

**“I’m Not Past My Sell By Date Yet!”: Sarah Jane’s Adventures in Postfeminist
Rejuvenation and the Later Life Celebrity of Elisabeth Sladen**

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Introduction

At apparent odds both with what has been highlighted as ‘the cultural invisibility of the aged,’ (Wearing, 2007:279) and with Matt Hills’ observation that ‘age and aging don’t seem to play well’ in the BBC’s rebooted iteration of iconic science-fiction series *Doctor Who*,(Hills in Jenkins, 2009), British television actor Elisabeth Sladen became one of the biggest stars of UK children’s television in her 60s. Reprising the iconic role of the Doctor’s investigative journalist companion Sarah Jane Smith that she first played in 1973, and in which she was once regularly seen by audiences numbering in excess of 11 million (Chapman, 2006: 99), Sladen experienced a quite remarkable career renaissance and resurgence of her celebrity during her seventh decade. This was such that at the time of her death in 2011, she had the distinction to be playing the longest running (albeit not continuously) character played by the same actor on British television outside of soap opera (Mulkern, 2011: 143). Frequently during its initial broadcast run from 2007 until 2011, when the fifth and final series was unavoidably curtailed due to Sladen’s untimely and unexpected death from cancer, the *Doctor Who* spin-off *The Sarah Jane Adventures* (hereafter, *SJA*), in which she starred in the title role as an alien-fighting journalist assisted by a small group of local teens, was the highest rated show on its host channel, CBBC.¹ This was routinely the case for the episodes that comprised the first two series in 2007 and 2008, when each one topped the Broadcasters’ Audience Research Board’s lists of the highest rated shows for that channel in its respective week of broadcast (*BARB*, 2015). Furthermore, after an apparent dip in its CBBC primacy during the third series,² it

continued to be the case for the entire run of the fourth series, and the partially completed (and posthumously broadcast) fifth series.

In the decades that followed her run in the original series from 1973-1976, she was remembered by audiences and fans as the best loved of the *Doctor Who* companions (Tulloch and Alvarado, 1983: 212; Garner, 2010:161). Nevertheless, she subsequently became only a marginal and intermittent presence on British television, a common fate for the young female actors that flanked the Doctor over the years. As Sladen attested just two years after her departure from the series, ‘the television people didn’t want me’ (Pratt, 1978: 9). After the revivification of her television career, prompted by her appearance in the *Doctor Who* episode ‘School Reunion’ in 2006, and the subsequent commissioning and success of *SJA*, Sladen’s persona was renegotiated into the public sphere through carefully ‘managed’ (Negra, 2009: 77) discourses of ageing femininity, in line with the imperatives of the postfeminist media culture in which it was now operating. She was thus positioned as an example of what Wearing describes as the postfeminist ‘subject of rejuvenation,’ (2007: 277) e.g. as ‘the ageless Elisabeth Sladen,’ (*The Times* 25 September 2007; Whitelaw, 2008) who was ‘young on time travel,’ having ‘rolled back the years [and] found the secret of eternal youth.’ (Keal, 2009: 27). Her re-entry into the public sphere as an ageing female subject was thus negotiated in a manner commensurate with the imperative to police the ageing of the older female body in postfeminist culture.

This chapter explores Sladen’s status as a symptomatic figurehead for what Wearing calls ‘the “aging” of feminism’ (2007: 280), tracking her celebrity from the time of her run as Sarah Jane in the original *Doctor Who*, when she was introduced as a conscious response to the rise of the UK women’s movement, through the latter day resurgence of her celebrity in millennial postfeminism, and the attendant problematic

of negotiating her thirty years of ageing, as it intersects with postfeminist norms of femininity. But it will also consider the fact of Sladen's death at the height of this renewal of her fame, and what it brings into view so clearly: that ageing 'well' and warding off the physical signs of ageing so abjected in media culture are ultimately unable to evade the final outcome of ageing. There is a range of illuminating scholarship that deals with the relationship between celebrity and death, and death and visual media. Steve Jones and Joli Jensen, for example, interrogate the phenomenon of 'posthumous fame' in the realm of popular music celebrity in their collection *Afterlife as Afterimage* (2005), which explores fan cultures and process and practices of mourning and remembrance for popular musicians whose celebrity is enhanced and transformed after death. Elsewhere, in her monograph *Dead Matter*, Margaret Schwartz conducts a materialist analysis of the complex mediation of the figure of the iconic corpse in culture (forthcoming 2015). Nonetheless, discussions of death and dying as the unavoidable endpoint of the ageing process often remain curiously absent from much of the extant work on mediated ageing, and celebrity and ageing. In the case of Elisabeth Sladen, her untimely death at the height of her resurgent later life celebrity emphasises a need to acknowledge and discuss the place of death in discourses and narratives of ageing celebrity. This chapter will therefore culminate in a look at how the narrative of Sladen's celebrity, and the trajectory of her mediated ageing, were forced to accommodate her relatively sudden death into its discourse.

