

Dr Who & Class

**Written tasks
and
Extended
Reading**

Class: Co-owner of a Lonely Heart tasks

Work through the following tasks and questions to demonstrate your comprehensive knowledge of Class: Co-owner of a Lonely Heart.

Language and close-textual analysis

1) Write an NCIS analysis for the episode - using notes from the screening in class. Make specific, detailed reference to moments in the text using media terminology (e.g. media language - camera shots and movement, diegetic/non-diegetic sound, mise-en-scene etc.)

Co-owner of a Lonely Heart

Narrative:

Character:

Iconography:

Setting:

2) How does Todorov's theory of equilibrium apply to Co-owner of a Lonely Heart? Try and use the expanded version of Todorov's theory: Equilibrium - Disruption - Recognition - Reparation - New equilibrium.

3) Applying Propp's character theory, what character roles do each of the main characters in Class fit into? Alternatively, you may wish to discuss how characters do not fit Propp's character types.

4) What enigma and action codes (Barthes) can you find in Co-owner of a Lonely Heart? Make specific, detailed reference to the text using media terminology (e.g. media language - camera shots, diegetic/non-diegetic sound, mise-en-scene etc.)

5) What examples of binary opposition (Levi-Strauss) can you find in Co-owner of a Lonely Heart? How do these create narrative or drama for the audience?

Representations

1) How is **gender** represented in Class - Co-owner of a Lonely Heart? Are gender stereotypes reinforced or subverted?

2) How is **age** (e.g. teenagers; older people like teachers or parents) represented in Class - Co-owner of a Lonely Heart? Does the show reinforce or challenge stereotypes about young people?

3) How is **race and ethnicity** represented in Class - Co-owner of a Lonely Heart? Are stereotypes reinforced or subverted?

4) How is **sexuality** represented in Class - Co-owner of a Lonely Heart? How does this reflect the BBC's remit to represent modern Britain?

5) How is **disability** represented in Class - Co-owner of a Lonely Heart? Why are disabled people generally under-represented in the media and how does Class try to address this?

Audience

- 1) What were the viewing figures for Class and why do you think it did so badly?
- 2) What audience psychographic groups might particularly enjoy Class?
- 3) What audience pleasures are offered by Class - Co-owner of a Lonely Heart? Apply Blumler and Katz's Uses and Gratifications theory to the episode. Make sure you provide specific examples from the episode to support your ideas.

Personal Identity:

Personal Relationships:

Diversion (Escapism):

Surveillance (Information / Facts):

- 4) Thinking of the 3 Vs audience pleasures (Visceral, Vicarious and Voyeuristic pleasures), which of these can be applied to Class - Co-owner of a Lonely Heart?
- 5) How did fans in the 'Whoniverse' (also known as 'Whovians') react to Class? Watch the fan reaction video (and read the YouTube comments) on the Class notes blogpost or check the comments in the extension articles below to help with this.

Industries

- 1) What was the objective of BBC3 when it was launched?
- 2) Why did BBC3 go online-only in February 2013?
- 3) How does Class - Co-owner of a Lonely Heart meet the BBC's mission statement to 'inform, educate and entertain'?
- 4) How did the distribution of Class contribute to the failure of the show with audiences?
- 5) What advertising and marketing was used to try and promote Class to an audience? Why do you think this wasn't very successful?

Comparison: An Unearthly Child and Co-owner of a Lonely Heart

- 1) How are the technical conventions different between 1963 Doctor Who and 2016 Class (e.g. camerawork, editing, sound and mise-en-scene)?
- 2) What similarities and differences are there between An Unearthly Child and Co-owner of a Lonely Heart in terms of the science-fiction genre?
- 3) What similarities and differences are there between An Unearthly Child and Co-owner of a Lonely Heart in terms of how they meet the BBC's remit to inform, educate and entertain?
- 4) How are representations of people, places and groups similar or different in the two shows?
- 5) What similarities and differences can you find in terms of the audience pleasures for An Unearthly Child and Co-owner of a Lonely Heart?

Grade 8/9 extension tasks and reading

Read this [Digital Spy feature on why Class was cancelled after only one series](#). Do you agree with its criticisms regarding scheduling, audience and character development?

Read this [Den of Geek fan review of Co-owner of a Lonely Heart](#). Do you agree with the praise and criticism in it and why?

