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‘Don’t Make Me Go Back’: Post-Feminist Retreatism in *Doctor Who*

By Alyssa Franke and Danny Nicol

ABSTRACT

In post-2005 *Doctor Who* the female companion has become a seminal figure. This article shows how closely the narratives of the companions track contemporary notions of post-feminism. In particular, companions’ departures from the programme have much in common with post-feminism’s master-theme of retreatism, whereby women retreat from their public lives to find fulfilment in marriage, home and family. The article argues that when companions leave the TARDIS, what happens next ought to embody the sense of empowerment, purpose and agency which they have gained through their adventures, whereas too often the programme’s authors have given companions ‘happy endings’ based on finding husbands and settling down.

KEYWORDS

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Russell T. Davies

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For over fifty years, *Doctor Who* has told the story of an alien - the Doctor - who travels through time and space with a companion, and that companion has ~~(certainly since 1970) been~~ predominantly been a conventionally attractive young woman. One of the most pivotal moments in each companion's story is when they leave. Travelling with the Doctor is not just an exciting adventure, but frequently an empowering experience. Yet all companions must eventually make the transition from life in the TARDIS. Their departure is inevitable: after all, *Doctor Who* has survived and thrived by continuously replacing its cast. So while companion departures are nothing unusual, examining how and why they leave the Doctor and what they do afterwards provides a valuable opportunity to examine broader societal narratives about femininity. By indicating what happens next in companions' lives *Doctor Who* shows us whether their sense of empowerment is durable or whether they are destined to retreat into conformist gender roles.

In this article we consider two companions – Donna Noble (Catherine Tate) and Amy Pond (Karen Gillan) - from the post-2005 programme. A focus on 'new *-Who*' enables us not only to assess the programme's contemporary stance on the politics of gender but also to address companions and their departures in the light of post-feminism. Post-feminism, according to Rosalind Gill, is a distinctive sensibility organised around notions of choice, empowerment, self-surveillance and sexual difference, and articulated in an ironic and knowing register, in which feminism is simultaneously taken for granted and repudiated. Its essence, that women have 'choice', seems progressive: but post-feminism is actually regressive since the 'right choice', the freely-chosen wish of active, confident women, is to conform to pre-feminist ideas of femininity (Gill 2007: 161). Post-feminism came to the fore in popular culture in the 1990s, and has brought about considerable changes in representing femininity on television. (Negra 2009: 5). Post-feminist themes engage both feminist and anti-feminist discourses. As Joanne Hollows observes, under post feminism, feminist themes can be appropriated, lose their radicalism and become attached to a conservative agenda (Hollows 2000: 198). In other words the good bits of feminism have already been incorporated into 'common sense' and the bad bits are condemned to ridicule. Rosalind Gill argues that feminism is made part of a common sense, yet is simultaneously feared, hated and fiercely repudiated. Post-feminism constructs its articulation between feminist and anti-feminist ideas through a grammar of individualism which fits perfectly with neoliberalism, which in turn constructs individuals as entrepreneurial actors who are rational, calculating and self-regarding (Gill 2007: 162). As Joanne Hollows observes, under post-feminism, feminist themes can be appropriated, lose their radicalism and become attached to a conservative agenda (Hollows 2000: 198). (Gill 2007: 161). Donna and Amy would seem particularly appropriate subjects for this analysis because marriage and weddings – which loom large in the post-feminist sensibility – feature more prominently in their narratives than any other companions.

Whilst there is now an established scholarly literature on gender and the companions in *Doctor Who*, and whilst this article is but one intervention in a continuing discussion about gender representations in the programme, charting *Doctor Who*'s relationship to post-feminism may

well provide important insights. The leading literature on post-feminism in film and television covers ~~American~~-chick flicks and ~~American~~ women-focused television, whereas this study focuses on a ~~British~~-science fiction programme, thereby probing whether post-feminism has broadened its scope. *Doctor Who*'s treatment of post-feminist themes is also important because the British Broadcasting Corporation is a public service broadcaster and part of the British state: it is bound by an obligation to promote diversity. *Doctor Who* is one of its flagship programmes with a huge worldwide audience. The messages which *Doctor Who* transmits about women are matters of general social importance with a clear connection to state politics. As Katie Milestone and Anneke Mayer observe, such representations *matter*: they are not merely words and images, but reflect and encourage certain ways of thinking about and acting in relation to women (Milestone and Mayer 2012: 112).

There is no question that the female companion has become more important since *Doctor Who*'s revival: Richard Wallace points to a significant restructuring of the programme, whereby a succession of story-arcs constructed around each companion make her a more central character such that we might now consider *Doctor Who* as a female-led show (Wallace 2010: 114). Yet, as Lorna Jowett observes, this greater role leaves open the question of whether *Doctor Who*, with its emphasis on the strange, novel and uncanny, fulfils its potential to offers something radical by way of gender relations (Jowett 2014: 78). In this regard even a traditional 'happy ending' for companions – one in which the woman pairs off with a man to form a 'final couple' - need not necessarily be regressive, since as James McDowell shows in his analysis of the endings in Hollywood films, happy endings have the *capacity* for ideological flexibility, even though they do not have a *tendency* towards such flexibility (McDowell 2013: 187).