“There's nothing 'only' about being a girl”: Sarah Jane Smith and Second Wave Feminism

It is widely acknowledged and recorded that the character of Sarah Jane Smith, a 23-year-old journalist, was introduced to *Doctor Who* in 1973 to be the Doctor's new

companion in direct response to the perceived cultural currency of the second wave feminist women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s. She was intended, as Patrick O'Neill writes, to be 'the first of a new breed of companions for *Doctor Who*: bright, independent women, not just screamers.' (O'Neill, 1983: 28). Underscoring the fact that the determination to challenge the apparent 'passivity' of the female companion was a conscious undertaking, as Jonathan Bignell and Andrew O'Day note that writers were specifically instructed to make the characterisation of Sarah Jane 'stronger.' (2004: 169) Speaking in the early 1980s, then producer Barry Letts attests to this:

Speaking personally, I'm very much in favour of women's lib. I don't like the great extremists who would like to castrate all men and throw them in the nearest ocean... I think that's bloody stupid. But I honestly do think that women have been conditioned to second class status and I think that's a very bad thing, and I'm pleased it's being changed. So when Sarah Jane Smith came into the programme we were pleased that it fitted in... with the idea that we wanted a *Doctor Who* assistant who would strongly initiate things (Tulloch and Alvarado, 1983: 182).

This passage is indicative of much that is troubling about the excessive assignment of feminism to the character of Sarah Jane, not least due to her (male) originator's easy alignment of feminism with misandry. But what it does show is a clear intention on the part of the programme makers (however flimsily followed through in the ensuing years) to grant narrative agency to the assistant character, and at a time when feminism was high on the cultural agenda. Then script editor Terrance Dicks similarly

confirms that the decision to experiment with the levels of agency afforded to the assistant upon Sarah Jane's introduction was taken in response to changing audience mores with respect to roles for women in the series:

One of the perpetual criticisms we got about the female lead... *from* women was that they never did anything except stand around screaming and wait for the Doctor to come and rescue them. And it was becoming increasingly obvious... that you could no longer get away with that kind of thing, that people didn't want it anymore. They very much wanted a heroine who was stronger... She wouldn't think the Doctor was wonderful, and she would argue... She always tended to stand up for herself and go off and do things by herself. (Tulloch and Alvarado, 1983: 183)

To whatever degree Sarah Jane's characterisation was intended to embody feminism, such intentions clearly came from a limited understanding of its discourse. The character was at this stage being wholly shaped by masculine subjectivities, determinants and understandings of feminism, at manifest odds with the goals of the second wave feminist project. Thus, and notwithstanding the extent to which she initially served successfully as a reference point for contemporary social events pertaining to the women's movement, the limitations of Sarah Jane's potential as a politically charged figure for feminism must thus be understood within these masculine contexts of production and authorship. Sladen herself acknowledged as much, writing retrospectively toward the end of her life:

After a long line of supposedly subservient female companions, Sarah Jane Smith was intended as the show's nod towards the nascent Women's Lib movement. I didn't want to make a big thing of this, though, assuming the Doctor to be a more liberal thinker than 1970s Britons. As the only girl running around UNIT's military set-up, Sarah Jane needed to make herself heard, but I figured this could be achieved simply by making her a strong character. Of course the writers occasionally had other ideas. In *The Monster of Peladon* for example, the Doctor actually orders Sarah Jane to give the Queen the full 'Women's Lib' lecture, no punches pulled. The irony of male writers getting a male character to 'order' a woman to talk about feminism wasn't lost on me. (Sladen and Hudson, 2011, p.83).

