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Forever Changed by the Doctor

In the British Broadcasting Corporation's television series *Doctor Who*, we are introduced to the last of the Time Lords of Gallifrey, the one and the only Doctor. The Doctor uses his Police Box Time and Relative Dimension in Space machine, also known as the TARDIS, to travel with his chosen companion throughout all of time and space helping those who need him (Newman). To quote the season three episode "The Family of Blood," "He's like fire and ice and rage. He's like the night and the storm in the heart of the Sun. He's ancient and forever. He burns at the center of time, and he can see the turn of the universe and...he's wonderful". The Doctor travels wherever he is needed and helps those that require his aid whether that be through mediation, defense, or leadership and never asks for anything in return. By creating a presence within the lives of those that need him, the Doctor is creating links between the people, himself, and the future that they now have thanks to his aid. By reading the BBC series *Doctor Who* through the posthumanism lens, it can be determined that the Doctor is creating lasting posthuman connections through the temporary links that he makes between himself and his companions.

In *Doctor Who*, the Doctor forms a kinship bond between himself and his many chosen companions. What is essential here is the recognition of this bond, for it is the posthuman link that inevitably provides the means for the coming metamorphosis of the companion. In Judith Halberstam and Ira Livingston's introduction to *Posthuman Bodies*, they make the claim that

“the dependence or interdependence of bodies on the material and discursive networks through which they operate means the umbilical cords that supply us (without which we would die) are always multiple” (Halberstam and Livingston 17). These “umbilical cords” that Halberstam and Livingston refer to are the metaphorical links created between people and the things and other people that have influence upon their lives whatever that influence may be. Halberstam and Livingston go on to say that “the partial re-configurability of needs means that our navels are multiple as well” (Halberstam and Livingston 17). This can be taken to mean that through the need to be linked to others, we have been made capable of receiving and reciprocating these connections by creating our “multiple navels” so we can always be connected to numerous influences at once. This concept of “multiple” is key here for we, at any given point in time, can have an endless number of links whether they be physical links through the continued interaction with a significant other or a lasting spiritual connection with someone that is long gone. Our links that we create during our lifetime are only forgotten upon our choosing to do so and yet in one way or another we are changed by the “umbilical cord” that we shared. There is no defined limit to the number of links that we as individuals can have thus creating opportunity for us to feel the effects of all of those that we have built meaningful connections with.

In the case of the Doctor and his companions, these “umbilical cords” are temporarily physical links since companions generally have a short lived journey with the Doctor but they however are a lasting spiritual connection. Speaking in terms of seasons, a companion usually stays between one to three seasons. The companions are hand chosen by him and are usually those who are lost and looking for their place in the world. During their time with the Doctor, his companions see extraordinary wonders and are tested both mentally and physically by the challenges that call for the Doctors’ aid. After their time with him, his companions have come to

a place in their lives where they are no longer the people that they were before thanks to their journey of self-discovery at the side of the Doctor. They have in one way or another been forever changed through finding themselves, making amends with others, coming to terms with their past, or as in the case of Captain Jack and Rose, changing spatially and physically. In Richard Gooding's essay "*Clockwork: Phillip Pullman's Posthuman Fairy Tale*," Gooding parallels the connections between the characters of Pullman's *Clockwork* and their magical environment to the posthumanistic notion of linkages between humans and their surroundings both living and nonliving (Gooding 313). Gooding goes on to say that "if *Clockwork* constructs a materialist world in which the self is the product of the reflexive systems in which it is entangled, it is not surprising that the text's narrative perspective reflects this position" (Gooding 319). He gives the text example, "Fritz is something of a poster boy for the posthuman belief that consciousness is not the indisputable mark of our autonomy, but an epiphenomenon generated by the systems we inhabit" (Gooding 319). Gooding is clarifying that creation of consciousness and person is directly connected to our personal links to the environment around us. This example given by Gooding parallels the connections being made on *Doctor Who* through the change in character that each of the Doctor's companions experience after their time spent with him.

Throughout the series, the Doctor has a number of companions that come from all walks of life and each he happens upon by chance. His companions have varied from a young female retail cashier to a handsome time agent. One of the first key examples of a lasting "umbilical link" from companion to the Doctor is the charming Captain Jack Harkness. Before Jack began his journey with the Doctor and Rose, he is a time agent who spends his time slumming in bars. During their adventures, Jack is met with physically demanding challenges that require the utmost effort to the point that he is eventually killed by a Dalek adversary. After Rose, with the

help of the time vortex, breathes life back into Jack, he realizes that she has rendered him immortal (Season 1). Captain Jack goes on to live millions of years due to the time that he spent with the Doctor for if he had not chosen to join the trek, he would never have been exposed to the time vortex and rendered immortal.