Finally, read this [Indiewire feature on Class](#). It contains plenty of references to other films and TV shows (intertextuality) - what popular culture references can you find in this article?

Here's why the Doctor Who spin-off Class just didn't work

It was the spin-off no-one asked for
BY MORGAN JEFFERY



07/09/2017

It's official: school's out.

The BBC had previously insisted that *Class* was still very much in session, with *Doctor Who* boss Steven Moffat saying back in April that he'd "love to get more [episodes] made" – but the outlook

was bleak when series creator Patrick Ness stepped away from the series in June, and now BBC Three has confirmed there won't be a second run.

When explaining the decision, one thing to take into account is the show's dismal ratings performance – *Class* failed to make the BBC iPlayer Top 20 in its first seven weeks, and failed to secure over 1m viewers at any point when repeated on BBC One in a late-evening slot across January and February.

In fact, the series finale could only manage a consolidated audience of 0.32m, with Ness publicly stating that he was "baffled" by the Beeb's decision to air the series in double-bills, late at night, more than two months after its BBC Three debut.

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In the US, where the series aired back-to-back with new episodes of *Doctor Who* on BBC America, the *Class* premiere pulled in 0.5m – losing almost half its forerunner's audience (0.9m).

So what went wrong? Poor scheduling might account for those disappointing BBC One numbers, but not its underwhelming iPlayer performance or BBC America showing. Why did *Class* misfire so badly?

Who was it for?

One big problem? No-one – not even the BBC – seemed entirely sure who the show was for. A teen-oriented drama with adult themes, spun off from a series intended (primarily) for children, the tone of *Class* was every bit as confused as that muddled origin would suggest.

Like a hormonal teenager, the eight-part series was all over the place, with quite literal moodswings. Frothy. Silly. Grim. Gruesome. *Class* could be all these things in the space of a single scene, and the end result was dizzying.



Take the climax to the series premiere, the charming but deeply flawed 'For Tonight, We Might Die'. The scene in which Ram's girlfriend Rachel (Anna Shaffer) is murdered by the Shadowkin is neither a wild sci-fi moment, nor is it horribly grim, but somewhere in the middle.

She first disappears in a puff of energy – a PG-13 scene straight out of *Doctor Who* – and *then* Ram is sprayed with her bloody remains. Next, Ram's subsequent scuffle with Rachel's killer ends with him having his leg brutally severed, and we fix on his blood-soaked face, frozen in a silent scream.

Then, into the middle of all this, strides the Doctor (Peter Capaldi), a kids' TV hero caught up in bloody chaos, dropping one-liners and waving his sonic screwdriver about. It was an awkward clash of tones, one that continued throughout the series, alongside a series of confused character arcs.

Who are these people?

This was another shortfall for *Class* – not only did it not know what it was, but it never felt as though it had a solid grasp on who its characters were.



The two notable exceptions were Charlie (Greg Austin) and Matteusz (Jordan Renzo). Their relationship was the show's most consistent and compelling, from the initial heady romance to Matteusz's admission that he was frightened of his boyfriend's alien nature, to their final reconciliation.

On the flipside, Ness could never decide whether Ram (Fady Elsayed) was a tortured soul or an emotionally awkward clown. Elsayed had the skills to play both, but the character and his journey across the series was a mess.

His girlfriend's murder? The loss of his leg, swapped out for a robotic replacement? Both were briefly touched upon in the Ram-centric second episode 'The Coach with the Dragon Tattoo', then never properly addressed again.

Rachel's death in particular received short shrift, particularly once Ram embarked on a misjudged romance with April (Sophie Hopkins) – a plot twist that came out of nowhere and then just sort of fizzled out.

April's own arc – an apparently "fragile" young woman holding onto a burning fury and resentment towards her wayward father – showed promise, but ended up totally buried by confused sci-fi gobbledegook. (Hands up who really understands what went on between April and Corakinus.)

Then there's Tanya (Vivian Oparah), a child prodigy. Only occasionally did *Class* bother to explore what that really meant, or how it made her feel. As for Miss Quill, Katherine Kelly gave it her all but she was a one-note character until the show's bonkers penultimate episode, 'The Metaphysical Engine, or What Quill Did' attempted to provide her with seven weeks' worth of character development in the space of a single hour.



