It's the Master! (Step in Time): Hearts of Darkness and Postcolonial Paradoxes in *Doctor Who*

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My heart feels dead inside, cold and hard and petrified.
—Scissor Sisters

Season three of the new *Doctor Who* (UK 2005-present) concludes with a trilogy of episodes written by Russell T. Davies: "Utopia," "The Sound of Drums," and "Last of the Time Lords." This story arc reveals the existence of another Time Lord, the Master, who transitions from well-intentioned pioneer (Derek Jacobi) to power-hungry invader (John Simms) after he rediscovers his true identity. The Master, one of the Doctor's archenemies, is a fixture in the original BBC series, which ran from 1963 to 1989. As Piers Britton argues, the Master is unique because he is a solitary villain, unlike the Daleks or the Cybermen: "The Doctor's fellow Time Lord and erstwhile friend, the Master, was the locus classicus of this kind of adversary, first appearing in 1971. His prowess as a mesmerist shaded seamlessly into lethal personal charm, and he was also portrayed as the Doctor's equal in intellect and experience" (63). This characterization of the Master carries over into the new *Doctor Who*, but he is also a fresh antagonist in Davies's scripts, one with a naughty humor, sharp suits, and a taste for the American pop band Scissor Sisters. After adopting the loaded name Harold Saxon, which intimates a white supremacist ethos, the charismatic Master becomes Prime Minister of the United Kingdom and sets out to conquer Planet Earth.

This trilogy explores the dark legacies of European imperialism by way of futuristic science fiction. The Master's reappearance as likeable leader and sadistic colonizer, *übermensch* and "last man," make him a

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compelling figure through which to read colonial and postcolonial resonances in *Doctor Who*, especially since he is both foil and alter ego for the "good" Doctor. As David Galef argues, "the problems of colonialism and postcolonialism achieve a peculiar force in science fiction, where racial divides may be species differences, and one planet's social customs may spell mass-destruction for another world" (201). The Master arguably resonates with the colonial character Mister Kurtz in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. There are hints of Conrad's infamous antihero in the Master, who is haunted by the sound of drums (which turns out to be the rhythm of a Time Lord's heartbeat) and whose plan includes the extermination of humanity (which he regards as a lesser race).

The narrative also engages in postcolonial critique through the enigmatic Doctor (David Tennant) and his companion, a black British medical student named Martha Jones (Freema Agyeman). The Doctor himself has much in common with Conrad's primary narrator, Charles Marlow. Like Marlow, the Doctor is a singular traveler who has seen things beyond the scope of the ordinary. Although more of a humanitarian than his Conradian counterpart, the Doctor is similarly removed from the circumstances he encounters, choosing not to interfere and maintaining an emotional distance even when faced with injustice. Alec Charles describes the Doctor as "the ideal of colonial liberalism: an objective, asexual savior-explorer—a scientist whose only greed is for knowledge—a man who's out neither for himself nor for a bit of the Other—a post-gendered gunless wonder—an upper-middle-class eccentric licensed by the establishment—a revolutionary who can't change history" ("Ideology" 117). This characterization of the Doctor recalls Marlow's persona in *Heart of Darkness* and affords a useful starting point from which to deconstruct the Doctor's liberalism, which is often inextricable from his paternalism. Martha is another provocative alternative to a Conrad character, in this case the "savage and superb, wild-eyed and magnificent" (Conrad 60) African woman who ominously paces the banks of the Congo River upon Kurtz's departure. Martha is a radical figure in these episodes and the key to the survival of the planet. While she employs guerilla warfare tactics on the ground to combat the Master's forces, her enslaved family carries out similar acts of resistance on the Master's airship, the Valiant. But Martha's subversiveness, much like the Doctor's liberal humanism, remains suspect.

Conrad's colonial novella can shape our understanding of the former television cult classic. While Davies may not have had *Heart of Darkness* in mind when he wrote these episodes, his trilogy nonetheless speaks to that novella through its central characters, the *mise-en-scène* of Britain, and an imperial metanarrative that supersedes any anticolonial moments within the story. It is telling that Davies majored in English literature at Oxford and took a special interest in nineteenth-century British literature, which may be relevant (Aldridge and Murray 20). The new millennial Master trilogy comes out of the *Doctor Who* franchise, "the longest-running science fiction television series in the world" (Orthia 208). The show's direction, screenwriting, and cast have changed regularly, including in the new series. The directors and writers have almost exclusively been white British men, although the openly gay Davies has been hailed as a groundbreaking figure in the history of the show. The new series's ethos provides a stark counterpoint to the dark message of Conrad's colonial text. The new *Doctor Who* imagines a peppy, postcolonial British future to Conrad's sinister, colonial British past. As Lindy Orthia argues, "Multi-raciality, in combination with heightened consciousness about gender and sexual diversity—in short, cosmopolitanism(s)—has become intrinsic to representations of both contemporary British society and future human societies in the new series of *Doctor Who*" (Orthia 212–13). When juxtaposed, *Heart of Darkness* and the new *Doctor Who*, which bookend the independence movements of the mid-twentieth century, provide compelling snapshots of colonial Britain and postcolonial Britain.