The so-called "'Women's Lib' lecture' to which Sladen refers comes as part of 'The Monster of Peladon,' a serial much discussed by scholars for both its direct reference to the women's movement, and its allegorical treatment of the contemporaneous miners' strike of 1974; and therefore of its conscious attempt to resonate with contemporary social issues (Tulloch and Alvarado 1983: 52-4, 182-3; Tulloch and Jenkins, 1995: 30-32, 58, 109-113, 130-131; Chapman, 2006: 94-5). The Doctor, having become embroiled in a dispute between the working-class miners and the power elite of the alien planet Peladon, entreats Sarah Jane to raise the feminist consciousness of the young Queen: 'Sarah, why don't you... stay and have a few words with the Queen? I have an idea you could give her some good advice'. Her reticence to assert herself stems, she professes, from her feeling of gender inferiority at being 'only a girl'. Sarah Jane responds with a characteristically reductive explanation of feminism:

‘Women’s liberation’, your Majesty. On Earth it means...well, very briefly, it means that we women don’t let men push us around. There's nothing “only” about being a girl, your Majesty. Never mind why they made you a Queen, the fact is you *are* the Queen, so... just you jolly well let them know it!

Further highlighting the limitations of Sarah Jane’s political charge as an embodiment of the values of second wave feminism in the 1970s was the contemporaneous construction of Sladen’s celebrity persona elsewhere in the media, which unsurprisingly operated more straightforwardly as a form of sexual objectification. For example, announcing her forthcoming appearance in the series in June 1973, a number of national newspapers, including *The Daily Mirror*, ran the story accompanied by a purpose taken glamour shot of the actress. Sladen is posed perched upon a concrete bollard, smiling broadly and running her fingers through her hair, dressed in minuscule cut-offs and a scoop necked gypsy top (Anon 1973: 2). Following her departure from *Doctor Who*, the same image would go on to be used to illustrate news media items that announced her appearance as the presenter of *Stepping Stone*, a children’s programme for the under fives (Anon 1977: 16). Such constructions of femininity as a sexual spectacle were of course entirely in step with the gender discourse pertaining to female celebrity as it was mediated in UK tabloid newspapers at the time (and still), which routinely published nude glamour shots of famous women; but it was manifestly at odds with both the values of the second wave feminism that the character was created (by men) to embody, and with her semiotic signification in her early appearances in the series.

With respect to this, Tulloch and Alvarado point to the fact that Sarah Jane was consciously divested of some of the semiotic trappings of sexualised femininity (e.g. mini-skirts) that had marked her predecessor Jo Grant (Katy Manning) via her costuming; such as her Robin Hood style Lincoln green in 1973's 'The Time Warrior', her leather jacket in 1974's 'The Monster of Peladon' and her overalls in 1976's 'The Hand of Fear.' Such costuming, they argue, was intended to appear "tomboyish," (1983: 101) going on to describe it as 'women's lib gear', asserting that her clothes 'were designed in accordance with the dominant media representations of feminists', and citing intentionality in this regard from Barry Letts (102). James Chapman likewise aligns what he reads as Sarah Jane's 'masculine' attire with an attempt to 'assert the character's feminist credentials', (2006: 80) as does Sladen herself, who notes that the 'smart brown trouser suit and white, wide-collared shirt', in which she was dressed for her inaugural appearance as Sarah Jane was a deliberate move away from the 'dolly-bird outfits' of previous assistants, and connoted the character's identity as a 'strong feminist journalist'. (Sladen and Hudson, 2011: 109). Thus, as one *Times* journalist wrote in their obituary for Sladen in 2011, Sarah Jane "was hardly the archetype for a new feminist superwoman that some commentators have suggested." (Anon 2011: 82)

Compounding the dissonance between Sarah Jane's purported feminism and the reality of Sladen's experience as a female celebrity, the downward trajectory of her career following her departure from the series, as she aged, and especially following the birth of her daughter, was symptomatic of the entrenched culture of what Jermyn describes as 'the under-representation of older women on television'. (2012: 6) As Sladen concurs in her memoirs, 'the [television] industry can be pretty cold to women of a certain age', and after having withdrawn from the public sphere in

her late 30s following the birth of her daughter, the ‘door swung closed’ on her television career (Sladen and Hudson, 2011: 289). This only underscores the extent to which the latter day renewal of her television stardom, following what was initially intended to be an isolated guest appearance on the rebooted *Doctor Who* was an extraordinary occurrence for a 60-year-old woman with a defunct acting career. All the same, as the next section illustrates, it was necessary to negotiate her return through familiar, and troublingly persistent cultural scripts of postfeminist femininity.