In this article we argue that post-2005 *Doctor Who* conforms to many features of post-feminism, yet while post-feminism fosters the pretence of female autonomy, airbrushing social and economic pressures, *Doctor Who* on occasion rejects even the semblance of its women controlling their destinies. We will articulate this argument first by considering the various persistent features of post-feminism and how they play out in Donna's and Amy's narratives, secondly by considering the nature of retreatism as post-feminism's most fundamental feature, and finally by assessing how retreatism is embodied in Donna's and Amy's departures.

Donna and Amy: fitting the post-feminist template?

The stories of Donna and Amy, we would argue, fit snugly into post-feminism in multiple respects. Donna, an office temp, encounters the tenth Doctor (David Tennant) in 'The Runaway Bride' (2007), when she is accidentally transported from her wedding into the TARDIS by alien interference. After this adventure, she rejects the Doctor's initial offer to travel with him, but subsequently seeks him out ('Partners in Crime' (2008)). She is the Doctor's companion throughout series 4 (2008). Her story arc centres on the prediction that she will become the most important woman in the universe, but will suffer loss. This happens in the series finale, where she accidentally fuses with the Doctor to become a human-Time Lord hybrid, the Doctor-Donna, in which form she saves the universe from the Daleks. But her body cannot cope with the hybridisation so the Doctor reverses it, wipes her memory of her adventures with him, and returns her to her family on Earth.

Amy joins the eleventh Doctor (Matt Smith) as his companion in ‘The Eleventh Hour’ (2010). She marries boyfriend Rory Williams (Arthur Darvill) while travelling with the Doctor, and they both join him for adventures in the TARDIS in series 5, 6 and 7 (2010-2013). At one point, the Doctor manages to persuade the pair to relinquish their adventures with him, but they subsequently resume periodic trips with the Doctor. At the same time they attempt to maintain a life on Earth, with Amy working first as a model then a journalist, and Rory pursuing a nursing career. Amy and Rory leave in ‘The Angels take Manhattan’ (2013) when Amy is forced to make a choice between ending her travels with the Doctor or separating herself permanently from Rory.

~~Rosalind Post-feminism, then, constructs an articulation between feminist and anti-feminist ideas. According to Rosalind Gill it does so through a grammar of individualism which fits perfectly with neoliberalism, which in turn constructs individuals as entrepreneurial actors who are rational, calculating and self-regarding (Gill 2007: 162). Gill identifies the following relatively-stable features which make a text post-feminist:~~

...the notion that femininity is a bodily property; the shift from objectification to subjectification; the emphasis upon self-surveillance, monitoring and discipline; a focus upon individualism, choice and empowerment; the dominance of a makeover paradigm; a resurgence in ideas of natural sexual difference; a marked sexualisation of culture; and an emphasis upon consumerism and the commodification of difference. (Gill 2007: 149)

Several of these themes are readily apparent in the stories of Donna and Amy, not least -notions of women’s choice, of ‘being oneself’ and ‘pleasing oneself’, which are central to post-feminism. All practices, so the story goes, are freely chosen by women. They are wholly autonomous agents, no longer constrained by inequalities or power imbalances (Gill 2007: 153). Proclamations of autonomy are commonplace, for instance Donna’s ‘lippy’ assertiveness and Amy’s supposed domination of Rory, such that the Doctor refers to the couple as ‘the Ponds’. Yet, under post-feminism, a veneer of autonomy conceals a pervasive imperative to please men – as exemplified by Donna’s husband-seeking and Amy’s jobs. Whilst post-feminist heroines are much more active protagonists in romance compared to their counterparts of earlier decades, they deploy their empowered position to make choices which are problematic in feminist terms, with pre-feminist ideals often being seductively repackaged as post-feminist freedoms (Probyn 1997: 127).

Donna’s and Amy’s stories also reflect not least post-feminism’s obsessive preoccupation with the body. The idea that a ‘sexy body’ is presented as a woman’s key source of identity is reflected in Amy’s early jobs being driven by her good looks – first kissogram then model. The adventure in which Donna becomes a companion revolves around the pursuit of slimness as ‘the holy grail of the modern age’ (‘Partners in Crime’ (2008)). —Donna also forgoes an adventure with the Doctor (~~David Tennant~~) in ‘Midnight’ (2008) in order to sunbathe at an expensive-looking health farm. This scene highlights another aspect of post-feminism: an emphasis on self-surveillance in which a woman’s constant effort to improve her body must always be understood as being ‘fun’, ‘pampering’ and ‘self-indulgence’. Bodily improvement is thereby presented as something a woman does ‘for herself’ rather than to be attractive to men (Gill 2007: 155). The scene also chimes with Hilary Radner’s observation that, under post-feminism, consumer

culture dictates the norms whereby women are obliged to constantly improve the self, through cultivating the body and its appearance (Radner 2011: 26).