Time and again, *Class* appeared to make character choices without considering the consequences, as though it had no clear idea of where it was heading and was trying to work it out while we all watched.

The spin-off no-one asked for

Class wasn't a total write-off. Far from it. The show absolutely had its gripping moments, its standout episodes (the poignant 'Nightvisiting' was a clear highlight) – and, oh, what a cast. They'll all be going on to greater things.

Most of its problems could've been fixed, if it had done well enough to secure a second series. Often cited as the show's chief inspiration, remember the mammoth leap in quality between *Buffy*'s first season and its follow-up?

Perhaps the biggest problem with *Class*, though, the one truly denying it success, was that it sorely lacked a big selling point. Clearly, spinning itself off from *Doctor Who* was not enough to guarantee success – and, even when the flagship was at its popular peak 10 years ago, its spin-offs didn't just ride its coattails.



BBC

There was plenty of buzz surrounding John Barrowman's performance as Captain Jack back in 2005. A year later, fans were eager to know what happened next for Sarah Jane (Elisabeth Sladen) after her bittersweet farewell to the Doctor in 'School Reunion'.

Both *Torchwood* and *The Sarah Jane Adventures* justified their own existence. *Class* never quite did.

No-one was particularly crying out for a spin-off set at Coal Hill. *Doctor Who*'s recent visits to its long-standing educational institute – 2014's 'Into the Dalek' and 'The Caretaker' – had been fun, but only one character from these episodes carried over into *Class* and Mr Armitage (Nigel Betts) was brutally offed two episodes in.

With an uncertain and flawed first series failing to immediately prove that the show could stand on its two feet, *Class* ended up looking like the spin-off no-one asked for. And ultimately, it was the spin-off no-one wanted.

Cracking theme song, though.

Class Episode 4 Review: Co-Owner Of A Lonely Heart

Class delivers a dramatic mid-series episode with the feel of a finale in Co-Owner Of A Lonely Heart...

By [Louisa Mellor](#) | November 5, 2016 |



This article comes from [Den of Geek UK](#).

This review contains spoilers.

Co-Owner Of A Lonely Heart

Who else feels as though we've just skipped twenty episodes to get straight to the two-part season finale? By my count, before the winsome young couple have it off and leap through a portal into a shadow dimension, there should have been at least one misguided comedy romp, a crossover ep, a guest star vehicle of dubious merit, and a handful of filler episodes.

You can't just fast-forward to the good stuff. Can you?

Class can. Its UK-size run of eight episodes pretty much demands that it does. Even if the side-effect is the audience suffering whiplash from the speed at which things accelerated to *Co-Owner Of A Lonely Heart's* dramatic conclusion.

Let's recap. April has gone to the Shadow world to get her heart back. Ram, being Ram, has gone after her. A species of carnivorous alien tree blossoms is eating squirrels and threatening to engulf the earth (I'm not sure which is more upsetting). April's dad is out of prison. April's mum can walk again. Coal Hill has a clued-in new head teacher. Quill knows the Cabinet of Souls isn't empty and has a chance at regaining her free will. Charlie and Matheus are fighting over political philosophy. Tanya...well, Tanya got all that screen time last week.

There was enough story development in this episode to power a series twice or possibly four times the length of **Class**. That's both exhilarating—who likes wheel-spinning?—and frustrating. With more time spent establishing Charlie's imperious treatment of Quill, the dangling carrot of her freedom would doubtless have had greater impact. The same goes for April's mum's cure. Having barely met the woman or explored her situation, the power of the transformation is obviously lessened. It's hello-goodbye storytelling, moving things along apace but failing to leave behind much of a mark.

To right a previous wrong done to **Class** (my suspicion that its best ideas have all been done before), praise has to go to the shared heart situation. While there's nothing new about a mystical link connecting a young hero to a villain—**Earthsea's** Ged and the shadow creature, that other young wizard and his scar, **Farseer's** Fitz and the Skill—the space-travelling heart feels like a strong, original concept.

It also allows **Class** to do its thing by telling a story about its characters' emotions through a fantasy lens. "You can't have my heart" screams April at both the Shadow King and her dad, conflating her anger towards one with the other. It's neat and meaningful and entirely fitting with **Class's** emerging identity as a kind of school counsellor to its young audience, helping them to work through their feelings with socially responsible messages and empathetic exploration of feelings.

