

SPOCK: A STUDY OF THE HOMOROMANTIC/ ASEXUAL VULCAN

Danielle Girard

Gene Roddenberry's science fiction television show *Star Trek* was originally pitched in 1964 with a pilot episode that was scrapped for numerous reasons including – as Leonard Nimoy writes in his autobiography *I Am Spock* – the inclusion of two specific characters: Number One (a woman in command) and Spock. Notably, Roddenberry was told to dispose of one of the two if he ever wanted his show to be on air. This choice would ultimately skew the show's overarching politics. Roddenberry chose to keep Spock, and while this choice is largely acknowledged as one that allowed the show to better tackle Civil Rights issues, it also paved the way for the show to indirectly address queer identity. After a second and successful pilot in 1966, *Star Trek* was picked up and lasted three seasons, totalling seventy-nine episodes that ran from 1966-1969. This was due to the continued efforts of the show's fandom, who wrote to the network to petition them to pick up a second season, and then a third (Nimoy 32). Already at this early stage of the show, the role of fandom can be evidenced as crucial in the longevity of *Trek*. In a way unforeseen prior to this moment in history, fandom ceased to be white noise in the background and instead became an active hand – perhaps not yet in the construction of the text, but certainly in its ability to be constructed. As *Trek* began its run in syndication in the 1970s, however, a new strain of fandom began to emerge centring on the characters of Kirk and Spock, namely 'slash fanfiction' – fanfiction that is explicit in its depiction of homoerotic relationships.

It is these dates upon the precipice of a new decade that posit *Star Trek* at a pivotal cusp of queer history. Consider that the Stonewall Riots occurred one month following the show's final episode in 1969 – allotting the Gay Rights Movement social purchase in America. The first slash stories, Patricia Frazer Lamb and Diana L. Veith (1986, 2014) and Constance Penley (1997, 2014) report, were written around 1976-1977, thus crafting a before-and-after timeline of the enforced silence on queer identity. While the rise of slash fanfiction would forever change the nature of the relationship between fan and creator, the purpose of acknowledging the social intricacies and cultural evolutions that were working in tandem to *Star Trek* in the 1960s and 1970s stand to demonstrate the way in which fandom – slash fandom in particular – would become inextricably linked with socio-political movements both within popular culture and the academic study of such. Lamb and Veith, Penley, and Henry Jenkins paved the way for these socio-political readings. In "Romantic Myth, Transcendence, and Star Trek Zines" (1986), Lamb and Veith claim that: "if the [slash] writer pairs two women to avoid the heterosexual problem of male dominance, she must still overcome the cultural dictum of female passivity" (102). Penley asserts that: "there is a perfectly understandable idealization of the gay male couple in this fan writing, because such a couple, after all, is one in which love and work can be shared by to equals" (180). Finally, Jenkins writes in *Textual*

Poachers (1992) that: “the genre [of slash] poses a critique of the fragmented, alienated conceptions of male sexuality advanced by patriarchal culture [...] the genre as a whole represents the conscious construction of a male homosocial-homosexual continuum” (205-206). All of these foundational texts seek to idealize (female) fandom, but the problem with limiting slash readings to socio-political issues of gender is that it discredits the subtext of the source material, thus removing the agency of female fans as textual readers and further crafting a vacuum of silence around queer identity. While there are a number of other critics who have written on the Kirk/Spock phenomenon specifically, much of the recent research being done on queer slash fiction mentions them only as a footnote in history – the first slash pairing, as it were – before moving to discuss another fandom. My research differs in that it looks back at the foundational text in order to speak to the ever-changing nature of how a contemporary queer lens can be used to remap the past with now uncloseted identities.

This article will examine how non-binary queer identity is presented within *Trek* canon from the mid-1960s to the late 1970s. Following a theoretical foregrounding, I will demonstrate how the character of Spock functions as a queer character within the original series, with particular focus on the episodes “Amok Time” (1967) and “Journey to Babel” (1967). I will conclude with an exploration of how the written canon begins to perform for slash fans within 1979’s *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* and the Roddenberry-written novelization of the same name (1979). Thus, this article will ask whether or not *Star Trek* crafts its own textual queerness prior to the moment that a queer narrative is ascribed to *Star Trek* by fandom, academia, and the wider cultural media. In essence, how does this greater cultural narrative of queerness, which would come to represent certain facets of the *Trek* lore, relate back to the foundational text? How does the distinction between romantic and sexual orientation (as well as romantic orientation’s partial relationship with asexuality) contribute to the reading of a text through the lens of queer theory? And how does it impact the function of the active construct of self-identity as well as the way characters are forced to perform and identify within a text?