Given that Conrad's novella was first published as a trilogy in the widely circulated *Blackwood's Magazine*, the comparison becomes more textually analogous. Both of these three-part narratives frame Britain for contemporary audiences through extant national models of selfhood and Otherness. If the discourses of colonialism and the "white man's burden" were representational strategies in Conrad's day, then cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism are the discursive paradigms for postcolonial Britain in ours. Yet, the very juxtaposition of these respective examples illustrates the ways in which they resort to similar cultural archetypes *despite* their century apart. Davies's *Doctor Who* trilogy ultimately presents a postcolonial paradox by attempting to show a progressive, cosmopolitan Britain (one that affords agency and

voice to marginalized characters) while still maintaining hegemonic power structures.

The Master trilogy's postcolonial vision obviously and necessarily extends Conrad's more limited nineteenth-century one. Pioneering theorists Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin argue that, "One way in which the term 'post-colonial' has come to be deployed is in the engagement with issues of cultural diversity, ethnic, racial and cultural difference and the power relations within them" (5). In its representation of humans, particularly British humans, *Doctor Who* partially fulfills this definition of "postcolonial." Since its return in 2002, the series has featured a diverse cast in terms of race, class, sexuality, and so on. Along with primary characters like Martha, the Doctor's first black companion, or the pansexual Captain Jack, the show relies on a diverse body of supporting characters. As Orthia observes, "Non-regular black, Asian and queer characters have peppered at least sixteen serials set in Earth's present, contributing to the representation of twenty-first century Britain as an unself-consciously diverse and liberal cosmopolis" (213). But the series often fails to go beyond showing diversity to exploring the inherent power relations of that diversity. Indeed, Orthia goes on to state that, "There are no deep power relations; there is only eternal humanity, different in colour but united in all other respects. This is no melting pot, it is no salad bowl. The appropriate metaphor comes from *Doctor Who*'s most famous foodstuff: humanity is so many coloured jelly babies inside a colourless (white) paper bag" (215). In other words, *Doctor Who* points to postcolonial histories and experiences by virtue of its cosmopolitan Britain, but the show never unpacks the histories and experiences themselves.

However, the series also engages with cultural difference and uneven distributions of power by way of its alien species, which can themselves be read as symbolic versions of humanity. For example, the Cybermen's objective of mass human-to-Cybermen conversion ("upgrading") can be read as a futuristic version of British imperialism since one of the goals of the British Empire was to disseminate and replicate a "superior" Britishness around the globe. The new *Doctor Who* portrays the Cybermen as villains precisely because of their desire to erase human diversity in favor of a grotesque homogeneity. Humanity itself becomes the subaltern species in relation to an alien race like the Cybermen, who enact a physical and psychological

colonization of Earth. The Master trilogy also represents humankind as subalterns under the Master's rule. Humans literally become "the wretched of the Earth," to quote Frantz Fanon's title—they huddle in ghettoes, nursing hope, and searching for a voice.

The new *Doctor Who* is not quite as postcolonial as contemporary British cinema that more carefully foregrounds and critiques the power dynamics of race, ethnicity, culture, and so on: the gritty Stephen Frears film *Dirty Pretty Things* (2002), Gurinder Chadha's feel-good comedy *Bend It Like Beckham* (2002), or Julian Jarrold's television adaptation of Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2002). But there is an intentionality about *Doctor Who*'s cosmopolitan, new millennial perspective and its representation of colonial power relations through alien occupation that fulfills postcolonial possibilities. As Charles argues, the new *Doctor Who* is generally more progressive than its twentieth-century antecedents in its self-conscious representations of Empire: "the early years of the original series of *Doctor Who* (1963–1989) were often characterized by a yearning for British imperial dominance, as its elderly Edwardian hero turned back time to patrol the universe and the history of the world in his Metropolitan police telephone box" ("War" 452–53). The rebooted series repeatedly imagines a multicultural Britain and pokes fun at a "stodgy" colonial past.

The Master episodes, in particular, attempt to frame "good" versus "evil" in terms of universal human rights and the dangers of imperial rhetoric. The irony, of course, is that the show can only exercise this implicitly postcolonial critique through the centrality, supremacy, and noblesse oblige of its protagonist. The Doctor and the Master may be fashionable postmodern replacements for their aging predecessors but they nonetheless re-enact the dated discourse of the original series, which includes the mutually related ascendancy of whiteness, maleness, and Britishness. Although the Master invents a machine that allows temporal paradoxes, the television program itself creates an unsustainable critical paradox.

"Doctor Who, I Presume?"

