**Bringing *Doctor Who* back for the masses: regenerating cult, commodifying class**

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Reviving *Doctor Who* (UK 2005–) for British television was a difficult task. Generating large audiences early on Saturday evenings was challenging for the BBC, facing competition from ITV and audience fragmentation. The regenerated series needed to engage the original series’ fans and attract new audiences. Through analysis of industry, text, publicity and stardom, this essay argues that to attract new audiences the BBC foregrounded authorial style and stardom which lead to positive working class representations. I argue that once successful, its working class narratives diminished, commodified in the process of making cult television mainstream.

The return of *Doctor Who* (UK 2005–)*,* one ofthe most iconic British television sf series, generated audience ratings that had become the exception rather than the rule. The average overnight ratings for the first new episode ‘Rose’ (17 Mar 2005) were 9.9 million viewers, peaking at 10.5 million.[[1]](#footnote-1) The original version of *Doctor Who* ran from 1963 to 1989, while the ‘regenerated’ version is still running and is now seen as one of the BBC’s leading global export products (see Johnson). The show follows the adventures of the Doctor, a traveller in time and space who has the ability to regenerate his body, enabling the actor playing him to be replaced many times over, thus giving the series a longevity not enjoyed by many sf television programmes.

For the launch of the first season of the new series,[[2]](#footnote-2) the Doctor’s outward appearance changed more radically than it ever had with previous regenerations. In the original series, the Doctor’s varying incarnations referenced him initially as older and cantankerous (William Hartnell), a clown (Patrick Troughton) then later harlequinesque (Colin Baker). More consistently, however, throughout his original incarnations, the Doctor maintained visual references through his costumes to notions of the eccentric ‘gentleman’, a figure deeply enmeshed in a cultural heritage of the British middle and upper[[3]](#footnote-3) classes. In the new series, the ninth Doctor (Christopher Eccleston) was unveiled with a more relaxed urban and fashion-conscious image, appearing in a leather jacket, T-shirt and large black boots. With Eccleston also came a non-RP accent from Salford in Northern England. Although not the first time the Doctor has had a non-Southern English accent, this was the first coupling of a visual and an accent change. This distanced the Doctor from both the southern English RP accent with its cultural capital and associations with ‘poshness’, and from the more formal ‘gentlemanly’ attire of the original series. Since Eccleston’s incarnation, the BBC and its various production teams have rarely made the Doctor’s image one with such distance from the middle to upper class connotations of his original identity.

In this essay I consider the tensions created by the desire to revive *Doctor Who*’scult status and the industrial needs to make the series a mainstream – then global – success, and the fate of class narratives and representations in these ambitions. I approach class in terms of its representation and consider how it has featured across the new and original series. In doing so, I argue that the industrial demands on the new series to appeal to new viewers meant that it was at its most inclusive in terms of working class representations when it re-launched, helping to revive its cult status, while securing the audience needed to survive. I suggest that once successful, the series’ returned to a middle and upper class imaginary in tune with the increasing normalisation of middle class identities and the recuperation of the classed archetype of the ‘English gentleman’.

In this article, I will first consider class in relation to its representation in *Doctor Who*, then analyse the original series of *Doctor Who* and the class identities and representations it foregrounded. I will consider the launch of the new series to that context and, finally, reflect upon the tone of the new series subsequent seasons in relation to class.

**Class, British television and *Doctor Who***

Class is often under-played as a structuring force in the UK, yet research suggests it is still a powerful social institution that affects people’s life chances (Morley 488). Class as a system, although structuring in its nature, still shifts in terms of its material and cultural makeup. Mike Savage and his colleagues have recently proposed an approach to class to capture these complexities – one that takes account of not only employment, the focus of previous sociological models of class in the UK, but also of cultural, social and economic capital. Therefore, the way we present ourselves, dress, speak, our education and tastes are part of what puts us in these groups and therefore affects our place in the relational fields of society (Bourdieu). Indeed, the continued ubiquity and power of class to position us is both evident in, and reproduced through, much British television output. This has led to a body of work that considers how class at a representational level can position us (Biressi and Nunn; Morley; Skeggs; Wood and Skeggs). The judgement of working class lives is perhaps most apparent in the reality makeover show, a sub-genre that became increasingly dominant at the time of the *Doctor Who* re-launch, such as *10 Years Younger* (UK 2004–), *Ladette to Lady* (UK 2005–8) and *Snog, Marry, Avoid* (UK 2008–). The modus operandi for these series is usually that those marked as ‘ordinary women’, a euphemism for the working classes (Skeggs 627), endure a process of surveillance and transformation to ‘improve’ their current identity through image advice. Indeed, increasingly, middle class identities dominate British television, and in many cases the implicit suggestion is that they are the ‘normal’ identities (Wood and Skeggs 230). In a television culture that often subjects those from working class or poorer backgrounds to shaming, programmes that can disrupt the dominance and ‘naturalisation’ of the middle classes and offer positive narratives around working class cultures are important (Morley 503).

