

OUTER SPACE AS LIMINAL SPACE: FOLKLORE AND LIMINALITY ON
DOCTOR WHO AND *BATTLESTAR GALACTICA*

by

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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This thesis explores the intersection of folkloric ritual theory and popular culture, expressed in science fiction television. The three-part rite of passage model established by folklorist Arnold van Gennep and later expounded upon by anthropologist Victor Turner is used as an analytical tool to establish the themes and structures of two popular television programs, *Battlestar Galactica* and *Doctor Who*. Both contain structures that resemble a rite of passage and exhibit a particular feature of the liminal stage of a rite of passage: ludic recombination. In the discussion of *Battlestar Galactica*, the plot arc of the entire series is analyzed as a rite of passage. On *Doctor Who* the ritual model is examined as a structural component of the “companion” character. The structure and features of rites of passage allow science fiction narratives to explore sociocultural issues and existential themes in a meaningful way.

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For Sam, without whom I would have long since suffered a breakdown.

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CHAPTER I

LIMINALITY AND FOLKLORE IN SCIENCE FICTION

During the last decade, science fiction television has become increasingly popular and, correspondingly, an increasingly appropriate cultural phenomenon to probe deep questions about humanity, technology, and what the future holds for the human race. In recent years, it has become apparent that scholars are now considering this kind of meaningful television academically relevant. In this thesis I explore the resonance between the concept of ludic recombination and the science fiction genre, focusing on the presence of ludic recombination in the diegetic of science fiction television, and I argue that it is viable to reframe most science fiction narratives as liminal and in some cases existing in the structure of a transformative rite of passage. Anthropologist Victor Turner characterizes his own work with liminality, which I take as my theoretical base, as the “speculative” tossing of a pebble into a pool of anthropological data and seeing what ripples resulted (36). Guided by Turner’s work and others, I drop the liminality-pebble (a phrase I use because it sounds like a Whovian weapon or artifact) into the pool of science fiction to see how the resultant ripples construct and inform narrative and meaning. The concept of liminality involves what is called a “threshold state,” usually seen during the middle section of a ritual in which one is subjected to various kinds of ambiguity and disorientation, unmoored from normal social mores and structures. The ideas of liminality and ludic recombination as links between folklore and science fiction are widely applicable, providing a more interpretive and universal method for analyzing storylines that include journeys and transformation than frameworks such as Joseph

Campbell's "monomyth," which continues to be given validity by many producers of mass culture and other popularizers¹.

I will demonstrate the relevance of the concepts associated with the ritual process in my two case studies: the television programs *Doctor Who* and *Battlestar Galactica*. These two shows are both pioneers in their own right and are richly endowed with cult followings. A number of variables, including the fact that *BSG* has aired in its entirety and *Doctor Who* is still ongoing, require them to be analyzed separately. However both programs share a surprising number of pivotal elements, including the use of outer space as liminal space and its exploration in fascinating ways. Outer space constitutes a liminal space because of its unmoored, transitive quality and its usual function as a backdrop for a journeys both literal and emotional. This quality of liminality allows science fiction narratives to transcend their often fantastical or apocalyptic subject matter and make poignant statements about reality, presenting their audience with not only the opportunity for entertainment, but for critical engagement. Liminality allows for science fiction narratives to act as social drama in the terms that Turner describes in *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*: "performances...probe a community's weaknesses, call its leaders to account, desacralize its most cherished values and beliefs, portray its characteristic conflicts and suggest remedies for them, and generally take stock of its current situation in the known 'world'" (11). Writer Hugo Gernsback theorized that science fiction transcends genre because it combines both fiction and

¹ Campbell's formula in particular is invalid for the analysis of most television narratives because its seeming simplicity masks a convoluted sequence of events that is too specific to be applicable the complex narratives of today's media landscape. Furthermore, it fails to provide for the potential of a female protagonist and relies upon the importance of a single protagonist, thus making it inapplicable to an ensemble piece.

nonfiction, making it inherently superior to other expressive genres (Westfahl 43). I suggest that science fiction has become a mixture of not only fiction and nonfiction, but also of cultural truth, and that this last component, accessible through its liminal nature and the rite of passage structure is what enables science fiction narratives to become truly transcendent. In this thesis I explain and explore the importance and function of liminality in the rites of passage model, beginning with a discussion of the basic concepts and relevant scholarship. I then offer some background knowledge on both of my case studies, integral to understanding my analysis of them, and also mention what scholarship has arisen dealing with the programs. First, I will look at *Battlestar Galactica*, analyzing the plot structure as a rite of passage ritual and exploring how the established feature of liminality appears in the diegetic of the show. Then I will delve into the world of *Doctor Who* (known to fans as the Whoniverse), focusing on the elements consistently used to construct forms of ludic recombination and then examining through close readings the rites of passage performed by characters on the show.

In 1909, French folklorist Arnold van Gennep published *Les Rites de Passage*, which elucidated that transitional religious rites occur in three stages: separation, transition (also termed “margin” or “limen”), and reaggregation (Turner 202). These stages can also be described as preliminal, liminal, and postliminal. The first and third stages of the model are rather self-explanatory; the middle stage, however, is complex and essential to the rite. During the transitive liminal stage, the initiates, or neophytes, undergo a transformation necessary for them to move from one part of their life to the next. It is often described as a sense of being poised upon a threshold, with a sense that has the power to enable change or maturation. Victor and Edith Turner later expounded

upon van Gennep's work, exploring the specifics of the model and relating it to, for example, the Jivaro Headhunting Celebration and the Native American Ghost Dance movement of the late 1800s. Turner famously characterized the rites of passage model as a movement from structure to anti-structure, and back to structure again (Bowie 170). Turner's work not only identifies concepts, but makes direct applications, such as to the rituals of the Zambian Ndembu tribe in *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (1970). He explores similar themes in *Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (1982), a compilation of four essays that deal with the idea of both rituals and theatre as a kind of "social drama" which uses symbols to express cultural fears, concerns, and values, taking a performance studies lens to the performance of ritual and making concrete connections between the theatre of ritual and literal staged drama. He makes a rather fleeting but intriguing distinction between "liminal" and "liminoid," and discusses at length the differing meanings and various connotation of "work," "play," and "leisure." He also uses a performative lens in *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (1974), which does not strictly engage with formal theatre but focuses on symbols present in rituals in Western and non-Western societies. Another important work by Turner is *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (1969), which engages again with the Zambian tribes and expounds upon the topic of communitas, which he demonstrates is an element of human interaction that transcends any imposed structures. He claims that the importance of ritual lies in its ability to be the site of social change and characterizes the difference between sacred and profane spaces as structure (profane) and anti-structure (sacred or liminal space).

Another influential scholar who has published in the field of “ritual studies” is Catherine Bell, whose books, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (1992) and *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (1997) both begin with intense and interdisciplinary overviews of relevant theories, from scholars like Turner who are very much associated with ritual, to theorists like Foucault and Saussure who are applied to many disciplines across the humanities and social sciences. Bell’s work focuses on discourse about ritual and the study of ritual more so than on actual data or analysis of it. She argues that the theories which were current to her (in the early 1990s) had all adopted a “predetermined circularity” which caused scholars to be limited to a unspoken and unvarying mandate in terms of epistemology and method. Bell also suggests that to break out of that circularity, it would be profitable to think not of “ritual” but of “ritualized action,” which she believes to be a “more fruitful” approach to ritual studies (viii-ix). Bell’s *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* provides an introduction to the discipline of ritual studies, and she situates the work as a continuation of her earlier book. Many of her claims are opposed to that of earlier scholars because she tends to suggest that ritual is not a universal facet of the human experience, but a socio-historical construct that differentiates cultures based on the intensity of the religious aspect of their rituals.

In the area of religious studies, Fiona Bowie includes a chapter on ritual in her book *The Anthropology of Religion*, in which she performs an overview and analysis of both van Gennep and the Turners, as well as other theorists. Unlike many books that offer a similar summary of scholarship, Bowie includes an eye-opening section on ritual violence. After the detachment of van Gennep and Turner, which Bowie goes as far as to call “positivity,” the more “cynical” viewpoints that Bowie discusses are jarring because

they situate ritual violence (religious rather than secular scenarios) in the profane world which is judged by secular mores² (182). In the category of ritual violence, Bowie seems to be including not only rituals that sound brutal and archaic, those involving like human sacrifice or rape, but commonplace rituals like fraternity hazing and male circumcision. In step with violence in ritual is coercion: Bowie explicitly states that ritual can not only enforce cultural values, but can also be a tool for producing valuable members of society, e.g. fierce warriors or docile wives, which is certainly a challenge to Turner's playful, ludic rite of passage. It is implied that the rituals involving women tend to be more coercive than those for men, which is certainly a valid challenge to van Gennep's claims of universality.

William G. Doty makes a clear connection between ritual and myth in his tome *Mythography: The Study of Myths and Rituals*, which among many other things presents (and occasionally explains) every conceivable neologistic permutation of the word "myth." His theory of connection relies on the assertion that rituals are the communal enactment of culturally treasured myths, or that extant rituals were originally attached to myths that have not survived the ages. He states that "ritual often implies a license to enact, within a specific spatiotemporal frame, the contents of a myth. Even when a record of a ritual performance is not available, elements of a myth may be clarified by reference to what is known about ritual usage in other contexts (78). This is later related to Turner's ideas equating social drama to theatrical performance. Doty makes clear that he is not suggesting that myths require literal performance in order to remain culturally relevant, as that has been the contention of past schools of thought and methodology (78). He also

² It should be clarified that Bowie and the scholars she draws upon, Maurice Bloch and Bruce Lincoln, are discussing largely non-Western violence in the context of their own Western cultural norms.

discusses “monomythists” like Campbell and Northrup Frye and the Jungian and Freudian theories that influenced them, describing them as “useful.”

Returning to van Gennep’s influential ideas, tribal life in the framework of *Les Rites De Passage* exists as a vacillation between the sacred and the profane worlds, casting liminal states as part of the sacred world (Gluckman 3). As anthropologist Terence S. Turner emphasizes, this transformation needs to be considered in the social context, as a movement from one set of societal roles to another (56). This role-transition occurs on many levels, resulting in multiple changes in the social positioning of the actor, but also in a lack of change in other areas. The example that Turner gives in “Transformation, Hierarchy and Transcendence” is that of the transition from boy to man, where the actor experiences a change in sexual and occupational status, but experiences little or no change to his role as a brother or son (56). Although one might suggest that what van Gennep actually did in his scholarship was simply to point out that rituals have a beginning, middle, and end, anthropologist Max Gluckman counters that this in no way devalues *Les Rites De Passage*, because “every important truth seems obvious once stated” (9). Gluckman has done some important work (with Mary Gluckman) on the rituals of games and competitions, which has significance to a discussion of ludic recombination. In *Essays on the Ritual of Social Relations* (1962), Gluckman describes the basic, groundbreaking tenets of van Gennep’s original work, and argues that van Gennep was hampered in realizing the full implication of his claims by the anthropological norms of the time; that is, he focused too much on attempting to prove, through quantity of examples, that his conclusions were universal. Gluckman posits that van Gennep did not go deeply enough into his subject to come to any sort of conclusion

about “the nature of society,” with the result that by the time Gluckman was writing, in the early 1960s, it is implied that he feared that the importance of van Gennep’s work was disregarded by scholars who found it passé (Gluckman 2).

Indeed, anthropologist Jack Goody challenges the existence of such a transformative ritual form in his essay that appears in the book *Secular Ritual* (1977), basically claiming that trying to codify and categorize ritual as van Gennep does obliterates the whole idea of ritual. Goody states that if we try to break down different types of ritual too much, the lines between what is “ritual” and what constitutes the everyday routines of life, anything that is procedural or proscribed suddenly becomes ritual, giving for example, a first communion or marriage the same ritual validity as ordering a complex cup of coffee (27). Goody’s point is that the idea of ritual as most scholars currently have it resists definition, and even to describe it as a repetitive act that is formalized (this is a somewhat reductive version of Victor Turner’s definition in *The Forest of Symbols*) gives the term a multiplicity of interpretations (Goody 27, 33).

Despite such criticisms, it is inescapable that ritual does seem to have a quality that sets it apart from mundane repetitive action, which Goody makes no attempt to explain, but is clearly linked or perhaps has the same as the concept of liminality. My interpretation is that ritual involves a sense of significance to the actors that is basically comprehensible, if not felt, by others; that is, they can acknowledge that something meaningful is occurring without entering into a liminal state themselves. This can obviously manifest itself in religious rituals, but in secular life the significance of a ritual can have nothing to do with “mystical beings or powers” (Turner in Goody 27) if they inspire a similar quality of fervor and importance. Whether or not Goody is to be agreed with on the

subdivision of ritual, he is helpful in identifying the interpretive nature of all ritual study and theory, which opens up the possibilities for ways that humans can utilize liminality in order to form meaning and imbue significance. Many scholars (even those writing in the same volume as Goody) disagree with him, advocating instead for a perspective on ritual behavior that is rigorously defined.

Liminality is usually represented as a state with certain hallmarks; however, the Turners characterize it as a process with certain steps or features, called *sacra*, *communitas*, and *ludic recombination* (202). These three features are all very adaptable to the plots of *BSG* and *Doctor Who*. These features should not be viewed as exclusive of each other, or as existing in separate spaces, as they are usually interwoven into the liminal experience, subject and respondent to several of the same factors, often happening or developing at the same time. In liminal states, boundaries and borders become permeable and challengeable, in a way that is both thematic and structural (or anti-structural).

Of particular importance to this analysis is the concept of the *sacra*: the communication of knowledge, stories and items that are held to be sacred. These are revealed during the liminal process, in a variety of manners. In the case of objects as *sacra*, they can be exhibited; often sacred objects are commonplace items that have been interpreted to have some sort of esoteric or religious symbolism beyond their material worth, other times sacred objects are inherently religious, such as idols or relics (Turner 204). Sacred actions, such as performances of significant dramas, dances, or staged myths may be presented as *sacra*, the actions being performed by those who are already initiated. The revelation of *sacra* may also involve the instruction of the initiates in sacred

actions or philosophy, such as the cosmogony or history of the group, or how to perform sacred dances and rituals (Turner 204). In science fiction narratives, it is often the revelation of sacra that constructs a liminal state or triggers ludic recombination. For example, a major plot device in *BSG* is the trail of sacred breadcrumbs left for the characters by God (or some kind of deity or force, the show is ambiguous) which they must discover and decide what to do with on their way to reestablishing a human society. The revelation of knowledge can, in general, play tricks with one's worldview, but in storylines of epic cosmic struggle they can cause characters to become untethered from their expectations of how the world works (because those expectations have been subverted) thus leading to ambiguity, disorientation, and occasionally the reimagining of the world. Furthermore, the appearance of sacra is often what drives a complex serial science fiction narrative.

During the liminal process, initiates tend to form bonds of shared experience that exist regardless of normal societal strata, which the Turners call *communitas*. These relationships are made more profound than ordinary relationships because of what initiates undergo as a community (Turner and Turner 205). The experience of alienation that occurs in the preliminal phase acts as a leveling factor: removing the element of rank and social status removes the social identities of the initiates, allowing bonds to be formed in true equality. However, as the Turners point out, "*Communitas*...does not merge identities; instead it liberates them from conformity to general norms, so that they experience each other concretely and not in terms of social structural (e.g., legal, political, or bureaucratic) abstractions" (205). Basically, the intense upheaval involved in a transitive ritual is so strong that the importance of societal norms fades and humans can

interact in a way that has more to do with honesty and reality than everyday interactions, creating a lasting and particular bond.