Postfeminist Discourse, Toxic Intergenerationality, and the Return of Sarah Jane Smith

Postfeminist anxieties and cultural scripts, as well as familiar tropes of ageing femininity, infuse the character dynamic, structure the narrative, and underpin the central conceit of ‘School Reunion.’ This was to reinsert the now 56-year-old (by the show’s timeline, since Sladen herself was 60) journalist back into the world of the Doctor after a thirty year estrangement. This was notwithstanding the re-pairings that took place in special episodes in the 1980s and 1990s, but which go unacknowledged in this episode. A much longed for reunion was thus staged, giving rise to reflections on what life after the Doctor holds for his abandoned former friends. Furthermore, this came at a time in the show’s lifespan when the actor embodying the Doctor was becoming increasingly younger.³

When Sarah Jane happens upon the TARDIS (the Doctor’s time travelling spaceship) while investigating strange goings on at a London school, she is shocked - not only to find herself confronted with the Doctor again, but also to find that his appearance is noticeably younger than before. She tells him ‘You look... incredible’. Standing under a shaft of light she herself appears to glow, this underscores the

paradox by which she has both visibly aged in the decades since they last met, yet how she still bears a striking resemblance to the Sladen/Sarah Jane familiar from the mid-1970s, having apparently enacted the necessary policing of the self, and performed the labour of youthful femininity (re. hair, make-up, etc.) required of women in neoliberal postfeminism. As Whelehan and Gwynne write, summarising Sharon Hinchcliff (2014), ‘while advancing age was once understood as an experience of freedom from societal pressures of physical desirability and a relaxation of body anxieties, postfeminism and neoliberalism has [sic] ensured that these concerns remain in sharp focus for women in midlife and even beyond’. (2014: 8) So in order to successfully manage the process of ageing in step with the cultural imperative to negotiate the ageing female body, Sladen can be seen to have managed its visible signs, and her femininity can thus be easily located in relation to discourses of (the maintenance of) youth via the clear invitation of favourable parallels to be drawn with her younger self. Hence, rather than transcending the binary of young/old that persists in structuring our thinking about age and ageing, the extent to which Sladen appears to embody both past and present versions of herself by playing this character with such equivalence at points in her life thirty years apart, the semiotic and performative invocation of her younger self instead structures the meaning and negotiates the cultural viability of her older self.

When the Doctor affirmatively responds in kind with ‘so do you,’ Sarah Jane’s immediate response is to call attention to the thus far unspoken fact of her physical ageing and his, not just lack, but reversal thereof, with a shake of her head and a forthright assertion that ‘I got old’. All the while her lighting, hair and make-up have been primed to invite favourable comparison with her younger self, and to showcase the extent to which she has managed her ageing ‘successfully.’ Hence, from their first

exchange in the full knowledge of one another's identity, the terms of their relationship have been revised to account for and negotiate her ageing, and to situate this in contrast to his perpetual agelessness. This is despite the ironic fact that it is he who has become dramatically older - by approximately a hundred and fifty years⁴ - but instead of ageing as a result, he has become younger. The Doctor's ability to regenerate, and thus reverse the physical decline that comes with ageing, has of course been a central conceit of his characterisation since Patrick Troughton succeeded William Hartnell in the role in 1966. As Tennant's Doctor avers in 'School Reunion' in response to Rose's (Billie Piper) accusatory questioning about her status as the latest in a long line of young female friends destined for the 'abject singlehood' (Negra, 2009: 61) that Sarah Jane has shown comes following abandonment by him: 'I don't age. I regenerate. But humans decay. You wither and you die'. This irony hence does not belie the fact that the physical youth of the 900-year-old Doctor as embodied by a 34-year-old David Tennant, when contrasted with the openly self-shaming 56-year-old Sarah Jane, whose ageing appears to have nonetheless been successfully managed (i.e. resisted), is entirely symptomatic of what Susan Sontag canonically described as the gendered 'double standard of aging'. (1972)