Linked to this, narratives of bodily failures, ~~another post-feminist theme~~, have a profound impact on both companions' ~~stories~~. Gill observes that under post-feminism women's bodies are continuously evaluated, scrutinised, and dissected by women as well as men and are always at risk of failing (Gill 2007: 149). Thus Donna's lack of a model figure and less conventional looks are the target of humour: the Doctor warns her off trying out her 'womanly wiles' to trick male adversaries in 'The Doctor's Daughter' (2008) and Captain Jack Harkness (John Barrowman) declines her repeated invitation to hug her in 'Journey's End' (2008). More profoundly, Donna is physically unable to sustain existence when she becomes a human-Time Lord hybrid (the Doctor-Donna) in 'Journey's End' yet absurdly her male counterpart, a human clone of the Doctor, encounters no such problem and swans off to live with Rose Tyler (Billie Piper). Amy suffers bodily failure wrought by infertility in 'Asylum of the Daleks' (2012) and by ageing in 'The Girl Who Waited' (2011).

A pervasive *sexualisation of culture* is also ~~Another post-feminist feature~~ readily apparent in *Doctor Who*. Negra argues that post-feminism has shifted the construction of femininity towards being romantically or sexually desperate (Negra 2009: 78). To be sure, post-2005 *Doctor Who* is widely seen as more sexualised than the 1963-1989 programme. In 'Flesh and Stone' (2010), on the night before her wedding, Amy pins the Doctor (~~Matt Smith~~) against the TARDIS, tries to undo his shirt and plants her lips on his. Amy's attempted seduction of the Doctor embodies a further post-feminist trope: rather than being straightforwardly objectified, *women are portrayed as active, desiring sexual subjects*. Post-feminism promotes the idea of the sexually-autonomous, heterosexual young woman who is forever 'up for it', albeit only in a porn-come-true fashion (Gill 2007: 151-2) Thus Amy's short skirts and kissogram job correspond to post-feminism's blurring of boundaries between pornography and other genres. Post-feminism thereby presents sexual objectification as a woman's freely-chosen wish. Whilst Donna does not desire the Doctor their discourse is nonetheless sexualised: they have a comic misunderstanding over whether he 'just wants *a mate*' or 'just wants *to mate*' in 'Partners in Crime' (2008). ~~However, it is only ever beautiful, young, slim women (like Amy) who are portrayed as active, desiring sexual subjects (Gill 2007: 152). Thus Amy's short skirts and kissogram job correspond to post-feminism's blurring of boundaries between pornography and other genres.~~

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Post-feminism is closely related to participation in consumer culture is a further aspect of post-feminism. For Hilary Radner, wealth has become a neo-feminist ideal: popular culture, she explains, encourages a philosophy of individual fulfilment which confirms the centrality of consumer culture in the viewer's life (Radner 2011: 98). Social decline can be managed by emphasising individuated well-being and treating one's personal wealth as a moral entitlement (Negra 2009: 117-126). New *Doctor Who* contributes to this hyperconsumerism by the Doctor radically improving both Donna's and Amy's wealth – something he had never done for previous companions. He gives Donna a winning lottery ticket as a wedding gift in “The End of Time” (2009-10) and treats Amy and Rory to a house and car to entice them to stay on Earth and embrace domesticity in “The God Complex” (2011). Donna's luxuriating at a health farm in 'Midnight' and Amy's role as a super-model advertising perfume in 'Closing Time' (2011) reflect the luxury services and status commodities with which post-feminism is associated.

