Star Trek

Essays Exploring the Final Frontier

Edited by

Amy H. Sturgis

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Series in Cinema and Culture



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Foreword: On Not Liking *Star Trek*

Una McCormack

I always used to say that I didn't like Westerns. Then, sometime in the mid-'90s, I watched *Unforgiven* and amended this statement to "I don't like Westerns—except *Unforgiven*." After that success I watched some more, and eventually I started staying, "I don't like Westerns—except for all the ones I've seen."

In the mid-'90s, I had a very similar relationship to *Star Trek*. At that time, if you can cast your mind back so far, you were either a fan of *Star Trek* or *Babylon 5*. I was unequivocally a fan of *Babylon 5*, which was clearly superior to *Star Trek* in every single way. Who wanted to watch *Star Trek*? Old-fashioned, moralizing, no grey areas to speak of (we were all about grey areas in the mid-'90s). No, I definitely didn't like *Star Trek*.

Except . . . except that when I look back, I realize that I have spent hours and hours (and hours) of my life watching *Star Trek*, thinking about *Star Trek*, and, eventually, even writing *Star Trek* (books). So I should probably amend that statement too. Because it's entirely possible that I don't dislike *Star Trek*. In fact, I might even go so far as to say that I really like *Star Trek*.

This naturally prompts the question, "Why?" What is it about this show—in all its manifestations—that so appeals that I've watched all the series (some several times), that I'll make an appointment to catch a new episode of *Lower Decks* or *Strange New Worlds*, that I taught myself to write by generating thousands of words of *Deep Space Nine* fan fiction? That I enjoy thinking critically and analytically about it, reading academic work, and writing academic essays on the *Star Trek* novels of Vonda McIntyre or "the One with the Whales"? Why *Star Trek*?

There are of course the simple (but not negligible) pleasures of seeing a ship soaring through space and the promise of transportation for the next forty-odd minutes to a different place and time. Sometimes what you need is straightforward comfort and escapism. Even so, there's something about *Star Trek* that invites analysis (perhaps that's just me, although the existence of this book suggests not). If *The Original Series* offered brash '60s optimism and presented an inclusive American dream as something still possible, and *Deep Space Nine* complicated matters in its treatment of imperialism, soft power,

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and the nature of belief, more recent iterations such *Picard* and *Strange New Worlds* have questioned the very nature of *Star Trek* as utopia. *Picard*, for example, explores what happens when the promise of the good society is not delivered and what we might do about that sense of disappointment and failure. *Strange New Worlds* asks us to think about the consolations of nostalgia and how we might live with the knowledge of mortality and extinction. In both cases, utopia becomes not an end state, but a way of being-in-the-world, a challenge that we could take on here and now—if we liked.

Big claims for a television show containing many polystyrene rocks and rubber-masked aliens. But popular culture is the site of some of our most uninhibited and guileless yearnings. And as the years pass by, and the central premise is revisited, remixed, and reimagined, *Star Trek* has begun to shift from popular entertainment to something closer to prototypical myth, the core characters (Kirk, Spock, and Bones) increasingly archetypal. They seem, to me, to have entered the same category as Arthur, Merlin, and Guinevere, Holmes and Watson, or Robin and his Merry Men. The Enterprise has become a portal as resonant as Camelot or the greenwood. The starship and the final frontier, expressions of our desire to reach out for something new, for something better. Sometimes these attempts fail, and we have to start again—the point, surely, is that we continue trying, and we continue learning.

This is the purpose of *Star Trek* scholarship, and of a book like this: to further our understanding of those stories that are most meaningful to us, that draw us to them again and again, that represent some of our most profoundly felt wishes for how the world around us might be. In answer to the question "Why *Star Trek*?" I would say, "Because few shows have given me so much uncomplicated pleasure, while asking me to think more carefully about the world I inhabit and the kind of world I would like to inhabit." Also, Cetacean Ops is funny.

These days, I watch *Star Trek* with my young daughter. She enjoyed *Prodigy*, but her real loves are Jadzia Dax, Deanna Troi, and Lwaxana Troi. As a result, we have watched "Menage a Troi" and "Fascination" together many, many times. The first has flawless comic performances from the two women leads. The second is a fun reworking of "A Midsummer Night's Dream." I don't think most people would put either of those episodes in their top ten, or even their top one hundred favorite episodes of *Star Trek*. But you know what? It turns out I really like them, too.

Introduction

Amy H. Sturgis and Emily Strand

Star Trek is a global phenomenon that, after more than half a century, seems only to gain momentum and relevance. At the time of this writing, more Star Trek works are underway or in development simultaneously than at any other moment in history. The franchise's message of hope and challenge to build a better tomorrow—conveyed through television series, films, books, comics, audio dramas, and even invented languages—continues to inspire and empower audiences. Star Trek fandom is worldwide, multi-generational, time tested, and growing.

