

# Re:Search

---

## The Regenerate: The Paradoxes of Nostalgia and Empire in the *Doctor Who* Series

Yue Yuan, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

---

### ABSTRACT

---

This essay examines the role of nostalgia for the Eleventh Doctor (Seasons 5-7) in the longest running BBC sci-fi TV series *Doctor Who*. Memory plays a paradoxical role as both that which plagues and exalts the nameless protagonist. As the Doctor travels the universe in search of a home he eradicated long ago, he remembers both his self-induced trauma and the hope he now provides as a hero independent of time and space. A walking paradox of creation and destruction, the Doctor epitomizes modern Britain's identity conflicts with its colonial and empirical past. *Doctor Who* unpacks the shame of Empire while it also glorifies a thoroughly imperial personality as a near divine exception. He, like the nation, struggles with the guilt and prestige of his past. Neither can completely separate from the overwhelming influence of nostalgia. The source of the Doctor's greatest tragedies and greatest aspirations coincide in memory. His nostalgia for his imagined homeland perpetuates his undying guilt for laying it to ruin. However, it is the nostalgia others have for him which spares him from the brink of erasure. Juxtaposing work on nostalgic memory by Frederic Jameson and Svetlana Boym against Michael Rothberg's theory of multidirectional memory, the Doctor works as a paragon of memory's role in identity formation. Memory acts as the most accessible form of time travel, though not the most reliable. As what the Doctor chooses to remember reveals how the mind restructures events in ever evolving identities, memory seems more storyteller than camera.

---

### KEYWORDS

---

anti-hero, *Doctor Who*, domesticity, empire, memory, national identity, nostalgia, trauma narrative

---

## FORGOTTEN HERO

Since the debut of the science fiction series *Doctor Who* in the early 1960s, the BBC program both perpetuates and challenges ties to British national identity. As viewers follow the Doctor, an eccentric figure who explores time and space in his teleporting police telephone box, the long-running series hints at an analogy which fluctuates between post-imperial Britain and manorial lords. For the series to survive, new Doctors unleash from the bodies of old ones in a renewal process of “regeneration.” For the Eleventh Doctor (Matt Smith), the series allegorizes the paradoxical relationship of British lordship and the freedom to choose a new identity apart from the fallen British Empire. Eleven teeters across a thin line between morality and memory. During the Time War, the Doctor committed massive genocide, terminating his entire home planet of Gallifrey along with the enemy population of Daleks. In his willingness to protect a moral ideal, he sacrifices his own people along with the enemy. His nostalgia for the world before his choice and the trauma he experiences afterward both trap him in a vicious memory loop.

In the episode “The Pandorica Opens,” the Doctor must reconcile the cracks in the universe created by his constant travelling. Lured into the prison believed to house the most dangerous, feared warrior in the Universe, the Doctor and his companion Amy Pond (Karen Gillan) wait with bated breath underneath Stonehenge. As he trails his fingers along the grooves or symbols of the cubic, stone Pandorica, Eleven gives a telling speech about the prison’s captive. He begins: “There was a goblin, or a trickster or a warrior. A nameless, terrible thing, soaked in the blood of a billion galaxies. The most feared being in all the cosmos. Nothing could stop it or hold it or reason with it. One day it would just drop out of the sky and tear down your world” (“The Pandorica Opens”). Unbeknownst to Eleven, an alliance of his enemies from every reach of the universe forces him into the confines of the empty prison. While the Doctor travels with the intent to fight evil, he tears entire worlds down in the process. Each crack actually acts as a portal across time and space, causing massive chaos in its midst. Eleven leaves these on his crusades to save choice individuals. Like a warrior, he possesses a drive that propels him towards action. However, this dichotomy forces the Doctor to choose a winning side. Despite his noble and lofty

causes, the carnage he leaves behind instills terror alongside wonder. In this particular instance, the alliance collaborates in self-interest to prevent further damage from memories of the Doctor. They no longer want to remember him or fall prey to his destructive memory habits. Better to forget him, burying him deep below the surface of consciousness.

When men play God, they decide their own genesis and revelations. The Doctor experiences such a liberty to compose entirely new identities. Heroes are neither born nor made, but formed through their retelling. The Doctor's constant retelling of himself and his own adventures inevitably leads to a host of alternative endings. Such constant shifting and editing of a person also transforms the nameless protagonist of *Doctor Who*, recreating his visceral reality once a body turns threadbare. At the end of every Doctor, the beginning of a new Doctor emerges as another chapter in a never-ending story.