Class representation in the new *Doctor Who* has received less critical attention than other facets of identity.[[4]](#footnote-4) Notableexceptions would be references to class in James Chapman’s social and cultural history of the series and Piers Britton’s discussion of the class implications of the Doctor’s association with the archetype of the British Gentleman. Britton’s analysis of the Doctor’s class image across the new and old series rather neatly argues that several previous accounts of class in *Doctor Who* have all too often defined the series ‘through the adversarial relationship of upper and lower, or the classes and the masses’ (29). He cites Nicholas Cull’s and his positioning of the Doctor’s of the early original series as ‘upper middle class’ and Chapman’s account of the fourth Doctor as bohemian but ‘upper class’ (31), both of which he argues suggest a ‘them and us’ approach to class relations. Of the series narrative in a broader sense, Britton also notes that an upper versus lower class analysis misses the tensions clearly expressed within the series of the pressure the middle classes felt from above and below in the late 1960s and 1970s, ‘crushed between an unwieldly state and growing trade union militancy’ (40). In this way, Britton’s overall argument is that the conflicting versions of narrative around class in *Doctor Who* over time, and the complexity of the representations of class beyond a dichotomised and conflictual version of class analysis, mean that it is difficult to suggest that *Doctor Who* has taken a classed position. Britton rightly highlights the complexity of class and the dangers of a ‘them and us’ approach to class, but less attention is paid to the broader picture of class and the television landscape in relation to what is – and is not – included in the series in terms of positive, and even frank depictions, of working class and poor lifestyles. Building on Britton’s work, I am interested in the way class inevitably does and does not manifest itself through markers and cultural references across the original and new series. In the way that critical questions around the quality of *Doctor Who*’srepresentations of gender, race and British identity have been asked, I want to pose similar questions in relation to class. I will begin at the very beginning, where the template for much of what shaped the original series – and much of the new series – was developed.

**The original series – a ‘classy’ gent for the masses**

The original *Doctor Who* did not exclude representations of the working classes, but middle and upper class identities were dominant. As Kim Newman notes, Coal Hill, the name of the school that features in the first episode, ‘An Unearthly Child’ (23 Nov 1963), along with its location in London’s Shoreditch and ‘its lack of uniform, mix of boys and girls’ (11) suggest that it is a state-run school in a working class district. However, we only briefly visit the school, and we see events from the perspective of Barbara (Jacqueline Hill), and Ian (William Russell) two well-spoken teachers from the school, who follow their pupil Susan (Carole Ann Ford) home and subsequently stumble into a space and time adventure. Barbara and Ian’s roles as teachers positions them as hailing from a profession still considered middle class today. The effect is to put us, the audience, in their middle class shoes. Indeed, as Mark Bould notes, in the first four-part serial (23 Nov–14 Dec 1983), Barbara and Ian’s class position is signalled by them ‘knowing better’, teaching the cavemen kindness and friendship (214). Moreover, class is further invoked by the way in which Doctor patronises Barbara and Ian from the moment they meet him outside the TARDIS; the narrative gives the sense that he sees them as no threat. His dress, which includes a hat, a large bow tie, checked trousers and a scarf, would be unusual for an older working class man at the time and would more likely be associated with the eccentric gentrified classes. Visually, he represents the idea of the aristocratic ‘English gentleman’ that was still dominant in the popular cultural imaginary of the 1950s and early 1960s. Marcus Collins notes of media discussions at that time: ‘The ideal gentleman of the mid twentieth century was upper or upper-middle class, with a good family and a public school and Oxbridge education’ (93). In this way, the Doctor’s attire connected him to the British middle to upper classes, while his demeanour – especially his condescension towards Barbara and Ian – mirrored contemporary class relations and placed a classed dynamic at the heart of the series.