Finally the contemporary Whoniverse has been characterised by an emphasis on *weddings and marriage is also a post-feminist feature. In this regard it is significant that post-2005 *Doctor Who* and its spin-offs *Torchwood* (2006-2011) and *The Sarah Jane Adventures* (2007-2011) include no fewer than ~~five~~ six state-sanctioned weddings (including Amy's and both of Donna's), whereas 'classic' *Doctor Who* (1963-1989) had none. Rebecca Mead argues that a wedding is a profoundly conformist occasion. She contends that the (enormous) wedding industry is built on selling a fantasy: that a wedding, if done right, will herald a similarly flawless marriage and subsequent contentment (Mead 2007: 10-11). To be sure, ~~the Whoniverse's~~ five of the six weddings are ~~all~~ startlingly conformist: white weddings, bridesmaids, smart venues, top tables, speeches, flowers. Chrys Ingraham argues that images of a white wedding convey the illusion that the institution of heterosexuality is stable, made up of promises and dreams fulfilled, and invulnerable to crisis or disruption. By helping to fashion taken-for-granted beliefs, values and assumptions regarding marriage, weddings in popular television constitute powerful sites for the enactment of dominant messages about society (Ingraham 2008: 170-183). In this regard Angela McRobbie observes that feminism initially intervened to constrain the conventional desire for white weddings, whereas post-feminism offers relief from this censorious politics, allowing women to enjoy freely what has previously been disapproved of. Feminism is thereby invoked in order to be relegated to the past (McRobbie 2004: 262). Yet intriguingly two of the ~~five~~ weddings - Donna's first and Sarah Jane Smith's (Elisabeth Sladen) - turn out to be bogus, a means of alien attack. More broadly Hannah Hamad argues that new *Doctor Who*'s 'hypermatrimony' is complicit with post-feminism up to a point, yet articulates a degree of ambivalence placing question marks on whether its brides live happily ever after (Hamad: 2010). It could be argued in this context that we should regard what happens as less significant than the desire for the event.*

Retreatism: post-feminism's master-narrative

Multiple aspects of Donna's and Amy's stories therefore fit the post-feminist construct. Diane Negra, however, maintains that post-feminism's most important element has in fact been 'retreatism,' the phenomenon whereby women are encouraged to retreat from their public lives and seek fulfilment in their homes and families. The retreatist narrative either ignores or rejects feminism and has increasingly reflected post-feminist themes, reinforcing conservative

ideologies of femininity. While there is nothing inherently problematic about a home-orientated life if that is what a man or woman freely desires for him or herself, what makes that situation regressive is the exertion and denial of social and economic pressure which shoehorns women into that role, pressure from which men are disproportionately free. Crucially, under post-feminism the decision to do so is *presented* as a free choice: a woman ‘pleases herself’ through retreatism, social and economic pressures being disregarded. In this regard Negra notes the frequency in cinema romances of a professional woman~~in cinema romances~~—undergoing a ‘retreatist epiphany’ whereby she comes to realize that she is somehow deficient unless she rebuilds her family base and stops being geographically unsettled. She must therefore ‘unlearn’ feminism and repudiate the working-woman career model. Jobs and careers are depicted as being against women’s feminine nature: instead traditional feminine roles - being a wife and mother - are seen as most fulfilling (Negra 2009: 15-46.) Retreatism is thereby grounded in another post-feminist feature: the resurgence of the idea that men and women are fundamentally different (Gill: 158). Milestone and Meyer argue that retreatism are not only ideological but highly passive. Retreatist narratives, they observe, do not advocate that women bring their ‘inherent qualities’ to bear on the workplace to make it better and more ‘feminine’. Rather, women are portrayed as incongruent with the workplace so that retreat is the only option: a powerful way to minimize women’s role and status. Instead of changing the world, women retreat from it (Milestone and Meyer 2012: 102-3).

Seeing retreatism as a key social practice of post-feminist culture, Negra observes that *television* has proved itself particularly adept at portraying it: a television formula has been developed whereby women ultimately deliver themselves back into safe, nurturing communities (Negra 2009: 15-46). Translating retreatism into the *Whoniverse* would require companions to deliver themselves from their roles as adventurers the TARDIS, with its unsettling gadding around time and space, into a domestic life back on Earth.

Donna Noble: Russell T. Davies’ happy ending?

When Russell T. Davies was *Doctor Who* showrunner – when Rose Tyler, Martha Jones and Donna Noble inhabited the TARDIS – companions’ departures shared elements in common with post-feminist retreatism. First, each companion is forced at some point to leave a life that has given them a stronger sense of self, purpose and direction and adjust to life back home with their families. Secondly, after a sub-plot in which they have tried and failed to secure a romantic heterosexual relationship while travelling with the Doctor, they secure such a relationship once they leave him.

These retreatist themes become particularly pronounced in the case of Donna. When we first meet her in ‘The Runaway Bride’ (2006) Donna is working as a temp in a high-end company in hopes of finding a well-off man to marry. Having nagged a suitable man (Don Gilet) into proposing, Donna is halfway down the aisle at her wedding before the fantasy falls to pieces. She discovers that her fiancé has been working with an alien invader (Sarah Parish) and poisoning her for months and that the wedding was a sham to keep her from running off. She then works with the Doctor to uncover the alien’s plan, helps save Earth and ultimately saves the Doctor. Afterwards, when the Doctor asks her what she’ll do now, she replies: ‘Not getting married for starters. And I’m not going to temp anymore. I dunno, travel. See a bit more of planet Earth ...

Just, go out there and do something.’ The experience has both soured her perspective on marriage and broadened her aspirations.