While he starts over, the Doctor inevitably hurts people. His authority bares rifts and torn seams. In Eleven's premiere episode, he causes a young Amelia Pond to wait for him twelve years when he promises to be gone for only five minutes. A Time Lord capable of manipulating time and space, he possesses even greater agency to change his storyline. One story ends and another begins, though the moral, the remnant of the Doctor's character, remains inherently the same. While the Doctor may come and go as he pleases, he insists on protecting universal tolerance and freedom to live. In the many chapters of the Doctor's life, he submits to a rebel fight for humanity and civil rights, often against institutionalized and corrupt powers at play. However, his noble aims emit from a questionable past. The Doctor must always make a choice. By his logic, in order to secure a future of the universe, he collapses both sides of the conflict. Though many viewers and characters hold the Doctor in high regard as an individual who can do no wrong, his choices betray a subtle bias towards British tradition. Britain entered World War II as an Empire but ends fragmented and decolonized. Met with mixed amounts of reluctance from its Dominions, Britain dissolves as a seemingly strong Empire upon war's end due to pledges of independence and a tarnished image of prestige ("The British Empire in World War Two"). While Winston Churchill adamantly viewed the British Empire as fighting for a more democratic society, many colonies interpreted the war as hypocrisy. An imperial

figure, the Doctor also proclaims to fight for the good of all beings. Looking back towards Empire, the series mulls over a problematic nostalgia of the past.

Infected with a longing for his lost homeland, the Doctor embodies both the perpetual foreigner and the forever homesick. Nostalgia returns him to a utopic past he imagines within the present. In “Nostalgia for the Present,” Frederic Jameson finds that the imagined space creates a drive for the safety in the domestic and the home. The Doctor merely wants to go home. However, the Doctor’s last memory of his home, Gallifrey, coincides with the planet’s fall at his hands. As he imagines home, he also returns to shock. Called the “reverse shock” in Michael Rothberg’s *Multidirectional Memory*, violence echoes repeated acts of trauma on a different population. As described in Svetlana Boym’s analytical novel *The Future of Nostalgia*, the medically diagnosed “nostalgic was a manic of longing” where his disease relates everything back to past memories (4). Embanked with sheer homesickness, the Doctor looks for home through his many travel companions. Because he realizes his safe haven no longer exists, the Doctor needs to find solace through other people. Rather than instill a sense of contentment, companions compound the Doctor’s nostalgia. They too contract nostalgia and develop an astute sense of irrevocable homesickness while accompanying the Doctor through the universe. Nostalgia ensures a return, whether to guilt or to newfound hope. Regardless, it is a return to the home or familiar. For the Doctor, that either means a return to the home he destroyed or the home he seeks to make among his companions.

Because imagined space also plays as fantasy, nostalgia blinds both the Doctor and his admirers from facing the rifts in his complex character. In “The Wedding of River Song,” the Doctor’s confidante, River Song (Alex Kingston), freezes time along a fixed point to prevent killing the Doctor. Mentally conditioned by Madame Kovarian and the Silence to murder the Doctor, River instead falls in love with him and breaks from her training. She, alongside Amy and Rory, refuses to let the Doctor die. When he wants to come to terms with death, she instead drains her weapons and replies, “Fixed points can be rewritten.” River refuses to murder the Doctor because of her personal relationship with him and nostalgia about their marriage. Her decision forces time not just to stop, but, as

the Doctor says, “it's [time is] disintegrating. It will spread and spread and all of reality will simply fall apart” (“The Wedding of River Song”). In order to preserve the idea of the Doctor, the Doctor’s friends will destroy time in the name of loving him. Memory of his loyalty to them creates a romantic yet generally destructive bond. As a means of saving the Doctor, his friends risk losing the entire universe.

The Eleventh Doctor wants to forget the horrors and traumas of his past lives. In a telling moment locked in with two previous versions of himself, he confesses he forgot the number of children who died on Gallifrey the night he ended the Time War. During the majority of episodes heralding in Eleven, the Doctor appears lighthearted and eager to approach dangerous situations. He holds none of the military exactness of Nine nor the altruistic guilt of Ten. Perhaps he just hides these qualities better under a veil of eccentricity. As Eleven reluctantly reveals the travesties of his past self, he also speaks about his character.