In his discussion of *Heart of Darkness*, Edward Said frames the novella as an imperialist text, but a self-conscious one, too. On the one hand, the entire system of representation for the narrative functions within

the self-contained world of the British Empire: "[N]either Conrad nor Marlow gives us a full view of what is *outside* the world-conquering attitudes embodied by Kurtz, Marlow, the circle of listeners on the deck of the *Nellie*, and Conrad" (24). Said describes "the whole thing" as "aesthetically but also mentally unassailable" (24). Viable alternatives to imperialism are absent in the narrative. However, the very self-consciousness of the text allows for the *possibility* of alternatives if not the realization of them. As Said further points out, "because Conrad also had an extraordinary persistent residual sense of his own exilic marginality, he quite carefully (some would say maddeningly) qualified Marlow's narrative world with another, unspecified but different" (24). That "other" and implicitly anti-British world is never sharpened into focus in the novella; rather, it lurks just beyond what Said calls "the tightly inclusive circle of Europeans on the deck of the *Nellie*" (24).

The Master trilogy (and the new *Doctor Who* series in its entirety) details some of those "other" worlds that Conrad leaves vague in *Heart of Darkness*. With each new alien encounter, the show suggests a specific alternative to both Britishness and humanity. The "Whoniverse" is full of Others—Daleks, Cybermen, Slitheen, Ood, Vespiform, Adiopose, and so on. As I have already noted, Otherness does not automatically denote a subaltern or even anticolonial status. The Daleks and the Cybermen are hostile imperialists in their own right with respective agendas of extermination and conversion. By contrast, the Ood are distinctly characterized as an enslaved species. But this range of "good" and "bad" Others does serve to destabilize the British narrative world. If the Others in *Heart of Darkness* are remarkably abstract and mediated by Marlow's European gaze, then the aliens in *Doctor Who* are afforded planets, languages, histories, and traditions. The Doctor initiates his companions and the viewer into privileged, sometimes life-saving, knowledge about these mysterious life forms. He explains that "the Sontarans are the finest soldiers in the galaxy" or that the Vashta Nerada are "the piranhas of the air." He waxes poetic about the worlds he has seen, including his lost home planet of Gallifrey. And like Marlow's listeners, the Doctor's companions are spellbound and eager for a glimpse of these extraordinary places.

But even in its imaginative scope, the show never strays too far from the safety and familiarity of the Doctor and his Tardis, much as *Heart of Darkness* is literally anchored by Marlow on the *Nellie*. Of

course, the Doctor is an alien in the guise of a British man, just as the vaguely "Oriental" Marlow has "the pose of a Buddha preaching in European clothes and without a lotus flower" (Conrad 10). But their own Otherness notwithstanding, these protagonists speak to and for a British audience. Marlow is known for his ability to tell an unusual tale. Unlike the "direct simplicity" of other seamen's yarns, Marlow's stories are rich, lengthy, and mysterious (9). His remarkable facility with the English language affords him this "propensity to spin yarns" (9) about his otherworldly and decidedly non-English experiences. A man of the world, Marlow brings his experiences home and translates them for his British listeners. Indeed, he acknowledges his own role as translator when he periodically pauses to frame rhetorical questions: "Do you see the story? Do you see anything? It seems to me I am trying to tell you a dream—making a vain attempt, because no relation of a dream can convey the dream-sensation" (30).

In a comparable role, the Doctor tries to share his indescribable experiences with his human companions. The Tardis automatically translates speech and writing so that all alien and non-English languages sound and read like English. As a result, the viewer rarely experiences aliens and their cultures without the mediation, intervention, or regulation of a pervasive Britishness. It is *only* through the Doctor, with his time machine, psychic paper, sonic screwdriver, and so on, that everyday individuals (like the viewer) can access the universe and its mysteries. Without the Doctor, "other" aliens might as well not exist. Said makes precisely this case against Conrad, whose white male characters speak for the Others in the text: "For if we cannot truly understand someone else's experience and if we must therefore depend upon the assertive authority of the sort of power that Kurtz wields as a white man in the jungle or that Marlow, another white man, wields as narrator, there is no use looking for other, non-imperialist alternatives; the system has simply eliminated them and made them unthinkable" (24). Even if he is more tour guide than tyrant, the Doctor is still another "white man in the jungle" and "we" are entirely dependent on his authority.

Like *Heart of Darkness*, the *Doctor Who* series strikes a precarious balance between British self-centeredness and the ability to allow for alternatives to that Britishness. Similarly, the show struggles to frame the perspectives of "minority" characters (like Martha Jones)

alongside its white male lead. Both texts have a historical continuity that challenges their audiences to untangle the underlying implications of imperialism. More importantly, however, Davies's narrative embodies a curious and contradictory sense of postcolonial progress *and* colonial datedness despite its release over a century after Conrad's novella. Although the Master trilogy imagines exciting and subversive alternatives to that default perspective of white male imperialism, it, too, falls short in making those alternatives a viable, sustainable, and primary reality.

