

## **Sparse rambling about: The origins of slash**

by mazaher

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Being a reprise of a discussion I've been having by email with athens7 about friendship, intimacy and sex in the late Victorian era, in view of a J&P story we are writing + of a friends-locked discussion about porn- and gen-fanfiction, hosted by ewin at <http://ewinfic.livejournal.com/199320.html> + of The Famous Roddenberry's Admission + of The (equally) Famous Kirk's Not-Quite-Denial.

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Let me begin with an imo admirable piece of fiction by an author to be named later. The omissions are minor, and strictly limited to hints about the time and place of the action. It is a conversation between two male characters, let's call them X and Y, and it goes like this:

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X.

(...)

A stranger's presence can alone excuse  
This forced and measured tone. Are we not brothers?  
In future, let this puppet-play of rank  
Be banished from our friendship. Think that we  
Had met at some gay masking festival,  
Thou in the habit of a slave, and I  
Robed, for a jest, in the imperial purple.  
Throughout the revel we respect the cheat,  
And play our parts with sportive earnestness,  
Tripping it gayly with the merry throng;  
But should thy X beckon through his mask,  
Thou'dst press his hand in silence as he passed,  
And we should be as one.

Y.

The dream's divine!  
But are you sure that it will last forever?  
Is X, then, so certain of himself  
As to despise the charms of boundless sway?  
A day will come—an all-important day—  
When this heroic mind—I warn you now—  
Will sink o'erwhelmed by too severe a test.  
(...) How vast  
The gulf that yawns betwixt mankind and him—  
A god to-day, who yesterday was man!  
Steeled to all human weakness—to the voice  
Of heavenly duty deaf. Humanity—  
To-day a word of import in his ear—  
Barters itself, and grovels 'mid the throng  
Of gaping parasites; his sympathy  
For human woe is turned to cold neglect,  
His virtue sunk in loose voluptuous joys.  
(...)

X.

Tearful and true,

Thy portraiture of monarchs. Yes—thou'rt right,  
But 'tis their lusts that thus corrupt their hearts,  
And hurry them to vice. (...)  
What could unseat my Y from my heart,  
If woman fail to do it?

Y.

I, myself!  
Say, could I love you, X, warm as now,  
If I must fear you?

X.

That will never be.  
What need hast thou of me? What cause hast thou  
To stoop thy knee, a suppliant at the throne?  
Does gold allure thee? Thou'rt a richer subject  
Than I shall be a king! Dost covet honors?  
E'en in thy youth, fame's brimming chalice stood  
Full in thy grasp—thou flung'st the toy away.  
Which of us, then, must be the other's debtor,  
And which the creditor? Thou standest mute.  
Dost tremble for the trial? Art thou, then,  
Uncertain of thyself?

Y.

X, I yield!  
Here is my band.

X.

Is it mine own?

Y.

Forever—  
In the most pregnant meaning of the word!

(...)

X.

And when round my unguarded heart  
The serpent flattery winds its subtle coil,  
Should e'er these eyes of mine forget the tears  
They once were wont to shed; or should these ears  
Be closed to mercy's plea,—say, wilt thou, then,  
The fearless guardian of my virtue, throw  
Thine iron grasp upon me, and call up  
My genius by its mighty name?

Y.

I will.

X.

And now one other favor let me beg.  
Do call me thou! Long have I envied this  
Dear privilege of friendship to thine equals.  
The brother's thou beguiles my ear, my heart,  
With sweet suggestions of equality.  
Nay, no reply:—I guess what thou wouldst say—  
To thee this seems a trifle—but to me,

(...) 'tis much. Say, wilt thou be  
A brother to me?

Y.

Yes; thy brother, yes!

X.

Now (...) my fears are at an end.  
Thus, arm-in-arm with thee, I dare defy  
The universal world into the lists.

[Exeunt.

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Now tell me if (apart from the blank verse) it doesn't sound for all the world like something out of one among the best K/S stories.

But it's not K/S and it's not fanfiction: it's Friedrich Schiller's *Don Carlos* (1787), act I, scene IX, as translated into English in 1847 by R. Dillon Boylan.

So, is it fiction? yes.

Is it slash? no, or at least... \*not at the time\*.

Nowadays, I believe none of us has problems reading it as slash, or pre-slash, or at the very least as sublimated/displaced slash.

The last two lines are even quoted by Konrad Lorenz, *Er redete mit dem Vieh, den Vögeln und den Fischen* (1949, translated as *King Solomon's Ring*, 1952) as a fitting verbalization for the nature and significance of life-long partnerships in the species *Anser anser*, i.e. wild or "cinder" goose.

In fact, this post is here because I was doing research for the J&P story I mentioned; I remembered the Schiller quote, which I needed as an *explicit*; and I looked it up.

I found much more than I was searching for: Lorenz actually adds that although the majority of permanent, intimate personal relationship between geese are heterosexual, homosexual bonds are neither rare nor socially or ecologically unsuccessful, for reasons discussed in detail in the book.

I had read *Don Carlos* in the past (I \*love\* Schiller), but I had never realized before that the lines Lorenz quotes are said by a male to another male =)

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Fast-forward to Gene Roddenberry's famous interview, occasioned by, and reported in, William Shatner's autobiography *Where No Man... The Authorized Biography of William Shatner*, New York: Ace Books, 1979, pp. 147-148:

Interviewer: "There's a great deal of writing in the Star Trek movement which compares the relationship between Alexander The Great and Hephaestion to the relationship between Kirk and Spock focusing on the closeness of the friendship, the feeling that they would die for one another."