What **Class** isn't trying to do is scare anyone by the looks of this episode. The comedy sex scene with the Shadow Kin (sort of volcanic Klingons) drains away whatever apprehension they aroused in episode one. Yes, their planet looks hellish, but that nagging pound of humanity beating away in the Shadow King's chest is sure to save the day. *That*, we have seen before. (Where? **Buffy** of course. The season five finale.)

That's another downside of this early dramatic series peak; we know they're going to get out of it. You don't kill off one of your leads in episode *four*.

At least I hope you don't. These characters are likeable sorts. No, with their tender, supportive heart-to-hearts and over-use of each other's names ("We can help you April, I'm sure we can", "Oh, April", "April, is this really okay?") they're not real-life, FIFA-playing, farting teenagers; they're better. They're TV teenagers, like the ones on **Dawson's Creek**, just with robot-centipede legs.

Assuming she does survive, will April be left, as Ram was in episode one, with a souvenir of her adventure? Her hanging on to the Hulk powers could be a profitable development at the end of all of this. It'd certainly make it easier for her to persuade volunteers to help decorate the next prom.

It was a surprise to see this histrionic an episode so soon in this show's lifetime. Packed with incident and ideas, *Co-Owner Of A Lonely Heart* was marked change from last week's quiet, emotionally resonant instalment. An uneven mix of romance, comedy and high-stakes drama, it may have struggled to find the right balance of tone and even tipped over into unintentional silliness at times but it proved one thing: **Class** certainly has the courage of its convictions. And with only eight episodes, where's the sense in playing it cool?

‘Class’ Review: ‘Doctor Who’ Spinoff Is Well Worth Powering Through Its Growing Pains

The BBC America series pits space monsters against inner demons in a teen drama that isn’t afraid to tackle adult themes.



“Class”

An exchange between two of the teen protagonists in [BBC America’s “Doctor Who”](#) spinoff “Class” takes place a little over halfway through the season and exemplifies some of the series’ unique strengths:

Ram, trying to explain his Sikh religion: “We believe the important thing in your life is to do good action. But if you do the good action, somewhere in the process there’s got to be God, even if you don’t have faith or believe that there’s some dude out there looking after you. Isn’t doing a good thing, one human to another, the closest we’re going to get to God?”

April: “And what about the bad things we do, one human to another?”
It’s the type of philosophical discussion that one might have in quieter contemplative moments, but since this is the world of “Doctor Who,” it instead occurs on a shadowy alien world, right before the two friends take on the leader of a race of angry, slaughtering monsters. The series’ ability to balance action and adventure, giddy moments of irreverent humor, adolescent angst, and deeper, more profound topics of freedom, identity and morality are all one would hope for in a “Doctor Who” spinoff. It just takes a while to get there.

As with any teenager, one must exercise patience when it comes to the teen drama “Class.” In fact, it takes three rather lackluster, “Buffy the Vampire Slayer”-lite episodes (out of eight total) before it truly starts to come into its own. But when it does, all credit goes to YA author and series creator Patrick Ness, who had already proven with “A Monster Calls” to have a deft hand in combining the supernatural with the human experience.



Vivian Oparah, Sophie Hopkins, Grant Austin, Fady Elsayed in “Class”

With “Class,” viewers enter a world that was already well formed: Coal Hill Academy was a school that was featured in the first-ever “Doctor Who” episode in 1963 and has popped up throughout the decades, most recently with The Doctor himself (Peter Capaldi) dropping by when Clara Oswald (Jenna Coleman) was an instructor there.

This time, our entry point is four students whom The Doctor deputizes to defend the world while he’s off in his TARDIS. The sweet but rather clueless Charlie (Grant Austin) turns out to be an alien prince, the last surviving member of the Rhodian race, who’s found sanctuary at Coal Hill as a normal teen from Sheffield. While the other three students are definitely of earth stock, over the course of the season we’ll learn about their dark pasts and surprisingly capacity for depth and heroism. Tanya (Vivian Oparah) is a Nigerian child prodigy who is three years younger than her mates, April (Sophie Hopkins) is the unassuming good girl who needs to break out of her shell, and Ram (Fady Elsayed) is a first-team soccer star.



