Star Trek's Fifty Year Mission: an Essay Celebrating a Cultural Landmark

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'Space: the final frontier. These are the voyages of the starship Enterprise. Its five-year mission: to explore strange, new worlds, to seek out new life and new civilisations, to boldly go where no man has gone before.'

Star Trek is a half-century old. The first ever episode of the original television series aired on September 8th, 1966. The fifty-minute show (or one hour, considering advertisements), on the NBC network, was entitled 'The Man Trap', and concerned an alien predator which disguised itself as human in order to entrap, and kill, its victims. It was science fiction, but science fiction that could appeal to both a younger and an older audience. Cast demographics steered toward the latter: the two main characters (Kirk & Spock) were played by actors who were both thirty-five years old, while the third most important character (McCoy) was played an actor who had only four years to go to reach his own half-century.(1) If younger people might be wooed by the science fiction element, more mature viewers could find plenty to enjoy in terms of pure drama. The dialogue was generally excellent because it was character-centric, and the acting was always of the highest quality. Many of the writers who would contribute to the series already had a

reputation for producing thought-provoking sci-fi –writers like Richard Matheson, Theodore Sturgeon and Harlan Ellison. All of these elements combined to make Star Trek something new, a television programme bold in design, vision and ambition, and fifty years later, its impact is still being felt. This brief essay celebrates a cultural milestone, focusing on the original television series.

The narrative of that original television series concerns the voyages of a huge spaceship called the 'Enterprise', classified as a 'Starship' because it can attain relativistic speeds, allowing it to traverse the known (and sometimes unknown) universe in a manageable amount of time, necessary in a 50-minute show.(2) The time setting is the 23rd century. The roughly four hundred-strength crew, led by Captain Kirk, are entrusted by The Federation[Council] (Earth-based legislative body) 'to explore strange, new worlds, to seek out new life and new civilisations', according to the words spoken by Kirk at the beginning of each episode. The Prime Directive, or protocol against which these voyages are carried out, 'prohibits Starfleet [analogous to Navy] personnel and spacecraft from interfering in the normal development of any society' with which it comes into contact.(3) Each episode usually, but not always, involves what occurs at the point and moment of such encounters with alien life forms and civilisations. The main characters form a triumvirate which makes for an engaging drama of interaction. The dashing, fearless, intelligent Captain Kirk (played by William Shatner) is served by his First Officer, the very logic-loving Mr Spock (Leonard Nimoy), who is half-alien, his mother being human and his father Vulcan (a logic-loving humanoid race on a planet called Vulcan), and McCoy (DeForest Kelley), the ship's doctor, who often expresses his opinions and emotions freely and as such often clashes with Spock. Kirk derives counsel from both precisely because they often present

contradictory, but not always mutually exclusive, advice.

Despite garnering very good ratings (in contrast to the convenient fallacy that it didn't), Star Trek's success was stymied in the early days by poor relations between the show's creator, Gene Roddenberry, and the distributing channel, NBC.[4] It ran for only three seasons, receiving ever-dwindling support from its sponsor channel, in diametric opposition to its growing fan base. The series survived, however, in syndicate. Re-runs earned the show a cult following (indeed, it was pressure from fans which had helped to keep the show running for three seasons), a situation which eventually helped to convince the powers that be in Hollywood of the promise of gold. (The success of Star Wars in 1977 altered plans to revive Star Trek as a TV show.[5]) Consequently, a series of motion pictures, starring all the original cast members was begun in 1979. From there on in, Star Trek was re-born as a hugely viable business enterprise, if you'll pardon the borrowing, leading to a spin-off TV series which followed the adventures of the crew of a chronologically subsequent generation (The Next Generation), and thereon into more movies, and spin-offs of spin-offs, so to speak.[6] The Star Trek universe is now a highly diversified one, making it incumbent to describe the first outing as 'The Original Series', or TOS for short, in order to avoid confusion. Things have come full circle indeed, as the very characters from the 1960s series are now being played on the big screen by a completely new cast, employing narratives both new and borrowed from the original, in what Hollywood likes to term a 're-booted' version. The first film in the re-boot (2009) covers how and why all these particular characters came together.[7] The 'mission' in the original series was set at five years; success has stretched things out a little.