The final feature of the liminal phase, ludic recombination, is perhaps the most abstract concept. The release from societal norms that enables *communitas* to take place also allows for the playful reimagining of the world, a theoretical building of community into the void left by the retreat of the normal and usual concerns of the world. This is the operative concept that provides a link between the rituals of real life and the play of ideas in science fiction. This notion often comes into play with the presentation of *sacra* that is somehow disproportionate to the normal world, that which is “deviant, grotesque, unconventional, or outrageous” (Turner 204). The purpose of this ritual exercise is to use the concept of “play” to force initiates to think about the real world that they live in, to suddenly reconsider the world that they accepted without question. Initiates are certainly guided in this by whatever form of superiors are involved, and perhaps guided to specific conclusions about society and the world, but initiates are largely free to “juggle with the factors of existence,” as the Turners phrase it (205). Often, other literary forms attempt to deal with huge issues (usually on a more specific or interpersonal level), but they present reality in stark and unimaginative ways. Elements of science fiction and fantasy allow for a more nuanced and imaginative consideration of reality, by way of ludic recombinatory ideas. Because of this, science fiction can assume either gritty or glossy aesthetics while still having the power to question, hypothesize, and, at times, even threaten. As will be discussed in more depth further on, this could be said to be the *raison d’être* of *BSG*, *Doctor Who*, and science fiction in general.

Science fiction as a genre is essentially an act of the creative reworking and exploring of cultural elements, its features of ludic recombination permeate science fiction narratives by existing on the authorial level and on the diegetic level. As a genre, science fiction has more devotees than academic respect, but recent works in the genre have shown science fiction's capacity to explore and question societal issues in deep and complex ways, requiring the reader or viewer to engage critically with themes that have great relevance. I argue that the element that enables this is the strand of ludic recombination that runs through much science fiction. In short, the liminal states offered by science fiction narratives often allow for a transcendence of popular culture clichés as well as dominant cultural norms, making discussion and questioning of the status quo appealing and acceptable.

In describing the basis for the science fiction genre in general, Frederik Pohl, author of the *Gateway* series, neatly sums up what happens on shows like *BSG* and *Doctor Who*: "...science fiction writers do universally use a single method in devising their stories. First they look at look at the world around them in all its parts. Then they take some of those parts out and throw them away and replace them with new parts of their own imagining. Then they reassemble this changed world and start it going to see how it works..." (200). Pohl is of course, discussing the authorial process, not any structure of content, but the practice he describes sounds very similar to that of ludic recombination. Based on Turner's definitions of the two terms "liminal" and "liminoid," it could be said that a character experiencing a moment of ludic recombination is in a liminal state, whereas the writer of science fiction is positioned as liminoid (41-43). Ludic recombination is actually a key element of science fiction in general, and while it

may be a process that characterizes science fiction writing, it also is a process that characters go through in the diegetic of science fiction narratives. Science fiction author Frank McConnell, in his contribution to *Science Fiction, Canonization, Marginalization and the Academy*, argues that the Greek concept of *agon* and the Latin of *ludus* are integral to science fiction, the latter more so than the former:

I have heard that science fiction is engaged in *contests* for authority. The Greek word for contest is *agon*, and it is under this term that we have, in the academy, largely configured our behavior. *Agon* implies ‘struggle,’ ‘competition’ It suggests that we are in a serious business I suggest that we shift terms from Greek to Latin. The Latin word *ludus* is roughly the equivalent of the Greek *agon*, but its connotations are ‘play,’ ‘game’ It suggests that we are in a delightful business (33).

The mere fact of the fictional existence of another world may be used as a way to explore our own world, sometimes through metaphor, or through hyperbole, showing what our world could become; often offering an implicit call to action. The device of outer space does this as well, offering a disconnected space where normal rules fall away in the face of crisis or struggle. Often what space does for ludic recombination is to create a vacuum into which new ideas can form or be received without the normal rules of societal propriety preventing progress, or interposing material concerns into ethical debates. The latter is especially relevant in this genre because so often the tough choices that characters face involve choosing between the greater good and the morally right action. One of the great charms of the science fiction genre is that it deals not with mundane, interpersonal issues, but with the bone-deep sort of truth that humanity carries

with it unconsciously, until some work of creative refiguring suggests an elusive revelation to us that may or may not be understood. One of the ways fiction can do this is by showing us an individual's journey through epic strife, using the relatability of that character to mediate between the science fiction world and the audience in the real world. The rites of passage model, and specifically ludic recombination, can facilitate a character's transition from innocence to experience in such a way that the audience can vicariously take that journey as well, thus connecting to and understanding the story on a deeper emotional and psychological level.

It seems reasonable to suggest that the fantasy genre is capable of acting in a similar capacity. For instance, one could say that the *Harry Potter* series uses the liminality of the wizarding world to make a very open-ended statement about oppression. However, science fiction tends to be more direct, more specific, and more explicit. Furthermore, science fiction is often linked to our own world, instead of taking place in an entirely made up realm or subculture, thus making the relation between fiction and reality inescapable. Conversely, in narratives completely removed from our world, science fiction narratives tend to have a specific element, say a piece of familiar technology or an issue that mirrors, rather than suggests a real world problem.

Science fiction television was preceded, of course, by science fiction cinema. Early film went hand in hand with the genre because it provided filmmakers with a platform to show off what they could do with the new found technologies of basic special effects, such as stop-motion animation, over or under cranking the camera, split screens, dissolves, and reverse footage (Bould 79). The first science fiction film was George Melie's *Le Voyage dans la Lune* in 1902, which used trick photography to depict a

journey to the moon. This period also featured a spate of films based on gothic novels (thought to be a forerunner of the science fiction genre) as well as an adaptation of Jules Verne's *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* in 1916. In 1927 the German film *Metropolis* hinted at the eventual function of science fiction as sociopolitical commentary. As the medium developed, the genre remained popular, but experienced a decided boom in the 1950s which coincided with the rise of television. Beginning with the Space Operas, such as *Captain Video and his Video Rangers* (1949-1955), which generally feature an all-American hero who fights for the preservation of the status quo, science fiction TV has always had some sort of societally meaningful edge to it, especially as the world moved into the treacherous Cold War years, when storylines involving nuclear war or the averting of it became popular. Beginning in the mid-1960s, science fiction moved away from the madcap camp and simplistic storylines of the Space Opera and started to integrate actual science as well as a need for there to be some sort of moral point to the story; often that moral echoed a real and current issue, such as the enormously popular series of *Quatermass* adventures, which were broadcast by BBC rival ITV in the 1950s through 1970s. Later science fiction began to use narratives and characters to explore cultural and counter-cultural concerns with race, class, the Vietnam War, the relationship between business and government and the representation of youth interests. Science fiction television occasionally broke serious ground, as with the character of African-American Lieutenant Uhura³ on *Star Trek*, but was still not taken seriously as a genre

³ Uhura (played by Nichelle Nichols) was an important moment in television because she was the first African-American to be featured in a non-menial role on American television. Her kiss with Captain Kirk was the first interracial kiss on television ("Plato's Stepchildren"). Nichols went on to aid NASA in attempting to recruit members of the black community. Dr. Mae Jemison, the first African-American woman in space cited Nichols and *Star Trek* for inspiring her to join NASA.

worthy of study, although there has been much critical engagement with the *Star Trek* franchise itself (Roberts 271). According to Mark Bould in *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*, the element of “moralizing” in science fiction was what kept it from becoming truly meaningful, coming off instead as trite and cliché. He specifically makes mention of a classic *Doctor Who* scenario in which the Doctor must choose whether or not to commit genocide against those dreaded specters of fascism, the Daleks, lest they themselves commit further genocide, a moment of truly epic implications that is rendered ineffective by the silliness of the mid-70s sci-fi aesthetic and the need to present the dilemma as a fable. Bould casts these issues as a driving force behind the marginalization of the science fiction genre in television and film (89-90).

More recently, it is hard not to note that on the silver screen the genre has all but returned to its roots as a vehicle for spectacle and special effects, rather than original or poignant storytelling. CGI and cataclysmic explosions are becoming more central than character development and meaningful statements. Case in point: James Cameron’s opus *Avatar*, which has grossed over \$760 million to date (IMDB), relies on amazing its audiences with (literally) otherworldly visuals in 3-D, seemingly stealing its simplistic plot directly from Disney’s *Pocahontas*. Similarly, Michael Bay’s *Transformers* franchise has been almost universally panned for lazy, uninspired, and often insensitive writing, but continues to pull in audiences with promises of ever more stimulating CGI battle scenes, not to mention ever more beautiful and scantily clad actresses.⁴ In contrast,

⁴ An exception to this critique is the recent release *Pacific Rim*, which was written, directed, and produced by Oscar Nominee Guillermo del Toro, which features an emotionally complex, if formulaic script, two main characters that are (shockingly) not white, and more male than female nudity. This film illustrates that the emptiness present in many blockbuster science fiction films is unnecessary. Complex and compelling narratives with well-developed and diverse characters can indeed coexist with massive box office returns.

differing budgets and production requirements have helped to keep science fiction television from relying on spectacle and instead emphasize storytelling. Unfortunately, major American networks seem not to be able to resist the temptation of flashy and vapid entertainment. A current example of this type of programming is the CW's *Reign*, which ostensibly tells the story of the young Mary Queen of Scots; the story it tells is almost entirely a fabrication and instead of designing lush period costumes, the production chose to outfit their Renaissance-era characters in clothing that is currently available at the retailer Urban Outfitters. Similarly, NBC is presenting two shows in its Fall 2013 season which have literary sources that rely in large part on folklore: *Dracula* and *Sleepy Hollow*, both of which are visually stunning, but which butcher their source material in order to engage younger audiences with more convoluted plotlines and sex appeal. For instance, the eponymous character of *Dracula*, takes on the guise of an American businessman in order to bring down a brotherhood called the Order of the Dragon and woo the reincarnation of his wife, a plotline that comes not from the Bram Stoker novel, but from the 1992 Francis Ford Coppola film. Although the production team insists that the show is inspired by the historical Dracula, Vlad Tepes (the Impaler), the historical details that made it into the show are complete inversions of the history. Furthermore, the show presents a version of Victorian London that behaves nothing like the Victorians and looks nothing like London (perhaps because it was shot in Budapest).

Both of the case studies presented in this thesis were produced by minor networks (Sy Fy and BBC Cymru Wales), which allowed them more artistic freedom and the ability to be smart, rather than spectacular. Although in the case of *Doctor Who*, it is impossible not to note the massive jump in production value that occurred at the

beginning of Season Two, when the show had first begun to demonstrate its ability to bring in high ratings, and then again at the beginning of Season Five, when a new showrunner, Steven Moffat, introduced a sleeker, hipper, more cinematic quality to the production. This updated look, and a more adept handling of tone negates the issues earlier noted by Bould in his critique of the ineffective production of the earlier classic show. *BSG*, existing within an idiom of science fiction realism, rarely has the potential for such undermining issues of tone; however, the 1970s version of the show was exceedingly silly, and seemingly made no attempt to create the sort of depth that the 2003 version plumbs. If science fiction television is now at the point where the storytelling and aesthetics have caught up to each other in sophistication (as evidenced by these two shows and arguably others, such as the short-lived, but much-loved show *Firefly*, produced by Joss Whedon), then such cultural products deserve academic attention, specifically some focused discourse on the mechanisms that make it possible for fiction (*science* fiction no less) to comment upon and elicit thought about societal realities and issues of existential concern.

It is also not a coincidence that the two case studies utilize notions of the liminal in distinctly different ways: *Battlestar Galactica* shows a group in a state of liminality, whereas *Doctor Who* works with very personal individual transformative storylines. In the former we see a form of public liminality that shows some elements of the carnivalesque, a society in the literal process of ludic recombination. The latter uses a human character, called the Doctor's "companion" to serve as a representative of humanity. I argue that these companion characters experiences ludic recombination the way an initiate would in a rite of passage. Both of these modes of performing liminality

present to the critically engaged audience a new way to analyze the structure of science fiction narrative, especially those that deal with travel across time and space. As opposed to mythologist Joseph Campbell's pop-psychology-folkloric Hero's Journey structure, and in contrast to folklorist Vladimir Propp's 31 functions of the fairy tale, the 3-part rite of passage model has the flexibility needed to work with increasingly complex science fiction narratives and lacks the casual misogyny⁵ that can be found in both of the other proposed structures of analysis. It also introduces a folkloric, ritual perspective to structural analysis that is not only relevant to the increasing prevalence of folkloric elements in popular culture (especially in the kind of popular culture that tends to inspire intense fan dedication), but to the human experience, rather than to the literature and literary criticism. Elements of popular culture such as science fiction television tend to garner cultic fan communities because they say something universal and yet personal that audience members can identify with on an emotional level. It makes sense then for analysis and criticism of such works to resonate with that quality of communal identification. A folkloric perspective has the potential to do just that, by reminding us that even in the technologically advanced, often fantastical landscape of science fiction, existential and profound issues can be revealed.

⁵ One of the main feminist complaints about narrative in popular culture is that so often women are only incidental to men, they have no depth or storyline outside of their attachment to a male Hero character. They exist only to provide the Hero with a stepping stone to self-actualization, or worse, sex. This is exemplified in Campbell's Hero's Journey, or monomyth, which only acknowledges women as plot devices to be made use of by the Hero. It also discourages the idea of a Heroine. Campbell explains his structure in detail in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, the title of which references the supposed universality of the monomyth. Propp's structure gives female protagonists depressingly few options in terms of endings: either marry the prince or die.

A Crash Course in *Battlestar Galactica*

At this point, it is necessary to give brief but thorough descriptions of the two case studies analyzed in this thesis, as they are both complex and dynamic, requiring some background knowledge. The first case study, *Battlestar Galactica*, situates liminality as the stage and structure for almost the entire drama of the show: in the pilot miniseries a group of survivors are separated from their society by an apocalyptic nuclear attack by the Cylons, a race of humanoid cyborgs, and given the chance to rebuild their society through assimilation into an existing (primitive) society in the finale. Several seasons of drama happen in the liminal phase, and all of the features of liminality as laid out by Victor Turner are present, and all contribute to, structure, and complicate the byzantine discussions of religion, society, freedom, death, rights, and culture that are woven into the narrative. Similar to *Doctor Who*, *BSG* uses outer space as liminal space, which makes a great deal of sense emotionally, given the instability that affects all of the humans and human connections in the survivors' unmoored, planetless, and therefore homeless, state. Also, like *Doctor Who*, this incarnation of the show is a reboot. The original *BSG* was an extremely campy late 70s affair envisioned by Glen A. Larson, who laced the program with references to Mormon theology and actually intended for the story to mirror the Christian narrative of Noah and the Ark. It was relaunched three years later in *Galactica 1980*, with little success. The incarnation I discuss in this thesis is the 2003 version helmed by Ronald D. Moore and David Eick. Although it maintains some symbolic Mormon elements instituted by Larson, Moore also introduced references to the Greco-Roman Pantheon and Eastern Mythology, particularly mandala imagery.