It is our honor and privilege, then, to add to the thriving conversations surrounding *Star Trek* with this anthology. As the following pages confirm, *Star Trek* invites engagement from a wide range of disciplines and perspectives. We hope that scholars, students, and fans will find the insights shared and questions posed in these essays as exciting—yes, even as *fascinating*—as we have.

It's been a (not so) long road

To understand the origins of this volume and its companion, *Star Wars: Essays Exploring a Galaxy Far, Far Away*, something must be said about the editors' perhaps unlikely partnership, which began as that of student (Strand) and teacher (Sturgis) in courses offered by Signum University, an online institution for the study of speculative fiction. Courses on both *Star Trek* and *Star Wars* helped Sturgis and Strand discover a deep, shared interest in these franchises as entertainment, as fiction, as fan phenomena, as speculative storytelling, but also a shared insistence on the importance of asking and attempting to answer the big questions both *Star Trek* and *Star Wars* raise. Through our mutual desire to occupy a space in which such questions are central to conversations on politics, history, language, culture, the environment and so much more, this teacher-student duo have now become co-editors, widening the conversation to include others with big questions, prompted by speculative works, to ask and answer.

We cast the net broadly in our global Call for Papers, seeking fresh, widereaching, up-to-the minute scholarship covering both the long history of and viii Introduction

recent additions to both franchises. The response astounded us in the best possible way. We soon realized that we had not one anthology, but two: one dedicated to *Star Trek* and one dedicated to *Star Wars*.

Selecting from the proposals proved to be a difficult task, given the large quantity and excellent quality of submissions received. In the end, for this book we chose those works that promised new insights and reflected timely approaches to *Star Trek*, works that showcased the breadth and depth and innovation in current multidisciplinary dialogue about the franchise. Soon these individual pieces became a whole.

Together, these works explore *Star Trek* from its debut in 1966 to its current incarnations, consider its implications for and collaborations with fandom, and trace its ideas and meanings across series, media, and time. To our delight, *New York Times* bestselling author and scholar Una McCormack agreed to provide a foreword to the volume. As she notes, *Star Trek* storytelling has made its indisputable mark on the world. In this anthology, we offer additional proof that *Star Trek* deserves critical attention as political and social commentary, as a reflection of the time in which it was created, as propulsion toward a more promising future, and as one of the most enduring, adaptive, and influential mythologies of the modern era.

Exploring the Series and Films

In the first section of this anthology, authors turn a discerning eye on specific series and films in the *Star Trek* franchise. In "'A Conservative World': Greece, Rome, and Stagnation in *Star Trek: The Original Series*," Daniel Unruh considers how *The Original Series* engages with the ancient Greek and Roman worlds, noting that the series' Classical-themed episodes present conservative antiquity as an instructive contrast to the progress and evolution embodied by the Federation and its heroes. Edward Guimont, in "The Truth Is Out There (Specifically the Delta Quadrant): *Star Trek: Voyager* as 1990s Conspiracy Culture," examines *Voyager*—and, more broadly, the *Star Trek* franchise as a whole—in the context of, and in conversation with, conspiracy-theory storytelling, as both a product of its time and a prescient commentator on the future.

Amy H. Sturgis, in her essay "Beyond the Wilds and the Waves: Reevaluating Archer, the Armory, and *Enterprise*," argues that *Enterprise* both embodies the dual traditions that first inspired *Star Trek* and complicates and subverts them in surprising ways, thus warranting more attention and analysis for the series. Brunella Tedesco-Barlocco also turns a gaze on a less-studied text, 2009's *Star Trek*, unpacking useful filmic comparisons with a work from another celebrated and long-lived franchise in "Galloping around the Cosmos Is a

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Game for the Young': The Nostalgic Drives and Generational Anxieties of *Star Trek* (2009) and *Star Wars: Episode VII The Force Awakens* (2015)." These essays together suggest that individual works of *Star Trek* storytelling, both classic and contemporary, have much to say to us.

Exploring the Ideas

In the second section of this volume, authors use various ingredients of *Star Trek* tales as illustrations of and windows into larger concepts. For example, Kristina Šekrst explains how the episode "Darmok" from *The Next Generation* offers cutting-edge insights about communication and customs from the fields of cognitive linguistics and cultural studies in "Darmok and Jalad on the Internet: The Importance of Metaphors in Languages and Natural Language Processing." Whereas Šekrst uses an episode to unlock big ideas, Erin Bell focuses on a character. In "'He Was a Son to Me': Understanding Seven of Nine as a Queer, Posthuman Parent," Bell investigates how Seven of Nine both reflects anxieties and opens possibilities about diverse relationships, families, and futures.