Science fiction has always suffered from being seen as the preserve

of a younger, or less mature, audience, perhaps because ray-guns tend to recall children's toys and on-screen aliens, especially ones which are clearly humans fitted out in costume, tend to recall dressing up for Halloween. Yet, while Star Trek was always clearly rooted in the realm of hard sci-fi, the lasting appeal of the original television series lay in its melding of thought-provoking storylines with traditional dramatic principles that allowed it to transcend, or certainly complicate, its ostensible genre. Gene Roddenberry's vision was of a narrative vehicle which would at once appeal to a wide section of the –initially– American public, and one keyed up about the JFK-inspired Space Program, and yet be capable of delivering a human drama of some depth. The very premise of the programme, 'to seek out new life and new civilisations', but –thanks to The Prime Directive– without interfering with other societies, was less about expansionism and more about expanding knowledge. In an era in which America was conducting a war against faraway Vietnam, this premise alone could be read politically. By staffing his Starship with not only white males, but also a black female character, a Japanese-American, a Russian [the young and handsome Mr Chekhov was drafted in for the second series], a Scot, and, in Spock, a person of mixed race, and showing them all working in harmony, Roddenberry was also making a statement, a very optimistic one, about the future of mankind.

Roddenberry wished to address serious issues within the framework of his science fiction narrative: he thought of himself as a modern-day Jonathan Swift, spinning implausible yarns but with an underlying serious intent.[8] (To wit, Roddenberry also loved Shakespeare, among others literary giants, as a glance at some of the titles below attest.[9]) He knew that television, with its diet of unchallenging programming and burgeoning and all-pervasive advertising, had the power to suppress

mental activity, but, alternatively, because it reached so many, could also be used to deliver messages on the state of society, and to actually provoke thought and debate. Just how provoking Roddenberry could be was already well-known among television executives. Prior to creating and producing Star Trek, Roddenberry was behind a series called 'The Lieutenant', which was set on a base of the US Marine Corps in contemporary America. Roddenberry was drawing on his own experiences as a lieutenant, as he had served in WWII. Each week saw the titular protagonist, Lieutenant Rice, played by Gary Lockwood (who would make a startling appearance in an early Star Trek episode and is immortalised in Kubrick's *2001*), facing a variety of situations concerning the day-to-day affairs of the base.[10] (Incidentally, Rice's middle name, the very grand 'Tiberius', would be re-cycled as the -not often mentioned- middle name of the captain of the Enterprise, no doubt as a mark of respect, and continuity of character, by Roddenberry.) While the focus was always on the drama of the characters involved, issues concerning the pressures and problems of contemporary American society could also be raised. In one episode, a retired high-ranking officer is given the opportunity to oversee and advise upon the making of a feature film based on an incident from his WWII past.[11] When it becomes clear that in doing so he may be inaccurately re-inventing that past, the narrative becomes not only a purely human drama, but also a commentary on American society's often strained reliance on the myth of the hero. (It might also be noted that Leonard Nimoy, who was to later play Spock, featured in this episode, playing, with great gusto, an opportunistic Hollywood filmmaker.)

The episode which managed to seriously ruffle the feathers of the NBC executives, however, concerned the issue of racial discrimination within the army. In 'To Set It Right', focus falls on a black soldier,

Cameron, who is (violently) unhappy to discover that the new NCO in his regiment, Devlin (played by Dennis Hopper), is a white racist (having suffered a beating from him and his fellows years previously at school). In one scene with his girlfriend, Norma, –played by Nichelle Nichols, who would later play a prominent role in Star Trek– Cameron voices considerable frustration at what he sees as inherent racial inequalities in both the army and in American society. While Lieutenant Rice is clearly sympathetic to Cameron's plight, he disciplines both men, and thereafter seeks to bring about some kind of rapprochement. His attempts to build bridges between Cameron and Devlin, however, reveal to him only how intractable the problem can be. The writing is perceptive and even raw: in one scene, Norma challenges the Lieutenant for what appears to be his stereotypical, if well meaning, approach to the idea of difference. When he concludes that her boyfriend Cameron is 'a proud boy', she shoots back: 'a proud *man*!' –the word 'boy' had been used before on a number of occasions by Devlin as a conspicuous term of racial contempt. The making of this episode illustrated Roddenberry's bravery and vision for exploiting the popular medium of television in order to raise awareness of, and engage the audience's attention concerning, serious societal problems. 'To Set It Right', however, incurred the wrath of NBC, which made sure the episode wasn't shown, and also that of the American army, which from that point onwards refused to allow the show's makers access to Camp Pendleton, where it had been filmed free of charge until then.[12] The upshot of all this was the abrupt dropping of the series by the sponsors and channel, making it a one-season-only series, automatically disqualifying it from the chance of a second life in syndication.

