INTERGALACTIC HEROINES
LAND, BODY, AND SOUL IN STAR TREK VOYAGER
by SUSAN DE GAIA
Published in International Studies in Philosophy XXX: 1 (1998)

In its 30 years on television, Star Trek has been an important vehicle of American secular mythology, expressing collective American values, exploring through story possible consequences of ethical choices based on those values, and evolving in dialectical relation to changes in American culture and society. The series looks at concerns shared by many Americans, such as social justice, unity, and peace. As Star Trek has evolved in the new series, Voyager, gender and environmental concerns have come to the forefront. Environmental pollution has become a central concern, pointing to a contradiction between technology's potential to benefit humanity and its potential to destroy the environment on which we depend. Equal opportunity for women has been a concern in Star Trek's utopian vision from the start, but this feminism has only recently found adequate expression, in Voyager. In this paper, I look at Star Trek as an evolving form of the American frontier myth, concluding that Voyager's move toward both ecocentric and feminist ethics are mutually supporting hubs at the center of changes in Star Trek's ideal vision of American civilization.

I. American Mythology: the Frontier of Space

Star Trek is a story about the frontier of space and a descendant of the frontier myth. The original myth told in the folktales of Daniel Boone and others was a dream of unlimited expansion, and of conquest over the "non-human" other of animal, forest, and Indian. The myth spoke of the unlimited use of nature, positing an unlimited wilderness. This seemed plausible early in American history, but by the time Gene Roddenberry was creating Star Trek, the west had been won and there was very little wilderness left, except for the unknown regions of space. Star Trek brought the wilderness narrative of the frontier myth into the futuristic context of space travel and incorporated critiques of earlier America's imperialism and homogeneity, developing an expansion narrative of exploration without conquest.

Both Star Trek and the earlier frontier myth externalized evil. The frontier myth told of a Christian society united under God, with evil arising from the external sources of untamed

---

1 I believe a cultural syncretism exists in which viewers select shows according to their pre-existing values, and selectively experience certain aspects of the show with which they have affinity, in the process transforming the product into something of their own making. This "re-production," especially in the case of Star Trek, becomes part of the show itself as it is talked about among fans and new episodes are written, often by fans themselves. For theoretical background on consumers as producers, see Michel de Certeau (1984). For a discussion of Star Trek fandom as a special case for this kind of "re-production," see Constance Penley (1991).

2 The first Star Trek episode featured a woman as first officer, second only to the captain. That episode was rejected by the network, and only after women were placed in subordinated positions and changed into short skirts, was Star Trek allowed to go on the air.

forests, wild Indians, and demonic spirits, while in *Star Trek* it took the form of bad aliens. Evolutionary theory played an important role in *Star Trek*, though, positing external evil that is redeemable: bad aliens are simply unevolved, exhibiting such characteristics as unbridled capitalism and barbaric sexism, or evolved in means to power but, through too much arrogance, unevolved morally. In contrast, early Americans' belief in the devil made redeemability of even unevolved nature (both animate and inanimate) and Indians questionable. These views justified unlimited use of the land for mining and logging, gratuitous hunting, and the conquest of Native Americans, activities which were important features of the frontier myth. But in *Star Trek*, Roddenberry invented the Prime Directive, a rule against interfering with other cultures.

The Prime Directive expressed contemporary self-identification of America as culturally and racially diverse and capable of participation in a global community. It provided for interesting explorations of the tensions between diversity and cultural relativism. Although its characters often fought bad aliens, *Star Trek* envisioned a peaceful coexistence with friendly aliens and even portrayed a crew that integrated (good) aliens with humans in both work and marriage. Unity among the crew and the "United Federation of Planets" expressed a hope for peace and harmony within a diverse country, world, and universe.

The series began in 1966 with Captain Kirk in the lead, moved on to *The Next Generation* in 1987, with Captain Picard, and finally in 1995 went on to develop *Voyager*, led by Captain Janeway. The starship Enterprise of the first two series had a mission to explore strange new worlds. But in *Voyager*, the mission is to get home after being accidentally catapulted 75,000 light years from Earth. On the level of adventure, *Star Trek* explores the possible consequences of space travel: what if we can eventually travel to other planets, and what if when we get there we encounter alien species? On a deeper level, it is a contemporary myth with roots in earlier mythology that is expressed through symbolism and metaphor.

