative and became more complicated. This change, Booth contends, reflects the change in our cultural sensibilities and the multilayered experience of "the contemporary digital citizens" who are accustomed to straddling multiple narratives, times, and media (p. 109). Kristine Larsen's essay explores how the post-2005 *Doctor Who* TV series and novels address another central issue in contemporary culture: "our obsession ... with old postponing death and old age beyond the nature's prescriptions" (p. 158). Larsen demonstrates how the stories of numerous characters that the Doctor encounters on his travels demonstrate that the quest for immortality is always dangerous and mostly futile. Other stories, focusing on characters that manage to become immortal, represent the burdens and the losses that immortality brings and convey the message that death and fear of it are central to being human.

All *Doctor Who* commentators notice that "Britishness" and "British" experiences are central to the narrative of the series and its look and feel. Maura Grady and Cassie Hemstorm's contribution argues that this particular aspect of the series, coupled with the theme of time travel, helped *Doctor Who* audiences to come to terms with the loss of the British Empire and the political and socioeconomic changes that Britain had undergone after the end of the Second World War. Focusing on the first decade of *Doctor Who*, the authors demonstrate that the series allowed its viewers to indulge their nostalgia for a colonial past, but also helped them to imagine a present and a future where Britain continues to play an important role in the world. While Grady and Hemstorm contend that the series eventually promoted a more thoughtful and critical approach to Britain's history of colonialism, J. M. Frey's piece maintains that the show remains deeply steeped in colonial sensibilities. Frey examines how Canada's representations in *Doctor Who* and its companion series, *Torchwood*, have been replicating colo-

nial attitudes. He argues that although Canadian talent and funding have been playing an important role in the production of both series, Canada remains marginalized in the shows and in the academic discourse surrounding them. Frey calls to "break the colonialist hold on the program" and to give more prominence to Canadian locations and talent, and thus, to reward the Canadian fans, who subsidize both shows with their tax money (p. 65).

The gender politics in *Doctor Who* remain one of the most heated controversies surrounding the show. The last three essays in the collection dive into the debate by exploring some of the Doctor's female companions. Antoinette F. Winstead examines the first three companions in the post-2005 series: Rose, Martha, and Donna. Winstead argues that all three characters pose a sharp contrast to the earlier female leads, who most often embodied the traditional gendered model of a naïve damsel in distress waiting to be saved by the Doctor. By contrast, the new companions are strong women, who make their own choices and join the Doctor's adventures as equal partners. Throughout the series, each of these characters develops further and uses her travels as an opportunity "to grow and expand," to discover her own strengths and qualities, and to attain independence and self-realization (p. 228). Sherry Gin's contribution demonstrates how the path for a strong female lead was laid out in the mid-1970s by Sarah Jane Smith—one of the most popular of the Doctor's companions. Joining the show in 1973, the character of Sarah Jane embodied the new feminist woman: she insisted on being treated equally and participating in all the action. Gin shows that during Sarah Jane's tenure as the Doctor's companion and in her subsequent appearances in the *Who* universe (including her own spin-off series), she offered "many positive exemplars of being a woman living life on her own terms" (p. 250). Lynnette Porter's piece explores the contested gender politics in *Doctor Who* by analyzing the controversy surrounding the character of Amy Pond—one of the most recent companions. Porter compares Amy's character with other companions in the post-2005 series and traces the debates around Amy's sexuality, her relationship with the Doctor, and the type of womanhood she embodies. Some feminist critics contend that the emphasis on Amy's sexuality and hints at her romantic interest in the Doctor objectifies her character and reinforces traditional gender roles. Others stress that Amy's character actually challenges traditional stereotypes and highlight her independence and influence over the Doctor.

From the very first pages, it is evident that this volume is a labor of love. All of the contributors appear to

be fans of *Doctor Who* and each essay exhibits a happy coexistence of intellectual rigor and passion for its subject matter. At times, it is difficult to see what binds these fascinating pieces together, aside from the obvious connection to the series. Usually the thematic core of a collection is laid out in its introduction and its conclusion. In the case of this volume, the introduction promises “essays which represented the many aspects of the series” and provides a brief summary of each contribution, but does not explain how the individual essays fit together (p. 1). The volume has no concluding remarks and thus misses an opportunity to present reflections that would transcend the sum of its parts. As a result, it is unclear how the volume as a whole engages with or contributes to the discussion of the larger questions related to *Doctor Who* as a cultural and media phenomenon. For example, what makes this very “British” show so appealing to millions of people around the world? How does the success of *Doctor Who* complicate the ongoing discussion about the future of “traditional” television and viewing practices in the Internet age? While several individual contributors grapple with these and other broad questions related to the series, the volume as a whole does not propose a comprehensive approach that would help the reader piece the insights together. These reservations notwithstanding, the volume gives its readers plenty to chew on and offers the fans of *Doctor Who* new horizons to explore as they await the fiftieth anniversary episode.

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