The show is replete with heavy religious themes that situate the plot in a highly ritualized state, to be further discussed in Chapter II. From a religious viewpoint, the plot might be viewed as a struggle between monotheism and polytheism, though an agnostic like myself would refer all claims about the show's religious message to a line in the second part of the series finale when brilliant, arrogant, womanizing, Dr. Gaius Baltar, who has apparently been chosen by God as an emissary, argues for the presence of some unseen third party, moving planets and people on a cosmic chessboard, and affecting the course of Cylons and humans alike:

There's another force at work here. There always has been...everyone in this room has experienced events that they can't fathom, let alone explain away by rational means. Puzzles deciphered in prophecy...Our loved ones dead, risen. Whether we want to call that god or gods or some sublime inspiration or a divine force that we can't know or understand, it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter. It's here. It exists. And our two destinies are intertwined in its force...god is a force of nature, beyond good and evil...we created those ("Daybreak: Part II")

For the entire show, Baltar and his Cylon lover, Number Six, are accompanied by visions of each other that are invisible to everyone else, initially presented as a delusion of Baltar's, but revealed (rather vaguely) to be some kind of angel, or agent of the divine, that help Baltar and his lover survive and achieve what needs to be achieved in order for "God's plan" to be fulfilled⁶. These two figures of the numinous, known as "Head Six" and "Head Baltar" in the fan community (because they only exist in their heads), close

⁶ The idea of divine intervention is used interchangeably with the concepts of fate and destiny, rendering the religious storylines ambiguous and open to interpretation.

out the final episode with a warning for modern society not to let technology get out of our control, lest humanity have to repeat the cycle of apocalypse and creation.

The three part rites of passage model that is reflected in *BSG* starts with separation, which begins on the series with an apocalyptic nuclear attack that cripples humanity, and that occurs in an era that initially appears to be far in the future from ours on a set of 13 planets known as the Colonies of Kobol. Earth is part of the ancient mythology of these defeated people. At the start of the two-part miniseries that precedes the actual sequence of episodes, the *Galactica* is preparing to be decommissioned, turned into a museum, a relic of a war that took place 40 years previously. Although we later learn that small pockets of life did survive the attack, most of the remainder of human life is aboard the *Galactica*, and its small fleet of civilian ships that were in space when the attacks took place. They are utterly cut off from news or communications from any of the Colonies. The perpetrators of this nuclear holocaust are the Cylons, a race of humanoid robots created by humans that became sentient and rebelled. Some Cylons are imposing metal robots, announced by their foreboding, metallic footsteps. This is the “centurion” model of Cylon, recognizable, though modernized from the original 1978 incarnation of the series, which has a single red eye that sweeps back and forth across a rectangular screen-like socket and various hand and arm attachments to maximize its deadliness in combat. The more intriguing Cylons are those that are virtually indistinguishable from humans, often referred to derisively as “skin jobs.” It becomes clear in the miniseries that the Cylons have found a way to construct a humanoid Cylon model, indistinguishable from an organic human until the blood of both is broken down into components and compared. There are twelve models of humanoid Cylon, seven of which were created by

the “Final Five” Cylon models. The “Final” refers not to the order of creation, as these five are the original inorganic humans who worked with the Cylon centurions to develop the other seven Cylon models, but, peculiarly, to the order in which their identities are revealed. The Final Five are single individuals, whereas there are thousands of each of the other seven models, which means that for actors like Grace Park, who plays Cylon model eight, they play not one character, but many, a staggering feat of acting over the course of the three seasons. These twelve Cylons are immortal after a fashion. When they die, their consciousness downloads into a fresh new body of the same model. This creates a very interesting conversation about the real meaning of life and death, as evidenced in the conversation where one of Park’s characters, Boomer, claims that death is “a learning experience.”

The remaining human contingent of less than 50,000 people is led by a military figure, Commander (later Admiral) William Adama, played by Edward James Olmos, and a civilian one, President Laura Roslin, played by Mary McDonnell. Adama, the Commander of the *Galactica*, survives because he has never suffered networked computers to be aboard his ship, which are vulnerable to Cylon attack. Roslin is the former minister of education, the only member of the Colonial government to survive. The two later become lovers. The other power couple of *BSG* is Adama’s son Lee (played by Jamie Bamber), and Kara Thrace (played by Katee Sackhoff), better known as Starbuck, the fighter pilot with which both Adama men have a complicated relationship. From the very beginning, death hangs between Starbuck and the people she is closest to, the Adamas. As seen in flashbacks, her association with that family began when she was engaged to Zak Adama, Lee’s brother, who died in a piloting accident for which Starbuck

blames herself. Adama senior acknowledges late in the series that he thinks of her as a daughter, but Apollo's feelings for her are decidedly not brotherly, and the two have a passionate and tumultuous romantic relationship. Later in the series, it is revealed that Starbuck has been unconsciously painting and drawing mandalas all of her life, abstract swirls of the primary colors which appear in conjunction with important revelations of sacra throughout the series. In season three Starbuck dies, literally chasing her demons, but reappears in season four, seemingly under the impression that she has only been gone a few hours. She is mystically dubbed "the harbinger of death," but also "an angel of god." The plot thickens when her body is found, and no one can explain her presence. She begins hearing a specific melody in her head that she believes to be significant, especially when the half human, half Cylon child Hera brings her a drawing of dots that resemble a musical notation of it. The melody is easily recognizable as that of "All Along the Watchtower," a song written by Bob Dylan, but popularized by Jimi Hendrix. Starbuck eventually begins to tinker with the idea that the musical notes may represent numbers, possibly map coordinates. The song, remixed with an eastern flavor (lots of sitar), also alerts the Final Five, who have been living as humans, to their true identity as Cylons.

The Galactica spends years in space searching for the legendary planet earth, attempts to colonize a new planet (which becomes a dystopia), visits the lost planet of Kobol (destroyed by the gods for being a dystopia), and survives a bloody revolt, the leaders of which perceive their current situation to be a dystopia. Finally, they reach Earth, only to find that it is an uninhabitable husk after a nuclear apocalypse that mirrors the Cylon invasion of the human colonies.

In the conclusion of the series, a moment of crisis leads Starbuck to enter the numbers she has transposed for “All Along the Watchtower,” into the ship’s navigation system as coordinates, leading the remains of humanity to a planet that is identified as Planet Earth in a sweeping shot from over the moon, with the familiar contours of the African continent visible. This shot is the first time the audience is given any indication that *BSG* takes place in the distant past as opposed to the far future suggested by their level of technology. It is also revealed that humanity as we know it is the product of interbreeding between organic humans, Cylons, and the prehistoric people that the survivors of Kobol find on “Earth.” Within the ritual process, this is the reintegration stage. The show ends with a warning to the viewers that we are headed toward a similar fate, because of the cyclical nature of history. This is suggested, not at all subtly, throughout the show in the Kobolian mantra: “All of this has happened before and all of this will happen again.”

A Brief History of *Doctor Who*⁷

The second television program analyzed in this thesis is *Doctor Who*, a British television show produced by the BBC/ BBC Cymru Wales that has the distinction of being one of the longest running shows in television history. Initially it ran from 1963-1989 and then returned to television in 2005 starring Christopher Eccleston as the Doctor, and since then has gained significant international popularity. Although *Doctor Who* has always held an important place in British mainstream culture, the fandom as it exists in America is largely a cult following, not to mention a recent development (McKee 182).

⁷ The majority of this thesis was written before the airing of the *Doctor Who* 50th Anniversary Special which, while providing recontextualization of some aspects of the Doctor’s story, does not affect the analysis presented herein.

Eccleston has since been succeeded in the lead role by David Tennant, Matt Smith, and (in the upcoming season) Peter Capaldi. The show follows the adventures of a humanoid alien who calls himself only “The Doctor.” This pseudo-eponymous character comes from the planet of Gallifrey, whose inhabitants refer to themselves as Time Lords. In its initial run, the show visits Gallifrey and meets other Time Lords; however, in the reboot the Doctor is the last remaining Time Lord, following a cataclysmic war between the Time Lords and the most classic of Whovian villains, the Daleks (a fascist race of fire hydrant-shaped robots). The details are not made explicit, but it is made clear that the Time War ended because of an action taken by the Doctor, wiping out both races and placing the War under a “time lock” to prevent either side from escaping via time travel. The highly complex narrative of the show finds ways of bringing back both Daleks and Time Lords, but the isolation and guilt that the Doctor feels as a result of his mysterious and inadvertently apocalyptic actions remain major themes of the show, and a justification for the presence of the Doctor’s “companion,” a human character who travels with and aids the protagonist.

Most episodes deal with the hero rescuing a people or planet (usually earth) from apocalypse at the hands of other alien races. This “Monster of the Week” plot is, in most episodes, intertwined with serialized plots that run the length of a season. These serialized plots often deal with the Doctor’s backstory or future. With the barriers of time removed from the narrative, often past and present become blurred or overlap. In one of his most famous and charming lines, the 10th Doctor (portrayed by Scottish actor David Tennant) says “People assume that time is a strict progression of cause-and-effect... but actually, from a non-linear, non-subjective viewpoint, it’s more like a big ball of wibbly-

wobbly... timey-wimey... stuff” (“Blink” 2007). This approach to time is a massive driving force behind the narrative as it means that the Doctor’s future can catch up to him just as easily as his past can.

The Doctor’s iconic space-time travel vehicle is a piece of Gallifreyan technology known as the Tardis, an acronym which stands for Time And Relative Dimensions In Space. Because of the Time War, it is safe to assume it is the last of its kind. The actual appearance of the Tardis is unknown, as it is equipped with a device called a “chameleon circuit” which allows it to blend into the surroundings of any place or time. However, the Doctor’s Tardis is defective; its chameleon circuit is broken and it was declared derelict. When the Doctor steals it, the Tardis has been installed in a Gallifreyan museum as an artifact of the past (an interesting parallel to the *Galactica*, which is being decommissioned at the start of *BSG*). The result of the Tardis’s defect is that it is locked in the guise of a bright blue, old-fashioned British police box, ostensibly encompassing only a few square feet of space. The interior of the ship is actually massive, prompting many to exclaim “It’s bigger on the inside!” when they enter the Tardis for the first time. Although it has a cavernous library, swimming pool, and many rooms full of intriguing and beautiful alien technology, most episodes only show the control room, or a tantalizing glimpse of hallway. It is assumed for most of the show’s lengthy run that the Tardis was stolen by the Doctor, but in the 2011 episode “The Doctor’s Wife” written by acclaimed fantasy novelist Neil Gaiman, the essence of the Tardis takes on human form and tells the Doctor that she (it) in fact stole *him*. It is often hinted that the Tardis is sentient, but only in this episode is it made explicit that the Tardis is somehow alive and capable of feelings and independent action.

While the subject matter of the show is generally serious, it is tonally much lighter than *Battlestar Galactica*, utilizing wit and humor to heighten the entertainment factor of seemingly impossible situations, while keeping the action and tension compelling. For all their circumstantial similarities (both being reimaginings of earlier series), *BSG* and *Doctor Who* operate on very different science fiction philosophies. *BSG* is thought to have pioneered the subgenre of science fiction realism, whereas *Doctor Who* clearly exhibits a type of science fiction that stands precariously close to the fine, smudged line between the genres of science fiction and fantasy. While these differences definitely inform the tonal qualities of the show—gritty and grim versus playful and witty—they also affect the thematic qualities of the show and what kind of underlying messages successfully explored in both shows.

Doctor Who uses the device of “regeneration” to periodically replace the main actor. However, it is understood that “the Doctor” is essentially the same person, with the same memories. Every actor who has played this iconic role has endeavored to bring a fresh, unique take to the role with signature quips, catchphrases, and quirks. Although the Doctor’s “essence” appears to be the same from regeneration to regeneration, there have been some hints that the consciousness of each Doctor may be separate. For example, moments before his regeneration (which was his exit from the show), Tennant’s Doctor tearfully murmurs “I don’t want to go,” breaking the hearts of millions of fans, but more relevantly, suggesting that there is a separate consciousness to each version of the Doctor that does actually die in the regeneration process (“The End of Time Part II” 2010).

One of the hallmarks of the show is the aforementioned companion character, called an “identification figure” by Whovian scholar Matt Hills, who is a (usually)

human, (usually) British sidekick that joins the Doctor on his adventures and performs a number of narrative and emotional functions. This companion is generally young, pretty, and female, though some of the most beloved companions, such as the blatantly pansexual Captain Jack Harkness (who stars in the spin-off series *Torchwood*), have fallen outside of those descriptors. When they travel with the doctor, these companions occupy an interesting liminal space that poises them on the threshold, not only of changes in their own lives, but of every time and every place that has ever existed. In most of their storylines, the companions are irrevocably changed by their time with the Doctor. For example, the first companion of the relaunched show in 2005, Rose Tyler, ends her story living in a different universe. Martha Jones becomes a soldier, Donna Noble becomes, for a moment, the most important person in the universe. For the first three seasons of the show from 2005-2008, the charm of the companion lies in the fact that she is a normal woman, a temp, a shop girl, or a medical student, and through her travels with the Doctor ultimately finds out that she is capable of extraordinary things. Between seasons four and five (after David Tennant's exit from the role of the Doctor) the control of the show passed from showrunner Russell T. Davies to Steven Moffat, who had penned many previous episodes⁸. Moffat's heroines, Amy Pond and Clara Oswald, are sometimes criticized by fans for having been too cosmically special, beginning their character arc with an event or quality that set them apart, negating their ability to go from ordinary to spectacular, which had characterized the transformations of previous companions.

The character arc of each companion on *Doctor Who* resembles, in a highly generalized way, the sequence of separation, transition, and reintegration that

⁸ The term "showrunner" usually denotes someone who is both the executive producer and lead writer.

characterizes the Turner/van Gennep model of rites of passage, though the narrative often thwarts or subverts the expectation of that sequence. More importantly, the experience of being a companion mirrors, almost uncannily, Turner's description in "Variations on a Theme of Liminality" of the experience of the liminary (initiate, subject). While it might be argued that my point may be flawed because the transformation the companion usually undergoes is generally internal (though usually having external consequences) rather than explicitly societal, anthropologist Terence S. Turner, writing in the volume *Secular Ritual*, defines ritual transitions broadly as "transitions between temporal periods, spatial zones, or social states or relations of various kinds" (53) which offers an appropriately inclusive parameter for understanding what happens to the Doctor's companions in the course of their adventures with him. Charting the journey of these companions as a transformative rite of passage provides an opportunity to analyze what happens to these people when they step outside of their lives and into the neither-here-nor-there and neither-now-nor-then space of the Doctor's storyline.

In some cases the narrative seems made for exactly this type of ritual and folkloric analysis. For instance, Amy Pond, the first companion to accompany the 11th incarnation of the Doctor, runs away with the Doctor the night before her wedding on the understanding that he can return her before her wedding, which settles her time with the Doctor neatly into the liminal phase of a transformative rite. The dynamic of this adventure changes when Amy's intended husband, Rory, is spirited away from his bachelor party to become a companion as well. As this example implies, the 3-part rite of passage model can be applied, but the complexity of the narrative requires it to be complicated and interpreted. Unlike his human companions, the Doctor himself exists in

a difficult to define space which is either constantly liminal or conversely, not liminal at all. With the ability to be in any moment of time or space within seconds, he is, in mythic terms, a demigod (equal parts trickster and hero) that exists simultaneously outside of time and intrinsically intertwined with it. This not only affects the relationship between the Doctor and his companion emotionally, but it uses the character of the Doctor to create a liminal state for the character of the companion, as I will explain further in Chapter III.