The middle and upper class identities and dynamics that form part of the original structure of the series are not surprising when we consider the institutional context of the BBC at the time. During the period of *Doctor Who*’sdevelopment*,* the BBC was still in the process of adapting to the new competitive television environment initiated by the introduction of independent television services (Chapman 13). The BBC at least partially created the series in response to the need for a wider variety of programming that could compete with its new rival ITV (14). It had attempted to offer ‘lower brow’ programming before *Doctor Who*, such as *Juke Box Jury* (UK 1959–67). However, institutionally much of the BBC was still operating under the original remit envisaged by John Reith, the first director general, to ‘entertain, educate and inform’, highlighted by the desire to ensure that the new *Doctor Who* was to have ‘an educational as well as simply an entertainment remit’ (19). Moreover, it was middle and the upper classes that made up much of the BBC at the time and were therefore interpreting what was educational. As Tom Burns notes in his analysis of the corporation based on a series of interviews he conducted with staff in 1963,

BBC Culture, like BBC English was ... composed out of values, standards and beliefs of the professional middle class … Sports, popular music and entertainment which appealed to the lower classes were included in large numbers in the programmes, but the manner in which they were purveyed ... remained indomitably upper middle class. (42)

This is not to say that the BBC did not represent working class issues or lives. Indeed, its the *Wednesday Play* (1964–70) produced many of kitchen sink dramas and other social realist dramas which depicted working class Britain. However, Burns’ work does highlight the overwhelming middle to upper class make-up of a BBC creating the narratives that would see a dominance of middle and upper class identities and values through the Doctor, Barbara and Ian. However, I want to suggest the shift away from some of the middle class values around education in the series gave rise to its eventual success, after disappointing initial ratings for the series.

At the early stages in the life of *Doctor Who,* the BBC did not deem the series a ratings winner. The first episode’s ratings were only 4.4 million (Chapman xxxv). It was not until the second serial of the first season, ‘The Daleks’ (21 Dec 1963–1 Feb 1964), that *Doctor Who* found its feet and first engaged larger audiences, attracting 10.4 million viewers by with the final episode (xxxv). It was the first story set off-world and introduced the British public to what was to become the Doctor’s most famous and publically recognisable enemy. The Daleks captured the public’s attention despite, and perhaps because of, well-documented tensions within the BBC production team (Bignell 78). BBC reports on potential material for the series dismissed ‘Bug Eyed Monsters’, viewed as the lower brow stuff of US comic book sf by some in the BBC, foregrounding literary connections and favouring historical adventures. Terry Nation’s script reconciled these tensions by including references to H.G. Wells’s *The Time Machine* (1895) alongside his monstrous creations (Chapman 17–8). The Daleks thus represented a move away from a middle class idea of what was educational for children and towards more populist entertainment, catapulting *Doctor Who* to ratings success.

Despite this, middle and upper class culture continued to provide the series’ centre of gravity for much of its original run. While the Doctor retained the image of the eccentric gentleman through each regeneration, his many companions would continue to be primarily middle class judged by profession, costume and associations with the British class system. The first Doctor’s other companions included Zoe (Wendy Padbury), a librarian, and Polly (Anneke Wills), a secretary who is nonetheless positioned as ‘posh’. The third Doctor (Jon Pertwee) was accompanied by Liz (Caroline John), a scientist, and Jo (Katy Manning), a junior, but well-spoken operative from the United Nations Intelligence Unit (UNIT), and the journalist Sarah-Jane (Elizabeth Sladen), who also travelled with the fourth Doctor (Tom Baker). His later companions included the two incarnations of Romana I (Mary Tamm, Lalla Ward), Time Ladies whose costumes in particular closely associated them with British upper class identity, while the fifth Doctor (Peter Davison) was accompanied by, among others, Turlough (Mark Strickson), ostensibly a public school boy. Working class characters from Earth’s current time zone were a rare inclusion. The two most notable exceptions are Ben (Michael Craze), a Royal Navy seaman who travelled with the First Doctor, and Ace (Sophie Aldred), one of the seventh Doctor’s (Sylvester McCoy) companions. With her use of slang, bomber jacket and often-abrasive attitude, Ace – from Perivale in North London – could in some ways be seen as a somewhat clumsy middle class idea of working class representation, and as a precursor to the introduction of Rose (Billie Piper) as a working-class character in the new series. However, unlike Rose, neither Ben nor Ace were embedded in working class relationships or environments.

It is also worth noting that two companions, Jamie (Fraser Hines) and Leela (Louise Jameson), who travelled with the second and fourth Doctors respectively, in some ways hail from outside the conventional middle or upper class cultures of the period in which their stories were first broadcast since one comes from the past and the other from another world. Jamie Mc Crimmon, a piper from the Scottish Highlands of 1746, meets the Doctor after the Battle of Culloden, and Leela, a warrior of the Savateem tribe, is descendant of a spaceship crew from Earth that landed on an unnamed planet. Both were characterised as being unable to understand technology and portrayed at times as child-like, naïve and in need of the Doctor’s instruction. However, while they were thus distanced from middle class identities, they did not reflect contemporary working class culture in the way that the series relaunch later did.

