



---

## "A Madman with a Blue Box": *Doctor Who* as Fairy-Tale

**Katherine Sas**

### **Abstract:**

Now celebrating its fiftieth year, *Doctor Who* has continued to entertain viewers of all ages since it first premiered and has constantly reinvented itself while remaining a simple tale of a "madman with a box." Neil Gaiman has called *Doctor Who* "a fairytale, with fairytale logic," while current show-runner Steven Moffat has spoken of the show's "very simple myth." This paper proposes that it is *Doctor Who*'s essentially mythic and fairy-tale qualities that have led to its continued success and will examine these elements alongside the attributes and criteria which define the fairy-tale genre as elucidated by J.R.R. Tolkien in his ground-breaking essay "On Fairy-Stories." Tolkien's four "gifts" of fairy-stories (Fantasy, Recovery, Escape, and Consolation) and his concept of "eucatastrophe" will be explained in relation to *Doctor Who*, and specific examples from the show's narrative and dialogue will be drawn to exemplify how *Doctor Who* embraces or modifies these characteristics. The show's mythic qualities will be discussed in relation to C.S. Lewis' discussion of mythic fiction from his classic work *An Experiment in Criticism*. The paper will incorporate relevant remarks from other notable scholars, theorists and practitioners of the modern fairy-tale as well as insight into *Doctor Who* specifically from several of the modern show's writers. Due to time constraints the discussion will be limited to the new *Doctor Who* which began in 2005 and continues to the present, although the paper will strive to contribute towards the understanding of why and how this show has continued to survive and indeed thrive in the global popular consciousness for the last fifty years.

---

**KATHERINE SAS** works at a non-profit organization in the Philadelphia area. She graduated with an English degree from Messiah College in 2009. During her time as an undergraduate, she spent a semester studying abroad at Oxford University in England and presented her senior thesis on J.R.R. Tolkien and W.H. Auden at the annual CS Lewis and Inklings Society Conference. She is currently pursuing a Master's degree with the Mythgard Institute and is the co-host of *Kat and Curt's TV Review*, a weekly Buffy and *Doctor Who* podcast, with fellow Mythgardian Curtis Weyant.