The Doctor has chosen to become a refugee without a family, nation, or government. He chooses to relinquish these things in the hope of the universe’s greater survival, but the move also solidifies his own hero status. Where would Superman be if Krypton were not destroyed? The universe only needs one time-travelling Doctor, not a world of them. Even when Ten and Eleven prevent the War Doctor (John Hurt) from genocide, the planet must still be frozen in a pocket universe. Thus, the population can never move forward or backwards, never existing in true time or space. Gallifrey’s memory forever exists on the cusp of destruction but never meets it head on again. The Doctor, too, operates on this logic. He locks his past away behind the borders of nostalgia, despite the freedom his time travel promises.

The Time War operates as the necessary evil incorporated into complex decisions aimed for the greater good. Its memory latches into the Doctor like a perpetually open wound, a moment he forever regrets yet compels him to always save those he can in the future. As the War Doctor debates with the Moment, a weapon of mass destruction with a sentient interface, to end the Time War, she devises a consequence for his decision. Though he wishes not to survive the war, she says, “Then that's your punishment. If you do

this - if you kill them all - then that's the consequence. You live. Gallifrey, you're going to burn it. And all those Daleks with it. But all those children too" ("The Day of the Doctor"). His condemnation, instead of a sentence to death, is a life sentence. With his numerous regenerations, the Doctor pays penance for his decision by his commitment to regret. Though forgetting creates a brief respite by freezing time, memory returns him to a fixed point of failure.

Due to a sense of multidimensional memory, the Doctor re-traumatizes himself with the past. As Michael Rothberg argues, memory interacts with different points along a time stream, never entirely isolated or laid to rest at certain key moments (5). However, within the boundaries of the show, the current of memory still flows around fixed points in time that even the Doctor cannot manipulate. Certain aspects of his past remain questionable and often horrific. The collective memory of the Doctor as a fierce warrior and ally must also coincide with the image of the Doctor as a renegade mass murderer. His heroism and superiority fail to guarantee justice.

While the show deliberates the guilt of empire, it simultaneously extols the imperial personality as an exception. Through the lens of *Doctor Who*, the Doctor is nearly divine. When the Doctor destroys the nation, he erases a part of his past yet also permanently cements a moment of trauma he must return to. The fall of Gallifrey never eliminates an entire people or a collective consciousness. It transforms collective memory into the eradicable loss of personal memory. Multidimensional memory serves to haunt him, as the trauma continues to resurface through traces of Gallifrey. The Doctor, though he aims to diminish evil, can never erase the dark choice he made in his own past. That formidable side of him integrates with the lighthearted Doctor who appears in moments of crisis as well. Both the best and worst of history, the Doctor serves as a symbol of national identity. As with the British Empire during World War II, no good came without its fair share of complications and dissent. A projection of hope onto the future, the Doctor also bears in mind the regret and peril of the past.

The Doctor neither escapes the guilt of his decision nor his position as a Time Lord. He seeks out those in danger, particularly women, and finds means by which he can

rescue them. In the history of the show, the Doctor's travelling companions nearly always submit to the trope of a screaming woman. For Eleven, his companions develop more of their own ferocity and independence, yet still depend on the Doctor. In the case of Amelia Pond, she is called the girl who waited, compromising both her sanity and future marriage for his sake. Eleven first crash-lands in Amy's backyard, still recuperating from his latest regeneration. He discovers the first crack in the universe near her bedroom wall. After twelve years of waiting for her "raggedy man," Amy accompanies Eleven as a travelling companion in the TARDIS ("The Big Bang"). With her fiancé Rory Williams in tow, the duo holds their own alongside the Doctor, often sacrificing their own safety for his.