It took the allegorical masque of Science Fiction, provided by the Star Trek narrative vehicle, to allow Roddenberry to approach subjects

deemed too sensitive or controversial at the time. Many of the actors from 'The Lieutenant' made it onto the Trek cast list, including, as stated above, Nichelle Nichols. Her role would be among the regulars, as Uhura, the ship's Communication Officer. Her presence alone as one of the regular main crew members counted for a great deal, in terms of the message of racial acceptance it projected, although it took a very special person to convince her of that. In an echo of the actual narrative of 'To Set It Right', wherein Cameron voices bitterness over the fact that because his girlfriend is black she can only get a job as a waitress, Nichols the actress began to feel that the role she held in Star Trek was unchallenging, and required her to speak only a few lines each week. On top of this, an offer to appear on Broadway, which she felt irresistible, prompted her to hand in her resignation from Star Trek.(13) Gene Roddenberry, shocked at the prospect of losing her, asked her to at least take the weekend to think about her decision. That Saturday, at a charity fundraising event in Beverley Hills, she was to meet a Star Trek fan like no other: no less a personage than Dr Martin Luther King. For those interested in this story, Nichols tells it best herself (I recommend 'The Archive of American Television', accessible on YouTube) but the upshot was that King convinced her of the need for her to remain in that role, as it enacted one of the principles he held dear himself, that of the inherent equality of all men, and women, irrespective of colour, creed or class. It was a (very timely) confirmation of her importance, and historically, remains a confirmation of the show's importance. Whether or not Dr King made mention of it, the fact that her name in the show derived from the Swahili for 'freedom', 'uhuru', was also significant at a time when black people, from Malcolm X to Muhammad Ali, were questioning why American black people, descended from Africans, all had Western names. As a related example of the show's consciousness

of black culture, in the very first-aired episode, 'The Man Trap', Uhura and a black crew member (actually the shape-shifting creature) exchange words in Swahili. The most famous example of Star Trek pushing the boundaries on racial acceptance, however, was in claiming title (since challenged) to the television's first-ever interracial kiss.(14) It is between Uhura and Kirk. Shatner apparently fought for this, as Nimoy was the first choice.(15) No doubt it was because he wanted to be part of television history, but Shatner may also have seen it as nicely balancing out an earlier role he had played as a vile but smooth-talking white supremacist in Roger Corman's 1962 film *The Intruder*. Of course, he needn't have worried about his image: like 'To Set It Right', *The Intruder* was never released to the public, being seen as too harsh – and too honest and realistic– in its portrayal of racial prejudice in small town America. (16)

While Star Trek did push boundaries and layered its narratives with serious intent, it was never just a vehicle for one man's visionary narratives on the state of society: it was also a collaboration of talented individuals who all contributed significantly to what the show would become. And it was also entertainment! It was another Gene, Gene L Coon, drafted into production half-way through the first season, who made sure that whatever Star Trek was, or whatever Gene Roddenberry hoped it could be, it couldn't fail to entertain. It was something both Genes were aware of, of course, but the second Gene, the man who had a big hand in creating The Munsters, knew the value of light-heartedness, whatever the genre.(17) He also had a hand in developing the characters, and is credited as responsible for conceiving of the Klingons (analogous to space pirates), as well as the concept of the Prime Directive. William Shatner replaced Jeffrey Hunter, who was Captain Christopher Pike in the pilot film for the series which was

never shown as a pilot film (because it didn't meet executive approval). Shatner's approach differed greatly from Hunter, who was seen as quite a serious, brooding figure: Shatner brought lightness and a far wider expressive range. Leonard Nimoy, who played Spock, also never failed to challenge the show's producers and writers when he felt the script called for his character to behave in a manner he deemed inappropriate, famously refusing to punch, which he simply felt a Vulcan would never do: hence 'the Vulcan nerve pinch'. The Vulcan salute was also Nimoy's idea, drafted in from his Jewish background.[18] In this way, the actors themselves had a great hand, no pun intended, in developing the characters they were playing. If there is consistency in their roles, and plausible character development, the actors themselves can claim a large part of the credit. These factors helped to make Star Trek a truly multi-faceted, deeply layered, and deeply engaging, series of dramatic narratives.