The main and most obvious way in which postfeminist discourses of ageing femininity manifest in 'School Reunion' is via the intergenerational 'catfight' that is staged between Sarah Jane and Rose. They each in the first instance adopt positions of intense defensiveness upon meeting each other, leading both, in light of this encounter, to revise the assumptions they had previously made about their respective relationships to the Doctor. An instantly vexed Rose looks Sarah Jane up and down with suspicion, asking 'Who's *she*?'. Sarah Jane's response is dripping with scornful sarcasm: 'Hiiii, nice to meet you', before she then anchors the emergent dynamic of

toxic intergenerationality between herself as the relic of second wave feminism, and Rose, a daughter of millennial postfeminism, with an aside to the Doctor: ‘You can tell you’re getting older, your assistants are getting younger’. Furthermore, in a neat nod to the fact that Rose, as a youthful subject of postfeminism lacks consciousness of the gains made by women of Sarah Jane’s generation, she retorts with an affronted ‘I’m not his *assistant!*’. Age difference and generational discord continues to structure their fractious exchange as Sarah Jane continues to belittle Rose for her youth, ignorance and naivety, and Rose expresses little but contempt for Sarah Jane’s age, knowledge and experience: ‘Where are you from? The dark ages?’.

Their swipes at one another are verbal, rather than physical, but they nevertheless reflect the persistent tendency of postfeminist culture to pit women against one another, especially across generational lines. The ‘catfight’ trope has of course long served as a means of articulating toxic discord between women in media culture..As Deborah Jermyn writes, ‘a “generationalism” has emerged [in popular culture] in which older women, and the second wave feminism they stand for... feature primarily as outdated antagonists to this younger [postfeminist] generation’, (2012: 2). This, as we have seen, is exactly the scenario that is played out in the initial encounter between Sarah Jane Smith and Rose Tyler.

As illustrated at the outset, publicity leading up to the broadcast of ‘School Reunion’ was striking for the extent to which it negotiated Sladen’s return to the public sphere and reignited celebrity in postfeminist terms of ‘successful’ ageing, firmly locating her ageing femininity in relation to over-determined discourses of youth and agelessness. This phenomenon continued following the commissioning of *SJA* and promotional activities undertaken to support it. For example, Sladen was profiled in a piece for Scottish newspaper *The Daily Record* under a headline

asserting that the 63-year-old actor had been kept ‘young on time travel’, and ‘rolled back the years’, (Keal, 2009: 26) Elsewhere in the article she is referred to as a ‘girl’ and as ‘Evergreen Elisabeth’, (Keal, 2009: 26), while her ‘successful’ ageing is asserted more directly when author Keal asserts that ‘Elisabeth, 61 [sic], has scarcely changed from her Seventies heyday’. Most invidiously of all, Keal distils the essence of the postfeminist imperative for older women to continue to strive to embody normative femininity as idealized within a ‘cult of youth’ (Negra, 2009: 76), when he writes: ‘As Dr Who's longest serving sidekick, Sarah Jane Smith, Elisabeth Sladen still looks slim, sexy and sensationally youthful’. (26)

SJA liberated Sladen’s character from the constraints of the gendered dynamic of the *Doctor Who* format that required her to play the passive sidekick to a hubristic, mercurial and paternalistic central male character. However, *SJA*, like ‘School Reunion’ before it, would prove highly symptomatic as a postfeminist media fiction of ageing femininity. It articulated many of postfeminist culture’s most dominant tropes, including through its status as a ‘narrative of adjusted ambition’ (Negra, 2009: 95) in which Sarah Jane’s life choice to remain a single, childless, public sphere professional is shown to have been erroneous, necessitating the recuperation of her commensurately abject femininity through a recidivist later life reuptake of a more normative mode of femininity – in this case: motherhood. After initially seeming to offer up the tantalising possibility that Sladen was going to take the starring role in a flagship series on national children’s television by playing a professional, economically independent single woman in her late 50s who is child-free by choice, and beloved of the teens in her local neighbourhood; the 2007 inaugural episode, ‘Invasion of the Bane’ quickly contrived a scenario to divest her of her singlehood

and provide her with an adopted teenage son: Luke Smith, an ‘archetypal’ human created by an alien race.