Other companions reinforce the desire of the Doctor to protect others while they themselves upend this assumption. River Song, the Doctor's wife, lives in an opposing time stream where her future exists in the Doctor's past. Though powerful, River exists to eliminate the Doctor as part of the Silence, an order bent on his imminent destruction. Well versed in time and space theory, she proves a formidable counterpart to the Doctor, sharing many of his Time Lord characteristics. Clara Oswald, the anomaly, exists to save him. A babysitter when the Doctor first encounters her, Clara downloads a massive amount of computer data from the Great Intelligence, a recurrent threat to freedom of life on earth. Later, the show reveals Clara as the girl who saves the Doctor, an ever-present force scattered across time to protect him. She sacrifices herself for his sake at Trenzalore. Despite the companions' respective strong personalities, much of their lives revolve around the Doctor's choices and lifestyle. Like a British lord, the Doctor gives off a traditional sense of chivalry embedded within his decisions. He represents a keen sense of honor and dignity which one associates, albeit subtly, as part and parcel of Britishness.

In terms of national identity, this both perpetuates and enhances what it means to be expressly British amongst, quite literally, aliens. While the show produces mostly white protagonists with a few exceptions, the abundance of aliens within the show provide opportunities for alternate perspectives to develop, incorporating different races and genders into conversation. While new writers readily incorporate minority characters into the show, the episodes distinctly lack in other minority diversity. While

underrepresentation of minorities in Western media remains the standard, the Eleventh Doctor in new *Who* incorporates an underlying tolerance and respect to all individuals with whom he talks. However, many of those written alongside the Doctor act merely as foils to him, mere plot devices without their own well-formed stories. The British colonial past of visiting and traversing, as Matt Jones in “Aliens of London: (Re)reading National Identity in *Doctor Who*” realizes, continues through the Doctor’s visits. According to Jones, the series analyzes Britain by “deconstructing and destabilizing the very fabric of British history itself,” playing with time to find a collective vision of national identity (86). A representative of a bygone era analogous to the British Empire, the Doctor contacts and often changes those planets he visits. He seldom leaves any world or people without meddling about with his sonic screwdriver. By passing judgment and often making choices for people groups, the Doctor places qualitative calls onto people groups. While viewed positively, these choices still reveal discrimination.

The Doctor exists on the borders and in-betweens, never in a single dimension. The same may be gleaned from his biases. While he earnestly promises individualistic freedom from oppression, he also subtly operates on the skeleton of the archaic British ruling class. He travels as a walking paradox, standing both for the empire he loved and destroyed but also for the future he can possibly save. Traumatized by the past yet holding in high regards with nostalgia, the Doctor never keeps anything he loves. His loved ones nearly always disappear or suffer due to his adventures, never remaining by his side. They exist in memory and, eventually, unreachable moments in time. While the Doctor aims for virtue, he must do so in the shadow of a nostalgic past he destroys for the sake of a collective future. He sacrifices what he loves the most to ensure the continuation of multidimensional memory. Trauma, however, causes the Doctor to transport back towards this moment in time as motivation behind his virtue. Vice both conceals and propels his just acts. The Doctor’s worst act overshadows his best, his last regenerations an attempt to rewrite amidst the dust.

## LOSS AND ABSENCE

Memory lapses across the sands of time in waves, the rejoinder that returns everything we left behind to forget. For those who committed heinous acts, memory serves only to haunt and repeat in a self-deprecating spiral. Though the Doctor's decision to eliminate both Gallifrey and the Daleks occurs only once, he must relive the moment forever in memory. In the episode "The Pandorica Opens," the Doctor encourages Amelia as she experiences some revival from severe memory loss. He says, "Nothing is ever forgotten, not completely. And if something can be remembered, it can come back." For the Doctor, this comfort instead acts as a curse, constantly evoking memories of his home destroyed by his own choice. As an allegory of Great Britain, the Doctor struggles with his painful past marked by his dark decision coupled with his unending nostalgia to return home. Though he struggles to reinvent himself and rebuild, he returns time and time again to the shoreline of his broken empire. Like the fragmented British Empire, national identity struggles to form amidst the rubble of an expansive kingdom. Nostalgia becomes his trauma, plaguing him with an imagined yet unattainable refuge.

