



**TURUN  
YLIOPISTO**

## **Q stands for Queer?**

Analysing queerness in *Star Trek* in the 1980s, 1990s and 2020s

Digitaalisen kulttuurin, maiseman ja kulttuuriperinnön tutkinto-ohjelman  
kandidaatintutkielma

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Tutkielma tarkastelee *Star Trek* scifi-universumissa esiintyvää Q-nimistä hahmoa queer-tutkimuksen avulla. Tutkimusaineisto perustuu kahteen *Star Trek*-sarjaan: *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (1987–1994) sekä *Star Trek: Picard* (2020–2023), joita analysoidaan lähiluvun avulla. Lähilukuun valikoitui kahdeksan *Star Trek: The Next Generation* -jaksoa sekä seitsemän *Star Trek: Picard* -jaksoa, joissa Q esiintyi.

Queer-tutkimuksen lisäksi Q-hahmon analyysiin hyödynnetään camp-termiä sekä aikaisempaa tutkimusta queer-antagonisteista. Tutkimus on osa pitkäaikaista scifi-genren tutkimusta ja toimii jatkumona aikaisempiin queer-analyyseihin liittyen itse genreen ja *Star Trek* -universumiin. Queer-tutkimuskirjallisuuden lisäksi tutkielma hyödyntää *Star Trek* -universumiin liittyvää tutkimusta sekä tuotannossa olleiden ihmisten haastatteluita.

Tutkielman päätutkimuskysymys keskittyy siihen, millainen hahmo Q on queer-analyysin näkökulmasta, hyödyntäen edellisessä kappaleessa mainittuja termejä. Koska tutkielma analysoi kahta televisiosarjaa, jotka ovat tuotettu hyvin eri aikoina, tutkielma analysoi myös sitä, mitä eroja Q-hahmon kuvauksessa on kussakin sarjassa.

Tutkimuksessa tulee ilmi se, kuinka Q sopii vahvasti queer-kuvastoon etenkin camp-termiä hyödyntäen. Myös hahmon kuvaus 1980- sekä 1990-luvuilla kuvatun *Star Trek: The Next Generation* -sarjan sekä 2020-luvun *Star Trek: Picard* -sarjan välillä erosi vahvasti toisistaan hahmon esiintyessä tuoreemmassa sarjassa huomattavasti totisempaan hahmoneen ilman yhtä vahvaa camp-ilmaisua.

**Avainsanat:** queer-tutkimus, tieteissarjat, Star Trek, camp

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## 1 Introduction

As a queer person I have always gravitated towards media that either has queer representation or one that allows for a queer reading. Although representation both in television and film has come a long way, I still remember how my first touches with queer representation as a young teen discovering his identity were films such as Ang Lee's *Brokeback Mountain* (2005) that had storylines built around the struggle around being queer.

While films such as *Brokeback Mountain* do undoubtedly deserve their place in popular culture and cinema, I wished to see queer representation without the weight of homophobia and despair. I thought I could find it in a genre I really enjoyed, which was science fiction. I presumed that in stories dominated by social utopias and scientific advancements I would see queer people just living their lives, but I soon found out that I was wrong.

Science fiction offers us different views and worlds from our own, often allowing the media to show and portray things normally deemed abnormal or strange without offending our sensibilities (too) much.<sup>1</sup> As queerness and queer people have throughout history been categorized as “other”, science fiction seems like a natural space for queerness or queer reading to occur. Although based on research done by media scholars, queerness tends to be one of the topics least explored in science fiction<sup>2</sup>.

I ended up choosing *Star Trek* as the focus of my bachelor's thesis due to my long-lasting interest in the sci-fi franchise. Besides my personal interest in the franchise, *Star Trek* is still considered a significant franchise in the genre of science fiction<sup>3</sup>, and thus offers a good view into the genre itself. As a franchise, *Star Trek* is a great example of science fiction, as it includes many tropes associated with science fiction such as technological and scientific advancements and time and space travel<sup>4</sup>. All of these tropes are very apparent in all eras of *Star Trek*, where space, and often time travel, is possible and where humanity and other

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<sup>1</sup> Wälivaara 2016, 69.

<sup>2</sup> Wälivaara 2016, 1.

<sup>3</sup> Tan & Song 2020, 577.

<sup>4</sup> See Oxford Dictionary's definition of science fiction.

species have made such scientific progress that many illnesses, such as cancer, have been eliminated <sup>5</sup>.

Science fiction is also prevalent in the visual language of *Star Trek*, although as time moves on, the futuristic imagery changes. A good example of the change the imagery goes through is the bridge of the starship USS Enterprise. It has had significant visual changes through the eras, from the grey-and-red, quite angular bridge of the 60s *Star Trek* to the more streamlined and beige bridge of the late 80s/early 90s *Star Trek* to finally, the bridge full of lights and screens of the *Star Trek* of the 2020s. Each of the three bridges of the distinctively different eras of *Star Trek* represent the changing ideas of what the future looks like as shown in picture 1.

Picture 1: The bridge of USS Enterprise in three different eras (From top to bottom: a) *Star Trek* (1966–1969), b) *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (1987–1994) and c) *Star Trek: Picard* (2020–2023)).

It is also important to note that throughout its history, *Star Trek* has been considered revolutionary in its humanistic approach<sup>6</sup> to the world as well as for its inclusion of racial minorities in its casting as early as in 1960s. Despite the turbulent political landscape in the 60s USA especially



<sup>5</sup> In the episode “Terra Nova” from *Star Trek: Enterprise* (2001-2005), a character’s lung cancer is easily and quickly treatable.

<sup>6</sup> Boslaugh 132, 2015.

considering the civil rights movement, *Star Trek* (1966-1969) included a Black woman and an Asian man in significant roles in the series.

Despite *Star Trek*'s reputation for being progressive, queer people were absent from the *Star Trek* canon for over 40 years. In my thesis I will explore some of the reasons why especially in the 1990s, *Star Trek* shied away from queer representation. The queer potential of *Star Trek* was of great interest to fans, which could be seen even as early as the 1970s when erotic and romantic written fanfiction and drawn fanart involving the two male main characters of the original *Star Trek* series, Mr. Spock (Leonard Nimoy) and Captain Kirk (William Shatner), started to spread in wider *Star Trek* fan circles <sup>7</sup>.

When I was only starting to plan my bachelor's thesis, I was considering exploring the topic of Spock/Kirk<sup>8</sup> fan culture but seeing the amount of research on the topic already, I wanted to explore something that had not been researched as much. Quickly I was entranced by the character of Q, who first appeared in the second *Star Trek* series, *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (1987–1994). Q as a character has never been explicitly queer in the canon of *Star Trek*, but his flamboyant and camp personality and the character's obsession with the male captain of the starship USS Enterprise have given space to queer readings both in fan spaces as well as academia as early as in the 1990s <sup>9</sup>.