Katherine Kelly, “Class”

Two other characters deserve mention as absolute scene stealers. Miss Quill is the physics teacher played with scenery-chewing asperity and wit by the fabulous Katherine Kelly (“Happy Valley,” “Mr. Selfridge,” “Coronation Street”). The Doctor has charged Miss Quill with keeping an eye on his ragtag band of students, and similarly, the veteran actress provides guidance to her young castmates in the form of an impeccably committed performance. It feels as if Miss Quill sprang forth from all of the Whoniverse’s most outrageous and impertinent impulses.

Finally, Matteusz (Jordan Renzo) is a fifth student who is seldom mentioned in the core group we suspect partly because of the potential for spoilers and partly because his presence would unbalance the two boys and two girls equilibrium. Nevertheless, Matteusz is essential not only as part of the Coal Hill Scooby Gang but also as the beating heart of the group who rarely wavers morally and who drives some of the key moments in the series. Keep an eye on Matteusz.



Vivian Oparah and Jordan Renzo, “Class”

While the first half of “Class” is rather rough and full of teen drama cliches — a school dance! unrequited crushes! strict parents! — combined with uninspiring monsters of the week, Episodes 2 and 3 deserve recognition for their nuanced treatment of grief. The show doesn’t offer up any platitudes and instead delves into the ongoing process of dealing with trauma and loss.

Once the series enters its second half, it maintains a consistent level of complexity, but by far the standout episode is its sixth. The brilliant bottle episode places all five students in detention, but this is not your parents’ “Breakfast Club.” What transpires among the group is so well orchestrated and so well considered — having far-reaching consequences — that this installment alone is worth enduring the earlier misfires.

While the show knows how to juggle the heavier issues and high-concept scenarios, it doesn’t skip on the fun. There are plenty of wicked pop culture references, over-the-top set pieces, old-fashioned fight scenes and all manner of gross blood and chunky viscera.

The show is sparing but deliberate in how it connects to the canon, and of the four monsters it created, we could see at least one — the simplest in design and concept — return. As “Doctor Who” spinoffs go, “Class” may not have established itself quite as indelibly as “Torchwood” did in the Whoniverse, but give it, well, time.

Doctor Who Tasks

Work through the following tasks and questions to demonstrate your comprehensive knowledge of Doctor Who: An Unearthly Child.

Language and close-textual analysis

1) Write an NCIS analysis for the episode - using notes from the screening in class. Make specific, detailed reference to moments in the text using media terminology (e.g. media language - camera shots, diegetic/non-diegetic sound, mise-en-scene etc.)

An Unearthly Child

Narrative:

Character:

Iconography:

Setting:

2) How does Todorov's theory of equilibrium apply to An Unearthly Child? Try and use the expanded version of Todorov's theory: Equilibrium - Disruption - Recognition - Reparation - New equilibrium.

3) Applying Propp's character theory, what character roles do each of the main characters in An Unearthly Child fit into? Alternatively, you may wish to discuss how characters do not fit Propp's character types.

4) What enigma and action codes (Barthes) can you find in An Unearthly Child? Make specific, detailed reference to the text using media terminology (e.g. media language - camera shots, diegetic/non-diegetic sound, mise-en-scene etc.)

5) What examples of binary opposition (Levi-Strauss) can you find in An Unearthly Child? How do these create narrative or drama for the audience?

Representations

1) What stereotypes of men are reinforced and subverted in Doctor Who: An Unearthly Child? How?

2) What stereotypes of women/girls are reinforced and subverted in Doctor Who: An Unearthly Child? How?

3) What are common media stereotypes of young people and old people? Do any of the characters or scenarios reinforce or subvert these conventional stereotypes (consider this was 1963)? Has this changed in more recent series of Doctor Who?

4) What representations of race/ethnicity can be found in Doctor Who: An Earthly Child? Is this surprising or not? Give reasons for your answer and consider historical / cultural context (the 1960s). Has this changed in more recent series of Doctor Who?

5) How is social class represented in An Unearthly Child? Think about how education and knowledge is presented in the episode.

Audience

- 1) Who is the target audience for Doctor Who? Has it changed since 1963?
- 2) What audience psychographic groups might particularly enjoy Doctor Who?
- 3) What audience pleasures are offered by An Unearthly Child? Apply Blumler and Katz's Uses and Gratifications theory to the episode. Make sure you provide specific examples from the episode to support your ideas.