However far Gene Roddenberry bent in order to accommodate the input of others (and it was always a battle among the various team members), he certainly didn't want his show to perpetuate the stereotyping of science fiction as fodder for children and immature adults, which shows like 'Lost in Space', begun a year earlier on CBS, appeared to do. He wanted, and got, as much scientific accuracy in his scripts as possible, and, fifty years on, people still admire the design of many of the elements of the show. Star Trek, the Original Series, has aged in only the most superficial ways, those which concern visual effects and representations of alien life-forms and planet surfaces, although most die-hard fans adore the sets, and most would agree that the general design of the show, the centrepiece of which is the Starship Enterprise, was, and remains, stunning. The small portable communication devices used by the crew, for example, appear to

prefigure the flip-over mobile phones which are still in use, and the hand-held 'tricorder' used in the show in order to carry out diagnostic checks on flora and fauna (human or alien) has inspired an organization to set up a ten million dollar prize for anyone who can design a portable stand-alone medical diagnostic device.(19) Engineers even see plausibility in the idea of a 'warp-drive', which allows the ship to attain light-speed or faster than light-speed, although Roddenberry of course borrowed the concept and the word from Arthur C Clarke.(20) And while the transporter which Scotty used to 'beam' crew down to any given planet or back is complete sci-fi, IBM does do research into quantum teleportation.(21) That Star Trek was praised, and cherished, by influential science-fiction writers, like Clarke and, most prominently, Isaac Asimov, as well as by professional scientists, and was to inspire a generation of science buffs, is testament to how much thought and care went into the making of the Star Trek universe. The ultimate accolade, perhaps, was the naming of a NASA shuttle 'Enterprise', in 1976, after the ship in the series. But all that was still only part of it, only part of the reason why viewers took it seriously. The show had to convince on a deeper level also, in the realm of drama.

What drew the audience into accepting the premise of each episode was the narrative focus. In 'The Man Trap', mentioned at the beginning, as the first-airing episode ever, dramatic plausibility was gained not because the premise itself was believable –an alien predator, assuming human form, kills humans in order to extract and consume the salt from their bodies (never really explaining how this was done beyond showing blotches upon the victim's skin)– but by shifting the focus away from the sci-fi element and onto the human. The creature is never seen in its proper alien form until the very end of the drama; up until that moment it is (almost) always seen as a woman, and indeed,

as a different woman by each person who sees it. McCoy sees it as the woman he knew romantically ten years previously, unchanged and as radiant as she ever was. Kirk sees her as the same woman, but as she would appear now, aged. He attributes McCoy's description of her as apparently unchanged to the short-sightedness that comes from looking through the eyes of one still smitten. This brings us into the realm not of sci-fi, but of human perceptions and of human behaviour, with the focus clearly on the very human tendency to see only what we want to see, especially where romance is concerned. It informs the climax of the narrative, as Dr McCoy, still blind to what everyone else can see, even as the creature attempts to kill Kirk, refuses to pull the trigger that might save his captain's life. This is science fiction employed in the service of dramatizing an aspect of human weakness, a pretty neat trick which would work again and again for Star Trek, in different storytelling guises.

The episode I show my students from time to time also turns on the idea of human weakness being uncovered within a sci-fi framework. 'By Any Other Name', from Season Two, doesn't get quite the approbation that some episodes receive, yet, in my opinion contains some of the most extraordinary writing and acting ever produced within the three seasons. The premise is simple, that aliens, who (again) have assumed human form, take control of the Enterprise and, because they possess devices which can paralyze any who seek to stop them, have free rein to commandeer the ship and sail to far-off Andromeda, where they will establish a new home for their race. It is essentially a bi-partite narrative, and the first section, in which the aliens' ruthless credentials are established in tandem with the helplessness of the captain and his crew, is very sci-fi. Students who don't particularly enjoy the genre endure as well as they can, perhaps finding at least the acting of the

main characters worth the effort. We stop the viewing at about the 30 minute mark and I ask them to discuss the individual characteristics of Kirk, Spock and McCoy, and then have them speculate on how the episode will end. In regard to the first question, most attention falls on Spock, no doubt because he is by far the most curious character, but also because he appears to possess such calm under pressure and is so unnervingly intelligent.(22) In regard to the second part of their discussion, opinions range from those who guess more or less correctly what might happen next and those who imagine that resolution will only come about through violent action. We then watch the rest of the show. It is a revealing experience even for those who guessed close to what might happen, because no-one can foresee that the narrative shifts from one which is densely sci-fi-based and full of high tension to a narrative which is more like romantic comedy (with a dash of farce for good measure), played out in the most elegant, witty and charming manner.