As the topic of my thesis got clearer, I decided to focus on two *Star Trek* series in which Q appears. Although Q makes appearances in few other *Star Trek* series, his appearances in them have tended to be briefer and have less coherent storylines. The first series I have decided to include is the previously mentioned *Star Trek: The Next Generation* and the second series is called *Star Trek: Picard* (2020–2023), created as a sequel to *Star Trek: The Next Generation*.

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<sup>7</sup> Hale-Stern 2018.

<sup>8</sup> The “/” is used in fan circles to indicate a romantic and/or sexual relationship between the mentioned characters.

<sup>9</sup> Atara Stein's article “*Minding One's P's and Q's*” was published in 1998. Stein was an English professor at California State University, Fullerton and a Q/Picard fan fiction writer.

## 1.1 Research questions

In this thesis, I will explore the character of Q through close reading while utilising queer theory and terms often associated with queerness. During my research I decided to include the sensibility of camp and the trope of a flamboyant villain in my thesis. Through them and the theme of queerness, I explore how Q appears in the *Star Trek* universe and what that can tell us about queerness in *Star Trek*.

As his appearances in the television series I have explored in this thesis have almost a thirty-year gap between their first airing, my thesis will also explore how Q's appearances and the themes surrounding his character have changed during the years as the television industry has gone through a major change with the introduction of streaming services.

As most of the "queerer" moments involving Q in both *Star Trek: The Next Generation* and *Star Trek: Picard* involve the main character of both series, Captain Jean-Luc Picard (Sir Patrick Stewart), this thesis will also explore the relationship between the characters, and how a queer analysis can bring out more than just pure antagonism in their relationship.

## 1.2 Methods and central terms

I have utilised the method of close reading to gather material for this thesis. Early in my research I had made a list of every episode that I would include in my research. In the end I analysed eight episodes of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* and seven episodes of *Star Trek: Picard*, although in the case of *Star Trek: Picard*, only three episodes had material that I could utilise in this thesis. First, I decided to generally watch every episode, to note parts that were especially interesting in terms of my thesis, before diving deeper into close reading.

As Q's appearances were usually brief, with him only appearing in each scene quite briefly, I decided on analysing each scene separately, replaying them to focus on specific aspects (body language, dialogue, facial expressions) each time. I have shown part of my close reading process in table 1, where I categorised my close reading results in a table form.

| STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION           |  |   |   |
|--|--|---|---|
| "Qpid" Season 4 episode 20 (18:10–20:20) |  |   |   |
| <b>Characters involved:</b>              | Q and Captain Picard   | <b>Location:</b>                        | Captain Picard's quarters   |
| <b>Crux of the scene:</b>                | Q taunting Picard about Picard's relationship with Vash  | <b>What happened previously?:</b>       | Picard and Vash had a fight, which Q saw, Picard's getting ready for bed, Q approaches  |
| <b>Clothing:</b>                         | Q's wearing a captain's uniform, Picard's wearing a pyjama with a deep V-neck and short shorts   | <b>Facial expressions:</b>              | Picard is stern and serious, slowly becoming angry Q is exaggerated and sometimes mocking, in the end he's upset at Picard's dismissal of him   |
| <b>Scene dynamics: (Physicality)</b>     | Q seeking physical closeness, disregarding Picard's feelings. Picard constantly moving away (Eg. getting off the bed when Q sits on it next to him)  | <b>Picard's behaviour in the scene:</b> | Picard is quickly agitated at Q's arrival, getting more angry as Q mocks him for falling for a woman. Finally he tells Q that he doesn't want Q's help or "for that matter, you"  |
| <b>Scene dynamics: (Dialogue)</b>        | Q enters the scene dismissive of Picard's feelings and his relationship with Vash. Q also insists that he is looking out for Picard, who is frustrated at Q's presence                             | <b>Q's behaviour in the scene:</b>      | Q is domineering, egging Picard on by mentioning Vash and how she affects him. He enjoys agitating Picard but when Picard mentions not wanting Q, he gets serious and quickly leaves. "Classic Q" in terms of his mannerisms                                      |
| <b>Queer potential:</b>                  | Q showing flirtatious interest in Picard through body language. Lines implying more fluid gender presentation on Q's side, while comparing himself to a woman in a sexual relationship with Picard | <b>General dynamics in the scene:</b>   | Q is dominant and masculine in a uniform, "chasing" Picard around the quarters, talking about helping and protecting Picard. Meanwhile Picard is almost feminised in his deep V-neck and short shorts, being followed by a taller man disregarding his boundaries |
| <b>Important lines:</b>                  | "She's found a vulnerability in you, a vulnerability I've been looking for for years, if I had known sooner, I would've appeared as a female" - Q  | <b>Other notes:</b>                     | Q mentions seeing Picard and Vash fight and says that if he didn't know better, he'd think they were already married -> pessimistic and stereotypical view of marriage  |

Table 1: Example of close reading done on a scene

During the writing process of this thesis, there has been several terms that have been central to it. The most central one is the term *queer*. The word queer has a very long history that is full of changes. Queer in the beginning was a word to describe something odd, strange, abnormal or sick that ended up being used as a slur for homosexuality.<sup>10</sup> In the 1980s the term queer ended up being reclaimed by LGBTQ activists and now it is often being used as a deliberately ambiguous term about the LGBTQ community<sup>11</sup>. As people also use the term queer to describe their own identity, queer as a term is wide and mouldable to one's needs. I want to utilise the term queer to describe Q as I do think it describes the attributes of the character well, while also giving space to the ambiguity that is integral to the character itself. As Q is not a human and we do not know anything about the sexuality or gender systems of his species, the term queer is a good way to approach the character without imposing strong labels on him.

The other central term in my thesis is the term *camp*. Like the term queer, camp is also often hard to define. In Susan Sontag's influential essay called "Notes on Camp", she describes

<sup>10</sup> Halperin 2003, 339.

<sup>11</sup> McCann & Monaghan 2019, 2.



camp as an unnatural sensibility, where its essence comes from the love of artifice and exaggeration<sup>12</sup>. Camp as a sensibility is often closely connected to queerness, especially with gay men. It is important to acknowledge that while camp is often connected to gay men, what is central in camp is the story of succeeding because of one's differences and not despite of it. This view makes camp meaningful for multiple marginalised groups outside the gay community.<sup>13</sup> When engaging in conversation with people, you will often find that people comprehend the word camp quite differently from each other. While Sontag also thinks of the *Swan Lake* as part of the camp canon<sup>14</sup>, I do doubt that many people nowadays would even consider it camp.

In this thesis I am also exploring the trope of a flamboyant villain. What is central to this trope is that the (usually male presenting) villain embodies traits often connected to femininity and thus queerness<sup>15</sup>.