Some might argue that Jack should curse the Doctor for what has happened to him but I argue that Captain Jack's link to the Doctor gave him the opportunity to truly live and to touch the lives of those that needed him. In Emma Tinker's essay "Talking Cookie Jars and Tongue-Tied Bodies: Posthumanism and the Office", we are given a case of Haraway and Livingstons' posthumanism "umbilical cord" connections between the coworkers in BBC's series *The Office*. In her essay she discusses how the shows character David Brent battles his own body image issues by tossing jibes at his coworkers (Tinker 763). In her paper she states that "Brent's indignation at Keith's apparent immunity to teasing highlights the fact that Brent's nicknames are directed at his body largely as a surrogate for his self—it is Brent the dysfunctional boss, rather than Brent the slightly overweight body, that is the real subject of criticism" (Tinker 763). Through the back and forth of image jibes, a form of negative "umbilical cord" is created between Brent and his co-workers in that the comments made at each other have negative spiritual effects upon the recipients. I tie this outside example to Captain Jack's experience with the Doctor for there is a parallel at play here. Brent and his co-workers throw self-image jibes at each other on a daily basis and this has negative cognitive effects upon Brent and causes a change in his social demeanor making him act in a certain manner as to say that he is not offended by these jibes and is much more popular and socially wanted than he really is. This example of Brent parallels the relationship between Jack and the Doctor because Jack is effected by this link in such a way that he too is cognitively changed but he is changed from a washed up

time agent bar junky to someone who is willing to lay it all on the line for complete strangers. Jack's connection to the Doctor is as the other companion links are, temporarily physical and a lasting spiritual connection but for the Captain this connection is changed for he is made new by his experience initially in a physical manner and not in a metamorphosis of character. He uses his immortality as a means of living life to the fullest but to also reach out to those that need his aid. In season 3 of *Doctor Who*, the Doctor and his companion Martha travel to New New York and help the people that are trapped below the city on the motor way (Season 3, episode 3). This episode is millions of years into the future and at this point Captain Jack has become the Face of Boe, a giant living head who has powers of telepathy and mind control that is contained inside of a giant glass tank that is toted around by personal nurses. To help save the people in the Motor Way, the Face of Boe/Captain Jack gives his last amount of psychic energy to open the Motor Way to let the people escape to freedom (Season 3, episode 3). So in a way, you could say that Captain Jack's lasting connection to the Doctor reaches outside of his gifted immortality and into a change of character. He uses his gift of immortality to reach out to those in need and to help them in ways that he is able to, quite similar to the ways in which the Doctor works. He almost takes on the persona of the unsung hero just like the Doctor.

The next companion that must be analyzed is the 10th Doctor's third and final one, the sassy ginger Donna Noble. Donna begins her journey with the Doctor in season four of the series. Before she meets the Doctor, she is a woman who suffers from a severe lack of self-confidence at the assistance of her mother and is lost without a direction for her life. During her time with the Doctor, she is learning to value herself and "for one moment... one shining moment... she was the most important woman in the whole wide universe" (Season 4, episode 13). She rises so high and is able to accomplish the feat of realizing who she is meant to be.

However at the end of her time with the Doctor, her memories of her time with him are wiped from her memory due to her development of the mind of a Time Lord. Her human mind could not handle on its own the extent of the knowledge that accompanies the mind of a Time Lord and so this memory sweep is necessary for the survival of Donna. So you may wonder how this “umbilical cord” between the Doctor and Donna is classified as a lasting spiritual connection. All of her memories of her time with the Doctor are wiped from her memory, yes, but that spiritual connection to him remains because she is no longer the same character that she had been at the beginning of the season. Donna grows from the woman who is about to marry the first man to ever show her attention but is using her for his own personal gain and blossoms into the woman who is able to harness a Time Lord mind and help the Doctor defeat the Daleks. She is still the same strong willed woman but now she has direction and self-worth more than ever before. Along with her metamorphosis of character, the Doctor reaches out to Donna in a later season and has to have her recall all her memories as a means of helping him. That link between her and the Doctor is able to help him save the universe even though Donna’s cognitive link to the Doctor has been severed. You could fully say that their connection is such a strong spiritual link that even though the physical and cognitive ties between the two were severed at the end of their journey, the Doctor is still able to reach out to have her help him save the universe yet again.