There are two key queer aspects present within the seventy-nine episode span of the original series: first, the manifestation of the Vulcan race and its culture as one that emulates the queer identity of asexuality, and second, the demand put upon Spock to perform in accordance to either the heterosexuality of the human-based Starfleet Federation or the heteroromanticity of the Vulcan race. Heteroromantic is a term not yet introduced to the academic sphere; it is one that signifies romantic identity, and it, along with homoromantic and aromantic, will be used frequently within this article as terms denoting lived identities. To clarify, romantic identity (or romantic orientation) refers to the gender or genders that a person is romantically attracted to. It differs from sexual orientation (referring to the gender or genders a person is sexually attracted to) as sexual and romantic attractions are two distinct facets of identity. That is to say romantic attraction should not be conflated with sexual attraction. This, as José Esteban Muñoz writes in his book *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (2009), relates back to the crisis of identity politics following Stonewall. Muñoz writes: “although [the] turn to the identitarian was important and even historically necessary, it is equally important to reflect on what was lost by this particular process of formalization” (115). He states that, prior to identity politics, the queer map was “more expansive and including of various structures of feeling and habits of being that the relatively restrictive categories of gay and

lesbian identities are incapable of catching" (115). This view of the post-identitarian demonstrates that although there was progress toward a more inclusive world, inclusivity in this case can also prove limiting, thus crafting a tighter map of queer identity that becomes resistant to complex identities, in this case romantically-inclined asexual identity.

It then becomes imperative to examine the numerous cultural misconceptions that surround asexual identity. These misconceptions are in many ways due to the biological roots of the term. In biology, "asexual reproduction" refers to an organism that requires only a single parent to reproduce, in essence inferring that "asexual" as an active term means the absence of sex (*Oxford Dictionary of Biology*, 2014). However, this is not the case when asexuality is expanded into the realms of identity politics. As a term that is ascribed to and appropriated by individuals as identity, asexual describes a person who does not experience sexual attraction. It is the absence of attraction, not the absence of sex, meaning that asexual-identifying people may or may not choose to engage in the physical act of copulation during their lifespans despite not being sexually attracted to their partners (*Asexuality Archive*, FAQ 2018). This identitarian expansion has occurred in bits parts with Esther D. Rothblum and Kathleen A. Brehony 1993 book *Boston Marriages: Romantic but Asexual Relationships Among Contemporary Lesbians* and David Jay's Asexual Visibility and Education Network (AVEN) founded in 2001. Thus, in order to conduct this rereading of *Star Trek*, contemporary evolutions to how society views sexuality must become the primary lens of theoretical study.

Asexuality as an identity is inherently resistant to the spectrum of queer identities insofar as the spectrum emerges from the middle ground of a presumed homosexual and heterosexual binary (exclusive sexual attraction to members of the same sex and opposite sex, respectively). In essence, a spectrum of sexuality built on this binary must assume that heterosexuality and homosexuality are the two extreme endpoints for all queer identities. This is the overarching issue with Eve Sedgwick's proposed homosocial/homosexual spectrum in *Between Men* (2006); it is built on an unstable social binary that seeks only to position gender-based sexualities, effectively erasing non-gender-based sexualities and romantic identity. Sedgwick writes that: "'Homosocial' [...] describes social bonds between persons of the same sex; it is a neologism, obviously formed by analogy from 'homosexual,' and just as obviously meant to be distinguished from 'homosexual'" (1). Notably this spectrum has cannibalized itself back into a binary over the period of time during which it has been repurposed, but it was never intended to be used as such. Instead, binary thinking has been ascribed to Sedgwick's work, rendering the term "homosocial" as one that has distinctly heterosexual connotations. She herself extends the failures of the binary into her renowned spectrum, postulating that: "to draw the 'homosocial' back into the orbit of 'desire,' of the potentially erotic, then, is to hypothesize the potential unbrokenness of a continuum between homosocial and homosexual" (1). In Sedgwick's view, the binary does not exist and the spectrum she suggests offers a concise view of (particularly male) relationships, one which offers a template onto which they may be positioned. Still, regardless of use or misuse, as it were, Sedgwick's work only seeks to embrace one spectrum of queer identity out of many. This assumption actively excludes all those non-gender-based sexualities such as asexuality. It seeks to further assume that sexual attraction is universal and stands to erase the percentage of the population for whom asexuality is a lived reality. The question then becomes how

can this spectrum be adjusted for the inclusion of asexual identity?