The End of the Universe

At the beginning of the episode called "Utopia," the Doctor and Martha are unexpectedly propelled one-hundred-trillion years into the future. Perplexed, the Doctor turns to his companion and declares, "We're going to the end of the universe." This exchange is immediately followed by a scene in which feral creatures with pointy teeth and pierced faces snarl the words, "Humans. Humans are coming." Introducing parallels to Conrad's novella, this episode inverts the strange journey of Conrad's narrator, Marlow, who is transported, in his own words, "to the earliest beginnings of the world" (35) when he sails up the Congo River. There, in the infamous "heart of darkness," he encounters a prehistoric savagery that some critics (most famously Achebe) have found offensive and others (such as Said) intentionally ironic. The savagery that the Doctor encounters, however, is not at the beginning of the world among Africans but at the end of the universe among aliens.

A small colony, the last of the humans, ekes out a fragile existence on a dark planet where even the stars have died and where they are regularly attacked by the feral denizens known as the Future Kind. As the Master, not yet aware of his own true nature, explains, "It's feared they are what we will become unless we reach Utopia." Appropriately, Utopia serves as myth and desire, a signal from across the universe that the humans wish to reach in the hopes of sustaining their species. In the guise of an absent-minded professor, the Master has labored for years to build a rocket ship that can transport humankind to Utopia before they regress into the Future Kind. The Master himself is already vaguely Kurtz-like when we first meet him: he

lives among the humans, although he is not one of them, and he has an initial desire to deliver humanity despite the ominous drumbeat pounding incessantly in his head. Once he discovers his true nature, his benevolent mission becomes more akin to Kurtz's famous postscript: "Exterminate all the brutes!" (51). All signs of goodness dissipate when he regenerates into a younger body, steals the Doctor's Tardis, and travels to twenty-first century Earth, where he forges his new identity as Harold Saxon, Prime Minister of Britain. Instead of an ivory empire in the Congo where even skulls must pay homage, the Master takes over the world, albeit through the same hypnotic power as that of Kurtz. The remaining episodes of the story arc, "The Sound of Drums" and "Last of the Time Lords," chart the Master's rise and fall over the period of one year.

The implication for both Kurtz and the Master is that these men are already corrupt long before they encounter any so-called savage Otherness. Both men arrive in their new environments with a dormant but maniacal power waiting to be unleashed. Even under the guise of spreading civilization, Kurtz's early vision hinges on a rigid hierarchy in which whiteness equates to godliness. As Marlow recalls of Kurtz's report for the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs, "He began with the argument that we whites, from the point of development we had arrived at, 'must necessarily appear to them [savages] in the nature of supernatural beings—we approach them with the might as of a deity'" (Conrad 50). Similarly, the Master endorses the view that Time Lords are *the* master race, and humans, whether in their past, present, or future form, are a stunted and inferior species. The Master's egomania is grounded in his boyhood experience of looking into the time vortex and consequently going insane. Nonetheless, his arrogance and cultural bias are aligned with the Doctor, who describes his people as "the oldest and most mighty race in the universe, looking down on the galaxies below." Like Marlow, the Doctor expresses distaste for war and conquest, but he retains the superiority complex of his race.

Certainly, the most overt parallel between Kurtz and the Master is their common ability to persuade the masses through rhetoric. Marlow is drawn in by Kurtz's beautifully written report, which advocates imperialism as a noble cause: "It gave me the notion of an exotic Immensity ruled by an August Benevolence. It made me tingle with enthusiasm. This was the unbounded power of eloquence—of

words—of burning noble words" (Conrad 50). Although Marlow's official mission is one of intervention, he admits to himself that his underlying desire is to meet and talk with the enigmatic Kurtz, whose ability to convince sets him apart from all the other ivory traders in the region. It is through other traders that Marlow first learns of Kurtz's reputation as "an emissary of pity, and science, and progress" and a "universal genius" (28, 30). Kurtz is initially "just a word" but he quickly becomes the driving force of the narrative (29).

Like Kurtz, the Master is a name, Saxon, that eventually manifests into a being. We do not meet the Master until the season three finale but earlier episodes afford a comparable build up to his unveiling—the name Saxon is referenced in a radio broadcast, a campaign poster, and so on. The most explicit heralding of the Master is the Face of Boe's final prophecy to the Doctor: "You are not alone." In "Utopia," the Master's human name, Yana, turns out to be an acronym for these words. As Prime Minister Harold Saxon, the Master uses mass hypnosis to garner support for his campaign. An undercover Torchwood agent posing as a journalist reveals Saxon's phony biography to his seemingly oblivious wife Lucy: "The forgery is screaming out and yet no one can see it. It's as if he's mesmerized the entire world." The Doctor also marvels at the Master's ability to fool an entire planet: "The Master was always sort of hypnotic but this is on a massive scale." And when Martha admits that she was going to vote for Saxon, she has trouble articulating why: "He spoke about... I can't really remember but it was good." Like Kurtz, whose discourse is "magnificent, though difficult to remember" (50), the Master's policies are vague yet convincing. Although Charles reads the Master as "a palimpsest of the presidential premier [Tony] Blair" ("War" 456), he also serves as a compelling reimagining of Conrad's Kurtz.