The change in tone within the episode occurs because the main characters realize that because the aliens have assumed human form they are then prey to human weaknesses. It begins when Spock notices that one of the aliens, after having declared that simple nutritional tablets are all they need for sustenance, in fact appears to enjoy good old fashioned human food (or what passes for such on a 23rd century Starship). The camera catches the human-enough-looking alien as he takes his first bite and then declares: 'That's quite good.' It is an almost surreal moment, because it recalls, not the world of hard-edged sci-fi action, but something closer to a cookery programme, wherein the guest eventually gets to sample the dish and express delight at the result. From that moment onward, the surviving crew of four get to further distract their alien captors in ways which they deem appropriate. For Scotty, the ship's engineer, whose nickname clearly indicates his

geographical provenance, treating this same alien to a few hard drinks, among them his prized, and exceptionally vintage Scotch (a rare item on a Starship) –in order to literally drink him under the table– provides one of the most hilarious scenes ever in Star Trek.[23] For handsome, dashing Kirk, turning on the charm in the direction of Kelinda, one of the aliens who has assumed the form of an extremely beautiful woman, seems to be the best strategy –in order to encourage a distracting jealousy from her partner, the alien leader. Yet, his opening advance results in an awkwardness rich in meaning, almost like something out of Oscar Wilde indeed, as he is asked to address concepts he likely had never considered until now:

Kelinda: Oh, you are trying to seduce me… [Kirk looks embarrassed] I have been studying you.

Kirk: [looking suddenly uncomfortable] Me?

Kelinda: All humans. This business of love. You have devoted much literature to it. Why do you build such mystique around a simple biological function?

Kirk: [looking perplexed and seemingly at a loss how to answer, he pauses and then…] We enjoy it.

Kelinda's next question is just a word, 'Literature?', which Kirk chooses not to answer, but by asking it, shows where her ideas are headed, toward a questioning of the entire human canon of romantic literature, one to which Kirk's reply might seem preposterously, and hilariously inadequate. This exchange demonstrates the subtlety and charm made

possible by a combination of good writing and great acting. It also demonstrates that the vehicle of science-fiction can be employed to approach complex subjects, like the idea of human romanticism, in ways not normally taken.

And while the ending of 'By Any Other Name' involves a thrilling fight scene, the conflict resolution is actually achieved without resort to violence proper. Kirk, when he finally gets the chance, does not punch, in order to disable, the alien leader, Rojan. Rather he slaps him. It is a provoking action, designed to elicit a response, the very human one of indignation. It has been Kirk's strategy to nurture feelings of jealousy from the alien leader, and so the showdown has more of the flavour of teen rivalry for a girl than a battle to the death for the command of the Enterprise. For my students, it is an example of conflict resolution, as so often portrayed on the big and the small screen, but one with a decided difference. By the end of their fight, Kirk and the alien leader will have become 'friends', or equals, because Kirk will offer as much; in contrast, by the end of the vast majority of the films that many of my students will have seen over the years, one of the two combatants, invariably the 'bad' one, will be dead (or arrested). While the first film of the 're-booted' Star Trek film series (begun in 2009) did manage to upgrade the visual aspects of the original series, and make everything look new, shiny and exciting, it borrowed from a different script in the creation of its adversary, about whom there were no redeeming factors at all, and who was only deserving of a spectacular or grisly (whichever ok) death, being an irredeemable savage. Star Trek, the original series, always sought to engage the audience with gripping, life-and-death situations in their weekly stories, but that didn't have to entail the simplistic pitting of the ostensibly good against the plainly bad. Star Trek's writers, and the show's producer, Gene Roddenberry, were interested in engaging

the audience's intellect as well as their emotions, making the resolution of each show a dramatic space which needn't always employ the sledgehammer tactics written into so many films and television shows so prevalent nowadays.(24) In regard to character or motivation, Star Trek explored what 'bad' meant, or what 'bad' behaviour meant, and often showed, as in this particular episode, that despite appearances to the contrary, progress toward peace between warring parties could be achieved.

In 'The Naked Time', the 'bad' element derives from a spore, discovered by accident on a striken planet, which, in course, comes to infect the crew. The 'bad' element as such is the tendency of those who are infected to succumb to strong, or raw, emotions, emotions which they had harboured but had managed to suppress until now. Again, the sci-fi element is used not simply as a device to ratchet up the tension, although it does do that, but as a way to dramatize what it means to be human. Considering that most humans are aware of the tendency to hide inner feelings, the drama reaches particular poignancy in regard to the spore's effect on Mr Spock. Being Vulcan, his behaviour is always eminently logical; being half-Vulcan and half-human, however, it is clear his eminently logical behaviour is enhanced by a self-imposed reluctance to give in to feelings. The effect of the spore on Spock in this episode, then, provides compelling insight into the depth both of Spock's efforts to mask his emotional side and the very great depths of that normally suppressed emotional side. It is the stuff of lore that after the airing of 'The Naked Time', Nimoy received a hugely increased amount of fan-mail.(25) Again, we see that the science fiction aspect of the situational narrative works not to merely build mystery and intrigue, but to unlock the drama of what it means to be human (or half-human!).(26)