Despite its middle class and gentrified preoccupations, *Doctor Who* was able to continue its success into the fifth Doctor’s regeneration. Ratings then began to dwindle across subsequent regenerations until the cancellation of the series in 1989. The Doctor returned for a television film in 1996, produced by Universal, Fox and BBC Worldwide. His resolute eccentricity was once more manifested through costume, which included a tweed jacket and bow tie reminiscent of the first Doctor. The film performed well in the UK, but it fell to the BBC and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) to bring the Doctor back a decade later, and with it dramatically transform his appearance and the generic style of the show.

**The ninth Doctor vs. Ant and Dec**

The BBC bought *Doctor Who* back to a very different television environment in 2005. The television industry in the UK had fragmented with many more channels available through cable, satellite and digital, many targeting demographically focused niche audiences for advertisers. Moreover, television had started to become multi-platform, with content available through catch up services. Mark C. Rogers, Michael Epstein and Jimmie Reeves refer to this period of the late 1990s up until the present day as the TVIII period (44). They base their classification of the period on the shift in the TV industry from the mass-market limited channel (Fordist) periods up to the late 1970s (known as TVI) to the multi-channel market, made up of subscription and advertiser paid channels of the 1990s (TVII). With that, they argue came the pursuit of niche markets through texts designed to draw particular audiences for channel brands from the 1990s (TVIII). Classification of these periods in this way, however, is not without its problems. For example, the model works well for the US industry or the UK commercial sector[[5]](#footnote-5) but for the BBC and its license paying economic model, creating programming to please advertisers was not important.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Therefore, instead of needing to create programming that would please advertisers’ drive for niche segments, BBC1, with its broad remit of family entertainment, faced the challenge of drawing fragmented UK audiences back to one place. On Saturday evenings, this meant pulling viewers away from *Ant and Dec’s Saturday Night Takeaway* (2002–), a long running ratings winner at the time for ITV, featuring two popular British comedians in a slot that advertisers highlight was popular with lower socio-economic groups.[[7]](#footnote-7) The pressure, then, to create television that could compete with ITV was similar, if not more intense, than the first launch of *Doctor Who*. In addition, for the re-launch there was a desire to recapture the imaginations of the original series and ‘expanded universe’ fan bases. Indeed, Miles Booy notes the way the new showrunner Russell T. Davies foregrounded the importance of the *Doctor Who* worlds that existed between the old series and the relaunch (177). The *New Adventures* novels, published after the original series ended, continued the adventures of the seventh Doctor and often dealt with difficult themes not previously addressed by *Doctor Who*, from Ace’s emotionally damaged childhood through to the realities of drug cultures (177). This clearly influenced the new series, especially its recreation of the urban sink estate of *Damaged Goods* (1996), Davies’s own *New Adventures* novel. It is evident from this that the new production team addressed the pressure of creating ratings and pleasing the fan base by considerably changing the show’s format, genre and lead characterisations. This included the shift to the urban working class settings that had become popular in the *New Adventures* novels but also to meet wider audience expectations of Davies’s work.

**The Doctor’s new clothes, accents and stardom**

The Doctor’s visual appearance is one of several significant changes in relation to class representation in the new series. While the Doctor always changed in terms of which aspects of his personality were foregrounded, he was always visually represented as an eccentric ‘gentleman’. For the first time in the history of the show, the Doctor wore a leather jacket, t-shirt and plain trousers, a shift in visual style that moved the Doctor away from his previous gentrified appearance. Unlike his previous costumes, this outfit would have been readily available in the casual section of a mainstream high street retailer. The casting of Christopher Eccleston also brought significant changes in relation to class, including aural connotations and associations with his previous roles.

Eccleston kept his own Salford accent, creating the greatest distance yet in *Doctor Who*’s history from the dominance of Standard English Received Pronunciation (RP) used by most of his predecessors in the original series. RP is associated with and constructed from accents in the South-East of England, and although it has changed in form over time, merging to include more local accents from the South East as mobility increased, it is still often referred to as a ‘posh’ accent (Fabricius 117). Although the Doctor’s accent had begun to move away from RP with the seventh Doctor, Sylvester McCoy’s Scottish accent was one closely associated with RP. His accent was mild, and although he spoke with rolling Rs, he used distinct Ts fitting with RP. Paul McGann’s eighth Doctor, in the one-off television movie, also moved away from English RP and spoke with an Americanised accent, presumably to appeal to transatlantic audiences. However, the narrative validated his Britishness when his companion, Grace Holloway (Daphne Ashbrook), suggested his eccentricity was related to his British origins, evoking American stereotypes of the British upper class. The ninth Doctor’s change in accent, in this context then, is significant.