Familiarly, this trilogy has one white British man tracking another into the darkness while the suffering of those around them is relegated to the back story for their turbulent relationship. The Doctor and the Master quickly recognize their mutual brilliance, which is magnified by the discovery that they are the only remaining survivors of their species. Britton describes the relationship between the two Time Lords as a "mutual obsession [that] is telegraphed as perversely erotic on the [Master's] side, and as intensely (not to say egregiously) compassionate on the [Doctor's]" (74). This unique, albeit dysfunctional, bond is complicated by the implicit rationality of the one and the

irrationality of the other. The Master's "final solution" is to wipe out Earth's six billion inhabitants and replace them with their future versions. Here we learn that the humans from the end of the universe never found Utopia but only darkness instead. In a last attempt at survival, they warped their bodies into round metal spheres and now serve the Master as his personal robot army, the Toclafane. The paradox is that these future humans can murder their twenty-first-century ancestors without compromising their own existence. But like Marlow, who feels a kinship with the misguided Kurtz, the Doctor maintains an unshakable loyalty to his nemesis despite the latter's psychopathic behavior: "He's a Time Lord, which makes him my responsibility. I'm not here to kill him. I'm here to save him." It is precisely this allegiance to a sadistic and genocidal imperialist that renders characters like Marlow and the Doctor suspect in terms of their humanitarianism or anticolonialism.

Frances Singh writes of Marlow that

> "[his] sympathy for the oppressed blacks is only superficial. He feels sorry for them when he sees them dying, but when he sees them healthy, practicing their customs, he feels nothing but abhorrence and loathing, like a good colonizer to whom such a feeling offers a perfect rationalization for his policies" (272).

Critics generally agree that Marlow's compassion for the dehumanized blacks in the narrative is discernible but not overwhelming. Marlow is, by turns, fascinated, touched, and disgusted by black characters. His attitude to his helmsman is an example that might be read alongside the Doctor's attitude to his human companions: "It was a kind of partnership. He had steered for me—I had to look after him, I worried about his deficiencies, and thus a subtle bond had been created" (Conrad 51). Granted, the Doctor is never as callous as Marlow, who briefly mourns the death of his helmsman and then "tip [s] him overboard" (51). But the Doctor claims a similarly deified status in relation to his companions, who are invited or propelled into his world but always as his inferiors.

Marlow recalls that his helmsman "steered with no end of a swagger while you were by; but if he lost sight of you, he became instantly the prey of an abject funk" (Conrad 45). Similarly, the Doctor's friends strive to impress him but very quickly fall apart in his absence. A common scenario in the series is the Doctor's compan-

ions frantically looking for him when they "lose sight of him" and desperately calling out his name. Indeed, the common refrain, "Doctor, Doctor," becomes a global prayer in the trilogy. Despite an established fondness and protectiveness for specific individuals and the human race in general, the Doctor remains (dare I say reigns) supreme as a Time Lord. This stark inequality precludes him from ever having a balanced relationship with a human being. For all his vim and vigor, the Doctor's primary trait is loneliness, a truth that he confides to the Master when he describes the destruction of their home planet Gallifrey: "I've been alone ever since. But not anymore. Don't you see? All we've got is each other."

A worthwhile question is how the Doctor feels about humans when he is not saving them. Is it only when they are in crisis that he feels compassion or does he admire them "when he sees them healthy, practicing their customs" (Singh 272)? One of the Doctor's more damning commentaries on humanity features in season one of the new series, where the humans of the year 200,100 play lethal versions of twenty-first century game shows like *Big Brother* and the *Weakest Link*. As he literally looks down on Earth from the Game Station satellite, the Doctor (Christopher Eccleston) scoffs, "The human race. Brainless sheep being fed on a diet of... mind you, have they still got that program where three people have to live with a bear?" Although the Doctor betrays his own appetite for "mindless television," his criticism of humans as sheep-like creatures stands. When a character comments on the conspicuousness of the Tardis, the Doctor retorts, "Let me tell you something about the human race. You put a mysterious blue box slap-bang in the middle of town. What do they do? Walk past it." And after watching television coverage on the crash landing of an alien spaceship with a companion and her friends, the Doctor quietly slips out of the room: "It's just a bit human in there for me. History just happened and they're talking about where you can buy dodgy top-up cards for half price."