Beside what this episode lays bare among its characters –hence the title– another important aspect of 'The Naked Time' concerns its approach to narrative structure. Yes, it is fascinating, to borrow a word from Spock's vocabulary, to witness the variegated effects on different crew –not all become emotional wrecks, Sulu, for example, the Japanese-American helmsman of the ship, famously seizes the opportunity to indulge his passion for (rapier) sword-fencing, and to show off his muscles, too; but the unpredictable course of the narrative itself grabs the viewer's attention. As the infection travels from crew member to crew member, against the best efforts of the doctor to create a vaccine, the narrative spirals in a downward pattern –as the ship spirals toward the planet and imminent destruction– as things become more and more chaotic, and even anarchic. One crew member, Riley, has locked himself into Engineering [from where the ship's propulsion is controlled], and spends the latter part of the show singing 'Take me home again, Kathleen' over the ship's intercom for all to hear, playing out the Irish drunkard inner self he seems to have been occluding for so long. His behaviour, which has Captain Kirk almost crawling the walls, as he realizes he has to listen to the song 'One more time!', is certainly humourous, but it has a serious consequence: Riley's seemingly inebriated actions lead to the near destruction of the whole ship. Not only is the viewer's focus divided by the variety of emotional meltdowns occurring throughout the ship, and the fact that they are all largely disparate, the backdrop of apparent drunken hilarity complicates how one is supposed to respond to the unfolding events. The episode ends with a moment of extremely heightened space action, yet one which seems, perhaps in character with the episode itself, almost somehow unrelated to the events which have brought it about: like the unexpected near-disaster that ends the drinking party. No matter how

many years later it is viewed, 'The Naked Time' presents a narrative fresh both in content and in form, and illustrates not only how ahead of its time the show was, but how little it conformed to any recognizable narrative formula in television drama.

I could go on. I invariably do. It is the sworn duty of any Trekkie to spread the word on how great Star Trek is. No doubt in 2016 other Trekkies will gather, perhaps at a Comic-Con (conference for followers of all manner of popular artforms), or at a lesser event, or just over coffee, or maybe a glass or three of Saurian brandy. Or, now that we have some of the technology from Trek, maybe fans will link up via a virtual video conference conducted by people in multiple countries (not planets yet), and talk Trek. University students may study Trek, as they can, for example, at Georgetown University in Washington, and discuss all manner of philosophical ideas with scenes and situations from the TV show shown as an attractive spur or prompt. The fact that it is taught at university and the publication of volumes like *Star Trek and Philosophy: The Wrath of Kant* suggest that Star Trek's potential for provoking thought is as vibrant as ever. Harvard may also become a beacon for academically-inclined Trekkies: the Houghton Library at Harvard recently acquired *The Official Star Trek Writers Guide 1967*.[27] However Trek is celebrated or discussed in 2016 and beyond, I predict, in the best traditions of science fiction's predilection for prediction, that it will continue to intrigue and enthrall for a very long time. If I mention academic-related material it is also partly to suggest that, even now, there is quite a disinclination in some quarters to accept science fiction as worthy of anything other than casual attention. I know that sci-fi is gaining considerable ground, now that writers like Philip K. Dick have been accepted into venerable traditional vehicles like The Library of America, but there is still considerable suspicion that sci-fi is ultimately

an immature art-form. Star Trek was always entertainment, but with a great deal to offer both the casual viewer and those who are a little more obsessed, or those who are aware of greatness when they see it, whatever form it comes in.

Another way forward in terms of studying the original series is provided by the recent publication of the *These Are the Voyages* series, which document each of the three seasons, episode by episode. This book series provides extensive documentary evidence and informed commentary on all aspects and is an invaluable tool in understanding precisely what went into the making of the ground-breaking TV show. The creation of each episode was a minor miracle, dependent on so much that could go wrong, but which usually did not. It is important to remember that there was a process in the creation of Star Trek which often involved extensive re-writes, much wrangling by writers who felt alternatively aggrieved or justified, input from the actors themselves, pressure from the executives above, and always with 'Time's winged chariot hurrying near'. No doubt this is why the TV programme still feels so fresh and relevant: work created under pressure has the longest shelf-life. Regarding time constraints, not only was Star Trek tied to a 50-minute narrative, but writers –as with any TV writers, of course– had to take account of advertising breaks, and make sure to insert tension-raising elements just before each switch to the ads, in order to ensure that the audience would stay watching. Regarding the makers, Gene Roddenberry irked not only his bosses, but also his fellow creators at times. As the *These Are The Voyages* books document so well, there was a constant drama behind the scenes throughout the show's three seasons, wherein either Roddenberry might be arbitrarily re-writing someone else's script, or others would be forcing him into submitting to their ideas. Often the house writers would be called in to review