### **1.3 Previous research and theoretical framework**

My thesis is majorly inspired by queer theory. Queer theory was born in 1990, when the term was introduced to the world of academia by Theresa de Lauretis at a conference of the same name. She had created the term to provoke people as she connected the world of academia and the word queer. While there was a previously established world of "gay and lesbian studies", de Lauretis wanted to open a way for a wider discussion that the established "gay and lesbian studies" could not offer.<sup>16</sup>

Queer theory can be thought to be multiple theories that have been created to transgress boundaries and categories<sup>17</sup>. What is integral to queer theory is the way it seeks to disrupt the status quo of how people perceive things, as it resists categorisation.

This disruptiveness and resistance to categorisation in queer theory was also one of the reasons why I wanted to include it in my thesis. Just like queer theory is disrupting and

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<sup>12</sup> Sontag 1964, 1.

<sup>13</sup> Schuyler 2011, 2.

<sup>14</sup> Sontag 1964, 2.

<sup>15</sup> Li-Vollmer & LaPointe 2003, 103.

<sup>16</sup> Halperin 2003, 339–340.

<sup>17</sup> McCann & Monaghan 2019, 1.

boundary-breaking, so is the character of Q. The ambiguity that queer theory offers gives me a good opportunity to do character analysis on a character such as Q without too much categorising, which I think would be counterintuitive.

This thesis is also part of a wider research into the genre of science fiction. The research of different aspects of science fiction has been a popular topic of research since the legitimisation of popular culture research in the 1970s. Despite this, research into the relationship of sexuality and science fiction which had started in 1980s has been rare.<sup>18</sup> As *Star Trek* is one of the most influential science fiction franchises<sup>19</sup>, it has been included in much of science fiction research.

One of the most influential researchers in the field of research around science fiction and the fan movement is Henry Jenkins. Henry Jenkins has researched the queer representation and the fan movement around queerness in *Star Trek* for decades. Another influential academic studying the relationship of queerness and science fiction is WG Pearson, whose article “Alien Cryptographies: The View from Queer” connects queer studies and science fiction. Another notable previous literary source in terms of my thesis was Josefina Wälivaara’s doctoral dissertation “Dreams of a Subversive Future” from 2016, which explores the relationship between queerness, heteronormativity and science fiction both in film and in television.

In the field of queer studies, there has been many influential writers since the start of the theory itself in 1990. For example, Annamarie Jagose’s “Queer Theory, an Introduction” that was published in 1996 has paved way to further queer theory studies. Hannah McCann and Whitney Monaghan’s “Queer Theory Now” (2019) has brought queer studies to the modern era, giving even more thought to intersectionality.

The most central piece of writing in the exploration around the term “camp” is Susan Sontag’s “Notes on Camp”, which was very influential in terms of my thesis. In her work she explores the different aspects of camp, what it is and how it can appear. Although it was written in 1964, “Notes on Camp” is still considered an important and formative writing on camp.

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<sup>18</sup> Wälivaara 2016, 22.

<sup>19</sup> Tan & Song 2020, 577.

## 2 An introduction to *Star Trek* and Q

To properly understand this thesis, it is integral to understand the general history of *Star Trek* and the basics of the character of Q. *Star Trek* has had a long history of almost 60 years, during which significant changes have happened in the world we live in, in television and in *Star Trek*.

### 2.1 A brief introduction to *Star Trek*

As previously mentioned, the start of the *Star Trek* franchise was in 1966, when the first *Star Trek* series was first broadcasted. Idealised as a spacefaring version of the Westerns that gained Americans' attention in the 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>20</sup>, the original *Star Trek* series (1966-1969) gained a strong following. The connection to Westerns becomes quite explicit during the series' title sequence, when the voice of Captain Kirk (William Shatner) calls space "the final frontier", referencing the old Western frontier during the further colonisation of the North American continent.

*Star Trek* is set in the 23<sup>rd</sup> century, where Earth and its colonies in the solar system have unified into a single united nation called United Earth. At the time of the *Star Trek* series, United Earth is a part of the United Federation of Planets, a union of multiple different planets united on the ideals of peace and justice. The series follows the starship USS Enterprise, the flagship of the Federation's space force Starfleet. The nature of the Enterprise's, and by extension Starfleet's, exploration is supposed to be peaceful, as the Enterprise's mission is one of discovery and diplomacy.

*Star Trek* was in many ways a revolutionary series. The field of American television was going through a big change as colour television was making a breakthrough in the markets. *Star Trek* with its colourful alien planets and futuristic worlds quickly created an imagery that is still popular with fans today. Despite the tense political landscape and oppression many racial minorities faced in the US at the time, *Star Trek* was supposed to give the American viewers a view into a more united future where people all around the world (including Russia despite the 60s Cold War tensions) had peacefully united. The show also included interracial

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<sup>20</sup> Willis 2015, 1.

kissing, with the most famous of example of it being a kiss shared between the white Captain Kirk and the black Lieutenant Uhura (Nichelle Nichols). The kiss has gained significant attention, being hailed as the first black-white interracial kiss in American television.<sup>21</sup> Despite this, it is important to remember that this kiss was not born out of a genuine passion between two people, but in-universe, was forced onto the characters by a maleficent entity.

After the cancellation of *Star Trek* and the *Star Trek: The Animated Series* (1973-1974), the *Star Trek* franchise would go on a hiatus for a few years. The huge boom in interest for science fiction caused by the 1977 release of the first *Star Wars* film caused the revival of the franchise in the form of a 6-part movie series built around the characters of the original *Star Trek* series that were released between 1979 and 1991.<sup>22</sup> Paramount, the production company behind the *Star Trek* franchise, also had an interest in starting a new *Star Trek* series, this time starring new lesser-known actors to cut down costs. This planned series finalised in being *Star Trek: The Next Generation* which started airing in 1987 after major rewrites during planning stages.<sup>23</sup> The series follows the general plot of the original *Star Trek* series, as again the Starfleet flagship USS Enterprise is on a mission to “discover strange new worlds”. *Star Trek: The Next Generation* is set almost a century after the events of the original *Star Trek* series so that the series could utilise the advanced technology of the late 80s.

After the conclusion of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* in 1994, the science fiction universe of *Star Trek* would continue on the television screens until 2004 with other series in the franchise. When the last of the *Star Trek* series, *Star Trek: Enterprise*, aired its final episode, the franchise would be off television screens until the late 2010s, when multiple new *Star Trek* series, including *Star Trek: Picard* were announced. While the other series either focused on new characters or were prequels to previous series, *Star Trek: Picard* was a sequel of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, focusing on Captain (now Admiral) Picard over 30 years after the events of its predecessor.

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<sup>21</sup> Pilgrim 2007.

<sup>22</sup> Booker 2018, 13.

<sup>23</sup> Britt 2022, 244-245 (epub).

## 2.2 Queerness and *Star Trek*

Although *Star Trek* has gained a significant queer following, as it has been titled the father of queer shipping culture which has been said to have started with Captain Kirk and Mr. Spock of the original *Star Trek* series<sup>24</sup>, it took *Star Trek* decades to have openly queer characters in the franchise.