Review of Literature on *Battlestar Galactica* and *Doctor Who*

In its short life, *BSG* scholarship has been more varied than prolific. Although the only major conglomeration of academic work on the show is *Cylons in America: Critical Studies in Battlestar Galactica* (2008), there are standalone essays dealing with sex, gender, class, technology, religion, queer theory, and philosophy that appear in science fiction and popular culture journals and anthologies with regularity. The complexity of the *BSG* narrative seems to lend itself to almost any kind of criticism. The aforementioned book, published in 2008 (consequently having the advantage of being written after the series finale, unlike earlier, more speculative, works) contains the kind of variety of themes and approaches mentioned above. For example, Jim Casey analyzes the tenets of the Cylon and Kobolian religion in relation to Nietzsche's theory of Eternal Return; C.W. Marshall and Mathew Wheeler discuss how the Cylons play into the concept of the Singularity; and Kevin J. Wetmore Jr. makes a surprisingly nuanced and significant analysis of sport, competition and leisure activities on *BSG*, his main claim being that on the post-apocalyptic meat locker that is the *Galactica*, play takes on agonistic, rather than ludic, tones. Other relevant studies include Lewis Call's "Death,

Sex, and the Cylon: Living Authentically on *Battlestar Galactica*” which explores the legitimacy of Cylon life versus human life by comparing how both groups perform their sexuality, though he pays extensive attention to the female characters, while failing to note the complicity, responsibility, or agency of the men involved. Susan A. George gets into similar territory in “Fraking Machines: Desire, and the (Post) Human Condition in *Battlestar Galactica*.” In addition to this collection of essays, two other books have attempted to apply the classic concepts of philosophy to criticism of *BSG*, one by Jason T. Eberl and the other by Josef Tiee and Tristan D. Tamplin, both published in 2008 and both entitled *Battlestar Galactica and Philosophy* (though with differing subtitles). In terms of scholarship, the former seems to be the closest in academic rigor to *Cylons in America*, and it includes a section on *BSG* and religion that discusses the main belief systems that appear on the show (atheism, monotheism, polytheism) in the context of the overarching religious themes of the series. There is also an essay by on the recurrence of the plot that retraces much of the ground that Casey covers in his aforementioned article. Elsewhere in this book, the show is given analysis according to Nietzschean and Machiavellian philosophies and an entire section is devoted to the discussion of human versus Cylon identity, wherein four essays come to varied, even contradictory, conclusions about where the two intersect and parallel each other. Identity is also a main subject in Stieff and Tamplin’s book *Battlestar Galactica and Philosophy* (subtitled “Mission Accomplished or Mission Frakked up?”). The essays in this book are not entirely scholarly, including anonymous creative compositions (basically fan fiction) alongside critical essays that tend to literalize what is effective metaphor on the show into non-academic fan monologue.

Although predating and in no way dealing directly with *BSG*, the majority of scholars who have written on this subject tend to cite and be informed by at least one of these two works: “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology and Socialist-Feminism in the Twentieth Century” by Donna Haraway and Jean Baudrillard’s *Simulations*, particularly “The Automation of the Robot.” Haraway’s seminal work posits that given the amount of technology present in the world (she was writing in the late 1980s) and the hybridity inherent in the roles we play in modernity (she specifically describes the roles of women, though an argument could be made that the same is or is becoming true for men), all people have become cyborgs in a figurative, or one could argue, thematic way. She links the concepts of human hybridity and the cyborg together with the idea of mythology and origin stories in order to suggest that modern humans do not really know where they came from anymore. This plays into the concept of hybridity that many scholars have identified in *Battlestar Galactica*, which presents an endgame in which the survival of humanity is dependent on its ability to become organic/”inorganic” (Cylon) hybrids. Haraway suggests a need for a cyborg origin story in which humanity’s reliance on technology is acknowledged; scholars have suggested that this is fulfilled in *BSG* (to be discussed in Chapter II), if we view it as an item of fictional mythology for the postmodern age. Of comparable theoretical importance are Baudrillard’s ideas that address the authenticity of Cylon life, as evidenced in the aforementioned essay by Lewis Call. In the show itself, discussions often arise that debate the validity of Cylon life; if they are not really human, can they really be alive? Baudrillard’s concept of “simulacra” is sometimes associated with the Cylon because the organic humans believe them to be mere copies of themselves. Baudrillard claimed that in the fourth stage of “sign-order”

there is no relationship between simulacra and reality; signs simply reflect other signs (Baudrillard 181), which has led some to question what reality exists when all humanity exists in the hybrid state of the cyborg, as *BSG* posits they do. Given the amount of *Doctor Who* plotlines that involve duplicates, doppelgangers, humanoid robots, and the destruction of reality, it is logical to think that a Baudrillardian analysis of *Doctor Who* must be forthcoming from someone.

Unlike *BSG*, scholarship on the new *Doctor Who* has been slow to appear, but as the 50th anniversary of the show nears, it seems that popular culture scholars are beginning to mobilize and analyze the program. Most academic work on the subject deals not with the actual show, but with the widespread, devoted, and very emotionally involved fan communities. A representative study is Alan McKee's unsympathetic "How to Tell the Difference Between Production and Consumption: A Case Study in the *Doctor Who* Fandom" from 2004, before the current version of the show was airing. Some works that do deal with the text directly are *Doctor Who: The Unfolding Text* by John Tulloch and Manuel Alvarado and "England Looks to the Future: The Cultural Forum Model and *Doctor Who*" by P.B. Greg. A fairly comprehensive book, though a bit out of date in terms of scholarship, it gives an account of what made the classic *Who* series so iconic, so successful, and so British. This study takes an anthropological approach, detailing early fan communities, as well as providing analysis of how the regeneration narrative works (or doesn't) and *Doctor Who*'s place in the science fiction and fantasy pantheon, and in the development of television as a mass medium. Most interesting from a fan perspective are the production details that pepper the analysis; for example, that the production was at one point so financially successful that it could afford to rent a

Concorde jet for use as a prop (price tag: 30 million pounds). Tulloch has also touched on *Doctor Who* in his other work, namely in *Television Drama: Agency, Audience, and Myth* in which he discusses the Bakhtinian carnivalesque elements of several other early British shows, focusing particularly on how they utilize comedy.

Given the show's lengthy run and cultural importance, especially in Britain it makes sense that works dealing with the history and major concepts of the science fiction genre often mention *Doctor Who*. For example, *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*, edited by Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn includes an essay by Mark Bould on the development of the science fiction and television/film relationship that handles the classic show's original run. Bould situates *Doctor Who* in the context of the development of science fiction on film and television and uses it as an example of how science fiction, in its early days, tried and failed to be deep and impactful.

However, these texts are of limited use to this project as they were all published before the 2005 reboot of the program. The reason for this is that in the 2005 version, the show was completely overhauled and flagrantly postmodernized, keeping only the most charming and iconic relics of the show's storied past. As was mentioned previously, the classic show has been criticized for being too silly (bordering on camp) to make any real statement (Bould 89), whereas philosophical issues and the exploration of human life and ethics are the bread and butter of what fans term "New Who." As with *Battlestar Galactica*, the 2000s reimagining of the franchise bears very little resemblance to the original.

There are a few fairly recent journal articles that focus only on the new version of the show. Aforementioned University of Cardiff scholar Matt Hills has delved into the

fandom aspect of television in his book *Fan Cultures*, and specifically into *Doctor Who* in “The Dispersible Television Text: Theorising Moments of the New *Doctor Who*,” which appeared in *Science Fiction Film and Television*. Hills makes the case for analyzing not only the structural underpinnings of a show, but of the specific “moments” that are engineered to garner fan reaction and memorability, maybe even shock. Though Hills was writing in 2008, an excellent example of the “moment” as he describes it took place at intervals throughout Seasons 6 and 7 (2011-2013) wherein the title of the show would be vocalized as a question (“Doctor who?”) by side characters, an uncommon occurrence which elicited very strong reactions from fans, particularly on the photo and video sharing website Tumblr.

Also appearing in *Science Fiction Film and Television* is a more recent article by Alec Charles, entitled “The Crack of Doom: The Uncanny Echoes in Steven Moffat’s *Doctor Who*” which analyzes the particular contribution of current lead writer and executive producer Steven Moffat, arguing that what Moffat brings to the *Doctor Who* narrative is the Freudian concept of “the uncanny.”⁹ Moffat’s reign has produced many episodes that read more like gothic horror than science fiction, usually because of his ability to take the paraphernalia of everyday life, such as doorways, dolls, statues, books, shadows, cracks, and turn them into objects of numbing terror. Charles compares Moffat’s work on *Doctor Who* to his other projects, such as the incredibly popular *Sherlock*, the comedy show *Coupling*, and the BBC miniseries *Jekyll*, highlighting the fact that “The television screen is...not a boundary but a point of conversion between the

⁹ According to Charles’s reading of Freud, the uncanny is “not merely the unfamiliar – it is that which is deeply familiar but which we have (subconsciously) attempted to conceal from conscious recognition. It is that which we already know – what we have known all along– but which we are not yet aware that we know” (Charles 3).

fantastical and the real” (5). Elsewhere, Charles writes about a *Doctor Who* that is recontextualized in a post-9/11 political landscape, exploring how current world events have the same (enormous) effect on the show that the Cold War had on the classic series. In this analysis, he focuses on the Russell T. Davies era of the show, specifically the pair of multi-episode story arcs that closed out Seasons 3 and 4 (the latter being Davies’s last as showrunner).

The analysis presented in this thesis will utilize the above scholarship while attempting something new: bringing a folkloric lens to television studies and arguing that the popularity of certain shows may be tied to the widespread applicability of the ritual process demonstrated by van Gennep. The next chapter will utilize the relevant scholarship on ritual structure, as well as the scholarship addressing the show itself, to address the plot structure of *Battlestar Galactica* in terms of a rite of passage that must be completed by humanity as a whole, a view which is supported by the clear presence of the features of liminality as plot devices within the narrative, as well as the mythic aura and religious themes that permeate each episode of *BSG*’s four season run.

CHAPTER II

BATTLESTAR GALACTICA

Battlestar Galactica (*BSG*) is a byzantine, often convoluted narrative of endings and beginnings. The plot arc of the series itself begins with an apocalyptic ending and ends with a beginning. What appears until the very last episode to be a story about the end of humanity as we know it is revealed to be the story of the origin of humanity as we know it very well. It manages to be a dystopian navigation of post-apocalyptic space that explores the deepest depravities, harshest insecurities, and most primal emotional responses of human beings (in organic and synthetic forms) in order to pull humanity through an apocalyptic rite of passage in order to begin anew, suggesting quixotically that humanity can always experience rebirth. This overarching presence of the cycle of life and death is central and absolutely essential to the plot. It allows the story to not only possess mythological elements, but to create an alternate fictionalized etiological myth for the human race on earth, a mythology redolent of both Christian and pre-Christian motifs.

The expression of cyclicity that takes place in the epic plot is infused into the story on both epically universal and gut-wrenchingly personal levels. Over and over again, the script finds ways to play with the concept and actuality of death, a passion play that is eventually pivotal to the etiological endgame of the series. Moreover, it is pivotal in explicitly religious ways. The exploration of these religious ways reveals the depth of enmeshment between life and death, and the desperate need that humanity has for both. *BSG* uses religious discourse on life and death to create a cyclical link between eschatology and etiology; all the while deploying a liminal post-apocalyptic environment

as a stage to explore what it means to be human. Ultimately, the show posits that to be human is to be caught in a cycle, as a community and an individual. This chapter explores the plot of *BSG*, and its resemblance to Victor and Edith Turner's rites of passage model. As noted, this model deals with rites that are in some way transformative, that move a person from one stage of their life to another. The human race takes just such a journey on *BSG*, moving from a damaged society at brutal war with the Cylons they created, to a group of people united with their creations and ready to begin a new, more pure existence, divested of the technology and corruption of their dead civilization. *BSG* frames this transformative journey as being at the behest of a "God" figure, therefore this discussion will also require an analysis of the religious themes that make this model an appropriate frame in which to examine the eternal cyclicity that is an integral part of *BSG*'s mythology.

BSG itself reads like a form of fictionalized mythology; an alternate explanation of how humankind came to be the way we are. Germane to this narrative is the fact that it also supplies mythicization for cyborgs, "couplings of organism and machine" that have become prevalent and symbolic in science fiction (Haraway 292). Much of our society and popular culture incorporates this particular type of hybridity in a literal way, but in "A Cyborg Manifesto," Haraway posits that we are all cyborgs in a symbolic way because of how the traditions we live with handle conceptions of the self and of the other (292). *BSG*, of course, posits that we are all literal cyborgs. Haraway says "In a sense, the cyborg has no origin story in the Western sense," a fact that Haraway refers to as a "final' irony," given that intelligent or part human machines so often play a part in apocalyptic scenarios, such as the concept of the Singularity (Haraway 292; Marshall and

Wheeland 93). Since cyborgs feature so heavily in our cultural portrayals of The End, why should they not have a beginning as mythological as ours? This is a lack that *BSG* certainly corrects by giving the part-human an etiological story. Haraway's statements about origin myths seem almost preternaturally relative to *BSG*, which was not made until nearly ten years after "A Cyborg Manifesto," especially when she states that Western etiological myths are always "longing for fulfillment in apocalypse" suggesting the very ritualized cyclicity enacted through a rite of passage on *BSG* (311).

BSG is both an eschatological and a creation myth, a divine explanation of how current human society was born out of the ashes of an earlier, more advanced society. The etiological part of this myth clearly takes place in the final few episodes, when the survivors of a devastating nuclear attack on the home worlds of humanity, after a long intergalactic slog, find and settle the planet currently known as Earth. However, the eschatology of the show is somewhat less clear, and demands a consideration of what exactly is "the end." Is the true apocalypse the nuclear annihilation of human civilization? Or the final breath of the human race? Is *BSG* a story about the bang or the whimper? These questions frame how we deal with apocalyptic topics in this mythic narrative, whether or not *BSG* is entirely post-apocalyptic, or if it involves a sort of averted millennialism. In the former scenario, the show simply deals with the aftermath of an apocalypse, whereas in the latter, we see humanity deal not only with a nuclear apocalypse, but trying to stave off a second, smaller scale apocalypse, wherein either the Cylons kill off the final remains of human life, or the species simply dies out, unable to grow at the rate needed for overall survival. In terms of apocalyptic scholarship, the latter is far more interesting. In an averted, or conditional, framework, an apocalypse is

believed to be preventable, if humans take certain measures, usually a reformation of behavior, or a display of religious devotion (Wojcik 209). On *BSG*, humanity's leaders believe that they can avert the end of their race by defeating the Cylons and finding a new home world. However, the transformative journey (discussed below as a rite of passage) to unity with the Cylons is what actually enables humanity to find a new home and averts the end of life as we live it. In many ways *BSG*'s eschatology is a mash-up of apocalyptic philosophies: it portrays an apocalypse that is both tragic, meaning that the end comes in a fiery, devastating catastrophe, and also that it will be comic, entailing hope for the human race and its transformation to a more peaceful, just society (Palmer 167). The way in which the apocalyptic vision of the Cylon attack unfolds is very similar to traditional Christian frameworks (Wojcik 14); however, the secularity of the *BSG* narrative does distinguish it from religious apocalypses, like the Christian version from Revelation, where divine powers are the main players. On *BSG*, religion is a prevalent, but largely abstract, theme. The divine is often mentioned, but rarely manifested; more of a master puppeteer than anything else.