When the British Empire dissolved, guilt and nostalgia for the past surfaced in imagining a new national identity. *Doctor Who* encapsulates Britain's polarized struggle to recreate itself despite the shadow of its expansive, colonial past. A narrative echoing with both trauma and nostalgia, the Doctor suffers from a sense of loss he battles through saving those in danger. However, this fallacy in appointing one's self as sovereign perpetuates the Doctor's original trauma. By appointing himself as an arbiter within the universe, the Doctor enacts his Time Lordship as an absolute power. *Doctor Who* unpacks the shame of Empire while it also glorifies a thoroughly imperial personality as a near divine exception. The show conscientiously displays the Doctor's shortcomings, yet he alone stands to maintain the universe's continuation. Fueled by the nostalgia towards a nonexistent home, the Doctor operates as a paradox. A self-determined hero bent on fighting those forces that only destroy, he must also fight his own destructive nature. Both time travel and introspection enhance the complexities of the Doctor as a guilt-ridden image of imperialism merging with postcolonial ideals.

While nostalgia stabs the Doctor with longings for a home he collapsed, nostalgia for his own past regenerations as a hero glosses over such trauma. The Doctor compensates for past destruction through reminding himself of his own good deeds. The Eleventh Doctor especially, known as “the one who forgets,” exudes an upbeat enthusiasm which betrays the guilt of his past (“The Day of the Doctor”). Thus, the Doctor’s past accomplishments refract against his destructive choice. As Michael Rothberg says, “[M]aking the past present opens the doors of memory to intersecting pasts and undefined futures. Memory is thus structurally multidirectional, but each articulation of the past processes that multidirectionality differently” (35-6). The past operates to both shame and glorify the Doctor as an emblem of empire. In one reflection, he epitomizes the lone hero raging against impossible odds yet who always makes the right choice. From another angle, the Doctor’s past rages with ruthless violence imparted towards his numerous enemies. In “The Pandorica Opens,” the Doctor prevents numerous attacks by reminding his enemies who he once was and still is. He shouts at the gathered alliance, “I don't have anything to lose. So if you're sitting up there in your silly little spaceship with all your silly little guns and you've got any plans on taking the Pandorica tonight, just remember who's standing in your way! Remember!” (“The Pandorica Opens”). When enemies from all parts of the universe gather to the Pandorica, the Doctor protects it by merely asserting his ego and his reputation. He relies on the guise of memory to terrorize his enemies, facilitating a sense of prestige to surround his name and ensure his future as someone with a great deal of worth. The past operates to redefine the future in manifold ways. The Doctor’s trauma surfaces as motivation to save, while his prestige and power intimidate future challengers. As in “Nostalgia for the Present,” his loneliness as a Time Lord can be interpreted as a sort of privileged privacy, “walling other people out, protection against crowds and other bodies” in a “misery” that “will not be alien” because it is his own (Jameson 286). He draws on his aloneness as a strength, for only isolated can he declare allegiance to nothing and no one. The Doctor claims a position above the ties and collectivity of relationships, but also against the collective attack of the Alliance. While he promotes individualism and independence, he symbolizes a desire for privatization against the looming crowds.

Interpreted as arrogance, even the Doctor's trauma equipped to attack his enemies reveals his shortcomings.

As a science fiction simulacrum of British national identity, *Doctor Who* operates on a sense of all-powerful prestige that resonates with Empire. However, with the debilitating and humbling experiences of World War II, this reputation ultimately deteriorates into a figment of the past. In its wake, the nation experiences a postcolonial awakening and awareness that must come to terms with colonial atrocities. Like "a kind of distorted form of cognitive mapping, an unconscious and figurative projection of some more 'realistic' account of our situation," *Doctor Who* creates space to reflect on these aftershocks of Empire building (Jameson 283). Lurking behind his bravado, the Doctor hides his profound shame about Gallifrey. His defeat at the pinnacle of his power mirrors Britain's role in World War II. While Britain, as part of the Allies, eventually shares in the victory of World War II, it is at an immense cost. Great Britain, in order to finance the war, dissolves the Empire as a superpower, allowing the United States to take her place. While Britain wins on a global scale, the Empire falls as a result. In "The Day of the Doctor," Eleven looks toward the painting of *Gallifrey Falls* and admits:

I've had many faces, many lives. But I don't admit to all of them. There's one life I've tried very hard to forget. He was the Doctor who fought in the Time War and that was the day he did it. The day I did it. The day he killed them all. The last day of the Time War. The war to end all wars. Between my people and the Daleks. And in that battle there was a man with more blood on his hands than any other. A man who would commit a crime that would silence the universe. And that man was me. ("The Day of the Doctor")

