

The Black Archive #19

The Eleventh Hour

DWC Extract



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CHAPTER 1: 'NEW MOUTH, NEW RULES'

Television is, by nature, a medium of compromises. The collaborative nature of production means it is nearly impossible for a show to reach the screen as originally intended – for instance, a director's choice of shot or actor's line reading may entirely alter the intent of a scene. The Doctor who arrived on screen in the final minutes of episode 2 of *The End of Time* is a case in point. Nothing about the incarnation portrayed by Matt Smith conformed to Steven Moffat's original vision for the part.

As already mentioned, Moffat's first idea was to ask David Tennant to return for one last series. This was a commercially and artistically shrewd decision – Tennant staying on would have largely concealed the sweeping changes in the production office, and he was clearly still popular with the public. The plot arc of the series would have been similarly structured to the one eventually seen on screen, though the emphasis of the character arc would have changed: it would have played out the end of one incarnation rather than the beginning of a new one. Instead of a new Doctor landing in Leadworth, the Doctor who met Amelia would have been the 10th Doctor at a point immediately prior to his regeneration¹. An earlier version of Tennant's Doctor would then have met the adult Amy and travelled with her, before coming full circle by regenerating in the last episode of the season. This scenario was ruled out almost immediately by Tennant confirming his decision to leave².

With Tennant ruled out, Moffat's ideal for the next Doctor was tempered by the practicalities of television production:

'The show is really tough for a super-fit David Tennant so you might kill someone who takes on the role in their 60s³ [...] I think the Doctor will always be about 40.'⁴

Although public statements around the time suggested that Matt Smith was always the first choice for the part, this appears not to have been the case. In DWM #500, speaking about Pearl Mackie's casting as Bill Potts, Moffat was asked if the next Doctor could be non-white:

'I certainly don't think there's a problem with making the Doctor black, which is why it should happen one day. I mean, we've tried. The part has been offered to a black actor. But for various reasons, it didn't work out.'⁵

Given that the casting of Tennant and Capaldi were essentially faits accomplis and the only known alternative offer made before the casting of Christopher Eccleston was a speculative offer to Hugh Grant, the only point to which Moffat could be referring would be the casting sessions for the 11th Doctor. In 2016, citing an unnamed

¹ Moffat would use this concept of regeneration as an audience teaser in his final episodes: the pre-credits sequence for *World Enough and Time* (2017) featured a regenerating 12th Doctor but the regeneration would not happen until the final moments of *Twice Upon a Time* (2017), a full three episodes (and several months) later. Never waste a good idea. (Moffat, Steven, 'Ask Steven Moffat', DWM #459, p6.)

² Tennant's decision to leave seems to have inadvertently started a trend – each of the executive producers generally referred to as showrunner has cast a new Doctor upon taking over. This is in stark contrast to the 20th-century BBC run of the show, where all the Doctors following Hartnell were cast by an incumbent production team, many of whom then almost immediately left the series.

³ Moffat would go on to cast the 73-year-old John Hurt and 55-year-old Peter Capaldi, the oldest and third oldest actors to play a unique incarnation of the Doctor at the time of their first appearance, and 75-year-old David Bradley in the reprised role of William Hartnell's first Doctor. Bradley is the second oldest actor ever to play the part, after Tom Baker, who was 83 at the time of his cameo in *The Day of the Doctor*.

⁴ Moffat, Steven, quoted in Pixley, Andrew, 'Just Like Starting Over', *The Doctor Who Companion: Series 5 Volume 1*, p9.

⁵ Quoted in Cook, Benjamin, 'This Is It. I'm Going to Push the Button. When I Do There's No Going Back. I'm About to End What Will Be the Best Job I Ever Have', DWM #500, p61.

source who worked on the show at the time, the *Radio Times* website named Chiwetel Ejiofor as the actor who had turned the part down, due to being 'unable to agree terms with the Corporation.'⁶ Ejiofor would have been in the age range Moffat was looking for⁷ and, at the same time, provide the kind of shake-up to the show's formula that Moffat has proven to be keen on.

Instead Moffat shook up the show in a way unexpected even to himself: he and his fellow producers would cast the youngest actor ever to play the show's lead role and, against his own generally contrarian instincts, it would be an actor in a relatively similar phase of his career to Tennant. Tennant's casting as the Doctor came after leading roles in two highly regarded BBC One shows in quick succession⁸. Matt Smith's career was in a similar place, with the role of Jim Taylor in BBC One adaptations of two of Philip Pullman's four **Sally Lockhart** novels⁹, and in two BBC Two dramas: as one of the four leads in **Party Animals** (2007) and in a secondary role in the police drama **Moses Jones** (2009). Of these roles, none are particularly indicative of how he would eventually play the Doctor in the way that Tennant's role in **Casanova** (2005) would point to his eventual performance¹⁰. Indeed, prior to the broadcast of *The Eleventh Hour* (2010) Moffat made a point of how he felt the role of the Doctor was a more natural fit for Smith than his role in **Moses Jones** or Dr Watson in **Sherlock** (2010-) (a part he auditioned for before it was given to Martin Freeman), and that his previous work had little bearing on how Smith would play the role:

'...as much as he was a struggling, but brilliantly at accomplishing, Dr Watson, he just utterly got the Doctor [...] He so **got** it in every move. He was like Matt Smith unleashed! It was like he could just act in the way he always **wanted** to, as opposed to the way he always **tried** to. He's brilliant in **Moses Jones**, but he's trying to play a geezer. Matt's **so not** a geezer...'¹¹

Rather than a dramatic statement of intent, this decision echoed the history of the series from the early 1980s, when Tom Baker was replaced by the previous youngest actor to play the part, Peter Davison. This may not be unintentional, if possibly subconscious, on Moffat's part. Although he has been critical of other eras of the show, Moffat has been consistent in his praise of the Davison era, saying as far back as 1995 that 'it still stands up', that it's 'well constructed' and that Davison himself was 'extremely good as the Doctor'¹². Whilst other producers may have balked at casting a young man as the Doctor, it's likely that Moffat's recall of Davison's successful performance in the role meant that he was receptive to the idea of a younger Doctor¹³.