BSG's unique internal mythology is established firmly in the two competing religions in the story: the polytheistic, Hellenistic-inspired beliefs of the organic humans of Kobol and the inexplicable, monotheistic religion of the Cylon. The two lend a permeating sense of myth to an already complex storyline, often working in tandem to further and affect the plot. However, it should be noted, as Douglas Cowan does, that though two religious traditions seem to be at play, the ways in which different humans and different Cylons live their religion are highly nuanced (241). The show explores several circumstances in which those of the Twelve Colonies of Kobol (ostensibly

members of the same religion) have different beliefs or practices based on what colony they hail from. For instance, those from more rural colonies are more conservative and fundamentalist. Interestingly, many elements of the religion of Kobol (including the term “Kobol” itself) appear to be drawn from the Mormon tradition and many stylistic elements draw from the Hindu tradition (Casey 239; Cowan 227). The Kobolian religion places overt emphasis on the eternal recurrence of events, the belief that history repeats itself infinitely, similar to the Nietzschean concept of eternal recurrence (Casey 242). Given the religious basis for this repetition, the implication is that humanity is performing a ritual over and over again. One of the most common mantras in the script is “All this has happened before, and all of it will happen again.” The idea that all life is doomed to wage war and experience apocalypse haunts much of the character-driven drama of the individual episodes by suggesting that the characters may not have free will. The audience is forced to wonder until the series finale—how does the cycle end? At one point the Cylon known as Athena explains that regenerative Cylon technology allows the transformation of death from an ending into “a learning experience.” Is, then, the cycle of apocalypse, passage and the reinvention of society, simply a learning experience for humanity?

The van Gennep/Turner model of a rite of passage can be applied to the plot of *BSG* as a helpful mechanism to map the cycle of life, according to the religious framework of the series. In order to complete the cycle, a rite must be completed by the human race, the three stages moved through, and liminality experienced. In this imagining of the series, the nuclear apocalypse acts as the separation stage, removing the initiates into the new human society from their old lives in the colonies. The universal

cycle of death and rebirth becomes ritualized in the form of the liminal journey that occurs between the apocalypse and the etiological creation of new beginnings. I use the term “initiates” because the ubiquitous nature of religion and religious themes of the show makes clear that the remains of humanity are enduring as a whole, a ritual that is coded in every episode as religious. In some ways, the cycle that the plot enacts could be read simply as the cataclysmic experience needed to shift humanity from polytheistic to monotheistic religious beliefs, as the tension between the two often flavors interaction between humans and Cylons. Of course, if one considers the events of *BSG* the way they are framed by the etiological finale, one would have to assume that the colonials were the origin of the Hellenistic pantheon, as well as the concept of monotheism. So even though the Cylon stress the fact that they do their God’s will, and that God appears to triumph, polytheistic religions flourish on the Earth for thousands of years before the advent of monotheism in the Judeo-Christian tradition.

Obviously, the separation that the colonials experience is somewhat more forcible than in your average religious ritual, with shocking and immediate isolation. In the *BSG* universe, humans and Cylons are the only life in existence, so when they are cut off from the ravaged colonies, they have only themselves to rely on in the whole of Space. The bulk of the action of the series happens in the liminal setting of Space, broken up by flashbacks to the lives of the colonists on their home worlds. Finally, when they reach the planet we call Earth, they experience reintegration in a very literal sense: primitive humans are living there already. After years of war and living as a conquered people, the surviving colonists decide to assimilate into the existing society, which from very brief shots of the indigenous humans appears to be pre-or very early Iron Age. Although their

own society no longer exists, they do reintegrate into a human society, tempered and matured by their passage, ready to build the kind of world that they played at during their liminal transition.

To understand the religious underpinnings of the series, it is necessary to take a look at the show's formation, or more accurately, its transformation. *BSG* began as the schlocky sci-fi product of Glen A. Larson, originally airing in 1978 on ABC. It ran for just eight months. The show was relaunched in 1980, entitled *Galactica 1980*, with significant changes and a miserly budget that was the show's undoing. Fans of the 1978 *BSG* rebelled at the setting of the show on modern day earth, and the repurposing of footage from other projects, both of which were done to cut costs and the show only lasted for ten episodes. These early *BSG* incarnations were created and helmed by Larson who subtly infused names and concepts from his own faith of Mormonism into that of the Kobolian colonials.

Although the use of the apocalypse as a mechanism of separation is fascinating, the real meat of *BSG* as a religious entity occurs in the liminal transition state, when humanity is poised between the apocalyptic death of one society and the birth of another. While it may not be groundbreaking to suggest that survivors of an apocalypse would develop *communitas*, it is interesting to note at what point *communitas* starts to develop between humans and Cylons. This occurs when the Cylons are no longer able to cheat death using their technology, and thus are forced into the same cycle of life and death that human beings endure. In the early days of the series, when a Cylon is killed, its consciousness is beamed into a new, identical body. This process, previously referred to as "a learning experience," is called resurrection. It makes the Cylons very flippant about

death. At one point when Caprica Six, one of the most fleshed-out Cylon characters, is badly, but not fatally, injured, a fellow Cylon offers to kill her, as a favor so that she may download into a new, untarnished body. In the Season Two episodes Resurrection Ship Parts 1 and 2, a group of Cylons, rebelling against their own, offer the colonial fleet inside information that will allow them to destroy the ship on which the Cylons are resurrected. Their stated purpose is to earn the trust of the organic humans, with whom they want to join, and though trust is slow to come, it eventually works. As Lewis Call says in “Death, Sex, and the Cylon: Living Authentically on Battlestar Galactica,” elimination of immortality offers the Cylons a chance at what Heidegger would call authenticity (100). However, they also now face the same threat of extinction that the humans do, the same threat of apocalyptic whimper. The great equalizer of death is ultimately what allows the humans to believe that the Cylons are capable of humanity; however, the seeds of accord are sown when the Cylon Athena becomes pregnant by the organic human Karl Agathon. Their daughter Hera is perhaps the most major player in the endgame of the series; she is revealed to be “mitochondrial Eve,” the earliest common ancestor of modern humans, the “phallic mother from whom all humans must separate” (Haraway 292). Though again, trust is built slowly; Athena is the first Cylon to gain any admission into the human community aboard Galactica, but the bearing of a child, and the unfeigned exhibition of motherly instincts and intense emotional attachment to her child earns her humanity in the eyes of those in the fleet. That the ability to give life and to die are what earn the Cylon entrée into the ranks of the humans points clearly to the message that inclusion into a certain life cycle is what makes one human, at least in a scenario where humanness is up for speculation. Interestingly, another Cylon woman

becomes pregnant later in the series and it earns her some rapport with the humans, not because she has a baby, but because she has a miscarriage after hearing the father of her unborn child had been unfaithful to her. This is of course, only the functional reason, as thematically the baby cannot survive because it is pure Cylon, and part of humanity's journey is to reach a space that maintains and encourages hybridity (Call 111).

The issue is further complicated by an analysis of the technology of both groups. The human versus Cylon conflict is often painted by humans as a man versus machine conflict, due to the engineered nature of the Cylons. The assumption is that Cylons are, while not technically dead, not alive. However, the battles between human and Cylon are usually battles between their respective technologies. Human machines, guns, the ships like Galactica that they inhabit, are dead, metallic. But the Cylon ships, raiders and weapons are all made of a substance similar to Cylon flesh. Forays onto Cylon battleships reveal them to be constructed of webs of muscle and flesh. In the many instances when smaller Cylon crafts are excavated, they do not have computers or wires, but blood and guts, and most interestingly, brain matter. It is suggested late in the series, that the small Cylon fighters are actually autonomous, craft and pilot in one. This suggests that the Cylon attitude toward life is more holistic and less exclusive than that of the humans. They seem to believe that life is not to be hoarded, that it is not just the province of humanoid or organic beings. They want their endeavors to be driven by sentient beings, not mindless machines. They do not take the concept of life for granted, even though they are flippant about ending their own when death can be so easily remedied, and similarly about ending the lives of humans. These are really two separate attitudes, one toward death and one toward life, compartmentalized in a way that is impossible for humans

because of their cycle-adhering lives. Ultimately, the problem is not that the Cylons are dead, but that they are too alive: not dying, surrounded by live technology, and suffused with purpose. When tempered with death, and the abjectness of the process of birth, rather than sterile resurrection, they do not become more alive, just more human.

On *BSG*, the civil government and military leadership have to strike a balance in the religiously charged atmosphere created by the revelation that the president of the colonies is the central figure in a prophecy that the humans will find Earth, the “dying leader” who will guide them. Not only do they have to deal with a threatening theocracy, but the political implications of the fact that their leader is dying. Although this seems perhaps too literal to be traditional ludic recombination, it only happens in the liminal period of the humans’ journey. All of their jockeying for power and position, their plays of philosophy, the world that the fleet has built by establishing their own culture in liminality; all this they take with them when they integrate into the existing primitive culture, sending all of their ships and technology flying straight into the heart of the sun. Being caught in the liminal area of space, trying to run a nation that is confined to a fleet of ships, a nation that contains the absolute last members of a race, gives the powerful characters the opportunity to be authors of culture. They are allowed by their situation to add, remove, and play with the elements of their society and form it into something that functions in a post-apocalyptic scenario. The problem with this proposal is of course that in the life-and-death literal and metaphorical situations that arise on *BSG*, the building, destroying, and rebuilding of worldviews is not at all playful in the childlike sense. Real consequences are attached to the actions of those doing the recombining, which tends to remove the ludic nature of the thing. Certainly for the writer(s), we can say that the

concept of fiction is what is making the actions playful, the ability to move pieces and ideas around at a whim, without consequences, because of the lack of reality.

In order to discuss the events of *BSG*, and the content of post-apocalyptic fiction in general, as ludic recombination, we must explore further the word “play.” It certainly does not necessarily denote something that is frivolous, play is very much entwined with the way young children learn about the world around them, finding out what is right and wrong through a process of trial and elimination. The phrase “child’s play” implies that play is easy and unimportant, which is the exact opposite of the case. Likewise, to “play” with a concept, perhaps in the way that I earlier described the plot of *BSG* as a play of endings and beginnings, is not a frivolous act, and not always an enjoyable one. In *From Ritual to Theatre*, Turner confirms that “play” and the more serious activity “work” are not mutually exclusive (32). In fact, “...the ludic aspects of ...ritual myth are...intrinsically connected with the ‘work’ of the collectivity in performing symbolic actions and manipulating symbolic objects” (32), suggesting that it would be an error to think of “play” as an activity which has no serious or meaningful purpose.

Therefore, if we think of the term play in its functional aspect, rather than in its popular equation with pleasure, it becomes appropriate. Even more so, when one takes into account the religious worldview of *BSG* which allows the Cylons to be referred to as “the children of humanity” and the humans and Cylons as “the children of God.” In his essay “Pyramid, Boxing, and Sex,” published in *Cylons in America: Critical Studies in Battlestar Galactica*, Kevin J. Wetmore Jr. explores just this notion of play in the context of *BSG*, noting that in their leisure activities, the crew aboard the *Galactica* engages more in play as the Greek *agon* (contest), rather than play as the Latin *ludi* (obviously a

linguistic relation of “ludic”) (77). This shift from play to contest is very germane to the contextualization of ludic recombination in this instance, namely because it articulates what happens to play in a war-ridden, post-apocalyptic scenario. The concept of *ludi* relates play to games, creativity and community; *agon* is all about the construction of dominance and hierarchies, a contest to see where the power lies in the void created by society’s fall. However, the two can be viewed as comparable and even adjacent concepts (McConnell 33). Much of the recombination that takes place on *BSG* could be said, in this framework, to actually be agonistic recombination, seeing what elements of society come out on top, which branch of the government gains supremacy, what laws will continue to be imposed on citizens, even which religion will gain ascendancy over the other (or others). This is, as Wetmore says, a version of Clifford Geertz’s concept of “deep play,” in which pleasure is sought, but the stakes are too high to garner anything but pain; the best case scenario is mere survival (85). The functionality of agonistic recombination as opposed to ludic recombination is thought-provoking in the medium of television; if the function of ludic recombination, according to the Turners, is to engender deep thought about the structure and mores of society in initiates, then agonistic recombination performs the same function, not for the characters of the show, but for the audience. For the actual initiates within the rite of post-apocalyptic passage, this concept definitely creates dialogue about what society should be, when a home world is finally located, which I would argue, still places it in the realm of the ludic. However, it is impossible to ignore how much play is consumed by domination and power struggles in the series itself, especially, as Wetmore argues, in the use of ubiquitous casual sex as a pastime and a weapon (84). The clearest explanation of how these two types of play

relate to *BSG* is that ludic recombination happens in its pure, abstract form, while *agon* influences the actual society that forms in humanity's liminal phase. They both function to encourage critical thought about society; however, ludic recombination in *BSG* affects only the fictional characters. Theoretically, agonistic recombination, or possibly deep play, affects the characters within the story and the audience peering in at them.

It could also be argued that *BSG* as an entity is one long, convoluted revelation of sacra, to the humans, to the Cylons, and to the audience, who, following the show's mythology, are purportedly part human and part Cylon. As mentioned in the previous chapter, sacra are items or pieces of knowledge or culture that are revealed to participants in the liminal stage of a rite of passage ritual which are believed to trigger, inform, or progress their transformation. The revelations of sacra on *BSG* happen in two parts that both pertain to the physical navigation of the *Galactica* and its tiny fleet of survivors. Sacra become the plot elements that move the narrative forward. Initially the plan is to find the lost 13th planet of Earth which, as prophesied, President Roslin leads them to, but they abandon it when it turns out to have been ruined by a nuclear holocaust. It is an interesting incident because the prophecy has not actually failed. However, the colonials behave as if that were the case, not in the sense that they resort to the adaptive strategies that millenarians usually resort to when their prophecies are disconfirmed, but that they accept the evidence before them and move bitterly on to try and find some other planet that will support human life. Functionally, the discovery of the dead Earth serves as a concrete confirmation that humanoid life in the universe is in indeed caught in a ritual loop. Their first, and most major lead in the search for Earth comes on the planet of Kobol ("Home: Part 2"), when nearly all of the primary characters share a numinous

experience that reveals to them the patterns of stars over the Earth. It is obvious in context that they are not actually transported to the Earth, but that they briefly inhabit a mystical space that mimics the Earth in a way that is not at all literal. By way of the “Tomb of Athena,” they enter a metaphysical space, a traditional group of standing stones in an Earth-like field. Rather than any formal cartography, they see a particular star pattern, and perhaps most helpfully, the star pattern in relation to the other constellations of the 12 Colonies (basically, the zodiac). This star pattern is what is used for the rest of the show (at least until the discovery of the dead Earth), to chase a home world.

The Cylons also receive sacra in the form of the identities of the Final Five Cylons, who are revered by most humanoid Cylons with almost mythic devotion. One of the Model 3 Cylons (played by Lucy Lawless), known as D’anna, becomes so obsessed with finding out who the Final Five are that she intentionally and repeatedly kills herself because she can see them when she is between death and rebirth, but she cannot remember them. For the Cylon, there seems to be a liminal space between life and death, or more accurately, death and life that can be experienced, but not recollected once life has been regained. This plot element seems to be a mirror, a synecdoche even, of the structure of the plot, namely that it takes place in the temporal and physical space between the death of human civilization and its rebirth.