The second set of essays in this section invite us to reconsider our assumptions. Javier Francisco, in "The Two Faces of the Same Coin: Star Trek's Federation and the Terran Empire," challenges the presumption that Star Trek's "Mirror-Universe" Terran Empire represents the polar opposite of the Federation, focusing instead on their shared and often problematic imperial characteristics. In "The Future Burning Brightly: The Role of Energy in Star Trek's Post-Scarcity Universe," Martine Gjermundsen Ræstad reflects on the Star Trek franchise's approach to the question of energy and the problems with audiences using its assumptions as a foundation for future action. These pieces remind us how Star Trek at its best invites us to be critical thinkers and actors in our world and to consider the repercussions of our actions on the future we build.

Exploring the Multimedia Storytelling

Both essays in the final section of the anthology widen the lens to capture bigpicture portraits of the *Star Trek* phenomenon across multiple media and decades. Andrew Higgins, in "'Dif-Tor heh Smusma,' 'Jolan tru,' 'NuqNeh': Exploring the Glossopoesis of the *Star Trek* Universe," traces the development of *Star Trek*'s invented languages, including the contributions of both fan and professional creative minds. John Jackson Miller concludes the volume with "Expanding Universes: *Star Trek* and Rise of Multimedia Narratives," an insider's analysis of how the role of licensed storytelling and tie-in material has evolved through different eras of the *Star Trek* franchise. These essays x Introduction

expand our appreciation of the many multimedia threads that form the complex tapestry of *Star Trek* storytelling.

... But to connect

One need only to visit a *Star Trek*-related website, listen to a *Star Trek*-inspired podcast, participate in a *Star Trek*-centric fan event, or attend one of the many *Star Trek*-themed undergraduate and graduate courses offered at colleges and universities to appreciate the franchise's resonance with active audiences. In short, people want to discuss, to delve into, to do something with the questions *Star Trek* raises. We hope by offering a snapshot of some of the critical conversations taking place across the globe and diverse academic disciplines, we may contribute to more thought-provoking and fruitful conversations about *Star Trek*. We are delighted to present these insightful and expert perspectives, and we thank you for joining us in this mission of exploration.

Part 1: Exploring the Series and Films

Chapter 1

"A Conservative World": Greece, Rome, and Stagnation in *Star Trek: The Original Series*

Daniel Unruh

Abstract: Three episodes of *Star Trek: The Original Series* directly confront the Classical world. Reading these episodes in concert with the ancient literature and history that ultimately inspired them, it emerges that the portrayal of the Classical world in *The Original Series* is a decidedly negative one. Ancient Greece and Rome are both associated with stagnation and the denial of progress. This can be seen as a rejection of conservative and nationalist strains in American society. The official aesthetics and rhetoric of the United States, more than almost any other modern nation, self-consciously imitate Greek and Roman models. By painting America's ancient role models in dark tones, the show encourages a critical look at contemporary society. Ultimately, the Classical episodes of *The Original Series* seem to warn against an over-reliance on the traditions of the past and instead urge the audience to look forward to a better future.

Keywords: *Star Trek: The Original Series*, Ancient Greece, Ancient Rome, Classics, conservatism, progressivism, pastoral

Star Trek has long drawn on Ancient Greece and Rome for inspiration. From the Romulans in Star Trek: The Original Series to the Roman-flavored Mirror Universe of Star Trek: Discovery, Classical literature and history have frequently proved a rich source of names, imagery, and even plot elements. Numerous episode titles have been drawn from ancient Greek and Latin literature. Thus it is somewhat surprising that very few episodes of any series of Star Trek have directly engaged with the ancient Greek or Roman worlds. It is only in the original 1960s series that Star Trek brought figures and scenarios from ancient Greece and Rome into the narrative.

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Dr. Andrew Higgins received his Ph.D. in 2015 from Cardiff Metropolitan University with his thesis "The Genesis of Tolkien's Mythology," which explored the first major expression of Tolkien's mythology in *The Book of Lost Tales* materials. He co-edited with Dr. Dimitra Fimi a new edition of Tolkien's talk on language invention, *A Secret Vice: Tolkien on Invented Languages* (HarperCollins, 2016). He has published articles on Tolkien's and other authors' invented languages in *A Wilderness of Dragons: Essays in Honour of Verlyn Flieger* (The Gabbo Head Press, 2018) and *Sub-Creating Arda: World-Building in J.R.R. Tolkien's Work, Its Precursors, and Its Legacies* (Walking Tree Publishers, 2019), as well as recently publishing the chapter "The Gothic World-Building of *Dark Shadows*" in *Exploring Imaginary Worlds: Essays on Media, Structure, and Subcreation* (Routledge, 2020), edited by Mark J.P. Wolf. He is also Director of Development at Imperial War Museums.

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