The series establishes Sarah Jane as the personification of the kind of ‘abject singlehood’ (Negra, 2009: 61) that postfeminist culture has time and again offered up as a cautionary tale of ‘miswanting’ (Negra, 2009: 95), warning women of the pitfalls of prioritising life choices wrongly, lest they age into such abject singlehood in perpetuity. The following excerpted dialogue from ‘Invasion of the Bane’ that takes place between Sarah Jane and Mrs Wormwood (Samantha Bond), a recurring villain whose femininity is pitted against that of Sarah Jane enabling them to stage a succession of spectacles of toxic sisterhood centred around their respective motherhoods or lack thereof:

Mrs Wormwood: ‘I take it, Miss Smith, you’re single?’.

Sarah Jane: ‘Yes’.

Mrs Wormwood: ‘No children?’.

Sarah Jane: ‘No’.

Mrs Wormwood: ‘Such a wasted life...’.

She is established in these terms temporarily in order to apparently (and subsequently) refute the logic of this scenario – that the childless post-menopausal woman is beloved and admired by the children of the neighbourhood who find her mysterious and alluring. By the conclusion of the episode, this apparent potential challenge to the status quo of media depictions of ageing femininity is offset by the re-negotiation of hegemonic norms when her femininity is re-situated in more conventional terms with the series-makers having contrived a scenario to give her a child, and thus begin the

process of repositioning and recuperating her femininity to fulfil the cultural imperative of maternity.

Garner writes of *SJA* that ‘the enigma that is central to Sarah Jane’s character arguably concerns whether Sarah Jane will be able to continue balancing her responsibilities towards Luke with defending the Earth’. (Garner, 2010: 167) Although he does not situate this observation in terms of the postfeminist cultural politics of gender, he nonetheless positions Sarah Jane and what he identifies as the central conceit of her series alongside one of postfeminist culture’s most enduring dilemmas of femininity: the ubiquitous work/life balance and the perpetual requirement to manage it according to the imperatives of the current cultural moment. He goes on to note ‘the decision to make Sarah Jane a mother’ determining that this ‘results in the character occupying the recurrent position of the “good adult”’. (Garner 2010: 167). In fact, he reads her aforementioned work/life balance, her transition from lifelong childless singlehood to later life motherhood, and her scuppered wedding and concomitant embodiment of the ‘runaway bride’ figure so ubiquitous in postfeminist media culture, only in terms of their respective narrative functions. But the stakes of these scenarios are raised considerably when considered intersectionally in terms of the cultural politics of ageing and femininity.

Postfeminist fears and anxieties about ageing femininity continue to structure and infuse the discourse of *SJA* throughout its run over the course of the ensuing five years. Instances range from asides by antagonistic minor characters whose pejorative references to Sarah Jane’s age appear ostensibly to garner sympathy for our protagonist – e.g. ‘She’s just an old woman with a funny lipstick. End of’. (‘Revenge of the Slitheen – Part 2’) and ‘You’re a tough old bird. I’ll give you that’. (‘Warriors

of Kudlak – Part 2’) - to larger narrative threads and structuring discourses that serve the more hegemonic function to negotiate her age. In a knowing reference to one of postfeminist culture’s most iconic cautionary tales of abject singlehood and miswanting, *Fatal Attraction* (Lyne, 1987), Sarah Jane is referred to by the mother of one of the regular child characters as a ‘bunnyboiler’ (‘Eye of the Gorgon – Part 2), and later positioned as a “child snatching maniac” (‘The Lost Boy – Part 2) in a narrative that sees her accused of abducting Luke from his ‘real’ parents on account of her deranged desire for a child in the face of her abjection as a single, childless post-menopausal woman - a scenario for which there are innumerable equally misogynist templates elsewhere in popular culture. The first series double episode, ‘Whatever Happened to Sarah Jane’ is marked by its structuring discourse of ‘toxic sisterhood,’ in a narrative that pits Sarah Jane against her childhood friend Andrea (Jane Asher), whose antipathy towards her former friend is positioned as envy of the extent to which she has aged ‘successfully’: ‘Look at you. Scrubbed up well. You always did look younger than you were’. (‘Whatever Happened to Sarah Jane – Part 2’).

