Richard Scully, "Entry on: Doctor Who (Series, Season 3): The Myth Makers by Donald Cotton, Michael Leeston-Smith, Donald Tosh ", peer-reviewed by Elizabeth Hale and Daniel A. Nkemleke. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2018). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/89. Entry version as of November 05, 2026.

Donald Cotton , Michael Leeston-Smith , Donald Tosh

Doctor Who (Series, Season 3): The Myth Makers

United Kingdom (1965)

TAGS: Achilles Homer Odysseus / Ulysses Trojan War Virgil





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General information	
Title of the work	Doctor Who (Series, Season 3): The Myth Makers
Studio/Production Company	British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	1965
First Edition Details	*The Myth Makers* (Serial U), *Doctor Who* (Series 3): Episode One: *Temple of Secrets* (October 16, 1965, 5:51 pm), Episode Two: *Small Prophet, Quick Return* (October 23, 1965, 5:49 pm), Episode Three: *Death of a Spy* (October 30, 1965, 5:50 pm), Episode Four: *Horse of Destruction* (November 30, 1965, 5:50 pm).
Running time	99 min 2 sec (4 episodes – 24:45, 24:43, 25:39, 24:25)
Date of the First DVD or VHS	2004 (DVD – 11 surviving clips released on Doctor Who – Lost in Time)
Genre	Science fiction, Television series, Time-Slip Fantasy*
Target Audience	Crossover
Author of the Entry	Richard Scully, University of New England, rscully@une.edu.au
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Creators



Donald Cotton , 1928 - 1999
(Screenwriter, Scriptwriter)

Donald Cotton (1928–1999) was an English writer for TV and radio, as well as for the stage. He specialised in classically-themed works, including a July 1951 musical *Pandorus* (focused on Troilus and Cressida) at London's Guildhall; and *Echo and Narcissus* (1959), *The Golden Fleece* (1962), and *The Tragedy of Phaethon* (1965) for BBC Radio. He wrote the humorous *The Myth Makers* storyline for Series 3 of *Doctor Who* (1965), as well as the Western-themed *The Gunfighters* (1965). Neither story was particularly well-received. Another Classically-themed script (*The Herdsmen of Aquarius* was rejected for the 1966 series). Cotton worked on the BBC series *Adam Adamant Lives!* (1966–1967), and co-wrote the comedy album *Medieval & Latter Days/An Englishman Abroad* (1968). He novelised the Classically-themed *Doctor Who* adventures *The Myth Makers* (1985) and *The Romans* (1987).

Bio prepared by Richard Scully, University of New England, rscully@une.edu.au



Michael Leeston-Smith (Director)

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Donald Tosh

Story Editor

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Additional information

Casting	William Hartnell – The Doctor, Adrienne Hill – Katarina (from Horse of Destruction), Peter Purves – Steven Taylor, Maureen O'Brien – Vicki, Cavan Kendall – Achilles, Francis de Wolff – Agamemnon, Frances White – Cassandra, Tutte Lemkow – Cyclops, Alan Haywood – Hector, Max Adrian – King Priam, Jack Melford – Menelaus, Ivor Salter – Odysseus, Barrie Ingham – Paris, James Lynn – Troilus.
Sequels, Prequels and Spin-offs	Cotton, Donald, *Doctor Who – The Myth Makers*, London: Target, 1985.
Summary	'The Myth Makers' continued the early tendency of *Doctor Who* (1963-1989; 2005-present) to mix science-fiction adventures with historically-themed storylines (as an extension of its intended educational role). The story sees the crew of the TARDIS (the time/space machine) materialise in Bronze-Age Asia Minor, just outside the walls of Troy (at the very moment when Achilles slays the Trojan champion Hector; indeed causing the death of the Trojan