An image of post-colonial Britain, the Doctor admits the blood of his past as something he longs to forget. Britain's role in World War II relied heavily on colonial involvement and manpower on several continents. As the Doctor confesses, "he killed them all" in "the war to end all wars," so the British Empire sacrificed countless colonial lives during the last World War. India alone sent two and a half million men to fight alongside the Allied

Powers ("Colonies, Colonials and World War Two"). Colonies in Africa and the Pacific also provided valuable funds and military bases to increase British prestige during wartime. Once more, this covers Britain with "blood" due to the overwhelming debt incurred by manhandling its colonies. While the Doctor confesses he destroys the planet outright, the British Empire self-destructs and fragments due to protests for independence. Without colonies in Africa or like India, Britain could no longer claim global dominance, thereby relinquishing the Empire's hold on her "planet." Gallifrey, then, represents both the destruction of the old Empire and the plot device that gives birth to the imperial figure of the Doctor.

The Doctor participates in a confusion of symbols that overlap modernity with memories of the past as a means to critique both. A warrior suffering from the throes of memory, the Doctor destroys all that which he felt loyal towards. Boym describes how "[t]he outburst of nostalgia both enforced and challenged the emerging conception of patriotism and national spirit" (5). The soldiers, whom she describes, felt so compelled to fight for their country they were willing to die for it. In the case of the Doctor, he presents an extreme opposition to nostalgia's link with patriotism. Though the Doctor loves the nation of Time Lords, he willingly sacrifices them due to his hatred of the Daleks. To prevent further destruction, he ensures the death of his own people to prevent them from ever resurfacing. His punishment, as determined by The Moment, is to live on while everyone else dies and his planet burns. As Rothberg states, "The dead are not traumatized, they are dead; trauma implies some 'other' mode of living on" (90). While the Doctor lives on, he inhabits the shadow of the past during his time travel. Though he survives as the hero to future generations, he must bear the immense burden of choosing to destroy his loved ones in a moment of crisis. Each altruistic act looms under his one terrible decision. However, this moment of memory predetermines how the Doctor sacrifices on behalf of those he chooses to save. Though traumatic, it propels him towards highly motivated good deeds. While viewers may feel sympathy towards the Doctor, his pain again mirrors that of the fallen British Empire. While "perpetrators of extreme violence can suffer from trauma," their stress "makes them no less guilty of their crimes

and does not entail claims to victimization or even demands on our sympathy” (Rothberg 90). By some means, the Doctor bears resemblance to this image of colonialism burdened by shame. A Time Lord who possesses sole rights to govern and travel in time, he knowingly weighs out a mass murder before enacting it. A calculated decision debated with the Moment’s interface, the genocide unveils the Doctor’s own thoroughly measured choices. Though the Doctor’s shame comes from a valid place, it fails to excuse the depravity of his crime. Though he means to spare the universe of further bloodshed, he achieves this end goal by slaughtering two entire species; one of them his own.

Such a critique on trauma and memory reveals a postcolonial spin surrounding the Doctor. While an imperial system may center on the decisions of a sovereign, Britain currently operates as a constitutional monarchy in which power remains divided. Just as the Doctor must reinvent himself, so Matt Jones notices the UK “once had to forge itself a new identity, disassociating itself from the colonialism and exploitation that had been the hallmark of its historical reputation, a past it also sought to suppress” (97). As an emblem of both the Empire and Britain’s future, the Doctor appears as a damaged, emotionally wrought figure unable to come to terms with his past. He emerges as both perpetrator and victim, unable to escape his own trauma. While the Doctor is a murderer, he also lives as the lone survivor of his own genocide. Though a hero to the universe at large, he exists as a walking impossibility. An artifact of a world gone, the Doctor creates himself as both a ruin and a relic. Rothberg reimagines history through pursuing “the power of anachronism, which brings together that which is supposed to be kept apart” (136). The Doctor erases and rewrites the world as a transcendent figure above time. He meets prominent figures of the past and often disrupts them to ensure their survival or safety. By crashing into others’ lives, regardless of time or place, the Doctor seeks to make familiar that “which is supposed to be” strange (Rothberg 136). So rises the Doctor, the impossible self-made anachronism.