~~She Although Donna~~ rejects the Doctor’s initial offer to travel with him, ~~she-but~~ subsequently seeks him out, having found her own attempts at travel unsatisfying (‘Partners in Crime’ 2008). She makes it clear that she has no sexual interest in the Doctor: as Lorna Jowett observes, this, plus her age and maturity, makes her more inclined to speak her mind to the Doctor, repeatedly challenging his authority (Jowett 2017: 79-80). ~~Y,-yet-heret Donna’s~~ desire for a committed, romantic relationship remains a theme throughout their adventures. This is most evident in ‘Forest of the Dead’ (2008), when Donna is trapped inside a computer and put into an integration programme which convinces her that she is a married housewife raising two children. Essentially, she gets to live the domestic life to which she originally aspired. Yet it is unclear whether she finds this illusory life fulfilling, and the Doctor eventually frees her from it. The story may be read as *Doctor Who* subtly questioning whether maternal domesticity is necessarily the onlyright path for a woman.

Yet, if so, this makes Donna’s eventual fate all the more poignant. In ‘Journey’s End’ (2008), Donna is accidentally transformed into a human-Time Lord hybrid, the Doctor-Donna. In this new persona she swiftly proves herself more intelligent and resourceful than the Doctor himself. ~~As the Doctor Donna, she saves the universe from the Daleks, yet her body cannot cope with the hybridization. To save her life the Doctor reverses it. She saves the universe, yet is unable to withstand the bodily transformation, which the Doctor reverses to save her life.~~ This also erases all Donna’s memories of him and of all her adventures in the TARDIS. Yet even before Donna has been transformed into the Doctor-Donna, she changes as a person as a result of her experiences with the Doctor. She becomes less self-centred and begins to believe in herself and her abilities. In ‘Partners in Crime’ (2008) for example she investigates on her own initiative public spiritedly and competently investigates a corporation bent on killing people through slimming products. Moreover her adventures politicise her. In ‘Planet of the Ood’ (2008) she deplors the slavery of the Ood, and in ‘The Sontaran Strategem’ (2008) she likens the militarism of UNIT to Guantanamo Bay. Originally Donna was aimless, drifting and waiting for a man to come along to marry her so she could live a normal, domestic life. But through her adventures she gains a sense of purpose and direction – which the Doctor erases. As Lee Barron points out, the treatment of Donna jars with the ideal of the new-*Who* Doctor as a progressive force in relation to his companions (Barron: 146).

Furthermore Donna’s short-lived transformation into the Doctor-Donna, ‘the most important person in the Universe’, ‘turns out to be due to a freak accident, not because of her resourcefulness, intelligence or even her compassion’ (Magnet and Smith? 2011: 159). Several commentators have referred to the Doctor-Donna as the equal of the Doctor, but in fact she is actually his superior. Addressing the Doctor and the clone-Doctor she explains: ‘You were both just Time Lords, you dumbos. Lacking that little bit of gut instinct that comes hand in hand with planet Earth. I can think of ideas you two couldn’t dream of in a million years.’ With the Doctor-Donna likely to upstage the Doctor at every turn, one wonders if this claim of superiority rather seals her fate. Sydney Duncan and Andy Duncan observe that Time Lord memory-wipes have previously featured in *Doctor Who* as a means of Time Lord self-preservation (‘The War Games’ (1969)), and that this may well be the case here (Duncan and Duncan 2011: 89). In any

event, as Noah McLaughlin notes, companions are perennially swept aside in a way which leaves the Doctor's masculine authority intact (McLaughlin 2010: 128).

Crucially, Donna has no agency when it comes to the Doctor returning her to human form and erasing her memories. He disregards Donna's pleas - 'I can't go back [...] Please don't make me go back' - and sends her home to life with her family. Not only does Donna lose her new hybrid identity, she even loses the growth and independence garnered as a result of her adventures (Winstead 2013: 238). The Doctor-Donna's fate is particularly hard to justify when one considers the ease with which she might otherwise have been ushered out of the show. Since *Doctor Who* is a fictional text, the Doctor-Donna's destiny was a choice for the programme's production team who could, in principle, do whatever they wished with the character. Indeed when writing Donna Noble out of the show, Davies considered a number of different reasons that Donna might leave - 'She gets injured? Dies? Sylvia [Donna's mother] dies? Donna gets lost in time, and I pick her up for one of the Specials (we find her years later, on an alien world, citizen of the universe, older and wiser, no longer needing the Doctor)?' -- but ultimately rejected these for her current ending (Davies 2010: 258). Yet it was the *human* Donna who wanted to 'travel with that man for ever': the Doctor-Donna would soon have had other ideas. With all the Doctor's memories and thoughts teeming through her mind, she would hardly have needed to linger long in the TARDIS. Like the Doctor's earlier Time Lord companion Romana (Lalla Ward), one could easily imagine the Doctor-Donna spreading her wings in an inspiring cause (Romana left the Doctor to help save an alien species in 'Warriors' Gate' (1981)). Handled in such a way, Donna's departure could nonetheless have met the practicalities of television production: resolving her story arc, satisfying the imperatives of a companion's exit by providing intense drama; and clearing the decks for new showrunner Steven Moffat.