The simple answer is that it cannot. Asexuality would fit as neither an endpoint nor opposition point to either 'homosexual' or 'heterosexual' as it does not designate a gender toward which sexual attraction is experienced. Instead, as asexuality designates the absence of sexual attraction, it would be better suited as the opposition point to what is itself the broad range of gender-based sexuality. This would cause yet another spectrum to form which would offer a space for representation to other non-gender-based sexualities such as demisexuality⁶, greysexuality⁶, and sapiosexuality⁶. The true complexity of identity politics comes into play here as it must further be acknowledged that the absence of sexual attraction does not equate to a lack of romantic attraction for a specified gender or genders. Asexual does not, for example, mean aromantic⁷. Hence, a third spectrum of gender-based identity must be introduced, namely gender-based romantic orientation. For the purpose of clarity, I have created a diagram dubbed the 'Attraction Triangle' that attempts to give a visual representation of how these spectrums and concepts exist in relation to each other.

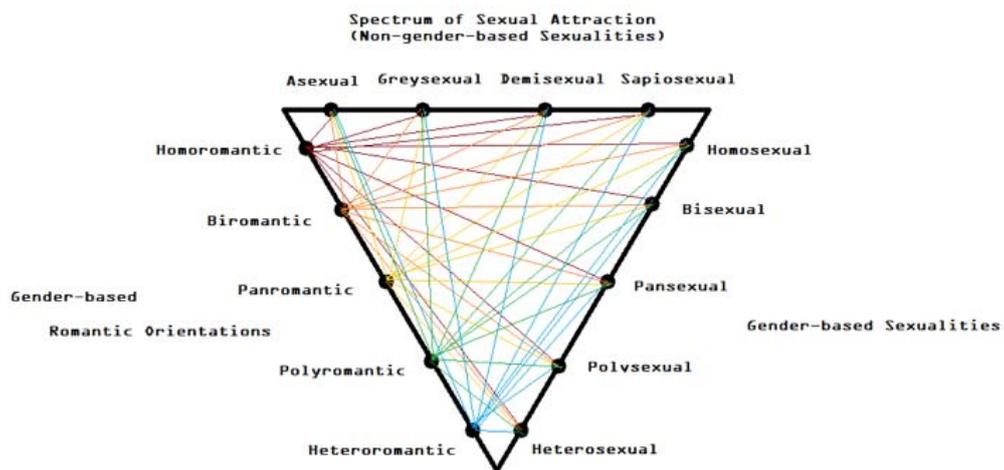


Figure 1: The Attraction Triangle

The Attraction Triangle is by no means a perfect, all-inclusive diagram of identity. For one, it has no room for the complex nuances of gender identity, nor does it offer forward a spectrum for non-gender based romantic identities (such as aromantic, greyromantic, or demiromantic), thus assuming that sexual attraction must be felt in conjunction to romantic attraction. This is the underlying issue with building spectrums based off binaries; as a social binary is inherently unstable, anything based upon a binary can be easily dismantled by tugging a single thread. The Attraction Triangle serves as a small sample of how the concepts I have thus far discussed interrelate with one another in order to offer forward a fuller picture of gender-based romantic orientation and sexual orientation's role in crafting individual identity⁸.

Having now established the template upon which identity is allowed to expand, I will now demonstrate how both Spock and Vulcan culture function as asexual. Vulcan culture emulates asexual identity insofar as they mate only once every seven years for the purposes of procreation. It is imperative to consider the varying concepts of (specifically gender-based) romantic orientation and identity in order to fully understand how queer identity operates as an active presence within *Star Trek: The Original Series*.