On the level of myth, space travel is a metaphor for the internal gaps between the perceived reality of life in this world and the ideal realm of our hopes and dreams. The direction of the Enterprise was ever outward, except for occasional trips to the homeworld. This outward movement was a metaphor for the utopian ideal of progress through ever greater technology, and for the capitalist economic system in general. In *Voyager*, there is a change in direction from outer space toward Earth. In my interpretation, this is a turn back from a utopian ideal that is beyond reality to a vision of hope lying within the reality of life as we know it, embodied and embedded in this world.

Despite its critique of sexism and racism, *Star Trek* failed, until *Voyager* was created, to give equal status and air time to women, just as it failed to fairly portray diversity and multiculturalism. Roddenberry had envisioned sexual as well as racial equality, but Hollywood

---

4 The first black man to take a permanent seat in *Star Trek*'s captain's chair was in the series *Deep Space Nine*. I have not included this series in my analysis of *Star Trek* as a descendant of the frontier myth because, rather than being centered on space travel, the series is set on a permanent space station.

5 I do not attempt an analysis of race in *Star Trek* in this paper, instead focusing primarily on the treatment of women and nature, although some discussion of race comes out of an analysis of essential female/human/animal associations in the character of B'elana Torres in Section II. However, I would note that in the original *Star Trek* and *The Next Generation* race and ethnicity were generally treated in a stereotypical and shallow manner, and that
and many television viewers were unprepared to fully accept the idea of women in positions of power over men. But, Rodenberry's dream that women would one day share the fruits of progress with men came to have meaning to enough Americans that equal opportunity for women was finally incorporated into this classic American myth, when Captain Kathryn Janeway was put in the lead in *Voyager*. And, soon after the series began, Janeway appointed another woman to a powerful position, making B'elana Torres chief engineer.

In addition to being the first *Star Trek* series to place a woman in the captain's chair and the first to cast a woman as chief engineer, *Voyager* was also the first *Star Trek* series to incorporate a new attitude shared by most Americans, environmental concern. *Voyager's* symbolism expresses this collective concern, while its explicit story lines, in episodes such as "Caretaker," take up a position in favor of environmental protection. By incorporating critiques of America's treatment of women and nature, *Voyager* takes the frontier myth into another stage of evolution. However, the ways in which this is achieved, by drawing on social and imaginary conventions, may be a double edged sword.

Myths are expressed through stories and symbols which draw on conventions of imagination and story telling. In some, cases this is a good thing. For example, the conventions of storytelling in science fiction leave room for exploration, speculation, and experimentation, bringing insight, invention, and new alternatives to light. In other cases, the use of conventions may be restrictive, particularly when the need to change requires new strategies. *Voyager* utilizes conventional images of women that are essentialist, that view women as the epitome of the biological and instinctual human being, a view that leads to the logical conclusion that we can get closer to nature through women's special connection to it. In *Voyager*, Captain Janeway and Lieutenant Torres bring us closer to nature, Janeway, by pointing to Earth and leading the way home to nature, and Torres, by bringing the human and non-human together.

*Voyager's* use of conventional images in its development of Janeway and Torres is atypical, however, for two basic reasons. First, because it is done in the context of the science fiction genre, which allows for greater possibilities for integration of various characteristics. Second, because it is done in conjunction with the integration of women into all areas of *Star Trek's* fictional social world, i.e., the restrictions on women's lives typically associated with the use of feminine stereotypes are eliminated.

---

there have been some interesting changes to their portrayal in *Voyager*. For an analysis of race in *Star Trek*, please see the work of Daniel Bernardi. I am indebted to Tara McPherson for suggesting Bernardi's work.

*Star Trek* did portray female captains and even admirals in the past, but these were never leading roles in the series. Rather, they were always short term, and in fact were often either killed off in the same episode in which they were introduced or were in conflict with male members of the main cast, such as Admiral Nicheav with Captain Picard.

Most Americans are concerned about the environment in one way or another, although they may fall on either side of the political divide, for or against protection.


The exception to this in *Voyager* is Kes. There are some problems with the character of Kes which should be addressed, though I cannot do so here. One question that might be asked is: If there is more than one type of woman in *Voyager*, are there two types that are
Star Trek is an evolving myth that expresses changing American attitudes and values. As our concerns with social and environmental justice change and are expressed through story in Star Trek, the frontier myth is transformed into a utopian vision of society in which adventure, scientific exploration, spirituality, and a healthy relation to nature might exist side by side and be shared equally by women and men alike. Although this is achieved through the use of conventional images, there are other factors at work in the development of Voyager's heroines which may play a role in the affect these images produce. My intention is not to defend the use of conventional feminine images and symbols, such as the ideal mother, but to discover how they are being used in Voyager to transform the myth.