the script, and then find themselves re-writing almost everything. The highly talented D.C.Fontana (Dorothy Catherine) would find herself questioning scripts by Roddenberry, D.F. Black, Jerome Bixby, or whoever, sometimes moulding them so far out of the original shape as to qualify as a complete re-write. (This can be said about 'By Any Other Name' for sure.) Actors might also want changes; or, occasionally, as we saw with Nichelle Nicols, might contemplate resignation, for a variety of reasons. Fame brought its promises and its pressures, as well as its pleasures. At the end of the day, Star Trek was really all about a team of highly creative minds battling it out against the odds –and sometimes each other– in order to make it through each week. In this sense, they were not unlike the valiant crew of the Starship Enterprise herself, boldly going where no man, or 'no *one*', had gone before. Or, might I add, where no one has gone since.

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In regard to Star Trek, I used the DVD box sets, and Volume 2 of The Lieutenant The Complete Series, DVD set.

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This essay is dedicated, with profound appreciation, to everyone who had anything to do with the making of Star Trek, the Original Series, and to its diehard fans over the decades…

Notes:-

(1) William Shatner (Kirk), 35 yrs old, b. March 22, 1931. Leonard Nimoy (Spock), 35, b. March 26, 1931. DeForest Kelley (McCoy), 46, b. January 20, 1920.

(2) The U.S.S. Enterprise (designated NCC-1701), 289 metres in length, *Encyclopedia,* p.137-9. Regarding the fictional timeline, the year 2266 is the start date for the 'five-year mission', *Encyclopedia*, p.690.

(3) Ibid., p.385.

(4) TATV, Two, 01: A Second Season: the author provides extensive documentary evidence to suggest that Star Trek did achieve good ratings at the time. He also explains the ins and outs of Roddenberry's relationship with NBC, which, he quips 'equated to a bad marriage.'

(5) WNOHGB, pp.62-8. Rivalry between fans of Star Wars and Star Trek is legendary. Trek fans, however, as this anecdote suggests, may feel themselves indebted to Star Wars and its success.

(6) A rough timeline: Star Trek, TOS, ran from 1966 to 1969. From 1979 to 1991, six motion pictures, featuring the original cast were produced, and were largely very well received. A spin-off TV series entitled *Star Trek: The Next Generation* [ST:TNG, in abbreviation], following the fortunes of a new crew –quite literally the next generation– began in 1987, and, unlike the TOS, which achieved only three seasons, ran on for no less than seven seasons. There were films made, too, based upon the characters from this series, using the same cast, which, then, kind of opened the floodgates to a variety of spin-off TV series, based upon individual characters in new settings or by using the Star Trek timeline in order to create Trek universe-related narratives. *ST: Deep Space Nine* [ST: DS9] (from 1993) ran, like TNG, for seven seasons, as did *ST: Voyager* [ST: V] (from 1995), while *ST: Enterprise* [ST: E] (from 2001) was phased out after four seasons. If the demise of the latter show appeared to indicate flagging interest in things Star Trek, public reception of the 2009 feature film suggested otherwise. It was a huge box-office success, and garnering significant critical praise into the bargain, breathed life into Star Trek both as a veritable golden goose and as a relevant cultural icon. A sequel was made, *Into Darkness* (2013) and a further film is forthcoming at the time of going to press.

(7) In fact, the idea for this goes back to discussions at Paramount following the 1989 release of *Star Trek V: The Final Frontier*. 'Star Trek VI: The First Adventure' was proposed by producer Harve Bennett, 'which dealt with young Kirk and Spock's adventures at Starfleet Academy.' Interestingly, 'Paramount was nervous about the thought of making a movie without Shatner and Nimoy, and so the story was rewritten to include flashback scenes featuring the adult Kirk and Spock.' WNOHGB, p. 92.

(8) TATV, Two, Preface, 20: A Tale of Two Genes, etc…

(9) 'To Set It Right', from 'The Lieutenant' is from *Hamlet*, and 'By Any Other Name' is from *Romeo & Juliet*. The title of the last Star Trek film with cast of the original series, 'The Undiscovered Country,' was also taken from *Hamlet*. Herman Melville's Moby Dick is exploited extensively for the second film, *The Wrath of Khan*.

(10) The Star Trek episode was 'Where No Man Has Gone Before', and was the third-airing episode of Season One. Lockwood played Frank Poole in Kubrick's 1968 masterpiece.