Consider asexual identity in regards to Spock's projected sexuality throughout the entire run of the original series. Never does Spock experience what could be perceived by the audience as sexual attraction save for three notable instances during each of which he is in an altered state of being. The first two instances are the blood fever (or the mating fever) from "Amok Time" (1967), and the infection of spores in "This Side of Paradise" (1967). In "Amok Time," the blood fever is presented as an affliction that Vulcans cannot break out of. It is a consumption that, as Spock says, "strips our minds from us" (15:40). Spock, then, becomes a unique example as he is both afflicted by this biological urge to mate and able to break away from these sexual feelings in favour of the homoromantic desire he feels for Kirk. In this sense, the blood fever becomes a performance of biological expectation for Spock that operates similarly to Judith Butler's theory on gender, specifically when she writes in *Gender Trouble* (1990) that the "gender core [is] an illusion discursively maintained for the purposes of the regulation of sexuality within the obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality" (186). In this case, the altered state brought about by Vulcan biology and expectation becomes the 'gender core' for Spock insofar as the opposing Vulcan and human biology operating within him act as performative bodies regulated and displayed via behaviour. He is willing and able to perform as Vulcan up until the moment Kirk's life comes under threat. As such, the altered state in "Amok Time" becomes a performance of the hetero-identity while the inner self of Spock reveals its homoromantic leanings.

"This Side of Paradise" presents an altered state that does not rely on performance to the same extent, though it plays to one of the prominent and damaging tropes that surrounds asexuality in contemporary media discourse, namely the notion that the lack of sexual attraction can be 'fixed' (Corcione, "How Television Is Leading the Asexual Revolution" n.p.). The narrative arc of the episode finds Spock engaging in a romantic (and potentially sexual) relationship with a woman on a colonized planet. Spock's innate self requires alteration, a striping of all those facets of self-identity that Spock has claim to. Therefore, apart from presenting a heterosexual and heteroromantic Spock, "This Side of Paradise" succeeds only in positing Spock with a queer identity that is resistant to heteronormative assumptions inherent to the function of male/female relationships. The assault of the spores upon Spock acts both as a plot point upon which the triangulation of desire (with Kirk) can be explored as well as a 'necessary' affect that can temporarily 'cure' him of his asexuality. It is this presentation of altered states as temporary affectations that must be overcome before the narrative arc is allowed to conclude that cements the true identity of Spock as existing outside of the hetero-sphere.

The third instance of perceived sexual attraction comes in the show's penultimate episode,

"All Our Yesterdays" (1969). Spock is transported to a more primitive age wherein his body chemistry begins to regress and he experiences the brutal, sexual nature of the Vulcans before they evolved past such a state of being. This fact, of reverse evolution in "All Our Yesterdays," further stands to place sexuality within Vulcan culture as something that the race has advanced beyond. With this lack of *sexual* attraction positioned, it cannot be said that Spock experiences a total and complete lack of *romantic* attraction throughout the show's run. Thus, the division between these types of attraction must become the focal point in which this debate rests.

It is important here to acknowledge that queer representation and the visual image of a same-sex couple actualized on screen are not mutually exclusive concepts. To suggest that they are could be equated to the narrow view that sexual and romantic identity do not exist for anyone until they have a sexual or romantic experience. Likewise, heteronormative assumptions and heteroerotic implications are quick to place heterosexual and heteroromantic identities as the default pairings, meaning that queer representation often requires verbal actualization of sexual and/or romantic identity. Yet this does not negate the fact that queerness can be emulated in any number of ways that are denied said verbal affirmation. There is fundamentally more to expressing queerness on screen than having two same-sex characters hold hands, or even – in some cases – kiss. Two great examples of such cases would be *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine's* 1995 lesbian kiss and the homosexualization of John Cho's Hikaru Sulu in *Star Trek Beyond* (2016). As Wendy Gay Pearson asserts:

If a lesbian officer is shown on the bridge, for instance, or a gay male couple is shown holding hands on the holodeck, either might certainly be an instance of 'cognitive estrangement' [...] for many audience members, but neither instance would necessarily be queer. (15)

This is not to say that I seek to present romantic orientation as a catchall for discussing queer identity in media that does not partake in an open dialogue about queer identity; it is not. Romantic orientation and identity is as complex an entity as both sexual and gender identity and it should be treated as such. My purpose in employing it here to the Science Fiction classic *Star Trek* involves a carefully cultivated study of the function of asexuality and asexual expression; it seeks to act as a contemporary lens of identity that is not exclusive to asexuality, but is most easily applicable to asexuality. By studying Vulcan as a culture that emulates asexual identity, the introduction of romantic orientation – and indeed homoromantic identity – becomes an important facet in understanding how *Star Trek* as a narrative functions and skews toward queer.