In seeking the Final Five in this suicidal manner, D’anna claims to be seeking a new beginning for herself and her race, but doing so through endless endings seems conceptually counterproductive. When she finally sees them it leaves her blinded, though they are later revealed to be well-known characters rather than deities. This happens at a

temple called “The Eye of Jupiter,” which is adorned with mysterious primary color mandalas (a term that is even employed in the script), which appear at several points throughout the show. A mandala occurs in the same sequence as a star going into supernova. Given the characters they are associated with, D’anna and Starbuck, they appear to be a cycle symbol of wholeness, or more appropriately, completeness, perhaps signaling that these characters are necessary to complete the cycle. Interestingly, they are not specifically associated with either the monotheistic or polytheistic traditions; they represent general connection to the divine. Functionally, they facilitate humanity’s transformative journey, as the supernova-mandala points the way to Earth. This is expressed on a micro level through the character of Starbuck, who has been idly drawing such mandalas since her childhood. Their appearance in the divine scenario of the plot signals not only Starbuck’s ability to transform, but humanity’s. In the essay “All This Has Happened Before”: Repetition, Reimagination, and Eternal Return,” Jim Casey explains that “the Dalai Lama and other spiritual leaders describe the mandala as symbolic of the myriad aspects of both the universe and the lone individual,” which situates the mandala as appropriate in a story that often includes synecdotal sub-plots, like Starbuck’s and D’anna’s (246). Casey goes on to say that “By contemplating the mandala, a person may become more aware of the interconnectedness of the micro- and the macrocosmic, ultimately cultivating a realization of the spiritual force within herself,” the implication being that the awareness of that inner spiritual force is necessary for a personal transformative rite of passage. It is worth mentioning that Starbuck’s personal rite of passage is her own death, and subsequent transformation into a divine

messenger that leads the humans and Cylons to their new home world (or as she is once called, “the harbinger of death”).

Perhaps the most meaning-laden revelation in the series is of the coordinates that Starbuck, in her postmortem guise discovers and, seemingly acting under divine inspiration, enters into the Galactica’s FTL (Faster-Than Light) drive in a moment of crisis. The coordinates deliver them into the shadow of our moon. After her death, she is mysteriously sent back, unaware that she has been gone more than a few hours. Before her own death, a divine being wearing the appearance of the Cylon model 2 takes her to a purely spiritual space where she is allowed to witness the death of her mother. His stated purpose is to prepare her to “cross over,” to help her “discover what hovers in the space between life and death,” echoing D’anna’s earlier statement that there is something that is not life or death, but sits between the two, a liminal break in the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth in the stream of eternal recurrence (“Maelstrom”). As a lone individual, Starbuck has to endure a rite of passage that involves her own death in order to lead humanity home. The show seems to suggest this is all the work of the Cylon God, in order for Starbuck to discover the proper coordinates to guide humanity to the current Earth.

The postliminal, or reintegration stage of humanity’s rite of passage takes place when the survivors of the Twelve Colonies land on the vibrant, life-filled planet that they decide to call Earth, after the mythic, ruined planet they spent years chasing. They assimilate into the existing primitive human population, along with a few Cylon allies. It is necessary that there be some kind of culture to reintegrate into, as opposed to simply settling an uninhabited planet, which would not have been nearly as appropriate to the rites of passage model. The very fact of how well the plot and structural elements of *BSG*

align with the concept of a transformative rite opens up new and exciting possibilities for further structural analysis of science fiction narratives and the use of folkloric concepts to discuss popular culture. It is not only exciting because it fuses two parallel but separate fields of focus, but because it necessitates a fusing of structural and thematic analysis and perhaps provides an alternative framework to Campbellian analyses of transformative journey narratives.

As stated earlier, *BSG* offers a fictionalized mythos, a contrived explanation, that for the audience is not meant to explain, but to provoke thought about our world, by showing us a very different one, one that could be our future, regardless of whether real time is caught up in a Nietzschean time loop of ritual, the way it is on *BSG*. It also provokes thought on the concept of time and eschatology. Often it is believed that the world will exist only until one apocalyptic moment in which all things end, yet in *BSG*, time is seen as cyclical, with apocalypses playing integral links in a chain of eternal events (as in eastern mythologies). The show negates the concepts of final endings, because instead of ending everything, the apocalypse produces a new beginning. *BSG* provides a mythology that somehow makes use of eschatology for etiological purposes, in both macro- and micro-storylines. To make all of these intense and philosophical concepts coherent, a structure is needed that weaves theme and structure together, and the rite of passage model provides just that. In the next chapter I further explore the rite of passage model in a science fiction context that is structurally and tonally different (and arguably more straightforwardly ludic) than *BSG* on the longest running program in television history, *Doctor Who*.

CHAPTER III

DOCTOR WHO

On *Doctor Who*, there is no series-long structural format to analyze due to its extremely long run of 34 combined years and the complexity of narrative that this run required. Furthermore, as the show is ongoing, it is not yet known what the Doctor's ultimate fate will be. The length of the show's popularity is testament to its ability to resonate with audiences; its initial run was 26 years and the reboot has been running for over eight years, with no hint of an end in sight. Perhaps the show will be just as immortal as its protagonist, being rebooted for each new regeneration that seeks familiar science fiction narratives amongst the otherworldly setting of the stars. This chapter discusses how the show uses a *mélange* of the mundane and the alien to construct liminal states and how the somewhat institutionalized aspects of the show contribute to that construction. I will then delve into close readings of the character arcs of three of the Doctor's companions which can be analyzed as a rite of passage. One of the main ways in which *Doctor Who* engages in ludic recombination is by presenting a world that mixes the familiar and the alien. The show gives the viewer just enough of an emotional foothold to recognize the humanity of a situation, but also enough science fiction imagery and effect that the indictments of the often upsetting plots are experienced figuratively rather than literally. As noted earlier, Alec Charles goes so far as to compare this quality of normal and extraordinary at the same time to the Freudian concept of the uncanny, especially in the episodes written by current showrunner Steven Moffat. In Freudian terms, the uncanny can be described as the thoughts, concepts, or truths that are known, but cannot be confronted. This is often enacted on the show by aliens who exist in the

midst of humanity by using technology that keeps humans from wanting to look at them (“The Eleventh Hour”). Charles claims that Moffat’s narrative style conjures “a sense that what appears safe and ordinary may always hold terrors underneath” (2) and that “the programme’s generationally ambivalent status – its juxtaposition of adult and childhood content and themes, and thereby its exploration of that which adulthood might seek to repress – lends itself to” explorations of the uncanny (4). Expectations of what the world is and how it works are subverted to show that the worlds around the Doctor and his companions are in the constant process of being broken down and reimagined. In *From Ritual to Theatre*, Victor Turner describes liminality, and his description is applicable to the narrative basis of *Doctor Who*: “Liminality may involve a complex sequence of episodes in sacred space-time, and may also include subversive and ludic (or playful) elements” (27).

For the companion of the Doctor in particular, this is a very personal journey as her individual experience of the world is irrevocably recombined by her experience with the Doctor, which takes place in the liminal state created by the rite of passage performed in the narrative structure. As liminality allows the companion to question his or her own world through ludic recombination, taking the journey along with that companion is what can activate the audience to take part in the questioning of the Earthly status quo, specifically to “continually provoke questions of what it means to be ‘human’” (Poon 78). The juxtaposition of “the banal and the unknown” is a convention of the show that, according to John Tulloch and Manuel Alvarado, goes back to the very first episode, “An Unearthly Child” in 1963, when a teenage girl named Susan confused those around her with her combination of pop music-obsessed normalcy and her seemingly superior

knowledge of everything (25). Tulloch and Alvarado go on to say that this element is essentially what drives the narrative of the entire show (26). Furthermore, Tulloch, in *Television Drama: Agency, Audience, and Myth*, claims that this is not a convention of science fiction alone, but a cornerstone of television formulae: “success consists in the grafting of the novel onto the familiar, and it is through the familiar—the formula—that the experience of television is grounded in the experience of the everyday” (65). From the ritual perspective of Turner one can argue that “in liminality people ‘play’ with the elements of the familiar and defamiliarize them. Novelty emerges from unprecedented combinations of familiar elements” (27). The juxtaposition, or in some cases, blending, of the familiar and the unfamiliar begins in the structure of the character arc followed, with variation, by the Doctor’s companions. While they may be formulaic, the structure of the transformation endured by the companion clearly enacts the rites of passage model.

In the cases of companions Martha Jones and Donna Noble, their rite of passage encompasses the single season of their companionship. However the first companion of the 11th Doctor, played by Matt Smith, Amy Pond, has a three season run as companion. Her rite of passage takes place in a recognizable way in her first season as the space between her separation from her family and fiancé the night before her wedding and her reintegration at her wedding. The rite of passage structure inherent in the story arc of a companion usually begins with an initial incident where the companion somehow proves their worth to the Doctor or piques his interest. A scene always ensues in which the Doctor formally invites the companion aboard the Tardis, sometimes giving her a key of her own. Early on in a companion’s tenure, there is a humbling episode, for example Martha meeting William Shakespeare, or Donna realizing she cannot save the citizens of

Pompeii from death-by-volcano, or Amy withholding information from the Doctor, which earns her a scathing rebuke. This is in line with Turner's analysis of initiatory rituals which "humble people before permanently elevating them" (25). In most cases, the factor that draws a companion back to her own time is the pull of her family, into which she reintegrates at the end of her time as companion. This sometimes means her extended family, or just husband and eventual children. During this time, the companion travels the universe, the past, and the future with the Doctor, and as in traditional rites, they receive "teachings about the structure of the cosmos and about their culture as a part and product of it" (Turner 27) with their worldview slowly changing as they see the how the problems of impossibly ancient and even more impossibly advanced societies suggest the problems of the modern Western world. In terms of the companion's personal journey, what they experience with the Doctor is a transformation not unlike what Turner describes as being part of African tribal rituals¹⁰:

...the imparting of esoteric knowledge, training in useful, practical techniques, subjecting the neophytes to ordeals, confronting them with masked, numinous figures representing remote tribal ancestors and deities, portraying origin myths and, in effect, dissolving their former social personalities in order to 'regrow' them...as self-disciplined, mature persons (Turner, 16)

As in *BSG*, ludic recombination is occurring on two levels, first in the diegetic, in that the companion's world is being disassembled and reformed by her experience with the Doctor, but also in that the writers are practicing ludic recombination in the world-

¹⁰ Turner is referring specifically to circumcision rituals, however, I will resist the urge to indulge in any Freudian analysis of that fact.

building that the show requires of them to realize a world that creates an appropriate threshold state. Furthermore, Mark Bould suggests in “Science Fiction Television in the United Kingdom” that the show is a national effort to create a sort of fantasy-Britain or a “retooling of that image of Britain for a new millennium,” suggesting that the show itself is a country-wide exercise in world-building, if not ludic recombination and reimagining (225).

The element of time travel adds a complicating factor to the presence of liminality. Within the narrative time travel means ultimate freedom; the writers can tinker with any time and place they can imagine, giving them ample opportunity to use the past and future as a lens through which the companion (and therefore the audience) can view their own time (Roberts, 274). It is not only the fact of being in-between-planets as in outer space, but a state in which an initiate is not only spatially removed from their normal life, but is removed bodily from that time. In a rite of passage, the (science) fictional element can make literal those things that are metaphorical in real life. The element of time travel is necessary in *Doctor Who* because, unlike in *BSG*, which takes place almost entirely in an adrift state, the Doctor and his companions do alight on other planets, and liminality does take place there. The constancy of the Tardis provides a “centrality...of ‘place,’” for the Doctor and his neophytes, “as signifying the ‘other’ world of the Doctor” that provides “a point of coherence, ritualized recognition” (Tulloch and Alvarado, 29) that situates the Tardis as the main portal through which the “endless transformations” of worlds and characters takes place (23). This is another instance of science fiction taking the symbolic and making it literal; Turner characterizes the state of an initiate as being “out of time,” and, when with the Doctor, a companion is literally out

of time in that she is out of her own timeline, and perhaps out of any time completely. When they travel from place to place, the companion's "place" within time is constantly changing and therefore blurring distinctions between then and now, which is something that may occur in liminality (Turner 26). Basically, the state of a companion traveling with the Doctor can be best described as being, in Turner's words, in "sacred space-time" (27). In *Mythography*, William G. Doty brings up the very germane point that trickster figures, like (arguably) the Doctor, have much in common with neophytes because they occupy the lowest echelons, or the margins of a society (360). According to Doty, "such figures represent for Turner the ideal pattern of social interaction he calls 'communitas,'" a type of social bonding illustrated in the Doctor's relationships with his companions.

Season 3 companion Martha Jones begins her story with the Doctor as a prospective doctor herself; she is a medical student when they meet. She ends up in what might be called the opposite profession: soldier, and potential destroyer of worlds. The season four episode "The Sontaran Stratagem" sees the Doctor and his current companion, Donna Noble (to be discussed later), meeting up with Martha months after she has last seen the Doctor. When they realize that Martha's new job is with UNIT (Unified Intelligence Taskforce), a military taskforce, Donna says "Is that what you did to her? Turned her into a soldier?" Martha's run as companion takes place during Season 3, during which the Doctor discovers that another Time Lord has survived the Time War, an insane genius called the Master who runs for Prime Minister of Britain and then takes over the world using an alien race that is literally made for killing. The Doctor is held captive by the Master, leaving Martha to save the world. However, her storyline does not end with her last episode as the Doctor's primary companion, as she is sucked into events

in Season 4 as well, and makes an appearance late in the series when the storylines of all the 10th Doctor's companions are wrapped up neatly. It is during this episode that Martha's transformation from healer to a warrior is confirmed, she shows herself ready to literally destroy the earth with an apocalypse device in order to uphold what she believes is right (Charles 462). It is suggested that she stays in the military, continuing to live a life of good, but one ultimately of violence, not healing.

Martha's separation from her old life as an exasperated daughter and put-upon medical intern happens in a highly symbolic way in her first episode, "Smith and Jones." The hospital where Martha interns is plucked from its location in the middle of London and deposited on the moon, along, of course, with all of its inhabitants, including Martha and the Doctor (in the interest of brevity I will not include the details of the plot, but an intergalactic rhinoceros police force is involved). The show sets up the idea that expectations about how the world usually works are about to be subverted by having the rain around the hospital falling upwards instead of down immediately prior to its extraction. This subversion is part of the ludic recombination that takes place once Martha has been separated. This is the "tearing down" of the world (or at least our expectations of it) in preparation for Martha to start rebuilding her concept of the world around what she now knows of it. The visual of Martha, on the moon, staring back at the earth emphasizes her isolation and the sense of her as being barred from her normal life even as she peers back on it. Removed from earthbound society, that society becomes a focal point and a goal for the rest of the action, neatly exemplifying (as many plots on *Doctor Who* do) van Gennepe's "pivoting of the sacred," in which the sacred and profane

switch places in relation to the liminary (Turner 53), and therefore “sacredness is relative to the situation” (Gluckman 7).

As is usual for a *Doctor Who* companion, the revelation of sacra begins with an introduction to the Tardis and to the knowledge that time travel is possible and many of the problems that plague the Earth are caused by aliens. The key point here is that this realization forces the companion to think differently about the world around them, a world that has always, from its formation, been different than it seemed. The show generally uses humor and occasionally absurdism to keep the tone playful (and thus suitable for ludic recombination). For instance, many historical events that inform our cultural backbone, the things that tend to be held as sacred, are revealed to have somehow been the handiwork of the Doctor.