Personal Identity:

Personal Relationships:

Diversion (Escapism):

Surveillance (Information / Facts):

- 4) What additional Uses and Gratifications would this episode provide to a modern 2018 audience?
- 5) Thinking of the 3 Vs audience pleasures (Visceral, Vicarious and Voyeuristic pleasures), which of these can be applied to An Unearthly Child?

Industries

- 1) What was the television industry like in 1963? How many channels were there?
- 2) Why is Doctor Who such an important franchise for the BBC?
- 3) How does Doctor Who meet the BBC's mission statement to 'inform, educate and entertain'?
- 4) How is the BBC funded?
- 5) Who regulates the BBC and what is the watershed?

Grade 8/9 extension tasks and reading

Read this [Media Magazine article tracing the cultural impact of Doctor Who](#). What does it suggest regarding the importance of Doctor Who, representations and industry?

Read this [Guardian feature on female characters in Doctor Who](#). What does it suggest regarding the representation of women over time in Doctor Who?

Read this [Guardian feature on the representations of race and ethnicity in Doctor Who](#) over the last 55 years. How has the programme changed in its representations of race and how does this fit the BBC's remit to inform, educate and entertain?

The bolshie, brilliant history of the women of Doctor Who

From the feminist journalist Sarah Jane Smith to the fiery flight attendant Tegan Jovanka, Doctor Who's female characters have been anything but props. So what can we expect from Jodie Whittaker?



Jodie Whittaker, the new Doctor, with first-ever assistant, Susan, and last Bill Potts.

Now here is a lovely thing: [Next](#), possibly the world's least cutting-edge science fiction fashion store, is stocking an extremely credible version of the new Doctor's striped T-shirt. You didn't get that with Colin Baker. But the joy (or, just as significantly, the relative ambivalence) with which Jodie Whittaker's appointment as the first female Doctor was greeted is encouraging in tricky times, in much the same way as Idris Elba looks like James Bond already, whether or not he gets the job.

Officially, there have been 12 Doctors – all white men – but, depending on how you count, there have been about 45 actors who have played the role in various spin-offs, stage plays and specials. A refresh was overdue.

Of course, not everyone is happy. A handful of angry “fans” have already “reviewed” the [new series on Amazon](#) with a series of one-star reviews declaring that Doctor Who is dead, thanks to the “feminazis” and “social justice warriors”. “We have an indifferent actress who wants to push a feminist agenda in the lead role,” says one. This is before any of them have seen it, obviously.

But as Whittaker has said: “There has always been change in Doctor Who; this is just more of it – I want to tell the fans not to be scared by my gender. Because this is a really exciting time and [Doctor Who](#) represents everything that's exciting about change.”

The most extraordinary thing about Doctor Who is its longevity – it is 55 this year, which means that, even though the show is about an alien in a magical box, it reflects our cultural evolution more than any other television programme. The only other series with that kind of staying power is Coronation Street, which is 57 this year.



Elisabeth Sladen as Sarah Jane Smith ... the longest-serving assistant.

But Corrie is an ensemble. Doctor Who's setup has always been (mostly) female companions orbiting a male star. That is not to say the women on the show were props. The first producer of Doctor Who, Verity Lambert, was a force to be reckoned with – the only female producer in the BBC at that time, as well as the youngest. She shaped the first companions, the Doctor's granddaughter, Susan, (it was very clear that there would be no hanky-panky in the Tardis – at least until much later on) and the schoolteacher Barbara to be clever and practical.

They were, however, followed by a spate of pretty, young things who were very good at screaming – Polly and Victoria spring to mind. It wasn't until the third Doctor, Jon Pertwee, that the series gave us Sarah Jane Smith, the longest-serving and possibly most-beloved companion. A feminist, she was the first companion who held on to her day job as an investigative reporter, although she did have her wobbly moments: "You're still living in the middle ages," she said to one woman who was living in the middle ages.

Generally, the Doctors' attitude towards their assistants was indifferent – as summed up in the fourth doctor Tom Baker's memorably offhand remark: "You're a beautiful woman, probably," even though the second incarceration of the Time Lord Romana, Lalla Ward, would tip the sexless Doctor on his head and marry him (in real life, for about three weeks, but it still counts).



'Something for the dads ...' Tom Baker as the Doctor with Louise Jameson as Leela.