As has often been reported (Penley, Lamb and Veith, Elizabeth Woledge), the history of Vulcan culture within fandom has already been skewed toward homosexual queerness. As Penley writes of early Kirk/Spock slash stories, "Pon farr" [a concept introduced in *Amok Time*] stories are so popular with the slash fans that a zine called *Fever* has been started to publish only pon farr stories" (180). Vulcan culture – and the way Spock relates to it – inhabits a queerness that is firm in its presence throughout the run of the original series. This visible queerness draws primarily on the

incorporation of Vulcan traditions – such as pon farr – that bring sexuality and romantic orientation into the sphere of what audiences (and studios) might classify as wholly innocent, certainly free from the threat of censorship or indecency. Pon farr was the merger of violence and the mating urge, and it was this tie that yielded easily to the expression of Kirk and Spock's fluid sexual/romantic relationship within fanfiction stories following the third act climatic fight scene between the pair in *Amok Time*.

In "Amok Time" Spock is consumed by the pon farr mating fever. This is where the division between sexual and romantic orientation is perhaps at its most definable. While it is clear that Vulcans form long-term romantic relationships as evidenced by Spock's parents, Sarek and Amanda (as seen in "Journey to Babel"), as well as between Spock's arranged betrothed T'Pol and Stonn, this queer depiction of their sexuality shows the separation of sexual and romantic love. It acknowledges Vulcan asexuality and further suggests that Spock's devotion to Kirk should be read as a homoromantic connection. This reading allows Spock to both adhere to and break from Vulcan tradition and culture. While Vulcans must be viewed as cross-oriented (asexual/heteroromantic), the cross of Spock's identities differs drastically from those of his Vulcan peers.

"Amok Time" introduces the audience to the concept of pon farr, which is presented as both a time of sexual urges and increased violence, effectively creating a parallel between the two. As Spock confesses during the episode:

How do Vulcans choose their mates? Haven't you ever wondered? [...] We shield it with ritual and customs shrouded in antiquity... it strips our minds from us, brings a madness which rips away our veneer of civilization. It is the pon farr, a time of mating. (15:51)

What this suggests is that in order to fulfil the biological function of reproduction, Vulcans must lose themselves and their identities to a primal urge that demands recognition, and this primal urge is depicted with a heavy hand of violence. As McCoy later tells Kirk following a physical examination of Spock, the half-Vulcan/half-Human undergoing the pon farr is facing "physical and emotional pressures [that] will simply kill him" (11:42). As pon farr is also described as a "mating fever," suggesting a biological illness through which the cure is the physical act of mating, this further posits Vulcan through a lens of asexual identity as it wastes no time assuring the audience that sexual relationships between Vulcans are shared only for necessity, not desire. Indeed, Spock's vehement embarrassment toward his own Vulcan nature in this instance is demonstrative of his own asexual identity, while his rage directed toward his female betrothed (in one instance he demolishes his computer with his bare hands moments after her image is displayed upon it) further suggests his conflicting identity of homoromantic desire in opposition to heteroromantic desire. It is the homoromantic desire that he feels for Captain Kirk that extends into the following scene wherein Kirk visits Spock in his personal quarters to discuss McCoy's prognosis. He says, "[McCoy] says you're going to die unless something is done, what? Is it something only your planet can do for you?"

(12:30). At this point it is fair to note that Kirk does not presently know that this “something” that needs to be done involves a biological sexual urge to mate, but the location of this conversation presents the audience with a peculiar point of interest. Rarely within the canon of the original series of *Star Trek* does the audience see the personal living quarters of the ship’s crew and on those few occasions a romantic moment is shared, usually taking the form of a kiss. This is the case in “Space Seed” – in which Khan Noonien Singh and one-off female Maria McGivers share a kiss in her quarters – as well as in “Mirror, Mirror” and “Elaan of Troyius” wherein the interior of Kirk’s quarters are shown as they hold women for him to kiss. Even within “Amok Time” Christine Chapel visits Spock’s quarters to express romantic love, though hers is not requited. There is an innate intimacy present within the bedroom, so when Kirk and Spock are alone together in the latter’s and Kirk asks if only Spock’s planet can attend to this “something” – “something” that the audience soon learns is sex – there is an evident lacing of subtext that further embellishes upon the homoromantic relationship these two characters share. This is further seen when Spock finally confesses to his troubled state and the following exchange takes place. Beginning with Spock’s dialogue:

SPOCK: It is a deeply personal thing; can you see that Captain?
 And understand? KIRK: No I do not understand, explain.
 Consider that an order. SPOCK: Captain, there are some things
 that transcend even the discipline of the service. KIRK: Would
 it help if I told you I’ll treat this as totally confidential? (13:21)

There is a delicacy to this scene that encompasses the entire visual frame, not only are Kirk and Spock alone for the duration of it, on the word “confidential” Kirk moves to stand by Spock’s bedchamber door with him. The usage of this word in conjunction to the scene’s frame adds a weight to this scene that fluctuates around what, exactly, is going to be treated as “confidential.” The implication is that Kirk will stay silent about what Spock reveals, but it is also notable that he does not, at any point, retract his offer of help from the table, gleaned from the previous line, “is it something only your planet can do for you?” which, in the context of the scene, reads more like an offer than a curiosity.

Indeed, the climactic fight of this episode acts as a merger of the mating ceremony and violence, of nature and performance as Kirk and Spock are seen thrashing about in the heat of Vulcan while the latter is himself in heat. Indeed, it is this moment that Spock later contributes to the culmination and cessation of his lust, saying, “It must have been the combat. When I thought I had killed the captain, I found that I had lost all interest in T’Pring” (48:19). Beyond the altered state of his being, Spock finds that his sexual interests and desires have in effect disappeared, he is again returned to his normal state wherein aspects of his Vulcan performance become easier to maintain as they have merged with self-identity. While Spock is able to embrace the asexuality of the Vulcan race with ease, finding comfort in his stoic lack of physical desire, his practice of emotional suppression is a performance under threat by a homoromantic thread that binds him to Captain Kirk. The end of the episode reinforces this when Kirk’s survival following his fight with Spock is revealed to the latter and the veneer of his performance cracks again in light of the joy he experiences. “Jim!” Spock exclaims, reaching out to physically embrace his captain before the

presence of McCoy is felt and he is forced to restrain himself again. Therefore, while the obvious reading of the episode might find that violent, physical contact with another man cleared Spock of his mating urge is undeniably homoerotic, the nuances of Spock's characteristic performance – how it functions and breaks – offers a fresh and more complete reading of the episode that works in conjunction with contemporary understandings of queer relationships and queer identities – namely that which is asexual/homoromantic.

“Journey to Babel” offers further insight into the expression of Vulcan romantic orientations/identities by introducing Spock's parents (Sarek, Vulcan; and Amanda, human) and further calls into question his emotional capacity to perform as the diligent, full-blooded Vulcan. Near the top of the episode, Amanda delivers the line of dialogue that shapes the essence of Spock and lays the foundation for his queer nature and Vulcan performance. She says, “It hasn't been easy for Spock, neither human nor Vulcan, at home nowhere except Starfleet” (6:57). While this clearly posits Spock as an outsider who exists in a space of social liminality, it also discounts the true nature of the Federation – exposing Amanda's own human biases for her son as the episode – and indeed the series – goes on to prove, the Starfleet Federation is predominately a human operation. That is not to say it does not embrace alien cultures, but it does come primed with its own biases – ultimately favouring humanity over other races. This becomes the basis of a later episode, “The Enterprise Incident,” wherein Spock meets with a Romulan commander and confesses that he does not desire command of his own ship to which the Romulan asks, “Or is it that no one has offered you, a Vulcan, that opportunity?” (18:20). Therefore, Amanda's instance that Spock is at home at Starfleet highlights her desire for Spock to take after her and her humanity, and in a sense her frustration at his Vulcan performance. At every turn during the episode, she seeks to undermine this performance by waxing poetic about Spock's “emotional” childhood – indicating his difference to Vulcans and the desire within him to embrace the mantle of performance to appease his Vulcan peers. The relationship Spock shares with Sarek further shows the tension that exists within his immediate family structure as the cold open of the episode finds the renowned Vulcan greeting both Captain Kirk and Dr. McCoy with the Vulcan salute, yet openly snubbing his son, Spock, despite the fact that Spock is the only member of the ship who can – and does – offer the salute in return. Further, when Kirk offers Sarek a tour of the *Enterprise* to be led by Spock, Sarek denies his son again and requests another guide. As Lamb and Veith claim, Spock's “being half-alien, which is underscored by his [...] Vulcan attributes, ensures that he will never “pass” in a Federation still dominated by Human males” (100). Not only does this reinforce my earlier claim of the Federation's bias toward humanity, it further expands upon Spock's own nature. Despite his human mother, it is essential to recognize that Spock presents and identifies as Vulcan, going so far as to perform to their cultural standards to an exceeding degree in the presence of his father; note his stiff formality upon greeting his parents and his later insistence on emotional distance and rigid discipline in the presence of his father. As Lamb and Veith are quick to relate, Spock's “loyalty to his father's culture and his own integrity, moreover, preclude a full commitment to the Federation, whose use of violence is antithetical to Vulcan values. But he does commit himself to Kirk” (100). Therein lies the true essence of both Spock's as a character and the *Star Trek* narrative canon as a whole. When examining either or both, it is vital to understand the underlying queerness that consumes both.