While the Doctor’s costume and accent change shed the remnants of the aristocratic patrician, present even into his eighth regeneration, his shift away from middle/upper class identity was not total. Eccleston’s previous television work had been in what were considered to be ‘quality’ dramas. Therefore, he brought to the role of the Doctor the aura of a ‘serious’ drama actor, one bound up in taste connotations linked with ‘high’ culture, and this is exacerbated by those moments when the Doctor seems to condescend not just to Earth people but, more specifically, to the working classes and the poor (in ‘Rose’, for example, he complains that all Earth people do is ‘Go to work. Catch the bus, eat chips, and go to bed’).

However, despite Eccleston’s serious acting credentials and the occasional narrative maintaining a certain ‘snobbery’ to the Doctor, the BBC seemed aware of Eccleston’s Northern connections and were keen to pursue an agenda that challenged the associations of the Doctor with RP. Ahead of the relaunch, Eccleston said, in material from the BBC press office, that ‘the accent is an interesting thing … The Doctor is a scientist and an intellectual and a lot of people seem to think you can only be those things if you speak with Received Pronunciation which, of course, is rubbish’.[[8]](#footnote-8) Since his departure from the series, Eccleston has made public that when he started to play the role of the Doctor he insisted on keeping his Northern accent to avoid associations of RP with intellect and to honour his working class roots.[[9]](#footnote-9) There were also other changes in the series that were to shift its tone in relation to class, one of the most significant being the inclusion of a working class family.

**The Tylers and storytelling shifts**

The new series not only introduced Rose but also, for the first time in *Doctor Who*’s history,an extended narrative embedded in the companion’s family. Rose’s family are reminiscent of other working class television families of the era, such as those in *The* *Royle Family* (UK 1998–2012) and *Shameless* (UK 2004–13), series which foreground family bonds, friendships and community in working class cultures – in contrast to the contemporary rise of lifestyle and reality television, with their shaming of working class ways of life and their normalisation of middle class identities.

Based in a London council housing high-rise block, the poor-but-happy Tyler family consists of a working mum, Jackie (Camille Coduri), and her daughter, a shop assistant in a department store. Despite Rose’s background, she is portrayed as smart, streetwise and able to keep up with the Doctor’s pace of thinking. Indeed, she was instrumental in broadening the appeal of the series. As well as her on-screen working class credentials, she was a girl to whom many non-traditional fans of the series could relate. Moreover, the series also indirectly dealt with the transition from working to middle class life, played out in the first season when Rose returns to Earth and repeats the Doctor’s own accusation about Earth people to Mickey suggesting that all they do is ‘work, eat chips and go to bed’. As Barbara Selznick notes, Mickey sees this as Rose suggesting that he is no longer good enough, but Rose retorts that it is not the lifestyle that is better, but that the Doctor has shown her how to fight to make things better (81). Here the series foregrounds Rose feeling the tensions of a transition from Earth person to pan-galactic time traveller, a journey that can be seen to replicate experiences of those trying to work their way out of poorer lifestyles, and the changes they experience as they socialise in both new and old class groups.

While the introduction of the new Doctor through Rose’s eyes provided a working class backdrop, incorporating the larger story of her family also changed *Doctor Who*’s narrative and generic texture, shifting it towards melodrama. Rose’s relationships with her mum and boyfriend Mickey (Noel Clarke) were not merely included but had recurring storylines revolve around them. This increase in emotional storylines pushed *Doctor Who* towards soap opera. In effect, this opened up the show’s appeal beyond its traditional sf audience to viewers who might be more interested in romance or family drama – part of a broader trend, noted by Glen Creeber, to hybridise with soap (115). Aside from the industrial benefits of this strategy, the soap elements link *Doctor Who* to the wider British genre, which grew from social-realist kitchen sink drama of the 1950s through *Coronation Street* (UK 1960–) to *Eastenders* (UK 1985–) – both of which still maintain a focus on working class lives – and beyond.

**Russell T. Davies, auteurship and the ‘relaunch’ Doctor**

Although Davies often downplayed his role as the new series’ auteur, he exercised control over it in a way not previously seen (Hills ‘Triumph’ 25) and was certainly foregrounded by the BBC in pre-launch press materials.[[10]](#footnote-10) It is important, then, to consider his previous work and the expectations this produced. Prior to *Doctor Who,* he was perhaps most famous for his Channel Four drama series *Queer as Folk* (UK 1999–2000), which frankly depicted Manchester’s gay male subculture. He also wrote a number of other successful drama series, including *Bob and Rose* (UK,2001), *The Second Coming* (UK 2003) and *Casanova* (UK 2005). Coding the forthcoming series as the next in Davies’s line of serious dramas also helped to open it out and appeal to additional viewers. With that in mind, the tone and the style of the first season, with its greater focus on melodrama and social realism, is not surprising. Davies’s casting of Eccleston is also significant in framing the show in this manner since he starred in *The* *Second Coming*.