Doctor Who puts a British-centered twist at every avenue of change within the show. While noting the colonialism found in writer Caryl Phillip’s fiction, Michael Rothberg also emphasizes how multidirectional memory proceeds in light of cultural possession. He constructs the “[m]ultidirectional exchange” as “beyond the forms of

cultural ownership that motivate competitive struggles over the past” (Rothberg 158). In “The Big Bang” Doctor Who episode, tension increases between the fluid moments in time and the Doctor as a figure who must exist and be remembered. Because the Doctor remains within the Pandorica, the universe and reality collapses. As he explains, “When the TARDIS blew up, it caused a total event collapses. A time explosion” which “blasted every atom in every moment of the universe” except inside the Pandorica. The Doctor causes the end of the universe but also proposes a new beginning. In the midst of askew timelines and the last dregs of existence, he promises to “reboot the universe” (“The Big Bang”). In order to reverse the damage he imparts onto the remaining universe, the Doctor must sacrifice himself. “The box contains a memory of the universe” which the Doctor launches into the heart of the TARDIS’s explosion. The universe begins and ends on the imprints of memory. As the restoration field occurs simultaneously throughout this infinite moment, he hopes time will restart itself. The Doctor believes each person will return to the place he or she is supposed to be. However, in order to do so, he must destroy the present world and create a new one based on its memories. At the heart of the explosion, he has very little hope for survival unless others remember him.

While Rothberg argues multidirectional memory exists above cultural ownership, the Doctor presents an incident where the two memories coincide. Representative of British national identity, the Doctor drags himself into the heart of the problem. The Pandorica was a prison meant to house the most dangerous being, the Doctor. Due to his imprisonment, the universe ends because the enemy alliance wants to forget him. The universe cannot exist with or without the Doctor. His memory, at least, must prevail over the changing times. Though he consistently travels time to help people, his reputation solidifies his enemy status with the Alliance. However, because of the Doctor’s existence within the Pandorica, he survives intact at the end of the Universe. The Pandorica imprisons, but also preserves, the Doctor as the last hope for survival. In regards to the idea of Britain, the British Empire passes on, but also enables, its people with a tradition of conquering and assumed power. This memory of prestige prevails throughout those who conceive or associate with British national identity, thus also preserving a sense of the

colonial. The Doctor successfully reboots the universe by imprisoning himself within the Pandorica walls and launching himself into the end – the TARDIS explosion. He quite literally becomes the center of the universe and its beginning. An egocentric interpretation of history, a Time Lord returns the universe to a peaceful state where an alliance could not. Individualism and the decisions of one overwhelm the popular opinion of the Alliance. The Doctor saves the universe, but at the expense of himself.

As the Doctor's timeline unwinds and people begin forgetting him, he ultimately returns due to Amy Pond's extraordinary memory. While most of her relatives interpret her memory of her imaginary friend the Doctor as medical, her mother in particular mentioning "the psychiatrists we sent her to," Amy's nostalgia veers away from the medical as "a romance of the past" (Boym 11). The show encourages imagination and nostalgia, as Amy's memory eventually brings the Doctor back. While romantic and impossible, this is exactly who the Doctor professes to be. Thus, only fantastical thinking and a ridiculous imagination of the past can bring him back from the void of nonexistence. Nostalgia enhances memory with colorful, though often fabricated, details of a life once lived. Rather than condemn this glorification of the past, *Doctor Who* encourages rereading of the past as paramount to the future. Without Amy's impossible memories envisioning this raggedy man in a blue box, she could not have rewritten the Doctor into his present existence. To save the universe from multidirectional cracks in time, the Doctor must eliminate every trace of himself. To drag the Doctor from unraveling at the brink of death, Amy must remember despite a collective universal amnesia.

Though the Doctor realizes he must erase himself from memory to ensure the universe's safety, he pins his remaining hope on the whims of Amy Pond, whom he dubs "the girl who waited" ("The Big Bang"). What does waiting mean but clinging to the imprints and memories of someone once lost? It is the last hope of those already past or civilizations laid in ruin. Since her first encounter with the Doctor, Pond endeavors to preserve his footprints on her life, whatever the sacrifice on her part. When Amelia Pond weeps at her wedding, she does so due to her memory of the Doctor. Boym defines "modern nostalgia" as "mourning for the impossibility of mythical return" or an "absolute,

a home” (10). The Doctor, though he can never return home and embodies nostalgia unanswered, is saved through another’s fond memories of him. Because he provides feelings of safety as a new friend with ancient ties, Amy Pond resolves her own feelings of nostalgia. She cries, “I remember! I remember! I brought the others back, I can bring you home, too” (“The Big Bang”). The Doctor can only live on through memory. When his loved ones choose to remember him, it confirms his purpose and meaning in life. Though plagued by his own nostalgia, the Doctor also pins his hopes on the nostalgia of his imaginative companion. The memories of his former home ghost through his mind ceaselessly, but it is also the memories of his loved ones that call him back to the living, which call him home.