Conversely, the third series double episode ‘The Madwoman in the Attic’ is a cautionary tale of the perils of ageing ‘badly,’ which stops just short of offering up Sarah Jane herself as the symptomatic example whose off-script life choices constitute a fate to be avoided. Sarah Jane’s teenage neighbour and friend Rani (Anjali Mohindra) is afforded a glimpse of her own future of aged abject singlehood as ‘The mad old woman of Bannerman Road’, an epithet by which Sarah Jane had been known at the outset of the series. By this point in the series though, Sarah Jane has experienced a later life recuperation of her second wave feminist ‘miswanting’, the tragic outcomes of which – abject singlehood and solitary ageing – have been renegotiated to situate her in maternal terms, something viewed by programme

makers as a straightforwardly happy outcome for the character. As Lynette Porter writes:

The series' frequent scriptwriter Phil Ford reiterated at Gallifrey One that he believes there can be no better television ending for the series, or the adventures of Sarah Jane, than to show how pleased she is to have traveled the universe with the Doctor but, eventually, to find her greatest adventure is in having a family. The final episode leaves *Who* fans with Sladen's voice saying that the adventure goes on (Porter, 201: 119).

The finality of this ending to the episode comes of course from the fact that it was posthumously broadcast following Sladen's death earlier that year. The final section therefore considers the impact that this event had upon the negotiability of the discourse of ageing femininity she had heretofore embodied with such success for the currency of her celebrity.

“Goodbye... my Sarah Jane”: The Death of Elisabeth Sladen

Writing in reference to Madonna, and to her fans' affective engagements with her negotiated performance of ageing femininity, Joanne Garde-Hansen argues that there is a cultural imperative for the ageing process to be managed via the discourses of agelessness and anti-ageing outlined here in relation to the latter day celebrity of Elisabeth Sladen, because if the beloved celebrity 'ages, we age, and thus we are reminded of our own mortality' (2011: 131). This was sadly brought into vivid view when, having re-established her heretofore dormant celebrity on precisely this kind of managed platform of ageless or 'successful' ageing, Sladen died of cancer on Tuesday

19 April 2011 at the age of 65, to the unwitting surprise of fans and general audiences across the United Kingdom and beyond. On 23 April 2011, CBBC broadcast a short memorial programme to the recently deceased star of the channel's flagship series: 'My Sarah Jane: A Tribute to Lis Sladen.' Here we are confronted with image upon image, taken from archive footage of the original series, of Sladen's younger self, followed by those of her older self. It culminates in a montage of images and clips of Sladen in character as Sarah Jane that moves forward in time beginning with her first appearances in the series in 1973 through her time on the show in the ensuing years, and on into her starring appearances in *SJA* before closing with the now iconic moment that concluded 'School Reunion,' in which Sarah Jane is granted the face to face goodbye with the Doctor that she was denied as a younger woman. In some ways the postfeminist media fictions of anti-ageing and agelessness that so often accompany the negotiation of later life celebrity for post-menopausal women, were disrupted and belied by the necessity of confronting Sladen's death – the inevitable outcome of ageing for everyone – in the face of such a successful negotiation of Sladen's defiance of both the physical and discursive markers of age. But in other ways, as the posthumously penned epigraph by David Tennant that opens this chapter suggests, these discourses remain steadfast and persistent, and the unexpectedness of Sladen's death becomes a morbid means of underscoring and celebrating the extent to which she was seen and understood right up to the end of her life (and beyond) to have aged without ageing, to connote youth, vitality, and the corporeal norms of pre-menopausal femininity, and therefore to have aged 'successfully'. In this way, rather than giving truth to the postfeminist lie that female ageing can be reversed, evaded or halted, Sladen's death enabled her embodied negotiation of this discourse in the face of her imminent end to be celebrated as a triumph of a well-lived femininity.

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¹ CBBC is one of the BBC's two channels dedicated to serving child audiences. Programming on this channel is aimed at a 6-12 year old viewership (DeBrett 2010: 49).

² A guest appearance by David Tennant as the Doctor across both parts of the double episode 'The Wedding of Sarah Jane Smith' provided a noteworthy ratings boost (BARB 2015).

³ Christopher Eccleston who originated the role of the Doctor when the show was rebooted in 2005 was 41 years old at the outset of his tenure. His successor David Tennant, who stars alongside Sladen in this episode, was considerably younger at 34. While his successor Matt Smith, the final actor to play the Doctor alongside Sladen before her death, in the Series 4 double episode of *The Sarah Jane Adventures* 'Death of the Doctor,' was younger still at 27.

⁴ One hundred and fifty years is the amount of time (in earth years) that has elapsed for the Doctor since he last saw Sarah Jane.