During the production of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, the franchise creator and showrunner Gene Roddenberry insisted that the show would have openly gay characters appearing in its fifth season, after his previous refusal and hesitance for that to happen.<sup>25</sup> Roddenberry passed away soon after, and no openly queer characters ever made it to the screen in *Star Trek: The Next Generation* or any other *Star Trek* television series until the premiere of *Star Trek: Discovery* in 2017. *Star Trek: Discovery* introduced the first openly gay characters in any *Star Trek* television series in the form of an openly gay couple of Paul Stamets and Hugh Culber.<sup>26</sup> Just a year before, the movie *Star Trek: Beyond* included a brief scene where the male helmsman Hikaru Sulu reunited with his husband and daughter.

Queerness and *Star Trek* have an interesting relationship, especially during the time of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. Queer rights activism had gotten more visible especially during the AIDS epidemic when government inaction caused AIDS grassroots organisations such as ACT UP to form in the 1980s and 1990s<sup>27</sup>. As the AIDS epidemic was a major topic in the era, there was a plan for a *Star Trek: The Next Generation* episode that would tackle the topics of queerness and AIDS/HIV, but in the end, the episode was scrapped.

The episode, titled “Blood and Fire” would have included a dangerous alien virus, which would have caused massive panic and fear among the crew of the USS Enterprise, mirroring the panic caused by AIDS. The episode would also have included two male crewmembers in a committed romantic relationship. The episode never made it past the writing table for unexplained reasons. According to the writer of the episode, David Gerrod, the decision to

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<sup>24</sup> Jenkins 2006.

<sup>25</sup> Jenkins 1995, 250.

<sup>26</sup> Tan & Song 2020, 577.

<sup>27</sup> Kohnen 2016, 104.

scrap the episode came from the producer Rick Bearman, who was against the portrayal of two men in a romantic relationship.<sup>28</sup>

According to both fans and the production team of *Star Trek*, the franchise ended up in an interesting paradox, where the production team claimed that to tackle the “issue of homosexuality”, *Star Trek* would have to have an episode with a major story around the “issue”. As homosexuality was deemed an “issue”, the producers thought it impossible to just have for example, two male crewmembers holding hands. At the same time queer fans’ pleas to have openly queer characters were met with resistance. The resistance stemmed from the opinion that as the society of *Star Trek* was truly equal, homosexuality would be a non-issue and to show homosexuality, it would have to involve conflict.<sup>29</sup> The contradiction in this sentiment resulted in the lack of queer representation in the franchise. Homosexuality was seen as explicit, while heterosexuality was pervasive, seen everywhere in *Star Trek*. Richard Arnold, *Star Trek* liaison to the fan community questioned if the fans’ asks for queer representation meant that they would have to show two men in bed or turn the show into a soap opera<sup>30</sup>. These dismissive reactions tell a lot about how queerness was seen even in the era that is sometimes called “the gay 90s” as many popular sitcoms started to have gay characters, bringing queerness to wider television audiences. It is vital to recognise though, that the form of queerness portrayed in the era was very one-dimensional as not to disturb the status quo.<sup>31</sup>

In the end queerness in *Star Trek: The Next Generation* and the following series would only be shown in metaphors, always including an alien species. *Star Trek: The Next Generation* has two episodes that include an allegory for queerness, the season 4 episode “The Host” and the season 5 episode “The Outcast”.

In “The Host”, the Chief Medical Officer, Beverly Crusher (Gates McFadden) falls in love with a Trill man. Trills are an alien species which live in symbiosis with a bug-like symbiotic being that has a longer lifespan. When Trills die, the symbiote will be transferred into another body to continue their life. When the Trill body of Dr. Crusher’s lover is dying, the symbiote

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<sup>28</sup> Drew 2014.

<sup>29</sup> Jenkins 1995 247-248.

<sup>30</sup> Jenkins 1995, 248.

<sup>31</sup> Kohnen 2016, 21-22.

is temporarily moved into the body of the First Officer William Riker (Jonathan Frakes). Although uncomfortable with the sudden change, especially when her good friend is involved, Dr. Crusher ends up having sex with her lover in his new temporary body. When the new official Trill host for the symbiote arrives, Dr. Crusher is surprised to find that it is a female body. After the symbiote changes bodies, Crusher's lover returns to her, attempting to rekindle their romance in the new body, but Crusher refuses, being uncomfortable with the major change.

In "The Outcast" the USS Enterprise's first officer William Riker falls in love with a member of an androgynous alien race called J'naii. The J'naii have evolved past having genders, and the idea of gender and sexuality is ridiculed and outlawed, with offenders being cast out and forced to undergo conversion therapy. Riker and the J'naii Soren start a romantic relationship and Soren admits that she thinks that she is a woman. When Soren's identity and her relationship with the male Riker is discovered, she is forced to undergo a court trial and conversion therapy. Riker attempts to save Soren from the fate, but when he goes to save her, Soren refuses his help, having undergone conversion therapy.

"Outcast" was meant to tackle the theme of sexual discrimination and conversion therapy, but as Henry Jenkins points out, no matter what the intent was, the androgynous, repressive society portrayed in the episode strongly reminds viewers of the conservative viewpoints about how queer people will end up outlawing gender itself<sup>32</sup>. Despite their best attempts, *Star Trek's* queer allegories fall flat, often causing more negative reactions among queer fans than positive<sup>33</sup>.

Both of these episodes are great examples of how 1990s *Star Trek* approached queer themes. Trills as a species are more thoroughly explored in another 1990s *Star Trek* show, *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* (1993–1999), where one of the main characters is a Trill. She has lived in both male and female bodies before and this theme comes to a head in the season 4 episode called "Rejoined". In the episode she is reunited with a Trill woman, with whom she had been in a previous heterosexual relationship with. Reuniting with a previous spouse in a new body is forbidden in Trill customs, but the couple end up sharing a kiss before parting. This kiss

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<sup>32</sup> Jenkins 1995, 256.

<sup>33</sup> See Jenkins 1995, which deals with queer *Star Trek* fans' reactions to the "representation".

also marks the first homosexual kiss in *Star Trek* history, even though it was based on a heterosexual relationship. Despite this kiss, the themes of queerness would not be explored further in *Star Trek* canon until the late 2010s.

### 2.3 Who and what is Q?

The character of Q first appeared in in the pilot episode of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* where he is the primary antagonist. This appearance also marked the first time a character of his species has appeared in the *Star Trek* universe. Q, played by the American actor John de Lancie, is part of the Q continuum, an alien species where all of its members are called the letter Q. During this thesis, unless I am specifying, my usage of the name Q will always mean the character played by John de Lancie.

The Q as a species, according to themselves, are a race of omnipotent and immortal beings, who see the universe nonlinearly. Based on the brief appearances of the other Q beings and the information we gather from Q himself, the continuum seems to have a strict sense of norms that the beings in the continuum need to abide by. For example, in the episode “Death Wish” from *Star Trek: Voyager* (1995–2001), a member of the Q continuum is imprisoned by the continuum after he decides that he wants to die.

