

Review: *Space, The Feminist Frontier: Essays on Sex and Gender in Star Trek*. Edited by Jennifer C. Garlen and Anissa M. Graham, McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2024. 265 pp. ISBN 9781476693347. \$55.00.

We are living in an abundant moment for *Star Trek* worldmaking and storytelling as multiple Trek ‘verse series have been running over the past five years, including *Discovery* (2017-2024), *Picard* (2020-2023), *Lower Decks* (2020-2024), *Prodigy* (2021-2022), and *Strange New Worlds* (2022-), with another to come in 2026. Unsurprisingly, *Star Trek* scholarship has been strong and plentiful during this same time, with McFarland books alone publishing at least ten volumes of *Star Trek* scholarship over the past five years or slated for release next year. These are, therefore, exciting times for fans and scholars of *Star Trek*, especially as some researchers are able to write about series even as those series continue to unfold and evolve. The volume *Space, the Feminist Frontier: Essays on Sex and Gender in Star Trek* (McFarland 2024), edited by Jennifer C. Garlen and Anissa M. Graham, is a rich and rewarding collection, offering a wide variety of both topics and approaches that rises to the challenge provided by a deep bench of writers from various backgrounds who have a wide array of topics, characters, and storylines to consider.

While the overlap between the Buffyverse and the Trek ‘verses initially may seem slim, the development of characters serving similar functions – such as Number One on *Star Trek* and Rupert Giles on *Buffy* – the consistency and complexity of world-building, and the intertextuality of casting (see Bussolini in *Slayage*, 2013 and see actors Armin Shimerman, Anthony Stewart Head, and Jeff Kober, who all had noteworthy roles in both the Trek and Buffy ‘verses) all suggest a stronger and more

mutually informative connection between the two sets of texts. Indeed, the creators of *Strange New Worlds*' musical episode ("Subspace Rhapsody, season 2, episode 9) explicitly mentioned *Buffy*'s musical episode as inspiration (see Romano in *Entertainment Weekly*, 2023, "Of course *Star Trek* looked to *Buffy* for its big musical: 'That was our bar'"; see also Millsap-Spears in vol. 22.1 of this journal). Especially as feminist and deep analysis of an iconic popular cultural text, this volume of *Trek* scholarship very much fits within the bounds of *Buffy+* studies.

The editors organize seventeen essays and their own meaty and satisfying introduction into four sections including one of "matriarchs and legacies," featuring essays on Majel Barrett and Nichelle Nichols and others, and "beyond the binary boundary," which consists of four essays considering the many explosions of binarized gender and sexuality in the *Star Trek* 'verses, as with Dylan Reid Miller's very interesting study of "the queer lives of joined trill." Several of the included essays focus on some of the most prominent female characters on *Trek* series—Seven of Nine and Michael Burnham in addition to Number One and Uhura—and while I was sorry to see some obvious omissions (I feel Captain Janeway warrants still more attention than she has hitherto gotten in *Trek* scholarship), I enjoyed reading the deep considerations of the four pivotal characters above along with others.

The first two essays in the book, by A. V. Rasmussen and Carey Millsap-Spears offer divergent and complementary considerations of the character Number One, one essay delving deeply into Majel Barrett's character in the original series and the other considering the arc of Number One from the original series to *Strange New Worlds*, where she is played by Rebecca Romijn. The second section of the book offers two analyses of the character Seven of Nine by Holly Eva Allen and Bryana

Fern, which complement each other and give us enough substance to consider this character through multiple series and eras and gives the actress Jeri Ryan sufficient attention to transcend her initial and overt sexualization as Seven to be considered as an artist and public figure even as Seven quickly developed into a multi-layered and complex character. In this respect, Seven's character offers a classic "bait-and-switch" of blonde apparent eye candy that actually belies the maturing, meaningful figure within, not unlike Buffy Summers. Indeed, throughout the book, individual essays are put into conversation with each other through the organization of the volume, and I found this to enhance my experience as a reader and the book's potential use as a teaching tool.

Among the many fascinating chapters, Brenda Selena Lara offers an intriguing and complex analysis of Latinidad and the gendered representation of Latinx characters across the series. In the same section, Judith Clemens-Smucker gives an expansive analysis of trauma and gender across a huge swath of the Trek 'verses and series. As well, Sidney Blaylock, Jr. offers a resonant analysis of the lasting legacy of Uhura as a character and also of Nichelle Nichols' original portrayal of her and of Nichols' ties to NASA as a result. Blaylock uses the concepts of Afrofuturism and Black exceptionalism to discuss Uhura's portrayal by Nichols and later by Zoe Saldana and by Celia Rose Gooding as a character through time and historical contexts. Each of these essays deserves close reading and also could be used in a number of different classroom contexts, perhaps especially accompanied by clips for the shows as support.

I have written quite a bit already about how much I enjoyed reading the book, but I also want to emphasize that the book likely could make very useful classroom material for courses on television or popular culture studies or for a course

on feminism and/or gender studies. The book is not perfect, and some chapters begin to meander, maybe leaning a little into fan writing, although they still offer an interesting study. On the whole, I found this collection to be well and carefully crafted, thoughtfully structured and organized, and really just a pleasurable read. I recommend it to lay readers with an interest in the Trek ‘verses, to students of popular culture, and to educators seeking material for college courses.

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Works Cited

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