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prince). The Doctor (an alien 'Time Lord' from the Planet Gallifrey) is mistaken for Zeus, and he is led away to the Greek encampment, meeting King Agamemnon and Odysseus (who is suspicious of the Doctor's true identity). The other members of the TARDIS crew are captured (as is the TARDIS itself, with Vicki on-board, prefiguring the Trojan Horse incident). They then encounter the likes of Cyclops, King Priam, Cassandra, and Paris. The basic narrative of Homer's *Iliad*, Virgil's *Aeneid*, Shakespeare's *Troilus & Cressida*, and other accounts of the Trojan War, are played-out across the four episodes; all with a humorous angle, and with the science-fiction element that characterised *Doctor Who*. Writer Donald Cotton undertook meticulous research into the historicity or otherwise of the Trojan Wars, consulting the relevant volumes of the *Cambridge Ancient History* (1924-5); Nicholas Geoffrey Lemprière's *A History of Greece to 322 BC* (1959); M. I. Finley's *The World of Odysseus* (1956); Chester S. Starr's *Origins of Greek Civilization* (1962); Andre Bonnard's three-volume *Greek Civilization* (1954); Stanley Casson's *The Discovery of Man: The Story of the Inquiry into Human Origins* (1939); J. B. Bury's *History of Greece to the Death of Alexander the Great* (1922); Leonard Whibley's *Companion to Greek Studies* (1916); and Hilda Lorimer's *Homer and the Monuments* (1950). Having determined the unlikely historicity of the wooden horse, Cotton allowed his characters to intervene in this aspect of 'history': it is the Doctor who proposes the use of the wooden horse to Odysseus and Agamemnon (having mused to himself that 'the whole story is obviously absurd'). Drawing on Cotton's earlier fascinations, the Doctor's companion Vicki is renamed Cressida, and she remains on the Trojan plain at the end of the story (having fallen in love with Troilus); while the Trojan handmaiden Katarina joins the TARDIS crew as her replacement (subsequently encountering the Doctor's arch-enemies, the Daleks, in the next serial).

Analysis

'The Myth Makers' is a key example of mid-1960s educational television entertainment. Watched by over 8 million viewers during its broadcast, the serial is a key example of a science fiction intervention into the Classical world/ancient myth, and legend. The time travelling theme of the program was a handy device for justifying the incursion into Classical and ancient themes (historical and mythical). The Doctor and his companions serve as useful avatars for the young audience-members as they are introduced to and familiarised with the

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	Classical/ancient history context of the storyline, or reacquainted with matters with which they were supposed to be familiar (such themes were still central to British elementary-level schooling in the 1960s).
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Achilles Homer Odysseus / Ulysses Trojan War Virgil
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adventure Coming of age Friendship Gaining understanding Heroism Humanity Humour Intertextuality Learning Love Relationships Sacrifice Travel
Further Reading	BBC Online, *Doctor Who – The Classic Series*: 'The Myth Makers' [Archived website], at bbc.co.uk (accessed: August 17, 2018) [comprises analysis and details from: Paul Cornell, Martin Day & Keith Topping, *The Discontinuity Guide*, 1995; David J. Howe & Stephen James Walker, Doctor Who: *The Television Companion*, 2003]. Harmes, Marcus K., *Doctor Who and the Art of Adaptation; Fifty Years of Storytelling*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014, esp. pp.68 ff. Howe, David J., Mark Stammers and Stephen James Walker, *Doctor Who: The Handbook: The First Doctor*, London: Virgin Publishing, 1994. Howe, David J., Mark Stammers and Stephen James Walker, *Doctor Who: The Sixties*, London: Virgin Publishing, 1992. Keen, Anthony G., "It's about Tempus: Greece and Rome in "Classic" Doctor Who", in David C. Wright, Jr., and Allan W. Austin, eds., *Space and Time: Essays on Visions of History in Science Fiction and Fantasy Television*, Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2010, 100–115. Keen, Anthony G., "Sideways Pompeii! The Use of Historical Period to Question the Doctor's Role in History", in Ross P. Garner, Melissa

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Beattie, and Una McCormack, eds., *Impossible Worlds, Impossible Things: Cultural Perspectives on* Doctor Who, Torchwood, *and* The Sarah Jane Adventures, Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2010, 94–117.

Pixley, Andrew, "Troy Story", *The Essential Doctor Who (from the Makers of Doctor Who Magazine)*, 8 – Adventures in History, June 2016, 14–17.

Addenda

Full film no longer extant (11 surviving clips released on Doctor Who – Lost in Time, DVD, 2004).

Full soundtrack released on BBC Radio Collection CD – 2001.

The serial's Trojan Horse model was designed by the appropriately-named John Wood.

Recorded viewers:

Episode 1: 8.3 million

Episode 2: 8.1 million

Episode 3: 8.7 million

Episode 4: 8.3 million

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