These new connotations were not just superficial marketing. For the relaunch, Davies and the BBC left much of the original series behind. As Chapman notes, the decision to not overemphasise the series’ past was highlighted by the trailers, replacing the television movie’s strapline – ‘He’s back and it’s about time’ – with the far more ambiguous ‘Do you wanna come with me?’ (193). The effect of this strategy of keeping the text open for new viewers was to set Eccleston’s Doctor up almost on a separate timeline, an alternative continuity. Rose finds him recovering from the Time War, the sole survivor of his race, a man wounded by a war. The series is about the beginning of his recovery and Rose’s part in it. Such a story, if removed from *Doctor Who*’sdiegesis, could stand alone as another addition to Eccleston’s television repertoire of ‘damaged’ men. In this way, Eccleston was a ‘relaunch’ Doctor, created specifically to function as the centre of a dramatic story that could fit within the frames and connotations provided by Davies’s and Eccleston’s previous work while also packing an initial Saturday night punch. However, once the series became successful and Eccleston departed, the pressure to attract the star’s and the showrunner’s previously established audiences decreased and a desire to reunite the Doctor with his narrative past began to dominate. This meant sacrificing the urban, less aristocratic, less Southeasterly Doctor in favour of a return to middle and upper class identities and culture.

**From ‘geek chic’ to bowties**

With the end of Eccleston’s short tenure came the need to transform the Doctor again. By the time David Tennant was revealed as the new Doctor, the series was a ratings success and warmly received by the media (Chapman 209). With Tennant came a new image, which returned him to the original series’ eccentricity and shifted him back towards middle class associations. His new outfit included a tailored calf-length coat, pin striped suit, tie and plimsolls. His dressed down appearance, connoting an entrepreneurial youth culture, could be worn to the office by a Soho media worker and then out for the night somewhere fashionable in London. A BBC press release highlighting how Tennant and the production team came up with this new look, which ‘David himself labelled “Geek Chic”, described it as ‘a huge hit with fans and critics alike’.[[11]](#footnote-11) (Press Packs, *Doctor Who* the Christmas Invasion, 2005).

The promotional use of the term ‘geek chic’ is worth considering further in terms of wider cultural trends. At the time of the second season, parts of popular cultural discourse were suggesting there was a subversion of the square/hip hierarchy that transformed the previously unfashionable notion of being an intellectual or geek into something more acceptable in youth culture. Emblematic of this discourse were such films and television series as *Napoleon Dynamite* (Hess US 2004), *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (US 1997–2003*)* and *The IT Crowd* (UK 2006–13).[[12]](#footnote-12) However, regardless of the concept’s fashionability, at its root is still the notion of the educated intellectual, which returned the Doctor to an association with the educated (middle and upper) classes. Despite this shift, the generic quality of the series retained a heavy emphasis on emotional storylines and narratives that investigated the implications of time travel on the working class Tyler family. However, with the Doctor as the engine that drives the whole narrative, his appearance and characterisation are fundamental to what the series represents and in that sense a shift back to the domination of middle to upper class identities of the original series had begun. As the series developed across three further seasons under Davies as showrunner, and new companions introduced, there was a further shift away from working class representations. Martha Jones (Freema Agyeman) replaced Rose at the start of season three. Although she was the Doctor’s first black companion, she was a well-spoken hospital doctor. Captain Jack Harkness (John Barrowman) made regular appearances during Tennant’s tenure but the implication that his character had been an officer in the military also associated him with the professional classes. Donna Noble (Catherine Tate), Tennant’s last full time travelling companion, was closer to the working classes as an office temp with an estuary accent struggling to find work, but eager to travel and open her horizons. Despite ultimately gaining immense power, her fate – unlike the younger Rose – was to return to her former life, robbed even of her memories of travelling with the Doctor. Tainted with sadness, this narrative arc intimated that her old life was both unsatisfactory and inescapable.