But for Donna there is a consolation prize. Initially the Doctor's dismantling of the Doctor-Donna is portrayed as a tragedy. We see the shallowness of Donna's new life as she returns to being a gossipy lightweight. But in 'The End of Time' (2009) a happy spin is placed on Donna's situation. Donna is now engaged to a new man (Karl Collins), and her grandfather (Bernard Cribbins) tells the Doctor that although her new fiancé is 'sweet enough, bit of a dreamer', sometimes Donna looks so sad yet cannot remember why. In sum, 'she's making do'. In part, this is due to a lack of resources, reminding us that 'the on-going struggles in which women are engaged are as much a product of class as they are of gender' (Hollows 2000: 198). The Doctor remedies this impecuniosity by dropping in on Donna's wedding and giving her a winning lottery ticket as a present. Thus Donna gets her faultlessly post-feminist 'happy ending' by acquiring both man *and* money. Although one cannot be sure, her wealth makes it unlikely that she would pursue a career outside the home. The fantasy of Donna's future happiness is that pleasant domesticity is made perfect by the liberal application of lottery cash, allowing her the gratification of the consumer culture. This should not obscure the fact that Donna does not have a retreatist epiphany and relinquish life in the TARDIS because she finds it unfulfilling. Rather, she is forced out - entirely against her will.

Amy Pond: Steven Moffat's happy housewife?

Amy Pond's narrative revolves around her contested identity as a wife and mother. This is not quite obvious at the outset. As Lynette Porter notes, she is the feistiest companion -

independent, forthright and determined to have her own way (Porter 2013: 253). Amy is a very independent woman who dreamed of escaping her sleepy village and joining the Doctor on his adventures ever since he crashed-landed in her garden when she was a **seven-year-old** girl. So when he returns years later, she takes the opportunity to travel with him ('The Eleventh Hour' 2010). Moreover she shows outstanding acumen as a companion. In Amy's first journey in the TARDIS in 'The Beast Below' (2010) she displays exceptional agency, piecing together evidence to solve the episode's mystery, her perspicacity contrasting with the Doctor's wrong-headedness. She comes to the rescue again in the very next episode, 'Victory of the Daleks' (2010), where she once more outshines the Doctor by using her emotional insight to defuse a human-cyborg time-bomb. Whilst not unprecedented for a companion to play a decisive role in one of the Doctor's adventures, it has been rare: instances include the mobilization of a rebellion by Vicki (Maureen O'Brien) in 'The Space Museum' (1965) and the use of mathematics by Zoe Heriot (Wendy Padbury) to destroy a Cyberfleet in 'The Invasion' (1968). For Amy to resolve two adventures consecutively was unprecedented and remarkable (Nicol 2017: 65-68). These episodes empower Amy, defining her not in relation to any man but as a powerful actor in her own right.

Only eventually do viewers glean that Amy's ambivalence towards Rory Williams is central to her story. Indeed she confesses to the Doctor in 'Flesh and Stone' (2010) that she ran away with him partly because she was afraid of marrying Rory. Her ambivalence is explored in 'Amy's Choice' (2010), in which Amy, Rory, and the Doctor are trapped in two parallel dreams. In one dream Amy is pregnant, married and living with Rory in a quiet village; this dream substantially corresponds to retreatism's social fantasy of the ideal hometown (Negra 2009: 7). In the other dream she is still travelling with the Doctor and Rory in the TARDIS. Domesticity is thereby counterposed to adventure. The 'Dream Lord' (Toby Jones), who trapped them in these dreams, asks them to guess which of these dreams is reality, and he makes it explicit that the choice is really Amy's. Amy is doubtful that their life in the village is real, telling Rory, 'Not really me though, is it? Would I be happy settling down in [this] place?' Only when Rory is killed in the village dream does Amy finally make her choice, choosing the dream in which Rory remains alive so that she can be with him. 'Amy's Choice' may be read as a pivotal episode, foreshadowing Amy's departure. It introduces the idea of settling down to domesticity; it also heralds Amy's choice being between two take-it-or-leave-it options, with no space to fashion a middle-way. **Her 'choice' is therefore in reality a choice between two unpalatable propositions set out for her by an external entity. The theme that Amy's choices are not really her choices at all persists** ~~The constraints on Amy's choice persist~~ in 'The Girl Who Waited' (2011), in which the time travellers encounter a joyless, hardened older Amy, who has aged in isolation, trapped in her own time stream. Older Amy represents a cautionary tale: Amy must not make the *wrong* choice by separating herself from Rory. This harrowing episode also reminds us of post-feminism's 'time-beset mode of female identity' (Negra 2009: 139).