All of these snide remarks posit humanity as a superficial and ignorant race that lacks intuition and substance. But the Doctor and the Master also identify a savage streak in humans and describe them specifically as monsters, a portrayal that culminates in both the Future Kind and the Toclafane. In his newly regenerated form, Tennant's Doctor observes Saxon's predecessor, Prime Minister Harriet Jones, destroy a departing alien ship that has already

surrendered. Horrified and disgusted, the Doctor states, "I should have told them to run as fast as they can. Run and hide because the monsters are coming. The human race." Two seasons later, the Master echoes this sentiment almost verbatim: "Human race. Greatest monsters of them all." The Doctor clearly grapples with an innate discomfort where "human nature" is concerned, and his empathy for humanity is inextricable from its victimization. Certainly, we can cite moments where the Doctor finds fortitude and dignity in humans but, again, such moments involve triumph over adversity and the ability to persevere in oppressive circumstances. While these are noble qualities, the Doctor rarely admires humans independently of a crisis situation. The show suggests that, like the Africans seen through the eyes of Marlow, humans are child-like to a Time Lord and need to be monitored and controlled. In this respect, the Doctor is not so far removed from the Master, despite the obvious critique of the latter as the villain of the narrative.

"Always the Women"

Said argues that even though Conrad could not imagine the end of imperialism, his acknowledgement of the instability of Western power is progressive (29). In other words, British imperialism and its rhetoric are tenuous concepts that can be unsettled by the pervasive Otherness that is always "out there." Conrad gives us an encroaching darkness that threatens to engulf the so-called "light of civilization" at any moment. *Doctor Who* takes these rumblings of postcolonial possibility in radical new directions. Through Martha, for example, we are given an exciting model of anticolonial resistance on a global level. Recall Conrad's controversial portrait of a nameless African woman, implicitly Kurtz's mistress, pacing the banks of the river upon Kurtz's departure. A silent and yet memorable presence, this black female character is later juxtaposed with Kurtz's anonymous fiancée in Europe, an equally controversial image of an insipid and gullible white woman who stands in for the ignorant masses of Europe. In Martha Jones and Lucy Saxon, we have compelling counterpoints to these primary female characters in *Heart of Darkness*.

Conrad's "wild and gorgeous apparition of a woman" has been read by critics as both another problematic stereotype and a subversive

characterization (60). Of all the black characters that he describes, Marlow spends the most time on this woman and betrays an obvious admiration for her. His ethnographic description of charms, beads, and elephant tusks is easily rooted in the Victorian fascination with "Africa" and the Social Darwinism of the day. In this respect, she is a caricature, an exotic portrait of an idea. Her flatness as a stereotype is compounded by her lack of a voice, which Achebe stresses in his pioneering criticism of the novella: "It is clearly no part of Conrad's purpose to confer language on the 'rudimentary souls' of Africa" (255). However, she is afforded a unique and unmistakable agency within the text. Her role as a "fearless" warrior comes through in Marlow's description, which stresses "the shape of a helmet," "brass wire gauntlets," and that she "[does] not so much as flinch" when she hears the steamboat whistle that scatters the rest of her people (Conrad 60, 60, 67). She is also the only character who verbally challenges Kurtz, a significant point given that the majority of the characters in the text aspire to listen to or simply humor Kurtz. Granted, her dialog is never transcribed; instead, one of the European men recalls the conversation: "[S]he talked like a fury to Kurtz for an hour, pointing at me now and then" (61). But her ability to outtalk the ailing Kurtz, whose voice is so central to the narrative, places her on an even footing with him, if only for the space of a conversation. In physically and verbally resisting a colonial European presence that includes Kurtz, the African woman arguably constitutes a postcolonial presence within the narrative.

In Martha, we have a more overt example of a militant response to imperialism by a black woman. Of course, Martha is the Doctor's companion and so her relationship with the Master does not correlate to the African woman's role as Kurtz's companion. Where Kurtz has "gone native" and immersed himself in an African village, the Master remains fundamentally separate from humans, choosing to live far above the Earth on a giant airship. But the Master's identity as a charismatic but brutal imperialist means that, like Kurtz, his reign of terror triggers opposition from both his "friends" and his victims. Martha and her family play a direct role in the Master's downfall. She travels across the planet spreading hope to humanity and enacting a secret mission on the Doctor's behalf. Simultaneously, her parents and sister attempt to undermine the Master's plans while living in servitude on his flagship.

