Enlightenment was the choice:  

*Doctor Who* and the  
Democratisation of Science

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A thesis submitted for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy of  
The Australian National University

April 2010
This thesis contains no material that has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university. To the best of the author’s knowledge and belief it contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where reference is made in the text. Some of the material has been accepted for publication in academic journals as single-author papers, as indicated.

Lindy A. Orthia
I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to my supervisory panel for their invaluable feedback, advice, support and encouragement throughout the PhD process. Thanks to my primary supervisor Chris Bryant for indulging my several topic changes, for discussing diverse matters with me over the years, for letting me take on *Doctor Who*, and for giving me unhesitating moral support and encouragement, without with I would have probably dropped the PhD program. Thanks to panel chair Sue Stocklmayer for all she has taught me about science communication, for the opportunities she has given me, and for her astonishingly fast turnaround corrections and sharp feedback. Thanks to Will Grant for his ultra-thorough proofing, for insightful political analysis and for discussions about the tough and complex problems we are yet to resolve in science communication and indeed the world. Thanks to the brilliant Helen Keane for asking big, important questions of my work, for introducing me to ways of seeing and fields of literature I would not have otherwise had access to, and for pushing me much further on critical matters than I would otherwise have gone.

Conversations about *Doctor Who* over the course of my life have inevitably fed into my approach to this research. For those, first and foremost, I would like to thank my partner-in-crime-on-Doctor-Who-matters, the multi-talented Rachel Morgain. Thanks also to Beth Beckmann, Sol Mason and Peter Llewellyn for interesting *Doctor Who* conversations, and to Beth for kindly lending me *The Making of Doctor Who*. Thanks to John Thieme, Martin Bauer, and four anonymous reviewers for their thoughts, feedback and support during journal paper submission processes that built on this PhD research.

The PhD is at times a horrendous sword of Damocles in one’s life. For going through it with me and bolstering my self esteem at key moments I unreservedly thank Ida Nursoo, Jay Silva, Bobby Cerini, Sean Perera and Suzette Searle. Thanks in general to the staff and students at the Centre for the Public Awareness of Science, especially Mary Hooper for her help on diverse administrative matters and Rod Lamberts for much needed unconditional positive regard and work opportunities. CPAS supported my attendance at conferences and pushed me to communicate my results in seminars, which helped clarify and further my thinking. The ANU provided scholarship support over the years which was absolutely necessary for getting the job done.
For contributing to making my life enjoyable and for granting other kinds of support including love, money, fun and general intellectual development I thank Rachel Morgain (again), Daena Murray, Trevor Robertson, Sue Enfield, Joyce Willis, Jill Varcoe, Cameron Cutts, Alisoun Neville, Kim Neville, Tash Case, Di Lucas, Bluse Waddell-Wood, Biff Ward, Gillian Hunt, Jenny Shapcott, Jenni Savigny, Orange Cat, Pandora “Kitten” Morgain-Orthia, Stormy P. Cat, and surprise last minute entry Vanessa de Kauwe.

Thanks to the staff of The Gods Café and Gus’ Café for letting me rent table space cheaply, for making great coffee, and for just being nice to me.

Thanks to the greener grass Eudora Scott-Wyndham, Ciaran Calhoun, Salima Rashid and Dinesh Kirpalani for always being there.

For support on previous PhD topics which did not bear fruit but which informed aspects of my thinking in this PhD, or at the very least led me to the discipline in which I clearly belong, I thank Mike Crisp, Lyn Cook, Judy West, Liz James, Jim Ross, Yvonne Parsons, Roger Riordan, Jason Grossman and Karen Barad.
ABSTRACT

The democratisation of science — shifting science governance, work opportunities and ideologies away from the exclusive domains of elite minorities and into the hands of the people — is an important aim of science communication. If communication products such as television series can influence people’s relationships with science in terms of their career choices, belief systems and feelings of ownership over science, then it is important for science communicators to understand what television series are saying about science.

In this thesis I examine representations of science in the long-running science fiction television series, *Doctor Who*. In particular I analyse the social, cultural, political and economic aspects of this representation to assess its consistency with four goals for the democratisation of science: goals that I name *franchise* (lay empowerment in science governance), *equality* (equal access to opportunities in science workplaces and careers), *progress* (democratic choice about the role of technology in our lives and our societies) and *enlightenment* (democratic freedom to choose our beliefs and worldviews about the universe).

Analysing the more than 200 *Doctor Who* serials broadcast between 1963 and 2008, I first give an overview of broad trends in the way the program has dealt with science themes and characters across four decades (1960s, 1970s, 1980s and 2000s), finding significant changes over that period.

I then analyse in greater theoretical depth three ways that debates about the democratisation of science manifest within *Doctor Who*. I show that the program varies in the degree to which it is consistent with the goals for the democratisation of science.

First, I investigate plotlines that depict struggles for science governance within societies and that show people trying to achieve democratic outcomes by renegotiating their relationship to science. Within that discussion I show that the literary construct of ‘the hero’ can obstruct democratic outcomes in the struggles for science governance that disenfranchised characters face. In this regard, I link ‘the hero’ to the social construct of ‘the expert’ in real world science, which has also been critiqued as obstructive to democratisation ends.
Second, I investigate real-world public dissent to ideologies of science as they are expressed allegorically in the program. Such expressions manifest through themes that counterpose one ideological position on science (such as liberal humanism) to another ideological position (such as technorationalism) in the form of a battle between archetypal characters who embody these principles. Responding to the work of scholars who have elaborated this point, I show that such expressions of dissent to science can be twisted and undermined to serve scientistic ideals through the clever manipulation of the literary imagery that is generally associated with antiscience protest.

Third and finally, I investigate the role-modelling function of scientist and non-scientist characters in Doctor Who: do they role-model empowered or disempowered positions for audiences within the institution of science? In concert with the literature I show that some structural elements of fiction — including the presence of a fallible scientist hero or an ensemble cast — can contribute positively to the capacity of characters to fulfil a positive role-modelling function that encourages equality in the science workplace and open access to science for all.
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