Roddenberry: "Yes, there's certainly some of that -- certainly with love overtones. Deep love. The only difference being, the Greek ideal-- we never suggested in the series-- physical love between the two. But it's the-- we certainly had the feeling that the affection was sufficient for that, if that were the particular style of the 23rd century."

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Put the two together and tell me what you think.

My own idea is this:

1-- "The particular style" of 1787 (and for a long time afterwards) was to leave sex well out of conversation as well as out of literary or theatrical representation; as a consequence, even such a frank declaration of reciprocal love as we find in *Don Carlos* did not make people immediately think about the possibility of sexual acts between the characters. (Authors managed to get away with things which would probably raise a few eyebrows today). I suspect that one reason was the then creeping, reciprocal alienation between social roles, intimacy, and sex. Personal choices had less influence than they have today in shaping lives, so sex mates (more or less occasional), official spouses, and life-long partners, were not always or necessarily the same person(s).

2-- "The particular style" of the present time (let's say, since roughly after the '60) is instead to very naturally factor sex in when considering both verbal and physical exchanges between people who are in friendly relationships with each other.

I may add that this seems to happen more or less universally if the relationship takes place between partners of different sex who are not related by blood; there remains a disparity of attitudes if the partners are both male (not everybody is equally prone to take into account that they may be lovers); and some residual resistance remains if they are both female, as women traditionally enjoy more leeway in expressing affection for each other --sex not being implied-- than males have, or used to have.

(Note that I am not making reference to \*opinions\* about different- or same-sex relationships, but only to the measure in which such relationships may appear to exist to those who witness friendly exchanges. Also, I am not discussing here the relative ease with which sex is integrated today in social and personal interactions, in comparison to different epochs.)

So, yes, we are a little bit less sexually repressed than we were two hundred years ago; but most of all, we seem to suffer in a slightly lesser degree from sex-related selective blindness.

3-- If I project this trend onwards, and down to the 23rd century, what I find is: \*you bet\* a physical, sexual expression for affection will belong with "the particular style" of the times!

I am perhaps too optimistic, but I foresee that disparities in how different- and same-sex relationships are perceived will have by then disappeared, together with discrimination at every level, legal or otherwise.

Also, the persistent stigma against direct involvement of the body in the expression of one's personality and relationships will have been overcome at last, once and for all.

And the conviction will be widespread that sex is great, but it is not the whole of life, and LOVE is more important.

I don't know about you, but from where I am, the 23rd century looks like a hell of a good place to me.

4-- As for K/S in particular, as I see it, they both would consider abstaining from having sex on their private time off-duty as an illogical waste, just as it would be a waste to abstain from their chess matches or sparring practice... or, reversely, as it would be illogical to waste time thinking about sex when some more pressing concern is at hand, like a Klingon attack or -- Scott forbid-- an engine failure.

In any case, their \*love\* doesn't depend on the opportunity to have sex, or the lack of it. It does feed on it, but then true love has a reputation for feeding on anything =)

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There is one more element to consider: The (equally) Famous Kirk's Not-Quite-Denial, reported in the *Editor's note* by Gene Roddenberry, in the novel *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* (1979), p. 22:

*"I was never aware of this 'lovers' rumor, although I have been told that Spock encountered it several times. Apparently, he had always dismissed it with his characteristic lifting of his right eyebrow, which usually connoted some combination of surprise, disbelief, and/or annoyance.*

*As for myself... I have always found my best gratification in that creature called woman. Also, I would not like to be thought of as being so foolish that I would select a love partner who came into sexual heat only once every seven years."*

Much has been written about the words "best gratification"; for an exhaustive web library of references, about this particular topic and about K/S in general, visit The Kirk/Spock Meta Project at <http://mirroreuler.dreamwidth.org/14711.html>.

What I wish to point out here is a biological consideration. To wit, "once every seven years" doesn't even come near to being enough to sustain a species, much less one evolved in an especially hard environment.

Just as a predator can't afford to start on a hunt only when it is on the brink of starvation, so every species needs to evolve means to take advantage of favorable opportunities for reproduction, or they face the risk of sudden depletion and extinction in unfavorable ones. This basic energetical dynamics is even more stringent when the investment in reproduction is high (long pregnancies, slow-growing offspring...) and/or when the environment is hostile. The evolutionary development of a compelling periodical urge to mate like *pon farr* is not enough to solve the problem, as it only provides minimum emergency respite for the species as a whole. It is therefore logical to believe that, although *pon farr* represents a last evolutionary ditch for an ecologically fragile species, the ability to mate outside of it in fitting circumstances has not been bred out of the general population.

What would make the circumstances fitting?

A time of plentiful resources, and/or the presence of special assets helping to deal successfully with the environment.

The best asset for members of a social, long-lived species which counts on solidarity among individuals to overcome dearth, danger or other difficulties, is a close, strong interpersonal relationship, of which t'hy'la is the archetypal version.

QED.

K/S makes sense to me. A whole lot of sense, both from the cultural and the xenobiological pov...

End of rambling.

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image at <http://jean.michel.peers.oiseaux.net>