II. Janeway and Torres

Voyager is the story of a journey homeward from the depths of outer space, led by Captain Janeway.¹⁰ I suggest that this journey is a metaphor for change from seeking distance to seeking closeness, a journey which, in our culture, seems appropriately led by a woman. Conventional images portray women as more associated with the body, i.e., more concerned with appearance and involved in activities like caring for the physical needs of others. Beliefs in essential feminine characteristics like emotionalism, intuition, and physicality support secondary associations of women with occupations like domesticity, food service, and health care on the one hand and prostitution and pornography on the other. In discourse, women are associated with animals (fox, cat) and with the land (fertile field, giver of sustenance). An important image that brings together women and land is Mother Earth, an association of the land with an ideal mother who is benevolent and selfless that may be symbolized by the whole earth image.

Today the whole earth image is used for a wide range of purposes. It is an image that cannot be trusted, says Yaakov Jerome Garb. In "Musings on Contemporary Earth Imagery," he notes that the whole earth image is "just as likely to appear above the desk of a physicist working on the design of nuclear weapons as above that of the director of a nonprofit environmental organization."¹¹ Some people now think of the whole earth as Gaia, in a reference to the "Gaia hypothesis" of James Lovelock and Lynn Margulis, which is a new scientific understanding of Earth as a living, breathing entity. Still others see Mother Earth as sacred ground insisting that an attitude of respect toward the earth is a moral requisite. Voyager uses both images, the caring mother and the whole earth, to call forth a new utopia in which women finally become central opposites (old and new, typical and atypical, for example)? Of interest in raising such questions, would be the fact that in Voyager's third season Kes is now changing both her narrative direction and her clothes.

¹⁰ The story of Voyager begins when an alien abducts the starship Voyager with her female captain and mixed crew, leaving them stranded 75,000 light years from home. The alien was left to care for a humanoid species, the Okampa, when his people, traveling through the galaxy, inadvertently destroyed their planet's biosphere. Now, he uses his technology to abduct people in an effort to procreate so he can leave his responsibility to another of his kind after he dies. But, he is not successful, and when he dies, Voyager is left stranded with no way to get home.

players in society and destruction of the environment becomes a central concern. Here, the whole earth image is used to aid the imagination of a journey home from outer space, a metaphor for the desire to return to right relations with our environment supported by the symbol of a beneficent mother, Captain Janeway.

Janeway is, in general, characteristically maternal in her attitude toward the crew. She is a symbolic figure who embodies the essential feminine associations of motherhood, home, and land. In the pilot episode, "Caretaker," Janeway tells Chakotay of her concerns for the crew after discovering they are stranded far from home. She remembers Ensign Harry Kim's mother calling her before they left on their mission, and in remembering that caring concern, Janeway takes on the role of substitute mother. This marks her from the start as a maternal figure, caring for all those stranded in the Delta quadrant under her command.

Mother and Earth are mutually supporting symbols, as each points toward the other. The crew looks to Captain Janeway to bring them home. And Janeway looks toward Earth, which remains forever in the foreground in Voyager, as the primary goal of captain and crew is to get home. As the bow of a ship points ahead, Janeway points toward Earth. She is like the lady figurine on the prow, bringing good fortune through benevolence, diplomacy, and protective concern. As she points to Earth, her desire to get there mediates the desire of the audience. She models the subject desiring the object, Earth, her femininity pointing to the instinctual need to return to home, place, community, and land where life emerges, is lived, and dies. In a scene in "Death Wish," Janeway is shown staring out the window longingly and lovingly toward Earth. Voyager has not come home, but the omnipotent alien, "Q," allows her to see Earth for a few seconds. Those few seconds provide a visual image of the mutuality of the two symbols, mother and Earth.

But, Janeway is not just a mother figure. She is also the person in charge. She leads, guides, advises, and commands her crew as well as caring for them as a mother would. Young women seek Captain Janeway's advice in matters of love and marriage, young men seek her advice in matters of religion and philosophy, and all depend on her strength and wisdom in a crisis. In "Sacred Ground," Janeway's role is made explicit. When the young Kes displease the spirits of an alien world and ends up in a coma, Janeway seeks a way to save her. A local story is told that in ancient times a similar thing happened to a boy. Because of his special status as king and father to the boy, the father was allowed to go through a special ritual to ask the spirits to save his son. Janeway cites this story as a precedent, claiming the same status toward Kes as the father/king toward his son. Through Janeway's status of substitute mother and captain, characteristics traditionally associated with the masculine, such as reason, strength, and power merge into the caring, intuitive, feminine, bringing both masculine and feminine into new associations.