Memory both perpetuates and alleviates pain, almost the logic behind the Doctor’s morality. He is a refugee borne out of his own torment, a lonely wanderer due to his own decisions. The Doctor’s genocide forces him into the slavery of nostalgia, as his idealized homeland perpetuates his guilt and fatigues him to no end. He constantly persecutes himself with a utopic picture of what his world once looked like. On his constant travels, no place can be home because the Doctor cannot live with himself. Such “paradoxical comprehension” thus involves “breaking up phenomena and recomposing the fragments in the form of constellations”(Rothberg 53). Like his numerous regenerations, the Doctor is a whole made up of parts. A raggedy patchwork man made not just from different physical parts, but the collective memories and consciousness of characters, he is but a figment of memory and dust.

Like the British Empire, he dissolved before reconstructing into an entirely new entity built on the ruins of the old. The Doctor, an analogy to the British ideal, resides between the new and ancient, a post-colonial push for independence, yet a domineering, lordly figure. A walking paradox, the Doctor is a nation of contradictions, which signify post-empirical Britain’s own unresolved questions of identity. The Doctor embodies this gap between destruction and resurrection, the frame of a nation built on the dregs of collective memory. Rather than progression, national identity is a recurrent conversation

with the past to tease out a future. As Britain rewrites its own narrative, the Doctor is also a story come to life after retelling.

Memory, like storytelling, adapts based on what we want to remember. It is the best story one tells about the self. Any modern neuroscientist or psychologist says that memory is a dynamic, active thing. It is not a mere recording on a faithful DVR. Memory lives on in mutability, editing itself and expanding on imagined, fantastic details. As memory changes, it not only mirrors but also constantly influences how we see ourselves and our histories. The Doctor tells himself a new story every time he travels or regenerates. He can change all the mechanics, the syntax, and even edit out some of his mistakes, but the plot remains. He is a warrior with the potential to heal – a war doctor. An enigma full of contradictions, he both destroys and heals the universe. National identity too morphs, returning to and re-editing points in the past to fit current interpretations. Memory, then, lapses and relapses across time to remind one of the lost. It is a way to find and return home when all else seems forgotten. Though the Doctor remembers destroying his home he can only reach through nostalgia, it is through Amelia Pond’s nostalgia of him that he can return to the living. Home is not where the heart is, but where memory thrives.

## WORKS CITED

- “The Big Bang.” *Doctor Who*. BBC One. UK. 26 June 2010. Television.
- Boym, Svetlana. *The Future of Nostalgia*. New York: Basic Books, 2001. Pdf. Web.
- “Doctor Who: The Day of the Doctor.” Dir. Nick Hurran. BBC One, 23 November 2013. Film.
- Jameson, Frederic. “Nostalgia for the Present.” *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Duke University Press Books, 1990. 289-296. Print.
- Jones, Matt. “Aliens of London: (Re)Reading National Identity in *Doctor Who*.” *Ruminations, Peregrinations, and Regenerations: A Critical Approach to Doctor Who*. Ed. Chris Hansen. UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010. 85-99. Print.
- Mulvey, Paul. "The British Empire in World War Two (lecture)." Academia.edu. N.p., n.d. Web. Jan.-Feb. 2014.
- “The Pandorica Opens.” *Doctor Who*. BBC One. UK. 19 June 2010. Television.
- Rothberg, Michael. *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*. Stanford University Press, 2009. Kindle Edition.
- Sherwood, Marika. "Colonies, Colonials and World War Two." BBC News. BBC, 30 Mar. 2011. Web. Jan.-Feb. 2014.
- “The Wedding of River Song.” *Doctor Who*. BBC One. UK 1 Oct 2011. Television.