Even as the women changed and grew feistier, some things stayed the same. Tegan Jovanka, the bolshie Australian flight attendant with a life of her own, was a prototype of what today's companions would become – even if the scriptwriters did have her run around Heathrow in purple stilettos more than was strictly necessary.

There was also the last companion of the “classic” series, Ace, a troubled teen who, unlike her predecessors, fought first and screamed later. Interestingly, the lack of sexual tension between early Doctors and their companions in what was a family show (albeit one that needed [“something for the dads”](#), according to one early producer, to look at, such as sexy, savage Leela) had unexpected consequences. It picked up a large gay following because it worked as one of the only shows on television where the hero didn’t get the girl. It showed a world in which you could beat the baddies and be the coolest person in the room simply by knowing more stuff than anybody else, rather than beating them up. This was new and unusual.

When the show returned in 2005, it was impossible for writers as talented as Russell T Davies, Steven Moffat, Paul Cornell and Rob Shearman not to broaden the scope. The way Davies saw it, having someone travel the universe with Billie Piper and not find her attractive was far more unlikely than, for example, [an alien pig crashing a spaceship into Big Ben](#).



David Tennant and Billie Piper as the Doctor and Rose.

The grand amour of Rose and David Tennant’s 10th Doctor arose, too, from a chemistry that captivated a new generation of viewers and enabled them to adore the idea of Piper going off for the rest of her life with a zombie Time Lord created as a byproduct of a biological metacrisis, all in the name of love.

So the new era was certainly different. When I started writing for Doctor Who in novel form, just before Matt Smith started, I was told to keep the romance out of it (my day job is writing romantic comedy). I nodded solemnly, repeated to myself: “You’re a beautiful woman, probably,” and proceeded to keep any reference to matters of the heart well out of things. Meanwhile, the show took a different line: the Doctor was married off twice (once to River Song, who was conceived in the Tardis, and once to – who else? – Marilyn Monroe). He then spent 45 minutes naked on BBC One in the middle of Christmas Day (because his holographic suit hadn’t worked) while Clara’s family looked on.



Ally Kinnear as River Song. with David Tennant. Photograph: Adrian

Ironically, though, many of the Doctor's most successful recent relationships have been platonic. It has been home to the sheer enthusiasm and keenness of Donna Noble – Donna wasn't there for the dads; she was, as Caitlin Moran said, there for puffing down corridors in Per Una outfits. She was loud, noisy, abrasive and didn't worship the Doctor an iota. Sarah Jane never stopped being a campaigning journalist. Bill Potts, Capaldi's last companion, was the first gay female companion, something that had almost nothing to do with what she brought to the show – a shot of adrenaline, as it happens. In the end, the most successful companions, and Doctors, share what Christopher Eccleston, the fabulous ninth Doctor, called the simple desire to "eat life".

And, from the one or two tantalising details we have seen so far of Jodie exclaiming: "Oh brilliant," the new Doctor looks to be firmly in this mould. Of course, like most feminists on hearing the news, the first thing I wanted to know was: would the new Doctor's outfit have pockets? #Pockets immediately started trending on social media as soon as the new costume was revealed: thankfully, it has plenty of space for a Time Lord on the move (plus a bum bag for tampons).

And who is writing the new series? Only Malorie Blackman and Joy Wilkinson, along with a host of young writers. My sense is they will keep as much continuity in the Doctor's personality as possible. (They could really have some fun with the Doctor's wife, River Song.) After all, a mild sense of the absurd, intellectual vanity and insatiable curiosity are not notably gendered characteristics. The cultural historian Matthew Sweet sees it differently. "In 2018, I reckon (the Doctor) has urgent work to do. Male anger and self-pity seem to be among the most powerful and dangerous forces in the world: I'd like to see the Doctor tackling that – or at least offering us an escape from it. And I'd like to see her channel a bit of maternal energy, too. In fiction, Doctor Who can sort everything out. In real life, it's more likely to be your mum."



A new start ... Jodie Whittaker as the Doctor with her new companions.

The writer and performer Stella Duffy, who is exactly the same age as the show, sees it much the same way as my daughter does: “I grew up with five sisters and one brother and we watched it religiously every week. And, for the first time, the Doctor is me.”

To see the Doctor reflected in all of us; to embody the very best of us; to welcome everyone into the Tardis; to wear our rainbow T-shirts with pride, our hands deep in our pockets. Oh, brilliant.