Martha is effectively a healer, "a would-be Doctor" as the Master mockingly puts it, but she plays more of a soldier in the trilogy and tellingly comes into her own when the Doctor is captured. Conrad's African woman experiences "the fear of some struggling, half-shaped resolve," namely whether to remain with her people or to follow Kurtz, who is being evacuated by Marlow and his crew (Conrad 60). But Martha's devotion is to the Doctor, and her choice is whether to remain with him and her family in captivity on the Valiant or whether to flee and try to help them from Earth. In the conclusion to the penultimate "The Sound of Drums," Martha tearfully teleports to the planet below as the Toclafane begin massacring one-tenth of the human population. But her final declaration, "I'm coming back," promises retribution and perhaps a different Martha Jones when she returns. The final episode, "Last of the Time Lords," which takes place one year later, features a black-clad Martha arriving by boat under the cover of night with gear strapped to her back and a reputation that precedes her. After introducing himself, her contact quickly states, "No need to ask who you are. Famous Martha Jones."

Although she is eventually caught and on the verge of execution, Martha has the proverbial last laugh once her mission is revealed. She has instructed the citizens of the world to think and speak the Doctor's name at exactly the same time, resulting in a kind of psychic rejuvenation that allows the Doctor to triumph. But that very act, the global and decidedly holy intonation of the Doctor's name, reestablishes the obvious power structures of the narrative. A British series like *Doctor Who* can never be about a Martha Jones, just as a British novella like *Heart of Darkness* can never be about an African woman on the banks of the Congo River. These secondary characters have their space but also their place. As Britton rightly points out, "The circumstances of Martha's departure, though ostensibly attesting her feistiness and self-reliance, actually also underscore her subordination to the Doctor. While she in effect saves the world from the Master in 'Last of the Time Lords', she is the instrument of the Doctor's messianic plan" (134). Martha is silenced just when she is at her most powerful and is most *central* to the narrative. Appropriately, given the Master's rhetorical ability, Martha's weapon is the power of words: "I told a story, that's all. No weapons. Just words." But her speech is also punctuated by the refrain, "I did what the Doctor said." As with *Heart of Darkness*, one can conclude that *Doctor Who* goes a

little way with its main black female character but not quite far enough.

The Master's wife is another female character with subversive potential in this paternalistic narrative. If Martha's militarism loosely reflects the warrior-like qualities of Conrad's "Amazon," then Lucy Saxon is reminiscent of the Intended, the "eloquent phantom" that Marlow meets at the end of the novella (Conrad 75). What makes Lucy a radical twenty-first century revision of the Intended is the unexpected choice she makes at the end of the trilogy. If one were to imagine an extreme adaptation of Conrad's novella, then Lucy's actions would be appropriate—she shoots the defeated Master in the stomach, exercising the retributive justice that none of the other characters, including the Doctor, can deliver. While this moment is a plot twist for the story arc, it is also an important example of female agency. As he slowly dies in the Doctor's arms, the Master quips, "Always the women." Given that the primary female characters in *Heart of Darkness* and the Master trilogy are marginalized and underestimated, Lucy's ability to kill the antagonist affords a curious reclamation of female power. The Doctor's apologetic comment, "I didn't see her," is also an appropriate indicator of his own myopia that women are only empathic caregivers or not worth seeing.

"A Remarkable Man"

The Master's death scene is almost on par with that of Kurtz in terms of its pathos. Instead of recoiling at "the horror" of an unseen vision, the Master is haunted by the sound of drums to the last (Conrad 68). He plaintively asks, "Will it stop, Doctor? The drumming. Will it stop?" Refusing to regenerate, he finally expires in the Doctor's arms. The Doctor weeps heartbreakingly over the body of his nemesis and later cremates him on a glorious pyre. The implication is that it takes one Time Lord to weep for another, in the same way that it takes Marlow, a British agent lost in the darkness, to mourn for Kurtz. Marlow, drawing on his own considerable rhetorical skills, reflects of Kurtz:

> He had something to say. He said it. Since I had peeped over the edge myself, I understand better the meaning of his stare, that

> could not see the flame of the candle, but was wide enough to embrace the whole universe, piercing enough to penetrate all the hearts that beat in the darkness. He had summed up—he had judged. "The horror!" He was a remarkable man. (69)

Surely the Doctor could not have delivered a more appropriate eulogy for the Master, the only other man who understood the raw power of time and the breadth of the universe.

This part of the episode fulfills what Britton calls Davies's penchant for the "saccharine" and the "bombastic," but it also extends certain trends in *Heart of Darkness* (205). Critics have long pondered the significance of Kurtz's final pronouncement and demise. Garrett Stewart reads Kurtz's death as inextricable from the fate of Marlow, his doppelganger, who experiences "a death by imaginative proxy" (360). More precisely, Stewart reads the trope of death in relation to the act of deceit, specifically the deceit of imperial rhetoric. Marlow seals his own fate (Kurtz's fate before him) when he lies to the Intended. By contrast, Juliet McLauchlan stresses what Marlow calls Kurtz's "moral victory," namely "a confirmation of the validity of his ideals, intentions, even his words" (382). McLauchlan argues that because Marlow's lie preserves Kurtz's vision it also ensures his victory.