Yet, for all this, Amy's and Rory's wedding in 'The Big Bang' (2010) ends on a feminist note: marriage need not mean a retreat into domesticity. Amy, who feared being forced to choose between life with Rory and life with the Doctor, decides that she can combine both. The final scene is of Amy in her wedding dress waving goodbye to her childhood home from the TARDIS doors to join the Doctor on another adventure - *with* her new husband. She also declines to take Rory's last name, maintaining an important marker of her own identity.

At the same time, however, two problematic motifs establish themselves. The first is Rory's deaths: he dies and is brought back to life so frequently that it becomes a recurring joke within the show. The first of these deaths happens in 'Amy's Choice,' when Rory's death forces her to confront the fact that she loves him and makes her feel guilty because she never told him so. She grows so despondent over this that she is willing to commit suicide with the hope of waking up from the dream in which he has died. Rory dies again at the end of 'Cold Blood' (2010) when he saves the Doctor's life, an indirect consequence of Amy's decision to travel with the Doctor. An illusion of Rory dies in 'The Doctor's Wife' (2011) after yelling at Amy for abandoning him. In their final episode, 'The Angels Take Manhattan' (2012), Rory dies several times. The first time, he is sent back in time without Amy to die of old age in the past. The second time, he and Amy seemingly commit suicide together to create a paradox, preventing the first event from happening. But for the third and final time, Rory dies when he is sent back in time *again* to die of old age.

Rory's deaths appear to serve three purposes. The first is to make Amy feel guilty about failing to love Rory properly. The second is to remind her how worthless her life is without him. On two occasions (in 'Amy's Choice' and 'The Angels Take ~~Manhattan~~Manhattan') she commits suicidal acts – never with the consequence of actually committing suicide, but certainly with the acknowledged risk that her actions could result in her death and a resignation that it wouldn't matter to her if she died. The third purpose is to set up a conflict between Amy's life in the TARDIS and her life as Rory's wife, with the ultimate purpose of forcing her to choose between them. Rory was always the more reluctant companion who travels with the Doctor largely to please Amy. By continuing to do so they both risk death, as the Doctor acknowledges on several occasions, but it is Rory who most frequently confronts this risk. Amy's desire to travel with the Doctor could therefore result in her losing Rory permanently, a danger which materialises in 'The Angels Take Manhattan.' Rory is sent back in time to 1930s America. Due to extraordinary circumstances the Doctor cannot retrieve him, so Amy must make a final choice. Distraught, she allows herself to be transported back in time to live the rest of her life with her husband, permanently separating herself from the Doctor. Amy tells the Doctor, 'It'll be fine. I know it will. I'll be with him like I should be. Me and Rory together.'

At first it seemed, therefore, that Amy could reject the false choice between a life she loved and the marriage to the person she loved and instead combine them together in a way that suited her. Yet time and again the two were placed in competition - as inherently incompatible. In conformity with post-feminist retreatist narratives, the heroine's desire for something more than domesticity threatened her marriage, in Amy's case by endangering her husband's life. Amy can live with her husband only if she gives up her adventures. Try as she might, the narrative will not allow her to have both.

The second motif is Amy's consistent refusal to call herself 'Amy Williams' and her preference for her maiden name, 'Amy Pond.' She even passes down her maiden name to her daughter ('A Good Man Goes to War' (2011)). This conflict comes to a head in 'The God Complex' (2011) when Amy, Rory, and the Doctor become trapped in a holographic labyrinth in which an alien minotaur feeds off Amy's faith in the Doctor. While trying to break Amy's faith in order to defeat the minotaur, the Doctor refers to Amy by her husband's surname for the first time, saying

'It's time we saw each other as we really are, Amy Williams.' The Doctor thereby promotes the idea that Amy's real, natural identity is as Rory's wife. This is confirmed after the adventure, when the Doctor returns Amy and Rory to Earth, intending a permanent separation. He buys them a new house and car, to facilitate domestic bliss. The Doctor encourages Amy to focus on her married life with Rory, telling her that there is a 'bigger, scarier adventure' waiting for her in their new home. He appeals to her identity as Rory's wife, encouraging her to take on the domestic role she had been avoiding. The conflict is resolved in 'The Angels Take Manhattan' when, a moment after she travels back in time to live out the rest of her life with Rory, her name appears on Rory's gravestone as 'Amelia Williams,' signifying both her permanent departure from life with the Doctor and her full acceptance of her identity as Rory's wife.

The moments where Amy accepts her husband's surname are closely associated with moments in which she supposedly grows and matures. However, these moments of 'growth' are actually occasions where she abandons her independent aspirations and accepts an identity as Rory's wife. And every time she accepts the name 'Amelia Williams' coincides with a moment where she abandons adventure for a more domestic existence with Rory. In this way, the conflict over Amy's name becomes another means of representing the conflict over her destiny. In line with post-feminism, the choice of surname is Amy's, yet social pressure to make a pre-feminist choice is exerted.