For instance, one reoccurring plot on the show is the Doctor taking his companion back in time to meet someone historically significant, such as famous authors (usually British). This is a sort of revelation of what could be called cultural sacra, especially in the case of “The Shakespeare Code” when the Doctor takes Martha to Elizabethan England and introduces her to the Bard himself. It is revealed that the Doctor gave the playwright some of his best lines, that the famous Dark Lady of Shakespeare’s sonnets is Martha (who is black), and that Shakespeare was not entirely heterosexual, as evidenced by his heavy flirting with the Doctor (to which he replies “Thirty-seven academics just punched the air!” a dig at scholars who suggest Shakespeare was homosexual, usually with very little evidence). This sort of plot upturns cultural details and (obviously fictional) character development of figures that are idolized by Western culture, turning them into a sort of secular deity. Again, the show challenges what we expect to find out

about our world by showing us that our secular mythology, our widely held beliefs about our cultural icons, is flawed and incomplete, which destabilizes societal ability to remain constant and thus enabling it to fall away, setting the stage for narrative ludic recombination.

The most obvious use of ludic recombination during Martha's era as companion is the episode "Gridlock" when the writers of the show (in this case Russell T. Davies, who helmed the reboot) literally destroys the world and rebuilds it, somewhat playfully but also somewhat more poignantly. The Doctor and Martha visit the planet of New Earth, far in the future after the death of the Earth (seen in Season 1) and the city of New New York (the fifteenth of that name). The show makes no particular effort to be subtle: the episode is a warning to audiences about becoming too invested in things that simulate emotions, most pointedly substance abuse, but it could be argued that social media and technology could be indicted as well. This city of the future is reliant on drugs that simulate feelings, with names like "Happy" or "Forget." Late in the episode, it comes to light that an entire half of the city has been quarantined for a hundred years as a result of a drug called "Bliss" that caused ecstasy, then death. For decades, the entire population has subsisted in the ghetto-like "lower city" or in a massive traffic jam of vehicles, which also suggests a warning about overcrowding and pollution in cities, like Martha's native London which is known for its atmospheric, though unhealthy, smog. The simultaneous familiarity and alien quality of the situation and setting, what Tulloch and Alvarado call "normal and uncanny" (16), allow the show to make a statement without preaching and the fact that events lead to Martha questioning the validity of practices in her own world

invite the viewer to join her in recognizing the seeds in our society that the show suggests could grow into a scenario that mirrors science fiction horror.

Martha's reintegration into earthbound society takes place after she has nearly singlehandedly saved the world. Although a year's worth of horrors has been erased from the memories of most humans, Martha's family remembers and they are emotionally broken. Their need of her, coupled with her unrequited attraction to the Doctor prompts her to remain in her own timeline (at least for that particular present). Again, the idea of what is sacred has shifted, it is no longer the liminal state she experiences with the Doctor. The concrete world of her family, and her drive to heal have become sacred. In "War without End?: Utopia, the Family, and the Post-9/11 World in Russell T. Davies's *'Doctor Who,'*" Alec Charles argues that Martha is a symbol for the modern family in a way that none of the other companions are, and that this is symbolized in her breaking of the fourth wall in 2008's "Journey's End" in which she smiles directly into the camera. Charles writes "the shared gaze interpellates the viewer into the joyful harmony the program has restored, offering an inclusiveness whose embrace extends beyond its diegetic realm" (460). However, as is shown in the subsequent season, she is not a healer anymore, she has become a soldier.

The character of Season 4 companion Donna Noble, a huge fan favorite, follows the rite of passage ritual perfectly—right up until her exit, at which point she is made to forget everything about her time with the Doctor, erasing all transformation and perverting the ritual model by denying it the appropriate conclusion. Following the precedent set by previous companions Rose Tyler and Martha Jones, Donna is achingly normal, seemingly insignificant. She is a temp from the Chiswick neighborhood of

London, for which she often maligns herself. By the end of her transformation she has become the most important woman in the world. Through a complex chain of events, Donna becomes part Time Lord and is able to fly the Tardis, sabotage the enemy Dalek mothership, and save not only the universe, but all creation which is threatened by a nonsensically evil weapon called a “reality bomb.” However, her human body cannot contain the Gallifreyan element, which must be entirely removed in order to save her life. That removal wipes her mind entirely clean, returning her to the unconcerned, uninspired, untransformed state. She completes the ritual stages only to be interrupted in the reintegration stage. Even to viewers without any knowledge of ritual theory, it reads as tragic on a bone deep level, not only pitiable but perverse. Knowing about van Gennep’s theories of universality in ritual makes it clear that the response of revulsion to this outcome may come from a human acknowledgement that a liminary must retain the effects of their transformation for the ritual to be completed.

Donna (played by master comedienne Catherine Tate) is actually introduced in the Christmas special that precedes Season 3 as a one-off character and then reappears as a companion in Season 4. When we meet her for the second time, she has been investigating odd happenings in hopes that she will run into the Doctor, which she does. Her preparedness gives her the distinction of being the only companion that has time to pack a bag (many bags, actually) before running off with the Doctor, giving the beginning of her companionship a formality that the others lack, which more accurately mirrors the preparations that are made for a ritual. Donna’s duration as companion sees her deal with storylines that suggest real life issues even more often than Martha Jones’s. First, in the episode “Partners in Crime” she is confronted with a topic ubiquitous in

modern culture: weight loss. The revelation that a popular and successful system is run by aliens trying to exploit humans undermines the credibility of some of our most cultural cherished (and simultaneously reviled) institutions: the exploitation of low self-esteem for profit and the multi-billion dollar weight loss industry. The theme of exploitation is impossible not to relate back to the way advertisers and corporations create environments that shame both women and men and then offer a product that purports to take away that shame. Next she visits ancient Pompeii on the eve of the infamous and deadly volcanic eruption, finding out that the Doctor actually caused the eruption in order to prevent an alien race from conquering the planet. This shakes her faith in accepted historical narratives and causes her to question the validity of everything she thought she knew. After this, her meeting with Martha occurs and they confront aliens that are using green technology in order to wipe out humanity, a technology that is ubiquitous and familiar to Donna; she is shocked to discover she has been daily using the element of an alien plot: an automobile navigation system that promises to eliminate carbon emissions, but is also capable of releasing deadly toxic gases (“The Sontaran Stratagem”/“The Poison Sky”). The instance of their meeting provides a moment of *communitas* between someone other than the Doctor and the companion, the two immediately bond, as opposed to a Season 2 meeting of companions that began with abrasive sarcasm and looks of death, before building into *communitas*. Martha and Donna have three episodes together for *communitas* to develop, so that when they and all of the 10th Doctor’s other companions reconvene at the end of David Tennant’s run, their bond is more pronounced than those of the other characters who traveled with the Doctor separately.

After this series of episodes, Donna's world is thoroughly destabilized, many of her expectations and taken-for-granted beliefs about the world have been shattered, but the ludic element remains intact in her rapport with the Doctor, conveyed by Tate and Tennant's snapping chemistry. At this point in the Season, storylines that destabilize Donna's world give way to plots that begin to show her growth and emotional expansion as a human. The flow of the season clearly moves from the destruction of Donna's worldview, to the rebuilding of it. One of the main ways in which this happens is that the Doctor and Donna begin to confront very human issues on alien worlds. In the complex, disturbing, and multi-layered episode "Planet of the Ood" they confront a human corporation that is selling a gentle, but fearsome-looking race of aliens called the Ood. Though the Ood are naturally servile, it becomes clear that this fact is no excuse for slavery. They are kept quiescent through the removal of their second brain, which when intact, they hold in their hand, rendering them unable to defend themselves from attackers. The removal of their second brain causes them to lose critical thinking abilities, feelings, and their ability to hear each other's silent, haunting singing, a beautiful and heartbreaking element of their captivity, represented to the audience as ethereal opera. The violation of this act is disturbing, but not immediately traceable to any real world issues; however, Donna helps to humanize the Ood, providing mediation between the fantastical science fiction plot and reality by relating them to enslaved humans of the past and present, and how the situation of that slavery obliterates identity as a consequence of the removal of free will. The compromising of self, identity, and individuality in the interest of a faceless and heartless corporation hearkens back to both "Partners in Crime" and the arc of "The Sontaran Stratagem" and "The Poison Sky" making it clear that one

of the main themes of the season is the violation currently being wrought upon humanity by corporations that require conformity and quiescence, and that use those things to acquire and hold ubiquity. In the rebuilding of Donna's world, it is obvious and not unspoken that humans make sacrifices of themselves to corporate culture. It should be noted that this season, especially "The Planet of the Ood," would be deliciously ripe for postcolonial criticism, especially since the endgame of the season deals with the eternally imperialist Daleks and their attempt to control reality in the only way they can—by destroying it.

The tragedy of Donna's forcible memory loss lies in its interruption of her transformation. In the end, her importance is not merely in that she shares in the Doctor's knowledge, but in the person she has become: someone capable of great sorrow and even greater love. Someone who is willing to sacrifice anything in order to right the wrongs of the universe. Someone who is both ordinary and extraordinary. The true power of her character is that she inspires viewers to look for that in themselves. She suggests that no matter how insignificant a person feels themselves to be, they have the potential to be cosmically important. This is perhaps the greater point of the companion character.

Amy Pond's first season as companion fits the rite of passage model with a perfection that is striking. After meeting the Doctor once as a child and once as a young woman, she is spirited away by him on the night before her marriage to the very human Rory Williams, thus taking a ritual that usually follows the course of separation and liminality, and extrapolates it by making the time of her separation a matter of weeks or possibly months rather than hours. When she does experience reintegration, and her marriage, she and Rory reintegrate together, both transformed by their experience with

the Doctor. In her second episode, Amy asks “Have you ever run away from something because you were scared, or not ready, or just...just because you could?” which suggests that Amy’s journey with the Doctor is taken on purpose to prolong the time before her wedding (“The Beast Below”). Given the fact that her childhood was spent dreaming of the Doctor, it seems likely that her need to travel with him is a way of reclaiming her childhood, enacting the childhood she should have had, before taking the vows of marriage, and in so doing entering adulthood. The executive producer and showrunner, Steven Moffat, is often accused of misogyny in the case of Amy Pond, making her noticeably younger and more fashion-model beautiful than previous companions, but *Doctor Who* maintains the “marked emphasis on female agency” that the reboot is known for, primarily through storylines that are “either resolved by female intervention or concluded with a female character in the position of power with responsibility for the future” (Cull 67). That is, despite her beauty, Amy remains a character in her own right, and later in her run, particularly in the case of the 2013 episode “Dinosaurs on a Spaceship,” becoming the Doctor’s equal in handling interstellar adventures.

Amy’s removal from her former life is symbolized in “The Beast Below” by a scene in which she floats in space, held in place by the Doctor, who is leaning out the open door of the Tardis. The contrast between her white night gown (she left her old life in somewhat of a hurry) and the inky blue-blackness of space subverts the audiences expectation of what a space scene should look like; there is no metallic suit, helmet, or apparatus of modern space travel, simply a girl in a nightgown and a blue police box. The mise-en-scene juxtaposes the earthbound normality of Amy’s nightclothes and normality with outer space, creating a sense that the rules one expects to encounter no longer apply.

That the lines between fantasy and reality become blurred, setting the stage for liminality. This blurring of lines is also implicit in Amy's relationship with the Doctor. After having met him as a child, the idea that he will someday return for her and show her the stars dominates her childhood. Even in her adulthood, Amy's family and boyfriend recognize the Doctor as Amy's "imaginary friend."

A serious, disturbing, and multi-faceted example of liminality and liminal states takes place in "The Beast Below," when Amy and the Doctor visit the far future, in which solar flares have driven humanity into space. The entire UK lives aboard the Starship UK, in high rise buildings that read "Devon" and "Surrey." The country exists in a police state because no one, not even the ruler, Elizabeth X, is allowed to know that the ship is driven by a captive alien known as a "star whale," which is that last of its kind. The star whale came to earth voluntarily when the solar flares made it impossible for humans to live on the earth anymore; offering its services, as it were. But humanity is unable to recognize this offer for the act of divine, selfless love that it is. They capture the star whale and build their ship around and on top of it, continuously (and unnecessarily) torturing it to keep it moving. The Doctor must choose between releasing the captive star whale (assuming that this will cause the creature to shake itself free of the ship and, not unreasonably, flee its torturers, thus causing the death of every UK citizen) or allowing it to continue in "unendurable agony," which will save thousands of human lives. In one of the few instances that the Doctor becomes angry at a companion, he screams "No one human has anything to say to me today," when he has to confront the thought that humanity's most basic instinct is to turn to violence and torture to ensure their own safety, a theme with which the Doctor often grapples ("The Beast Below"). However,

Amy uses parallels between the Doctor and the star whale to predict that if freed, it will stay and continue to protect the humans living on its back. She recognizes that the star whale's impulse to bear the population of the UK to safety is the same loneliness that leads the Doctor to take on human companions like her.

The world of Starship UK is uncanny, because of the familiar elements that are worked into the unfamiliar setting, again juxtaposing normality with fantasy. For example, the streets of the London Market look exactly the same as those in many of London's current markets (that is, the area of Starship UK designated as the dwelling of people originally from London), albeit with blue sky instead of starry outer space above them. They are festooned with exactly the kind of Union-Jack paraphernalia that can be found in any London tourist shop. The entire Tower of London is aboard the ship, in fact the star whale is tortured in the Dungeon. And of course the monarchy endures, there is a Queen Elizabeth, but she is played by part Nigerian actress Sophie Okonedo, challenging the audience's expectation of what the monarchy will look like in a thousand years.

The meat of the episode lies in the choice the Doctor, and ultimately Amy, have to make: continue torture of the star whale or cause the deaths of every man, woman, and child in the UK if the star whale abandons them, leaving their ship broken and adrift in the vastness of space. This kind of greater good dilemma is typical of *Doctor Who*. Here it is an indictment, asking viewers to think about all of the parts of our world that remain in terrible condition because no one will initiate discourse that could change things, usually out of self-interest. When faced with the opportunity to protest, the implication is that human kind will more often than not choose simply to forget, ensuring their own survival, even if the price of it is that they must be implicit in great evil. The power this

episode has (it still brings a seasoned Who fan like myself to tears) lies in creating a world encapsulated with liminality; not only does the interweaving of realistic and fantastic elements constitute ludic recombination, but the plot itself glistens with it. The people aboard the Starship UK are in roughly the same situation as those aboard the Battlestar Galactica: bereft of their home world, they seek asylum in space, and they seek a planet that will sustain them, placing the citizens of the UK in a threshold state. The ludic element of how they have rebuilt their world lies in the almost retro-campy voting cubicles and in the “smilers,” cyborg police that resemble clowns, an element that swings between absurdity and terror.

Ludic recombination in the sense that Pohl writes about it happens on an epic scale in the two-episode story arc that closes out the season. In the first episode, “The Pandorica Opens,” Amy and the Doctor track down the Pandorica during the Roman conquest of Britain, a mythical prison-for-one that he initially dismisses as a “fairy tale.” In his quest to find out who would be feared enough to be interred in the “perfect prison,” the Doctor fails to see the obvious: the Pandorica is not opening to release an intergalactic criminal, but to receive him. However, the Doctor knows that with him trapped in the Pandorica, there will be no one to stop an anti-Doctor movement called the Silence from blowing up the Tardis, an event which will cause a crack in time itself and lead to the supernova of every star in existence and thus the eventual end of life in the universe. This creates an alternate version of human civilization in which the stars do not exist, and indeed, never existed. Earth is utterly alone in the night sky. Those who believe that stars once existed, like the alternate version of young Amy that we meet, are given mental treatment and about the same level of respect that is currently given to ancient

alien theorists. It shows how different our world could be with just a few cosmic tweaks, what the far-reaching consequences would be, similar to the trope colloquially known as “the butterfly effect.”