(11) Episode title: 'In the Highest Tradition'.

(12) TATV, Two, opening of the Preface. In 01: A Second Season, it is stated that NBC, under pressure from civil rights groups, did broadcast the episode, but other sources I have checked, including IMDb, state that the episode was not aired, until many years later.

(13) TATV, Two, 02, 'Casting Off, Season Two'.

(14) From 'Plato's Stepchildren', Season Three, aired November 22, 1967. There are a few other candidates vying for the title of first inter-racial kiss on TV, from earlier years. Star Trek maybe got more limelight.

(15) WNOHGB, p. 44.

(16) Actually, the film was released only very fleetingly and only in New York. It had no national release. Also known as *The Stranger*.

(17) TATV, Two, 20, 'A Tale of Two Genes/ Roddenberry versus Coon' provides a wealth of information on him, and his relationship with the other Gene.

(18) The Vulcan salute was derived from the blessing given by the Kohanim, Hebrew priests, to the congregation. The fingers positioned in the way that has now become famous conjure the word 'Shin' which corresponds to 'Almighty God'. Apparently Nimoy, who saw this gesture as a child, peeked, when he was supposed to avert his eyes during the ceremony. This suggests that the hand sign may not be a prominent or easily recognized symbol. Incidentally, Milo O'Shea's Leopold Bloom, in the 1967 Joseph Strick film of *Ulysses* at one point also produces the very same hand sign. He is clearly doing so as a person with Jewish background, indicating that despite conversion to Christianity he is in touch with Jewish ways. Imagine, then, a Trek fan at the time, with no knowledge of Jewish ways, witnessing Joyce's Leopold Bloom apparently mimicking First Officer Spock from Star Trek! He or she would have been a tad confused.

(19) The Qualcomm Tricorder XPRIZE, worth ten million dollars. The Qualcomm Foundation hopes to make '23rd century science fiction a 21st medical reality'. See http://tricorder.xprize.org/ Accessed December 9, 2015.

(20) Arthur C Clarke's 1962 *Profiles of the Future* discussed 'space drive', 'warped space' and 'instantaneous teleportation' and inspired Roddenberry to incorporate some of these ideas into his sci-fi drama. A famous quote from this book is: 'Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable

from magic.'

(21) With those keywords, IBM's page on this is easily accessible on the Internet.

(22) I invariably inform the students, after they have given their opinions, that early in his presidency Barack Obama was likened to Spock (evidence enough of Star Trek's cultural assimilation). The attribution was not supposed to be positive, however, because it suggested that Obama was too Spock-like, or too ostensibly intellectual and detached, for some, and lacked a certain element of folksiness and plain-spokenness, qualities thought by some to be a pre-requisite for the President of the United States. Interestingly, this angle from which to view the character of Spock then brings to the fore the regular dramatic conflict with Dr McCoy, who could be described as 'folksy' and 'plain-spoken'. Roddenberry created an interesting pair in Spock and McCoy, as between them we can discern the range of the American psyche.

(23) It may be a tribute that the spaceship engineer in *The Mote in God's Eye* by Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle is Scottish.

(24) The resolution of 'By Any Other Name' has one more subtlety to be disclosed. When Kirk convinces Rojan that a 300 year journey to Andromeda would see the complete assimilation of his Kelvan fellows by the humanity which they have assumed in order to take over the ship, he appears to be drawing upon history. After 300 years in control of an 'alien' England, the Normans themselves became English. Kirk's logic, therefore, holds up in terms of historical precedent.

(25) WNOHGB, pp.23-27.

(26) Shatner's performance of Kirk's emotional breakdown also deserves praise: it is raw and compelling.

(27) From The Harvard Gazette, May 10, 2013: 'The guide contains page after page of "Trekkie" gold. The Enterprise is "somewhat larger than a present day naval cruiser," carries a crew of 430, and provides the TV audience a "familiar and comfortable counterpoint to the bizarre and unusual things we see during our episodes." Of the ship's engines, it says, "(the two outboard nacelles) use matter and anti-matter for propulsion, the annihilation of dual matter creating the fantastic power required to warp space and exceed the speed of light." Warp speed, factor one, the guide notes, is the speed of

light, or 186,000 miles per second. “Maximum safe speed is warp six. At warp eight, the vessel starts to show considerable strain.” Sensor, according the guide, is the ubiquitous term for any equipment used for “sensing” and “reading” a range of details, like the number of aliens on a ship, or the size of a meteoroid. “Never try to explain or describe the sensors, simply use them -they’re real because they are and they work.”" See: http://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2013/05/boldly-going-to-houghton/
Accessed December 9, 2015.