⁶ Dowell, Ben, 'Was Chiwetel Ejiofor the black actor offered the role of the 11th Doctor ahead of Matt Smith?'

⁷ 'I thought it's mid-30s to mid-40s... young enough to run but old enough to look like they can be King of the Universe' (Moffat, Steven, quoted in Spilsbury, Tom, 'The Time Is Now!', DWM #418, p18).

⁸ **Blackpool** (2004) (transmitted as **Viva Blackpool** in the US) and **Casanova** (2005). **Casanova** was first broadcast on BBC Three but was repeated on the main BBC channel within three weeks of its first airing.

⁹ These were broadcast under the umbrella title **The Sally Lockhart Mysteries** (2006-2007) and also starred Billie Piper. Smith would work with Piper again on an episode of **The Secret Diary of a Call Girl** (2007-2011).

¹⁰ The value of **Casanova** as an indicator of Tennant's performance perhaps lies in it also being a leading role written by Russell T Davies and the first indication of how Tennant would interpret Davies's scripts. None of the shows Smith had starred in are particularly close to Steven Moffat's style of writing.

¹¹ Spilsbury, 'The Time is Now!', p18.

¹² Quoted in Bishop, David, 'Four Writers, One Discussion'.

¹³ This would not be the only parallel to Davison's casting: both actors recorded their first stories out of sequence, ostensibly to allow themselves to settle into the role and find their performance before recording an opening story which would see them disoriented. Davison disputes this in his autobiography, claiming that the reason the recording took place out of sequence 'was the minor inconvenience that there was no script' for *Castrovalva* (1982) (Davison, Peter, *Is There Life Outside the Box?*, p170).

Chapter 4: 'A Bit Fairytale...'

It is a different strand of children's literature which sets the tone for our initial impression of this Doctor. Instead of a fairytale it is modelled on AA Milne's *The House at Pooh Corner*: specifically, the second chapter, 'In which Tigger comes to the Forest and has breakfast'. It begins with Winnie-the-Pooh being woken up by 'a noise of some kind, made by a strange animal'¹⁴. After a relatively long exchange of hallos Tigger is invited in (unlike the Doctor he does not depart immediately). Tigger is portrayed as a ball of energy: being described as cheerful, awake early in the morning and wrestling a tablecloth. The remainder of the chapter forms an obvious basis for the 'fish fingers and custard' scene: after declaring the night before that Tiggers 'like everything',¹⁵ he proceeds to reject the favourite foods of other characters: Pooh's honey, Piglet's haycorns and Eeyore's thistles. On a visit to Kanga's house Pooh only finds unsuitable foods: 'And he found a small tin of condensed milk, and something seemed to tell him that Tiggers didn't like this.'¹⁶

Tigger then proceeds to reject everything in the cupboard:

'But the more Tigger put his nose into this and his paw into that, the more things he found which Tiggers didn't like. And when he found everything in the cupboard, and couldn't eat any of it he said to Kanga, "What happens now?"'¹⁷

Finally, when Kanga's child Roo is being fed Extract of Malt as 'strengthening medicine', Tigger takes a 'large gallop' and in a child's food, finally finds something he likes and proceeds to have it 'for breakfast, dinner and tea'¹⁸ and 'sometimes, when Kanga thought he wanted strengthening, he had a spoonful or two of Roo's breakfast after meals as medicine.'¹⁹

This is a clear model for the 11th Doctor's arrival: Amelia investigating a noise from outside the house and finding a rude stranger, and the following scene with the Doctor rejecting conventional foods ('Beans are evil – bad bad beans'), before arriving at fish fingers and custard – a child's idea of a meal, with two favourites mixed together regardless of suitability. He may not eat the dish for 'breakfast, dinner and tea' but he clearly remains fond of it, even if only for its association with Amelia: in *The Time of the Doctor* when Clara discovers him in the TARDIS immediately prior to his regeneration she finds a half eaten bowl of fish fingers and custard²⁰.

More pertinently this sets the tone for this incarnation – it's hard not to think that this portrayal of Tigger is a model for Smith's performance: like Tigger he is friendly but endearingly rude in a childish manner – rather than asking, he demands 'you're Scottish – fry something!'²¹ Despite being newly regenerated, he is easily as energetic as Tigger: he pops his head from the TARDIS like a jack-in-the-box and paces up and down while Amelia tries to find him food.

¹⁴ Milne, AA, *The House at Pooh Corner*, p21.

¹⁵ Milne, *Pooh Corner*, p22.

¹⁶ Milne, *Pooh Corner*, p34.

¹⁷ Milne, *Pooh Corner*, p36.

¹⁸ Milne, *Pooh Corner*, p37.

¹⁹ Milne, *Pooh Corner*, p37.

²⁰ 'Fish fingers and custard' also appears to be a literary reference, to a 1982 **Listen with Mother** story by Jane Holiday: it subsequently appeared on Noel Edmonds' radio show and on vinyl record read by Clement Freud (Castle, Paul, 'An Old Recipe?', DWM #517, p10).

²¹ That Amelia is able to safely use a cooker marks her out as having an independent streak, even at such an early age.