Although this prompt shift away from the inclusion of working class companions or positive narratives around working class culture was a notable feature of the Davies era, the most significant transformation of the series away from a social realist tone occurred when Steven Moffat took over as showrunner with season five. Unlike Davies, most of his previous television work had been sitcoms concerned with middle class lives, including *Chalk* (UK 1997), *Joking Apart* (UK 1993–1995) and *Coupling* (2000–04). He introduced more dramatic changes in style, not only in terms of the Doctor’s appearance but also in the series’ narrative texture, shifting it back to one dominated by middle class/upper class identities and themes. As the eleventh Doctor, Matt Smith’s new outfit included a bow tie, a tweed jacket and a clownish persona, reminiscent of Patrick Troughton’s era, returning to the image – albeit younger – of the eccentric English gentleman. His new companions did little to offset this return to middle and upper class markers. Although the kissogram occupation of Amy Pond (Karen Gillan) initially distances her from middle class respectability, her childhood, growing up in a large old Victorian house in the country, associates her with the wealthy English rural classes.

By this point, *Doctor Who* had become a highly successful international export. Chapman suggests that the Doctor’s renewed eccentricity is part of a return to the original series’ ‘Britishness’ against the backdrop of the new series’ growing success in the US (269). However, I would argue the process of situating the show in an identifiable ‘Britishness’, albeit through a different iconography of ‘Britishness’, was started by previous showrunner Davies (see Johnson 100). For example, in the first episode of the first season ‘Rose’, red London buses and black London cabs, both symbols of Britishness through their London associations, feature prominently. Such recurring imagery grounded the series in the UK, drawing on the ‘Cool Britannia’ Britishness of the late 1990s.[[13]](#footnote-13) Indeed, Selznick argues that Davies, and later Moffat, used different facets of Britishness to appeal to US audiences. The Brit ‘coolness’ of the Davies era foregrounded social realism, a youthful anti-establishment stance and a focus on working class lives – a formula that had found success for other British exports, including *Trainspotting* (Boyle UK 1996) and *The Full Monty* (Cattaneo UK 1997*)*. After the John Major and early New Labour governments, ‘poshness’ was out of fashion and being ‘street’ was cool (Smith 398). Therefore, although the series did flag its ‘Britishness’ before the Moffat era, Davies sought to win over the initial domestic market through markers of urban London, including its high-rises and working class culture.

With the fifth series, however, *Doctor Who* returned more specifically to an ‘Englishness’ present in the original series, one with different class connotations than Davies’s more urban and less class specific notion of ‘Britishness’. The shift from urban London to the English countryside is quite explicitly denoted by the trajectory of the eleventh Doctor’s crash-landing in Amy’s back garden, the TARDIS crossing London from north to south and heading into the home counties – a quintessentially English part of the British Isles. Thus Moffat returned the Doctor to middle England’s countryside and, through Smith’s costume and performance, to the flamboyance and eccentricity of the English gentleman adventurers of 1970s television (Chapman 277), affiliating the Doctor once more with the middle and upper classes. Indeed, the media have associated Matt Smith’s new gentrified appearance to the paradoxical return of the outdated figure of the ‘English gentleman’ in fashion seen through the popularity of the Barbour jacket and Jack Will brands.[[14]](#footnote-14) Simone Knox suggests that this was part of an effort to reclaim ‘heritage’ as cool (115), a theme that Selznick argues is another facet of Britishness important for export to the US (71). However, domestically it is also part of a ‘re-imagining of archaic status structures through popular forms’ (Smith 392). It highlights the recuperation of these classed archetypes in a television landscape replete with poverty and extreme wealth voyeurism, dominated by class difference in all but name.

The effect of these shifts away from Eccleston’s down to earth portrayal of the Doctor to Smith’s eccentric ‘English gentleman’ is matched by a shift in the make-up of the audience. [Eccleston](http://www.radiotimes.com/news/tag/christopher%20eccleston) had a large working-class (DE) audience that made up more than 28 per cent of his viewers. Two Doctors later and that number had fallen to 23 per cent for [Matt Smith](http://www.radiotimes.com/news/tag/matt%20smith) while it seems the upper-middle and middle classes have taken to him. Just 23 per cent of Eccleston’s audience were AB versus 27 per cent of Smith’s.[[15]](#footnote-15) In the Doctor’s latest regeneration,played by Peter Capaldi, there has been some movement away from the focus on the Englishness of the Doctor, with Capaldi – unlike Tenant – retaining his own Scots accent. There has also been some discussion of the ways in which his costume, particularly his Crombie overcoat and Doc Marten boots, recalls mod subculture. However, it is also been noted that is outfit denotes not only Englishness, but also expensive tastes, in its origins.[[16]](#footnote-16) Moreover, while these mod allusions perhaps hint at working class roots, the significantly older Capaldi, dressed in a shirt and jacket with a velvet lining, is visually the closest to the Hartnell’s first Doctor since Pertwee’s third Doctor. With the BBC’s latest announcement of the launch of *Class*,[[17]](#footnote-17) a spin-off series based at Coal Hill School, there is the potential that positive working class representations will be foregrounded once more.