There is no information in the *Star Trek* canon on what the true form of a Q is. While Qs as a species almost always appear in a human form, it is made clear that the form isn’t natural to them. Qs do not seem to have the same kind of concept of sex or gender as humanity does, although they do, at least in Q’s case, stick to one form once used to it. As Q always appears as a male in my source material and has he/him pronouns used of him, that is also how I will be referring to him in my thesis.

Despite the rigid nature of the Q continuum, Q is a character based on pure chaos which gets him into trouble both with his own species, but also with other species including humans. His appearances especially in *Star Trek: The Next Generation* usually revolve around a plot where the crew of USS Enterprise deal with the chaos Q has brought, whether it is a test of some kind or an adventure Q wants to bring them on. He relishes in chaos and the discomfort he causes to humans, as he does not have a great amount of respect for the beings, deeming them inferior. Throughout *Star Trek: The Next Generation* Q goes through a lot of changes and

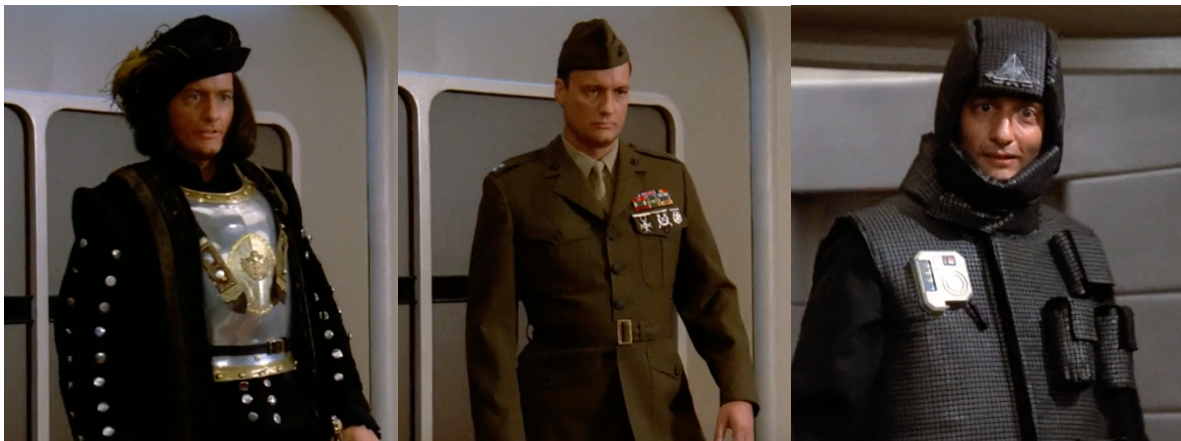


character development. The character goes through further changes during *Star Trek: Picard* which I will explore more in the fourth chapter.

### 3 Q in *Star Trek: The Next Generation*

#### 3.1 Flamboyant villain

Q in his first appearance in the pilot episode “Encounter at Farpoint” of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* is mysterious, dangerous and undeniably camp. The first time we see him, he is dressed in Elizabethan era clothing while speaking in archaic English. He waltzes around the bridge of the starship as if he was an actor in a play, dominating the space. He changes his clothing two times in the scene, showing three eras of humanity. Shown in picture 2, he first changes into a 20<sup>th</sup> century US Navy officer and then into the uniform of a 21<sup>st</sup> century soldier. This is an attempt to portray the savage history of humanity. The Q continuum is sure that humanity continues to be a “savage child race” in the 24<sup>th</sup> century despite Captain Picard insisting that humanity has evolved from needless violence.



Picture 2; (a-c) Q dressed up in clothing of different eras in “Encounter at Farpoint”

Soon the senior crew of the Enterprise are transported into a postapocalyptic 21<sup>st</sup> century court room. The scenes in the courtroom mark one of the more iconic looks of Q. In these scenes Q is dressed in red and black flamboyant judge’s robes, controlling the rabid crowd with the wave of his hands. He is domineering, with quickly changing moods rabidly going from amused to furious. These quick changes between extreme feelings as well as the flamboyant use of expressions, body language and voice are heavily linked to the essence of

camp where exaggeration is one of the key characteristics <sup>34</sup>. Picture 3 shows Q in his judge's robes, sitting on his throne, his legs slightly crossed. His face has a hint of makeup with dark eyeshadow and grey lipstick.

Q's controlled behaviour, his way of sitting, his expressions and his dramatic hand movements while wearing the billowy robes are similar to the imagery of late 1990s Disney villains such as Judge Claude Frollo from *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1996) and Hades from *Hercules* (1997). Both Judge Frollo and Hades are often associated with the trope of a flamboyant villain with their more feminine body language and physicality. <sup>35</sup> This kind of physicality is also common in Q, who can often be seen sitting cross-legged while also talking with his hands in an effeminate way.



Picture 3: Q in his judge's robes judging Captain Picard in "Encounter at Farpoint"

Q is by no means the only example of a flamboyant villain. Flamboyant villains have been the focus of a fair amount of research, especially in terms of children's animated films or television series <sup>36</sup>. Although this does not mean that these types of villains only exist in children's media as they can be seen in films such as *Skyfall* (2012), where the male

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<sup>34</sup> Sontag 1963, 4.

<sup>35</sup> Li-Vollmer & LaPointe 2003, 99–101.

<sup>36</sup> See Li-Vollmer & LaPointe 2003 which focuses on flamboyant Disney villains.

antagonist Raoul Silva teases the captured James Bond using homoerotic undertones<sup>37</sup>. Characters and moments like these can blur the line between queerness and villainy. At the same time the theatrics of a flamboyant villain can also make especially a male villain seem less threatening. This, of course, is tightly linked into sexism, as flamboyant or effeminate men can be seen as “lesser men” closer to women than “real men”, and thus, less valuable.<sup>38</sup>

As the way one performs their gender is one of the more visually obvious characteristics in a person, it can be used to judge people’s “value”. This is especially apparent in more heteronormative worlds, where gender is clearly divided into masculinity and femininity. While people can judge others by how “successful” they are in their performance of gender, a person’s gender portrayal can also influence opinions on for example, a person’s morality and social acceptability.<sup>39</sup> While one would think that the 24<sup>th</sup> century world of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* would have gotten past a strict gender binary, the existence of it is strong both in the examples I gave in the previous chapter, but also in the occupations of the main characters. While the main male characters can be found in a wide array of different occupations, the two main female characters work as a physician and a counsellor.

Especially Q’s first appearances in the first two seasons of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* fit the trope of a flamboyant villain well. As the series was finding its feet, so was Q’s character. *Star Trek: The Next Generation* had a rocky first few seasons, which can be seen in both the ratings the earlier seasons have gotten, and in the fact that almost everyone in the series’ writing staff had either quit or been fired<sup>40</sup>. Although Q’s character developed as the series went on, his body language and physicality were strong from the start. Q’s facial expressions, tone of voice and body language are all exaggerated, fitting the trope of camp that I will explore more in the next part of this chapter.

