

‘Your petty human obsession’

There’s a first time for everything, says **Georgia Harper** – and a last time for sexism



Some recent *Doctor Who* Magazines, including issue 516 introducing Jodie Whittaker as the Doctor-designate. (We'll see 'Jodie Whittaker is the Doctor!' once Peter Capaldi's last episode has been broadcast.) There was disquiet in some circles over the main cover line – will the new Doctor be as 'old-fashioned' as Missy?

IN SOME WAYS, IT IS FRUSTRATING THAT SO MUCH DISCUSSION OF JODIE WHITTAKER'S CASTING AS THE THIRTEENTH DOCTOR HAS REVOLVED ENTIRELY AROUND HER GENDER, WITH HEADLINES AND CONVERSATIONS ALIKE ATTRIBUTING THE ROLE TO 'A WOMAN' RATHER THAN HER NAME. In the most recent series, the Twelfth Doctor declared that Time Lords were *'billions of years beyond your petty human obsession with gender'*, treating it as a forgettable minor detail, and I hope this attitude is maintained in Thirteen's reaction to her regeneration this Christmas.

At the same time, however, the fact that Whittaker is the first woman to star as the Doctor is a huge part of why this summer's reveal video still gives me goosebumps. Perhaps it shouldn't be such a big step forward, but the intensity of reactions to Whittaker's casting, from the videos of young girls excited to see themselves as the hero to the vitriolic backlash of a small but vocal minority, only highlights its importance in challenging misogynist views. (For that reason, comments by outgoing showrunner Steven

Moffat amongst others denying *any* backlash, although well-intentioned, came across to me as belittling and unhelpful.) Looking ahead, I am particularly relieved that whoever follows Jodie Whittaker, there will not have to be another 'First Female Doctor'. We will be able to speculate about future regenerations without having to put up with the same old

sexist arguments, and the next female Doctor can play the role without the pressure of representing her entire gender to a subsection of viewers looking for reasons to criticise.

Fortunately, the Doctor is in very capable hands. Jodie Whittaker recently impressed critics and viewers alike in the BBC serial *Trust Me* – in which, coincidentally, she played a doctor who had stolen her identity and qualifications from someone else. For those still yet to see it, I also thoroughly recommend ITV's *Broadchurch*, written by incoming *Doctor Who* showrunner Chris Chibnall and also starring a host of other *Who* actors.

With Series Eleven being Chibnall's first as showrunner, and the inevitable introduction of a new companion (or several), the new Doctor will be just one of many changes to the show, making speculation difficult. Hopefully, *Twice Upon a Time* will leave enough time post-regeneration to provide us with more of an insight into the Thirteenth Doctor's character and how Whittaker will play the role. One thing's for sure, though – I haven't been this excited for a Christmas special in years.

Lots of planets have a north (still)

I hadn't taken the rumours that Jodie Whittaker was to play the Doctor seriously at first. When Jodie Whittaker's name first came up, I assumed it was the result of someone doing another trawl through *Broadchurch* cast members and thinking, well, if Chris Chibnall doesn't cast Olivia Colman, who might be next?

Of course, and happily, there was more to it. I'm glad, because from what I've seen of Jodie Whittaker, she's a very versatile performer and I have no inkling of how she will play the Doctor. While I can imagine her as an exuberant lass from the West Riding of Gallifrey, living life to its fullest, sharp of wit and broad of voice and gesture, that's only my imagination and Whittaker is capable of so much.

I was disappointed that a small number of senior *Doctor Who* fans were quick to denounce Jodie's casting. I think they are tied to an understanding of the part rooted in the society into which *Doctor Who* was born, when the Doctor was about the only youngster's hero who was not a gunslinging cowboy, a knight, or a soldier of Empire, the World Wars or the taskforces of the imagined future. For some boys, those not inclined to guns and swords but wanting to reject the implication that they were cowards, the Doctor's bravery of intellect and his use of wit to ensure right triumphed over might were very important. Yet now there are other flavours of heroism in popular culture and the values the Doctor represents will benefit from being Everywoman's as much as

Everyman's.

As for my immediate reaction? I was at my sister's at the time the reveal was transmitted, and she took the photograph of me to the left in this boxout. I think you can see my smile.

Matthew Kilburn