**Conclusion**

Matt Hills argues that, like the film industry, the television industry designs texts to have dispersible moments (‘Dispersible’ 29). In this way, production teams work to incorporate various moments into an episode to appeal to a cross section of audiences, including different age groups, men, women, cult fans and so on. To this list, I would add appeal to those with different generic interests and from different class groups. The need to prove *Doctor Who* a ratings winner at the time of relaunch was a key driver in making the text as dispersible as possible, appealing to fans of Davies through his dramatic style and a television past replete with working class representations. With that, came Eccleston’s casting, his serious drama credentials and class connotations. This was not the first time that *Doctor Who* effectively broadened its appeal through inclusion of different themes for different audiences. Indeed, the original *Doctor Who* became successful when it moved away from its Reithian preoccupations and a middle class version of what was ‘educational’ children’s television and embraced the Bug-Eyed Monsters.

With the growing marketisation of British television, the BBC has operated with a paradox at its heart, upholding its responsibilities as a public service broadcaster while proving its continued value in a commercial ratings system. This is evident in the internal struggles around the genre and narrative structures for *Doctor Who* at the time of its original launch. In its wake, the public/commercial tension has created moments where the BBC has reacted to boost ratings for *Doctor Who* and in doing so has broadened the appeal of the series. However, I argue that the drive for ratings can have differing outcomes for the inclusion of working class representations and positive narratives around working class cultures. In the case of the *Doctor Who* relaunch, class was caught in the dialectical nature of the cult versus the mainstream, where the BBC’s drive to be competitive in a fragmented market incorporated themes that could appeal to a wide range of audiences and successfully created a fusion of cult with mainstream. Once the demands of establishing the series for a new set of domestic fans were eased, wider class representations or inclusive narratives were the first story elements to suffer, allowing a return of the dominance of middle to upper class identities at a time when these increasingly became ‘normal’ and fashionable in wider popular culture.

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1. See http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/4385801.stm. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The two versions of *Doctor Who* are variously described as the ‘original’ and ‘new’ series, or ‘classic’ and ‘Nu’ *Who*. I will use the former pair of terms original and new series in the interests of consistency. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. I use the terms, working, middle and upper classes throughout this paper for consistency although the nature and make-up of these groups is disputed (see Savage 2013). These groups have shifted in size and composition, depending on changing definitions, etc. While trying to define class is always slippery, here I use the terms in their broadest sense in relation to morphing, but still-present, cultural representations. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. For example, the areas of gender and British identity have been considered at length (e.g., Amy-Chinn; Barron; Jones; Knox; McLaughlin; Porter; Selznick; Wallace; Winstead). For discussions of class in original *Doctor Who* series, see Tulloch and Alvarado, and Cull. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Although, for example, the UK was behind the US in shifting to multi-channel subscription. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The BBC has pursued commercial goals through other outlets, including its distribution of *Doctor Who* overseas. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. See <http://televisioncampaign.co.uk/TVChannels/ITV.aspx>. Socio-economic groupings are a system of [demographic classification](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demography) based on profession, first introduced by the research company NRS and now commonly used in the UK. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. See http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2005/03\_march/10/who\_eccleston.shtml. This intention to challenge socio-geographic hierarchies is also seen in the BBC’s strategy to reflect its many communities across the UK in its regions and nations policy (see <http://www.bbc.co.uk/aboutthebbc/insidethebbc/whoweare/publicpurposes/communities.html>). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. See http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/celebritynews/11533169/Christopher-Eccleston-on-Doctor-Who-I-didnt-want-him-to-have-a-posh-accent.html. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. See, for example, http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2005/03\_march/10/who\_eccleston.shtml. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. See <http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2005/11_november/23/who_tennant.shtml>. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. See Quail. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Cool Britannia became a buzz word in the late 1990s following Newsweek’s front page titled ‘London Rules’ (4Nov 1996 ). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. See http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/culture/harrymount/100049334/downton-abbey-effect-kicks-in-sloane-look-goes-trendy/. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. See [http://www.radiotimes.com/news/2011-09-27/Doctor-who-exclusive-matt-smith-is-a-hit-with-children-and-middle-classes](http://www.radiotimes.com/news/2011-09-27/doctor-who-exclusive-matt-smith-is-a-hit-with-children-and-middle-classes). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. See http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/fashion/features/doctor-who-and-crombie-mod-man-with-a-box-9091847.html and http://www.telegraph.co.uk/men/fashion-and-style/10608398/Deconstructing-Doctor-Whos-latest-costume.html. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. See http://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/latestnews/2015/class. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)