What is more, "Journey to Babel" first presents the audience with the importance of the use of hands between Vulcans and their romantic partners, offering forward a unique gesture that represents Vulcan expression of romantic affection or love. The idea that physical contact through hands is being repurposed through "decoding strategies," (244) as Elizabeth Woledge writes in "Decoding Desire: From Kirk and Spock to K/S" (2005), is outright wrong where Vulcans are concerned as Vulcan touch does not, canonically, have the same implications as human touch. While this facet of Vulcan culture plays only a small role in the original series, it becomes paramount to the continuation of Vulcan culture within the following films, particularly 1979's *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*.

Coupled with the pon farr, Vulcan touch as romantic expression is a recurrent theme within slash fiction written about Kirk and Spock, and as I have shown, both are firmly rooted in textual fact. Fans were quick to rewrite Vulcan culture because it filled the gap of explicitly stated queer sexuality. Writing toward a sexual relationship rather than the homoromantic one present is perhaps the only true "rewriting" (Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*) that these fans have done, and further the best example of the merit that sociological readings of slash offer. A homoromantic text is sufficiently queer, but its queerness is easy to ignore. Sexually explicit queer content, however, is far more difficult to closet. This is one of the main issues with proper queer representation on screen, as Gwenllian-Jones points out in "The Sex Lives of Cult Television Characters" (2014), the "wider cultural logic [dictates] heterosexuality can be assumed while homosexuality must be proved" (118). There is no room here for the expression of romantic desire because such orientations are buried underneath the favour that sexuality receives. Yet both are thoroughly and equally suppressed by the social conscious of heteronormativity. Therefore, what Gwenllian-Jones is broadly saying is that despite (in this case) Spock's lack of sexual (altered states excluded) or romantic interest in female characters he is presumed to be heterosexual purely on the merits that he is not behaving erotically with other men (insofar as the common audience views the Kirk/Spock fight scene at the end of "Amok Time" as violence). It is through this socially binding mind-set of heteronormativity that slash fiction writers must repurpose the homoromantic to the homosexual in order to highlight the queer text. But what gives true purchase to these readings – and indeed to Spock's internalized performance toward Vulcan values – can be found in Roddenberry's 1979 novelization of *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*.

Consider that by 1978, when *The Motion Picture* hit cinemas, Kirk and Spock had been an established slash coupling for two to three years (Lamb and Veith). In the novelization, Roddenberry coins the Vulcan term "t'hy'la" which means "friend, brother, and lover" (Roddenberry 18, *emphasis added*). The term was written to describe the relationship between Kirk and Spock and is still hotly discussed in *Trek* fandom today. It is an in-text moment that not only openly addresses the Kirk/Spock slash fans, it also actively draws them into the narrative as Roddenberry writes, "this has led to some speculation over whether they had actually indeed become lovers," suggesting that this coupling is not, as it were, isolated in the margins (19). Instead, this footnote suggests that the Kirk/Spock relationship stretches beyond fandom, in essence bleeding into the narrative and characters that actively interact with the pairing in-text. Indeed, the response written in Kirk's first-person perspective becomes its own performance that, apart from denying any "lovers rumor," dancing

around outright denial with ambiguity and concludes by Kirk suggesting that his “best gratification” rather than his only gratification has been found with women (Roddenberry 18-19). What this is not is a staunch statement about his heterosexuality. In fact, it is the exact opposite as Kirk ‘comes out,’ declaring only that he prefers women sexually – not that he has only been with women. His romantic identity is left to be inferred by the audience.