Q’s more villainous side is most evident in the season two episode “Q Who”, where his actions seem purely self-motivated. The episode starts with Picard walking down the corridors of the Enterprise, when suddenly he finds himself in a small space shuttle alone with Q, unable to contact the Enterprise. The scenes inside the shuttle have a tension that Atara

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<sup>37</sup> Hester 2019, 29–30.

<sup>38</sup> Li-Vollmer & LaPointe 2003, 89.

<sup>39</sup> Li-Vollmer & LaPointe 2003, 91.

<sup>40</sup> Britt 2022, 248 (epub).

Stein in her essay “Minding One’s P’s and Q’s” even suggests give a threat of a possible rape<sup>41</sup>. While Q and Picard have shared spats that became characteristic to the characters’ interactions, “Q Who” introduces even stronger homoerotic tension with the forced proximity of the shuttle craft paired with the dramatic finish of the episode, where during a life-and-death situation Picard has to beg Q for help, telling the entity that he (Picard) needs Q. As soon as Picard declares his need for Q, Q immediately helps him.



*Picture 4: Q and Captain Picard in "Q Who"*

At the start of the episode after Picard arrives onto the shuttle, Q notices that Picard’s uniform has a stain from a drink that a crewmember spilled on him. Q chastises Picard and then cleans the uniform by stroking his hand down Picard’s chest and stomach. Later when Picard sits in front of the control panels, trying to contact the Enterprise, Q circles around him telling Picard how the Enterprise will not even know where to search for him. Picard tells Q that keeping him prisoner will not make Picard speak to Q. This frustrates Q, who then gets increasingly close to Picard, whispering right into his ear that “it will in time”. This moment is pictured in picture 4. While Q has had a disregard for Picard’s personal space before, “Q Who” raises the tensions even higher.

This kind of tension intrigued me and the shuttle scene was the scene that first raised my interest in exploring this topic. The tension and danger in the scene are something that leave a lot of space for homoerotic interpretations, as it clearly did based on the amount of fanfiction

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<sup>41</sup> Stein 1998.

that has been created surrounding the characters from the 1990s onwards, that especially in the beginning, had strong domination/submission themes often inspired by the events of the series itself<sup>42</sup>. Erotic undertones between the male hero and the male villain are not unique to the scene between Picard and Q and can be seen for example in the previously mentioned scene between James Bond and Raoul Silva in *Skyfall*. It should be noted that in the case of *Skyfall*, the erotic undertones are even more apparent, with clear sexual innuendo and Silva touching Bond's bare chest.

Q in his performance especially as an antagonist jumps between masculinity and femininity. As mentioned before, although his body language can often be flamboyant and effeminate, the immense power imbalance between him and the crew of USS Enterprise and Captain Picard in particular makes the character dangerous, threatening and dominant. Such traits, especially aggression and domination are ones often stereotypically associated with masculinity<sup>43</sup>. The choice of actor is decidedly masculine and imposing, as Q is often the tallest character in a scene with a traditionally masculine stocky build. The flamboyancy and effeminacy are also not present in the character's visual appearance sans the slight makeup in his judge costume, as Q's hair is often styled to emphasise his traditionally masculine widow's peak.

### 3.2 Camping on board the Enterprise

Besides his more villainous role in the series, Q's character is, as previously mentioned, dominated by campness. Although one could argue that *Star Trek* in itself is camp, with its over the top alien worlds and melodramatic plotlines, and especially in terms of its older forms, dated special effects.

Throughout *Star Trek: The Next Generation* and partly in *Star Trek: Picard* Q always stands out. His energy is always exaggerated, his voice is melodious, his expressions outrageously expressive and his body language flamboyant. Q does not just sit on a chair, he poses himself on it, usually laying his feet on a table. This kind of body language is shown on picture 5, where Q is shown lounging on the bridge of the USS Enterprise.

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<sup>42</sup> Stein 1998.

<sup>43</sup> Balirano & Baker 2018, 2.



Picture 5: Q laying on the bridge of the USS Enterprise in "Q Who"

When reading Sontag's "Notes on Camp", it seems as if the essay is listing Q's characteristics. Sontag theorises that camp is only able to exist in affluent societies and in the end, what could be more affluent than an immortal and omnipotent society? <sup>44</sup>

As the series progresses, although Q's appearances are still usually characterised by the chaos he brings, he loses most of his villainous edge. While he still causes chaos and danger to the crew of the Enterprise, it is not born out of pure spite, but is born out of Q's wish to either help or teach the Enterprise crew (mostly Captain Picard) in his own way. Camp lives outside the traditional sense of good and bad, outside our own morality and so does Q <sup>45</sup>.

Especially the season three episode "Deja Q" deepens Q's character to be more three dimensional. In the episode, as a punishment for the chaos he has caused, the continuum decides to turn Q mortal. Q decides to be turned into a human and be dropped at the bridge of the USS Enterprise. Q arrives, suspended in air, completely naked before dropping on the floor, grinning.

Q finds his experience as a human to be more challenging than he might have previously thought, gaining a deeper understanding of humanity and mortality. At the end of the episode, although he finds the experience of being a human dreadful, he is willing to die to

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<sup>44</sup> Sontag 1964, 11.

<sup>45</sup> Sontag 1964, 9.

save the crew of the Enterprise, showing an unprecedented amount of care. As a reward for his unselfish actions, the Q continuum decides to give Q's powers back to him, an action which he flamboyantly celebrates by appearing on the bridge of the USS Enterprise with a Mariachi band playing, much to Picard's chagrin.

Despite the slight character development that the brief stint as a human brought to Q, Q is still shown mostly through comedic and camp lenses. His complaints during his time as a human are overblown, from complaining about the colours of the clothes he was given to his current position as a "lowly" human. This continues the theme of exaggeration that is prevalent in camp. After his time as a human, Q continues occasionally appearing in the series, although despite his newfound (and lost) humanity, he goes back to being a menace at least in the eyes of Captain Picard and the crew of the Enterprise.

### 3.3 Relationship with Jean-Luc Picard

*"Q's interest in you has always been very similar to that of a master and his beloved pet"* Commander Data on Q's interest on Picard in the episode "All Good Things..."

The series finale finds the senior staff discussing Q's latest appearance and his interest in Captain Picard. In the final episode Picard finds himself travelling between three different times; the present, the past (moments before the USS Enterprise left for her voyage seven years ago) and the future (decades after the events of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*). The Q continuum has put humanity on yet another trial, where Q again is the judge. This time the challenge is only Picard's, who is supposed to save humanity from extinction although he has no idea how to do so.

Compared to how Q acted during the first trial by the Q continuum in the series pilot, Q shows a considerable amount of care and empathy towards Picard and humanity as a whole. While he continues to be sarcastic and sometimes mocking, near the end of the episode it's revealed that during the trial he had been constantly helping Picard by giving him hints, saying that while the rest of the Q continuum did not believe in Picard, Q did.