Both of these interpretations resonate with the Master's death in "Last of the Time Lords." The Master's last taunt to the Doctor, "I win," translates to a strange kind of victory for the dying villain. In an ironic moment that drives home the marginality of Others in the narrative, the weeping Doctor breathes, "I have no one else," while his human friends look on. And if Kurtz's death bodes a similar, if delayed, fate for Marlow, then the Master's demise reiterates the mortality of a Time Lord and the possibility of death for the Doctor. More pertinent to a postcolonial critique of the trilogy, however, is the question of imperial deceit. For Stewart, Marlow is ultimately another cog in the imperial wheel, especially because of his final deception to the Intended. Although the Doctor does not preserve the Master's legacy, his choices after the Master's death are equally, if not more, suspect. The Doctor's destruction of the paradox machine triggers a time reversal, and he literally rewrites history by turning back the past year. The rest of the planet forgets the entire experience of the Master's tyranny with the exception of those on the Master's

ship. As the Doctor puts it, "We're in the eye of the storm. The only ones who will ever know."

While the erasure of the colonial experience seems like an ideal solution, postcolonial critics stress the dangers of this approach. In her discussion of colonial aftermath and postcolonial remembering, Leela Gandhi argues that the colonial past *must* be remembered to be exorcised or transcended. She suggests that postcolonial theorists can help with this work of resurrecting the past to deal with it: "If *postcoloniality* can be described as a condition troubled by the consequences of a self-willed historical amnesia, then the theoretical value of *postcolonialism* inheres, in part, in its ability to elaborate the forgotten memories of this condition" (7–8). The Master trilogy bears out "historical amnesia" as a common response to the colonial experience. In a familiar science fiction representation of time being rewritten, the Earth revolves backwards at high speed and key scenes are rewound. Most poignantly in terms of colonial occupation, a giant statue of the Master disappears, along with the thousands of nuclear missiles he planted on the ground.

To its credit, however, the show remains self-conscious about the dangers of postcoloniality as a condition of amnesia. Martha's mother constitutes what Gandhi might call a postcolonialist voice when she picks up a handgun, points it at the Master, and tearfully says, "All those things, they still happened. . . . I saw them." But she is quickly dissuaded by the Doctor from pulling the trigger or, indeed, dwelling on the past. In a more ominous scene, the camera zooms in on the Master's funeral pyre at the end of the final episode. His ring drops to the glowing embers below where it is scooped up by a female hand sporting bright red nail polish. The Master's maniacal laughter reverberates faintly in the distance. The implications of this scene are fulfilled in the two-part *Doctor Who* special "The End of Time," which features the literal resurrection of the Master by a group of loyal followers. Clearly then, burying or expunging the past does not guarantee that colonial demons have been laid to rest. What makes the mass forgetfulness of the human race that much more problematic in the trilogy is that it is not the "self-willed historical amnesia" that Gandhi describes but an amnesia effectively imposed by the Doctor. The human race is not given a choice in how it will deal with the colonial aftermath since the Doctor has the power to rewrite history.

In a final ironic moment, the ever loyal Martha sighs to the Doctor, "Time was... every single one of these people knew your name. Now they've all forgotten you." For Martha, the tragedy is not that people have forgotten the Master's tyranny but rather that they do not remember the Doctor's heroism. But the danger of the Master was grounded precisely in his deified status and his ability to sway people. In remembering the Doctor, the human race would simply swap one idol for another. Although the mass amnesia negates this risk, the Doctor remains a similar threat precisely because he is not so different from the Master. Stewart argues that Kurtz's brand of idealism lives on in Marlow, who "is twice described in the prologue as an inscrutable effigy" (370). Similarly, the Master's egotism and deification as a Time Lord remain alive and well in the Doctor, albeit on a smaller scale. One cannot help thinking that it would not take much for the Doctor's brand of paternal guardianship to tip over into something more brutal.

There are numerous ways in which the Master trilogy speaks to but also continues Conrad's narrative. The series in general plays with infinite models of Otherness by way of alien life forms and opens up radical alternatives to the stolid Britishness at its center. These particular episodes are also self-conscious about the legacies of imperialism. Said writes that, "Conrad's tragic limitation is that even though he could see clearly that on one level imperialism was essentially pure dominance and land-grabbing, he could not then conclude that imperialism had to end so that 'natives' could lead lives free from European domination" (30). By contrast, the imperialism of the Master is decidedly ended so that humans *can* lead lives free from domination. Yet the hero of the narrative, the Doctor, continues to exercise a form of benevolent rule himself. One of the markers of the human race in the series is that they always need rescuing. While that hardly constitutes imperialism on the Doctor's part, his relationship with the planet resonates with what Said describes as "a prevailing Western consensus that has come to regard the Third World as an atrocious nuisance, a culturally and politically inferior place" (28). Despite an obvious love for humans, the Doctor regularly betrays his own superiority complex, begging the question of whether the humans are ever entirely free from the "graces" of their former colonial Masters.

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