Last but not least, here is the best example of a companion having a transformation of character due to the effects of their venture with the Doctor and her name is Amy Pond and she is the 11th Doctor’s companion for seasons five, six, and half of seven. Before her time as the Doctor’s companion, she is an independent woman with a plethora of abandonment issues who worked as a kissagram, a woman who dresses in costumes such as a police woman or a nurse and comes to parties and is paid to kiss people, and is loosely committed to her boyfriend Rory to the

point where she attempts to throw herself at the Doctor on the night before her and Rory's wedding (Season 5). To rectify the situation, the Doctor brings Rory along with him and Amy to venture around in Italy in attempts to bring Amy to the point of level headedness and away from her bout of whimsy (Season 5, episode 6). Rory grew up with Amy and is a male nurse who often looks at their predicaments and situations with a realist perspective. Throughout the continuation of her time with the Doctor, Rory comes along for the ride and over this time her "umbilical" tie as well as her loyalty to him grows stronger and stronger to the point where she finally learns that there are people out there who are willing to be in her life for the long haul, no abandonment ever again.

When her time with the Doctor has come to an end, she has been able to work past her fear of commitment and abandonment, marries Rory, and has become a stronger woman. In Eva Zekany's essay "A Horrible Interspecies Awkwardness Thing", she discusses the posthuman nature of the videogame franchise *Mass Effect*. She makes the claim that what classifies *Mass Effect* as posthuman is the "affective connections between species, resulting in the birth of what Braidotti would call nomadic subjectivity, a subjectivity that fizzles across bodily boundaries, transgressing the artifices of gender and species definitions," (Zekany 75). Zekany is highlighting the presence Halberstam and Livingston's "umbilical cords" within the *Mass Effect* universe in the form of cross species interactions and how these interactions allow for the acts of sexuality seen within the game (Zekany 75). This example given by Zekany demonstrates the ability of these individual posthuman connections to be able to have their effects act fluidly and fill the surrounding environment, changing all that it touches. Zekany's work is seen in the life of Amy Pond through her own change in character and how because of this change that she experiences, Rory is able to take up a role of permanence in her life as her spouse. Thanks to the

Doctor, Amy is no longer the same rigid kissagram that he first took off on an adventure with but is a woman who has opened herself up to make those “umbilical cord” connections that are so essential for a successful adult life. This metamorphosis in Amy is sparked because of the initial link that is created by the Doctor. By showing kindness and loyalty to her, he is able to create the foundation that Amy needs in order to build the kind of adult relationships that all people require to be able to thrive.

To close, how do these “umbilical” connections between the Doctor and his companions in the series *Doctor Who* effect the companion’s immediate surrounding community? How are the families of these companions impacted by this close relationship that their loved one has developed with this “mad man with a box” (Season 5, episode 1)? When analyzing the families of the Doctor’s companions, it becomes clear that the “umbilical cord” reaches farther than just from the Doctor to his companion. The “umbilical cord” effects that the Doctor’s friendship has upon his companions resonates throughout their community of loved ones. As with Amy Pond’s original link to the Doctor, Rory, her husband, is able to feel the effects through her newfound willingness to let him inside her old built up walls. Along with Rory, the existence of their child Melody Pond is also an example of the effects of the original “umbilical cord” connection between Amy and the Doctor. If Amy had never been tied to the Doctor, Melody may not have ever existed, let alone become part Time Lord. The most important people in Amy’s life may not have ever become as important as they are if Amy had never become the person that the Doctor made her. For Donna Noble, her grandfather Wilfred in particular felt the effects of her forgotten time that she had spent with the Doctor. For Donna’s own well-being, her grandfather took on the burden of protecting her from remembering the cognitive and spiritual connection that she has built with the Time Lord thus changing his life as well. These are just a few examples of the

larger picture at hand. When the Doctor takes on a companion and creates that bond of friendship, that trust that ties them together, he is creating Halberstam and Livingston's posthuman "umbilical cord" that becomes such an essential part of that relationship for the companion, that they are no longer the same due to its existence. The companions are put through a metamorphosis of character and are new once their time with the Doctor is through. However what may not be clear, is that the other connections that the companion has made are also altered due to the presence of this Doctor bound "umbilical cord". The change in character of the companion disturbs the way that they are received and interpreted by the other links that they do have. This disturbance can range from a change in the degree of relationship such as Rory's jump from Amy's boyfriend to her husband or a change in relationship action such as Wilfred's new mission to protect Donna from remembering her time with the Doctor. The loved ones of the Doctor's companions are effected in just as critical of a manner as the companions themselves are.

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