Q's relationship with Captain Picard was for me one of the most interesting parts of the character. While Picard is the serious, often distant captain of the Federation's flagship, Q is the opposite of him in his flamboyancy and campiness. The actor of Captain Picard, Sir

Patrick Stewart seems to agree with me as he has previously talked about his interest in the idea of Q being the other aspect of Picard. Stewart also mentioned in the same interview that he himself thought that Q indeed was gay.<sup>46</sup> Atara Stein's essay also notes that when asked, John de Lancie, Q's actor, has also been open to a queer reading of Q, calling the character "bispecial" as a nod to the Q continuum's evolved stage of being.<sup>47</sup>

As I was doing close reading for this thesis, a thing I quickly noticed was how Q's attention almost always was on Picard. Even if other characters talked to him, he would usually react through Picard. Q's nickname for Picard "Mon Capitaine" (French for "my captain") also portrays the near possessiveness Q has for Picard while also being an example of the teasing relationship between the characters (at least from Q's side) as the nickname references Picard's French origins.



Picture 6: Q and Picard in Picard's quarters at night in "Qpid"

In the season 4 episode "Qpid" Q puts the senior crew of the USS Enterprise into a *Robin Hood* story, to help Captain Picard understand his feelings towards the morally gray archeologist Vash. When Q first discovers their relationship, he mocks Picard for having a weakness like that, while also mentioning that if he had known about this particular weakness for women, he would have appeared to Picard as a female. This scene is pictured in picture 6.

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<sup>46</sup> Minkowitz 1995.

<sup>47</sup> Stein 1998.



This casual comment shows the flexibility of gender and the performance of gender that the Q continuum most likely has. Why in the end, would an omnipotent being that is capable of any form possible, restrict themselves to only one gender? As Annamarie Jagose said, queerness is something that has no interest in consolidating or stabilizing itself<sup>48</sup>. Q in his comment about Vash is also comparing himself to a character who is having a romantic and sexual relationship with Picard. Later in the episode Vash herself challenges Picard by telling him that she and Q are very similar when Picard questions Vash's interest in joining Q on travelling the universe.

The queer potential between Picard and Q was not something only seen by fans or academics, but also something that the cast and crew was aware of. Sir Patrick Stewart, who played Captain Picard has received the theme positively<sup>49</sup>, while Ronald D. Moore, a writer and producer behind multiple episodes of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* has openly spoken about the writers' belief in Q being in love with Captain Picard<sup>50</sup>.

In the season 6 episode "Tapestry" Q brings Picard back in time after Picard has been mortally injured to give Picard a chance to change a major event from his youth that he regrets. In the episode Picard and Q are friendly, with Picard being willing to give Q intimate details from his life, such as his romantic affairs from his youth.

The most visually queer moment from the episode came from a scene pictured in picture 7, where after Picard spent a night with a woman from his past, Q is the one to wake him up in the morning. Q wakes Picard up by stroking his ear and when Picard turns around, Q greets him with "Morning darling". While Picard is first annoyed at this, the two of them end up having a friendly conversation, a far cry from their previous antagonism earlier in the series.

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<sup>48</sup> Jagose 1996, 131.

<sup>49</sup> Minkowitz 1995.

<sup>50</sup> Holmstrom 2022, 252-253 (epub).



Picture 7: “Morning darling”, Q and Picard in bed in "Tapestry"

Q and Picard share a fascinating relationship that blurs the line between comradeship and antagonism. Despite the changing atmosphere between the characters and the situations they are in, what does not change is Q’s fascination with Picard. Based on the scenes explored in this thesis, I would disagree with Commander Data’s analysis of the relationship between Picard and Q being one of a dog and its master as the relationship is full of implications of a sexual and romantic nature.

## 4 Q in *Star Trek: Picard*

### 4.1 A dying god

Q appears in the second season of *Star Trek: Picard*, back again to teach Picard a lesson. Picard has decided to self-destruct a starship he’s on due to the hostile alien race Borg boarding the ship. As the ship starts to explode, Picard suddenly finds himself back in his home in France. Picard wonders aloud what is going on, to which Q, still unseen, answers to Picard’s displeasure and shock. When Picard turns around, he sees Q, still looking as he did over 30 years ago. When seeing how Picard has aged between their meetings, Q ages himself so that they’re “even”.

Q tells Picard that he has transported him into an alternative future, where instead of the peaceful Federation, humanity was now controlling the imperialistic, colonial force called “Confederation of Earth”. In this alternative universe Picard is a famous general of the confederation’s space force, with a trophy room in his house full of trophies from different alien species he has killed. The pacifistic Picard is understandably shocked at this but refuses Q’s help to get out of the situation that Q himself has created.

The reason for Q's appearance in *Star Trek: Picard* remains a mystery for most of the season, although the viewers, alongside Picard, notice that something is wrong with him. Compared to the flamboyant, arrogant, and loud Q, the character we see in the series is only a husk of the entity. Although Q still has the sarcastic sense of humour and expressive facial expressions, he seems more on edge and weary.

It is important to understand the major change television industry has gone through between the end of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* and the start of *Star Trek: Picard*. While *Star Trek: The Next Generation* was a syndicated series<sup>51</sup>, with storylines contained in single or sometimes two, episodes, *Star Trek: Picard* was shown on a streaming service and had season-long arcs.

Later in the season it is revealed that Q appears to be dying. As Qs have thought to be immortal Q is shocked when he realises his powers are fading. Q's newfound mortality brings out more vulnerable parts of him and he is seen losing control of situations in ways the audience has not seen before. In the episode "Penance" after Picard agitates Q, Q slaps Picard in frustration. While Q had previously threatened characters with violence and even death, sometimes having been the cause for physical harm and death, Q had never been physically violent on screen.

The Q that appears in *Star Trek: Picard* could almost seem like a completely new character if it wasn't for the characteristic facial expressions and voice intonations. Compared to the campy entity seen on *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, this Q seems defeated and melancholy. This can be explained by viewing camp through the lens of camp being a story celebrating success despite one's circumstances as explored by Michael T. Schuyler in his doctoral dissertation about camp<sup>52</sup>. But as there is simply no success or celebration for Q to have, the entity seems to have given up.

As I explored in the previous chapter, camp appears in affluent societies. By utilising this idea, we could presume that the reason why the characteristic camp attitude of Q is not present in *Star Trek: Picard* is because the affluency (in this case the omnipotence and

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<sup>51</sup> In syndication a series is sold to multiple television stations and was not shown on a specific television network.

<sup>52</sup> Schuyler 2011, 23.

immortality of the Q) needed for camp simply is not there anymore. While the Q in *Star Trek: The Next Generation* was an omnipotent being with seemingly no limits, the Q we see in *Star Trek: Picard* is a being who is aware of his draining powers and imminent death.

#### 4.2 Relationship with Jean-Luc Picard continued

The relationship between Q and Jean-Luc Picard is even more central to the story in *Star Trek: Picard*, as the show's form gives more time to explore characters compared to the "alien of the week" form of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, in which Picard was only one of the main characters.