These moments of in-text calls to the relationship between Kirk and Spock, apart from dissolving the ‘rumours’ of an affair between them, seek only to assure the audience that while Spock has shown evident, demonstrable queerness throughout the run of the original series, Kirk is also queer (potentially bisexual, probably pansexual) within the established canon of the *Star Trek* universe. This is the foundation that the original *Star Trek* films are built upon, yet the media as well as academia has been quick to ignore this ‘coming out’ moment for Captain Kirk and diagnosed heterosexuality as the affliction of the text. It becomes redundant to read the same “heterosexual women” claims that slash theory consistently makes while the queer aspects of the texts that they draw from are ignored. This divide in theoretical disciplines is succinctly discussed by Frederik Dhaenens, Sofie Van Bauwel, and Daniel Biltreyst in “Slashing the Fiction of Queer Theory” (2008) as they write that slash “very much resembles some of the basic premises of queer theory” but “slash fiction does not appear to be of interest to queer film theorists” (336). This divide seems to actively disregard the audience of canonically queer texts and subtextually queer texts alike. Slash is no longer the outlier of fanfiction communities, but instead a vast entity that, more often than not, influences the on-screen chemistry and intimacy of a particular pairing. These pairings deserve to be attended to as authentic readings of a text that offer more than fetishized masturbatory content or statements about the agency of heterosexual women’s sexuality.

By introducing a dialogue of speculation and rumours about the Kirk and Spock relationship into the text itself – particularly considering that “Spock encountered it several times” – Roddenberry has effectively created a *Star Trek* canon wherein the fans’ alleged perception of textual queerness is made an active part of the textual universe (Roddenberry 18-19). In doing so he acknowledged the agency of the fans and their deep and real involvement with the text. He granted authorial agency to the very real queer implications of the original series as well as the very explicit stories written in closed slash fan communities. Performance to heteronormative standards becomes the shallow façade of a deeply queer enterprise that actively employs romanticity as a lived identity using the character of Spock as a focal point and making the original series of *Star Trek* a queer text.

I have here highlighted the performative nature of Spock as his normative behaviour works in contrast to the character truths that remain closeted by circumstance. As readers and examiners of Science Fiction, it is time to move beyond the binary traps of heterosexual/homosexual identity, of sexual/platonic relationships and embrace the contemporary nuances of queer identity which find a vast array of lived realities that can be mapped back onto a post-identitarian past in order to craft a better understanding of how time and convention affects character performance. It is beyond time to unbox the complex range of sexual and romantic identities and approach texts with a vast dossier of paratextual slash stories as queer narratives. As asexuality and other non-hetero/homo sexualities

and romantic identities begin to take root and become increasingly recognized within mainstream culture, deeper examination of the breadth of the Science Fiction canon on both page and screen becomes a necessary step. It is imperative to move forward with a greater understanding of the new queer landscape, but it also a crucial to re-map queer identity onto a past shrouded in binary understanding.

NOTES

1. This episode has a copyright date of 1964; however it was not released for public viewing until 1986 (when it appeared on VHS). 1988 marks the year it was first aired on television.
2. Seventy-nine in the original run, the 1964 pilot would make eighty, but it was not released for public viewing until 1986.
3. This is an archive of information for understanding asexuality and the way this orientation functions.
4. Demisexual – A person who does not experience sexual attraction prior to forming a strong emotional friendship (or romance).
5. Greysexual – A person who exists in the so-named grey area between experiencing sexual attraction and not experiencing sexual attraction.
6. Sapiosexual – A person who is only sexually attracted toward those people with whom they are intellectually stimulated by.
7. Aromantic – A person who does not experience romantic attraction (the absence of romantic attraction).
8. All terms employed in the Attraction Triangle are explained and defined in my further (yet unpublished) research.
9. The pon farr is a time of biological urges for Vulcans. It presents as a mixture of arousal and violence and drives the Vulcan race to mate once every seven years.

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BIONOTE

Danielle Girard is a PhD candidate at Lancaster University, UK. Her thesis, tentatively titled: *Slashing the Frontier; Queer Representation and the Heteronormative Canon: Examining Star Trek and the*

Effects of Participatory Culture, explores Gene Roddenberry's *Star Trek* through a lens of Fan Theory and Queer Theory. She is particularly interested in introducing the concept of romantic orientation to academic studies as well as dissecting the rhetoric that often shapes the debates surrounding female slash fans and female queerness.