Amy's narrative also highlights another problematic aspect of post-feminist retreatism: the idea that being a mother is a woman's fundamental and most fulfilling role. Travelling with the Doctor made Amy and Rory a target to his opponents. In an attempt to harm the Doctor, his foes kidnap Amy while she is pregnant in order to take her baby and raise her to kill the Doctor ('A Good Goes to War', 'Let's Kill Hitler' (2011)). She is thereby denied autonomy over bringing up her own child, though by time-travelling sleight of hand, she grows up with her daughter as a wayward best friend (Nina Toussaint-White). In 'Asylum of the Daleks' (2012) it transpires that when she was kidnapped Amy was also forcibly sterilized. Fleeting on the brink of divorce, she confesses that she is trying to leave Rory because she cannot have children, and she knows he wanted children. Though Amy is the one who has suffered the physical and emotional trauma of being kidnapped and sterilized against her will, the focus is entirely on the impact on Rory and how Amy has failed to be the wife and mother he wanted. Amy seems to think that she should pay the price for her bodily failure by sacrificing her life with Rory. After Amy's and Rory's departure in 'The Angels Take ~~Manhattan~~Manhattan', the BBC ~~published~~released –an online mini-episode entitled 'P.S.' (BBC: 2012) which reveals that Amy and Rory subsequently adopt a son. If we accept Clare Parody's argument that studies of an open-ended text like new *Doctor Who* should include scrutiny of the show's online presence, then we should include the BBC's online *Doctor Who* output, such as 'P.S.', in our analysis (Parody 2011: 157). 'P.S.' makes it likely that Amy would have spent a number of years as a housewife since, in that era, the child-rearing role would have fallen to her not Rory.

In Amy's case, unlike Donna's, domestic life is not merely a consolation prize. Rather, it is something constantly placed in competition with her adventures. Yet as Rachel Swirsky argues, Amy need not inhabit either extreme. She could create an existence where she could both be married to Rory *and* travel with the Doctor, both have a baby *and* have adventures (Swirsky 2012: 258). Immediately after her wedding, Amy succeeds in fashioning an unconventional life

which suits her. Yet ultimately she is confronted with a choice between accepting Rory's death or accepting a permanent end to her adventures. As with Donna's departure, therefore, a lack of agency is all too apparent. Indeed, Amy's choice is actually a modality of *constraint*. Hers is not merely a limited choice between only two rigid options. Rather, Amy is compelled to be the kind of subject who can make the *right* choice as part of a regime of personal responsibility (McRobbie 2004: 261).¹ Dee Amy-Chinn has proposed that *Doctor Who* is a 'semiotic democracy' in which one may either focus on its powerful women characters such as Amy, or on the continued dominance of patriarchal authority (Amy-Chinn 2014: 84). Surely though, where the companion *is* powerful, it becomes all the more egregious to deny her agency.

Conclusion

In post-2005 *Doctor Who*, the desire to return home is a strong and prominent theme. But for the Doctor's female companions, this narrative becomes problematic. The writers attempt to soften the trauma of their departures by granting them domestic bliss. But in so doing, their endings lean into regressive narratives about femininity and how women find fulfilment in their lives. Post-feminist themes have become prominent in new *Doctor Who*, and Donna's and Amy's retreats into domesticity chime with post-feminism except in one respect. Under post-feminism, women characters undergo a 'retreatist epiphany' in which, recognizing natural sexual difference, they 'please themselves' by making a return to the home, social and economic imperatives being denied. Yet in Donna's and Amy's cases there is no pretence of autonomy. Both 'downsize' from intergalactic adventurers to wifely roles on Earth, but Donna has no say in the matter and Amy is forced into an arbitrarily binary choice. The retreatist epiphany may be absent because new-*Who* always presents travelling in the TARDIS as desirable, so that companions must rarely leave of their own volition. Yet is there much difference between post-feminism's phoney autonomy and *Doctor Who*'s denial of autonomy? Both disempower women.

At their core, the stories of the companions are stories of ordinary people being removed from the limitations of their ordinary lives and discovering just how much they can achieve in extraordinary situations. But rather than showing companions taking the lessons they have learned from their travels along with their sense of empowerment to do something inspiring with the rest of their lives, Donna's and Amy's stories suggest that having been prised out of the TARDIS they find fulfilment by giving up their adventures in the name of married life. But a happily-ever-after ending need not involve finding a husband and settling down, and wrapping stories up with a neat bow should not mean tying the companions down to lives they do not want.

¹ Amy's departure does not conform to the classic post-feminist epiphany in another sense too. A central aspect of the retreatist narrative is that a woman returns to her hometown where she can be supported by kith and kin. Yet, far from returning home, she and Rory are exiled to New York in 1938, dislocating them, probably uncomfortably, from their own country and plunging them into an unfamiliar era which was more restrictive for women.

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