*Star Trek: Picard* gives Q space to feel and be vulnerable. While Q's more vulnerable moments were used as comedic relief in *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (such as his panic about human experiences in "Deja Q"), this time they are taken seriously. This gives an opportunity to portray something new in the relationship between Q and Jean-Luc Picard. While their interactions during the start of the season do not stray from the mould *Star Trek: The Next Generation* had created, with the characters characteristically bickering, the final episode of the season, "Farewell" shows an amount of emotional vulnerability in Q that had not been shown before. *Star Trek: Picard* lets Q open honest and open to Picard.



Picture 8: "You matter to me" Q touching Picard's face in "Farewell"

Q's last conversations with Picard are meaningful and heartfelt, with Q accepting his fate and telling Picard about his feelings. In one of his last scenes Q talks about the feelings of loneliness and the realisation that he is going to die alone, not wanting that for Picard, who

has been alienating himself from people around him. Q confesses that Picard matters to him and that he has always been one of Q's favourites. While there is not a straightforward confession of love, the emotional weight of the scene is heavy, with some deeming the line "you matter to me" to be a confession of love<sup>53</sup>. Admittedly the moment, which is shown in figure 8, paired with Q gently touching Picard's face does lend itself to such an interpretation.

A scene later, as Q and Picard bid each other farewell, they share their first and final embrace as pictured in picture 9, after which Q uses the last of his powers to send Picard and his friends back to their own time. As one of Picard's friends decides to stay in the past, Q is able to resurrect one of their recently fallen friends. Q helping Picard while knowing that using his powers so significantly would most likely mean his death is deeply meaningful, especially considering the character's previous immaturity and selfishness. With tears in his eyes, Q looks at Picard as he snaps his fingers, transporting Picard and his friends back to their own time.



*Picture 9: Q and Picard embracing in "Farewell"*

As the portrayal of older queer people is still comparatively minimal in television even in the 2020s, finding possible representation of older queer people is important<sup>54</sup>. This is also due to

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<sup>53</sup> Opie 2022.

<sup>54</sup> GLAAD's (Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation) yearly television report "Where We are on TV" 2022-2023 report notes the lack of stories about older queer people. GLAAD 2023, 11.

the fact that people 50 years and older are generally less represented in media due to ageism and the misbelief that older people do not have or enjoy sex <sup>55</sup>.

Although if we were to look at Q through in-universe lenses, the character is neither male nor “older” in the human sense. Nonetheless, what I think is more important is what we as the audience see and how we comprehend it. In this way just the visual imagery of two elderly men embracing and openly showing affection can be significant. Although one could criticise the vagueness of Q’s confession and compare it to the “representation” that was previously seen in *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, where the audience did not have to see queerness or allusions to it if they did not want to. When asked about Q’s feelings for Picard, Akiva Goldsman, the executive producer of *Star Trek: Picard* remained quite vague when describing the kind of love Q had for Picard, saying that, “In his own god-like way, Q loved him” <sup>56</sup>.

## 5 Conclusion

*“Simple name. For a complicated being” Q in “The Last Generation” in Star Trek: Picard*

Q, just like television and queer representation, has gone through significant changes throughout the years. From a flamboyant villain to a campy comedic relief with antagonistic moments to finally a vulnerable entity facing mortality, Q has changed and evolved as a character throughout the years while retaining the focal characteristics of himself. As shown in this thesis, Q embodies many characteristics and tropes often associated with queerness, even though both the character and the characteristics have changed during the almost thirty years that has passed between the series I analysed in this thesis.

Based on everything I have introduced in this thesis, could one make the assumption that Q, especially in terms of his flirtatious interactions with Captain Picard, is queer? While we cannot know what the Q as a species think of gender and sexuality, Q in his appearances is visually a male character whose main point of interest is the male Captain Picard. While we cannot put exact labels on him, his appearances have a clear connection with the popular

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<sup>55</sup> Tommaso 2018, 88.

<sup>56</sup> Kelley 2022.

depiction and tropes surrounding queerness which give the audience the possibility to read him as queer. While there never was anything explicit in a romantic or sexual sense between Picard and Q, it is clear that to fully understand Q as a character it is important to acknowledge his relationship with Picard and the significance that it holds.

Science fiction can be a great tool to create queer stories, as the genre often involves species and cultures different from our own. There is a high chance that these species and cultures could involve aspects that we humans categorise as queer. At the same time, I fear that there is a danger of using alien queerness to shy away from what would be seen as explicitly queer. Q was allowed to love Picard in his “own god-like way”, but is he allowed to love him in a way that is queer to us? Why could Q as a character flirt with human males, be flamboyant and talk about the possibility of being a woman, but a human male character like that would have been an impossibility in 1990s *Star Trek*?

The sad truth is that as utopian and developed a possible futuristic world is, it will be created in a world full of our own prejudices and ideals. Queerness in a masculine-presenting character could be shown through an omnipotent and immortal being, but as shown in chapter 2, even showing two human males holding hands or loving each other was an impossibility in 1990s *Star Trek*. Luckily queer representation has come a far way since that, as modern *Star Trek* across the whole franchise, including *Star Trek: Picard*, has multiple openly queer (human) characters. But in the long run, who knows if in thirty years’ time we look back on the representation of 2020s with disappointment? Only time will tell.

There are multiple ways future research could be done on queerness in *Star Trek*, and in science fiction in general. As I have watched different *Star Trek* series during my time working on this thesis, I have come across multiple characters and storylines that have a lot of queer potential. I have thought of potentially exploring the topic of queerness in *Star Trek* more widely in my future master’s thesis, as there is more than enough material for that. Queer people exist here on Earth, so why could they not in space?

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**Pictures:** (All links checked on 15.5.2024)

Picture 1: Screenshots from The Roddenberry Archive website. Picture a)

<https://roddenberry.x.io/2267-uss-enterprise-ncc-1701/> Picture b)

<https://roddenberry.x.io/2370-uss-enterprise-ncc-1701-d/?view=Main> Picture c)

<https://roddenberry.x.io/2401-uss-enterprise-ncc-1701-g-launched/>

Picture 2: Screenshots from the episode “Encounter at Farpoint” *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. Timestamp: picture a) 7:30 picture b) 7:33 picture c) 8:38

Picture 3: Screenshot from the episode “Encounter at Farpoint” *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. Timestamp: 28:04

Picture 4: Screenshot from the episode “Q Who” *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. Timestamp: 8:26

Picture 5: Screenshot from the episode “Q Who” *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. Timestamp: 8:40

Picture 6: Screenshot from the episode “Qpid” *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. Timestamp: 19:35

Picture 7: Screenshots from the episode “Tapestry” *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. Timestamps: a) 27:58 b) 28:05

Picture 8: Screenshot from the episode “Farewell” *Star Trek: Picard*. Timestamp: 30:13

Picture 9: Screenshot from the episode “Farewell” *Star Trek: Picard*. Timestamp: 33:48

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