What these three characters have in common is their respective transformations. Martha changes from a doctor to a soldier. Donna changes from a temp to a time lord. Amy makes a deceptively difficult change from a child to an adult. The liminality that accompanies their transformative rites is what allows their stories to be poignant, lead the audience on a journey of questioning, and transcend the campiness that characterizes the earlier *Doctor Who*.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

Even though the body of scholarship on *Doctor Who* and *Battlestar Galactica* is relatively sparse, these programs resonate with a huge fan base, as is evidenced by the vocal fan presence on the internet, at convention panels, and at fan events. For years, the producers of the classic *Doctor Who* attempted to give the show international appeal and especially to bring in the American audience (Cull 54). Only now has this effort been realized, as is evidenced by the huge crowds drawn to *Doctor Who* panels and conferences, such as ComiCon. The recent casting announcement of veteran actor Peter Capaldi as the new Doctor was an international media phenomenon that included an hour long announcement special that was broadcast not only in Britain, but across the world. The BBC recently announced that the 50th Anniversary Special will be broadcast simultaneously in all of the countries in which it airs, so that the UK will not retain its usual privilege of being the first to experience an episode of *Doctor Who*. Furthermore, in October 2013 it was announced that the 50th Anniversary Special would appear in movie theaters across the United States, as a 3D event. *Doctor Who* has truly become an international phenomenon on a level that the producers of the classic era could only have dreamed.

Although the last episode of *Battlestar Galactica* aired in 2007, fans continue to be interested in the promulgation of the show, as is demonstrated by the recent web series *Battlestar Galactica: Blood and Chrome*, which is rumored to be in development as a primetime show for SyFy. As recently as October 2013 *BSG* actors were steadily appearing at ComicCon and similar fan conventions. The advent of Netflix.com and the

attendant trend of “binge watching,” has brought *BSG* an audience that is constantly expanding in size and demographic. This increased accessibility has greatly affected the popularity of both *BSG* and *Doctor Who*, creating an environment where it is not only acceptable to watch and enjoy thoughtful science fiction television but also making it somewhat fashionable.

This trend requires further investigation. It seems clear that viewers are choosing more sophisticated science fiction because they want to be challenged, intellectually and emotionally, by what they watch. Such shows address fears about where our world is heading and offer assurances that crises can be averted through the strength and intelligence of ordinary people, soldiers and shop girls alike. As Frederick A. Kreuziger states in *The Religion of Science Fiction*, “Apocalyptic literature is a literature of hope in a time of crisis. It is a terrible (i.e., terrifying) consolation, but consolation none the less; everything will be resolved” (6). *Doctor Who* and *Battlestar Galactica* provide the reassurance that humanity can withstand catastrophe, but that survival will require human beings to change, grow, adapt, and transform, which is what occurs in the rituals enacted in the plot and through the characters of these iconic science fiction programs.

The three-part rite of passage ritual so clearly defines many of the milestones of modern life that it is easy to see how it could infuse popular culture, especially a popular culture that increasingly includes characters that elude Joseph Campbell’s definition of a “Hero,” or the fairy tale storylines that do not necessarily end in death or marriage, as in the structural analysis conducted by Vladimir Propp. Campbell’s proposed monomyth was, famously, one of the major influences for George Lucas’s *Star Wars* trilogy, which, like *BSG*, is set in the distant, but somehow highly technologically advanced past. While

Star Wars does provide the viewer with entertainment, the idea of it as a piece of fictional mythology is questionable because there is no link between the plot and the future of humanity; it explains or establishes nothing about current human existence. Its appeal lies in its simple and formulaic journey of one hero (hence the colloquial title of Campbell's framework). While Campbell's model does resonate with a good deal of patriarchal, western European myth, it fails in its claims of universality because it assumes western European myth to be the only myth, thus the prefix "mono." Furthermore, it fails as an analytical tool for modern narratives because of its simplicity, specificity, and exclusionary principles that inhibit diversity, a thing that modern audiences are increasingly demanding.

Van Gennepe's structuralist model is clearly more adaptable and less convoluted than Campbell's, although the Hero's Journey does somewhat resemble the rite of passage model in very broad terms: it is divided into three main sections with subordinate "stages." These three main stages are called Departure, Initiation, and Return; thematically similar to Separation, Transformation, and Reintegration (Campbell 36-38). However, the individual stages are extremely specific with little room for interpretation which discredits Campbell's claims of the universality of this pattern. Once outside of the canon of Western folklore, both Campbell and Propp tend to lose their validity, usually on the fault of their specificity. Campbell has been criticized across the humanities by scholars such as folklorist Alan Dundes (42) and mythologist Robert Segal, and film scholar John C. Lyden accurately summarizes the issues that tend to crop up around Campbell thusly: "Not all myths conform to this pattern, but Campbell works hard to make it seem as if they do, emphasizing those features that seem to fit and ignoring those

that do not” (61). William G. Doty, largely a proponent of the Campbellian form, has also criticized Campbell for failing to cite the relevant contemporary sources, instead relying on earlier scholars, such as Adolf Bastian and Arthur Schopenhauer, whose works, though important, were less relevant to the study of psychology and philosophy at the time Campbell was writing (309). Regardless of the validity of Campbell’s complex 17 stage “myth” in terms of actual folklore, there is a serious disconnect between Campbellian theory and the complex television narratives of current science fiction television.

Campbell’s Hero structure is not viable as the backbone of a program like *Battlestar Galactica* which has a true ensemble cast, and which is arguably either made entirely of heroes or devoid of them. The narrative relies on character development, venturing into the past and subconscious of its individual characters, not just a single pivotal figure. Furthermore, the women on the show play perhaps an even more important role than the men: Starbuck, the angel of death, Athena, the mother of “mitochondrial Eve,” and Laura Roslin, president of the colonies, are all invaluable to the plot and heroic characters. Campbell tends to cast women incidentally to the hero, as objects or obstacles, only.

As noted by Segal in “Theories of Myth,” Campbell does state that both males and females can be heroes, but then goes on to construct a framework that boxes women out of the role (28). Although not strictly a Jungian, much of Campbell’s analysis does rely on Jungian ideas, which often juggle the concepts of femininity and masculinity—most of Jung’s theories on femininity, it is relevant to note, were simply derived from mirroring his theories on masculinity (Segal 27). Therefore it seems odd in context that

Campbell would posit that male and female heroism should unfold in exactly the same sequence of events, with the exact same meanings. For example, some of the steps of the Hero's journey have oedipal overtones, seemingly suggesting that daughters and sons, as heroes, would have the same relational struggles with their parents, which in the context of Campbell's Jungian and, at times, Freudian ideas, is contradictory. Freud did not believe, as Jung and Campbell did, that a quest or journey was necessary to articulate heroism, however, many of the interactions that take place between men and women in Campbell's model mirror the parent/child tensions that are typical of Freudian psychology (Segal 2). For this to make sense to both male and female heroes, there should be some element of adaptation for either gender. Other heroic frameworks do posit that male and female heroism are identical, but they are structured to be inclusive (Doty 238). Segal mentions that many scholars believe that rather than suggesting male and female heroism to be the same thing, Campbell was simply neglecting to describe how a female hero would fit into his framework. This is reinforced by the gendered nature of the language Campbell uses in his framework: without exception, the wording assumes the hero to be male. Segal himself explains that while the first stage of the Hero's journey, the Departure stage, can accommodate a female heroine, the two latter stages, Initiation and Return, could have "effortlessly been widened" to include the possibility of a female hero, but were not (Segal 28). Like Campbell, Victor Turner has also been criticized by scholars (particularly Bruce Lincoln) for focusing his research on male initiation rituals (Bowie 152). However, Turner chose his language in such a way that the structure itself is appropriate for both men and women; none of it is gendered or

exclusionary.¹¹ The specificity of the monomyth framework, which it could be argued, is in great part due to the exclusivity of the language, is a major factor in keeping Campbell's ideas irrelevant, perhaps even dangerous (from a feminist or LGBTQ perspective) to current narratives in iconic popular culture cornerstones like *BSG* and, of course, *Doctor Who*.

Furthermore, the Doctor's (currently) 1200 years-long life is certainly much too complex and nuanced to fit into the monomyth framework and attempting to make an individual story-arc or episode work would fail due to the monomyth's specificity of events. For instance, Campbell's framework includes a shamelessly misogynistic stage in which the hero is tempted sexually by a woman (Campbell 121), which, given the Doctor's ambivalence towards sexuality (a sexuality that at times seems to be fluid), does not occur at any point in the reboot and would be unlikely to happen in the future. Although not asexual (thanks to the Doctor, Elizabeth I's most popular nickname is no longer appropriate), the Doctor does not respond to seduction; when propositioned by companion Amy Pond, he describes himself as "space Gandalf," in other words: not interested.

¹¹ Lincoln's claim was that for women's rites of passage the three stages were better described as enclosure, metamorphosis, and emergence, which incorporated the idea that women's rituals tend to include cultural indoctrination and coercion more so than for men (Bowie 152). In my analysis, Turner's framework has seemed entirely appropriate and not at all incapable of including societal coercion. However, *the Doctor Who* character Amy Pond does experience her transformation in the context of a heterosexual marriage, and it is entirely reasonable to suggest that there is an element of coercion in her storyline that I have chosen not to address here because it deviates from (though it does not defy) the trajectory of this thesis. It is my fervent hope that future scholars address this, paying particular attention to the way Amy is addressed in the sixth season of *Doctor Who*; there seems to be significance to when she is referred to as Amy Pond as opposed to her married name Amy Williams. Her husband Rory Williams is often referred to as Mr. Pond, and the Doctor calls them collectively "the Ponds," even though Amy legally takes her husband's name. It could be suggested that there is a disturbing connection made between the gaining of maturity for a woman and the subjugation of her identity and individuality. When Amy is a Pond, she is a superhero; when she is a Williams, she is simply an extension of her husband, which is, in the end, what she chooses to be.

The universality that van Gennep argued for in his ritual structure is apparent in the narrative of science fiction television, supported by the texts of my two case studies, *BSG* and *Doctor Who* to suggest that what essentially allows these narratives to transcend genre and probe important questions about humanity's past, present, and future is comparable to what happens during the liminal phase of a transformative ritual, namely ludic recombination and presentation of sacra. In *Battlestar Galactica*, a heavily mythologized society and pan-religious themes create a ritualized space, while the plot arc of the entire series acts as a rite of passage for humanity, with ludic (or in this case, agonistic) recombination as the centerpiece of the metaphysical and societal exploration that transpires while humanity is adrift among the stars. On perhaps a different facet of the gemstone of the ritual model, *Doctor Who* uses the juxtaposition of science fiction and reality and the subversion of earthly norms to create moments of ludic recombination that are grounded in sociocultural commentary, sometimes even in protest or indictment. This happens in the context of the rite of passage model, as experienced in the traditional three parts by the Doctor's companion. The distinctly different tones of the two shows may be the result of *BSG*'s use of agonistic recombination, while *Doctor Who* exemplifies ideas of ludic recombination.

There is much more to be said about the convergence of ritual studies, folklore theory, and television narratives. For instance, in the current climate of fan bases that often demand ever more complex narratives, do fantasy programs, even those that focus specifically on a fairy tale milieu such as NBC's *Grimm* or ABC's Disney-driven *Once Upon a Time*, still adhere to traditional fairy tale structures? It seems that in the complexity of the narrative and yet with the traditional simplicity of the thematic content,

there is a very interesting contradiction that deserves scholarly attention. Also worth pursuing is the assertion that popular drama is the “new Myth” and television is oral tradition, updated for postmodernity. This idea, presented by John Tulloch in *Television Drama: Agency, Audience, and Myth* is based in the idea that culture needs to be mediated in order to be actually lived, and that television provides that mediation. Shows function as folklore by “conceptualizing” cultural norms and attitudes and disseminating them to communities through narratives. As Tulloch claims “Television...does not communicate fixed and recoverable texts. Like the ancient oral myth forms, the potentially endless play of generic formulae create a memory (64).” In this way, he equates the formulaic nature of television with the formulaic nature of myths and folktales, as exemplified by the work of scholars such as Propp, Otto Rank, or Lord Raglan. However, it could be argued that this assertion applies less to complex and heavily serialized shows such as the new *Doctor Who* or *BSG* that avoid formulas, or at least present them in fresh and poignant ways.¹² He also stresses a relationship between oral traditions and television on the basis of the communal identity that both engender (64-65).

Tulloch’s theories, published in 1990, are worth exploring in light of the television technologies that have been since invented, namely websites like Netflix and Hulu, the practice of selling entire seasons of television programs on DVD and iTunes, the DVR, and, of course, less-than-legal online viewing options. The premise of his argument from the above quote seems to posit that television in the traditional broadcast

¹² *Doctor Who* has, of course, an obvious formula that always ends with the Doctor finding a way to save the day, however, the show uses a deft mixture of monster-of-the-week plots punctuated by serialized storylines to maintain narrative complexity.

model renders television ephemeral—it airs, and then it is gone. However, the new technologies that have arisen within the last decade have changed the way television is consumed. DVDs full of television episodes can now sit on bookshelves next to movies and novels. However, if the intensity of the fan communities on various websites (Tumblr, Reddit, and Twitter, to name a few) are accurate indicators, it could be argued that the current trends in television consumption have only heightened the communal identity that Tulloch mentions as attendant on television fan culture. Thus, the first half of his claim about television as unrecoverable appears to have become irrelevant while his statements about television and community identity have increased in relevancy.

Despite the changes in television culture brought by technology, television continues to be a thematically folkloric experience: storytelling not around the campfire, but in front of a high definition screen in the postmodern age. It is the power of the narrative that results in the intensity of the devotion in fan communities that become almost religious in their popular culture obsessions; so much so that they earn the title of “cult” fandoms, with actors, producers, or writers functioning as hierophants. Many “fandoms” (slang for fan communities), actually become producers of content, writing their own stories and alternate versions of canon events in fanfiction (See Hills, Jenkins). With the advent of Tumblr, fans are also creating fan art, some of it very beautiful. Therefore, for many, it is not only the love of a show that brings fans together, but the focusing of their own creative energies. This can actually result in “fanon” or “fan canon,” which writers and producers sometimes allow to infiltrate the actual canon of the show, making not only the experience of consumption a communal one, but also the experiences of conception and production can become communal, creating a dialectic

loop. One reason these fan groups tend to specifically spring up around science fiction and fantasy shows is the element of folkloric themes in the narratives, and the fact that writers are using fiction to try and explain the world the way mythology and folklore does, while acknowledging the modern element of technology, and making that element complicit in narratives of science fiction mythos. In this way, such narratives embody the argument made by William Doty that “science itself has become a modern myth through which we understand the world” (Lyden 74). The hybridity of myth and science speaks to the postmodern viewer in a way that few genres can, providing a link between the need for stories of explanation and creation and the reality that our world revolves around technology. For myth to be viable and effective for modern communities and consumers, it must be rooted firmly in our world. Embedding the structure of the three-part rites of passage model enacts this mythos by speaking to the experience of the past, present, and future of our civilization.

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