Changes in gender associations are supported by male role reversals. For example, Neelix, Tuvok, and Harry Kim take on the roles respectively of domestic, nurturer, and young trainee. As women come to be recognized as capable of leadership, men are seen as capable of nurturing. We even see a new exploration of the physical aspects that might be associated with masculinity. For example, in "Ex Post Facto," Tom Paris goes through cycles of physical pain.

---

12 See for example, Kes in "Elogium."
13 See for example, Harry Kim in "Emanations."
and in "Emanations," Harry Kim temporarily experiences physical death in a scene that emphasizes the body as a source of existence in time and place.

Opposites merge more dramatically in Lieutenant B'elana Torres than in Janeway. *Star Trek*'s utopian vision typically explores evil through conflicts with alien outsiders. But it also looks at evil from within, exploring the tensions between the human potential for evil and the need to keep it in check. In *Voyager*, this takes the form of division within the crew, which is made up of both Starfleet officers and Maquis rebels-turned-Starfleet, as well as that of conflict within individuals. These are seen in the character of Torres, another heroic female character developed in *Voyager*, who is half human and half alien Klingon. While Janeway is a feminine woman who gains strength through her role and official position as captain, in Torres, a strong woman is created by incorporating the human with a stronger race, the Klingon, and by affiliation with an independent group. As a Maquis rebel who joined the Starfleet crew when they were stranded together in the Delta quadrant, Torres retains an aura of independence and a history of success against great odds.

In Torres, the two essences of human and alien represent opposite poles. The Klingon is portrayed as a dark, sexual, and aggressive race, while the human is portrayed as intelligent and peace loving. In the conflict between these two types, we can see telltale signs of three sets of essential opposites drawn from conventional images in our culture: masculine/feminine, dark/light race, and human/animal. The alien or animal (dark) side has been traditionally associated with the feminine as it was understood to be irrational and in need of male (superior racial) control.\textsuperscript{14}

In Torres, the conflict between the evil outsider and the human insider has been internalized to portray the inner conflict between good and evil, human and animal, light vs. dark-skin, pure vs. uncontrolled female sexuality. One aspect of this conflict is dealt with in a scene that is pure science fiction fantasy, when a mad alien scientist separates the human part of Torres from her Klingon part. In this scene, the two halves of Torres—aggressive Klingon and intelligent human—now separately embodied, are in dialogue:

Torres (Klingon): So you're what's left over when all the Klingon DNA is taken out.

Torres (human): Apparently.

Torres (Klingon): If I hadn't come along were you just going to waste away in that prison camp until they killed you for your body parts? Were you too frightened to act?

Torres (human): I was looking for a way to escape.

Torres (Klingon): Look! I'll show you the way to escape. This (holds up a fist), and this (in other hand, holds up weapon).

\textsuperscript{14} Through this analysis, we can see how the association of race with aggression and lack of reason supports an attitude of fear and hatred toward black men in our society, and justifies the belief that they should be kept under control, just as the feminine (vulnerable, scared) feelings are supposed to be repressed and women suppressed, and how in black women, all of these conditions are combined.
Torres (human): That's the way you respond to everything, isn't it. If it doesn't work, hit it. If it's in your way, knock it down . . .

Torres (Klingon): Can't you even admit that you won't be able to get out of here without me?

Torres (human): I don't know that I'll be able to get out of here with you. Brute force isn't going to do it.

Torres (Klingon): Maybe not. Maybe we'll die in the attempt. But at least it's better than sitting here like frightened Tika cats.

Torres (human): There you go again. Out of control. Just leaping into action before you think things through.\(^{15}\)

This dialogue shows Torres's alien Klingon half representing the animalistic, non-reasoning aspects of human being in conflict with its reasoning side. In the end, though, both sides recognize their need for each other. One advantage of aggression is that it provides strength when force becomes necessary, and one advantage of reason is that it can create opportunities to avoid the need to fight. Together, the whole is greater than its parts.

Through the drama of an internal conflict, diversity is valued and the ability to overcome evil is dramatized without creating absolute differences between types. The usual portrayals of conflict show a pure, true, good, superior self opposing evil projected onto an externalized alien, racial, or gendered other. In Voyager, the merging of aspects typically associated with one or another side of opposite poles allows the creation of new images to evolve from conventional ones. In Torres, for example, the blending of Klingon strength with human intelligence allows the image of a strong, intelligent woman to emerge.

In both Janeway and Torres we find new images of women as powerful, yet feminine. Instead of the conventionally feminine women who are always in need of rescuing, these new women are active and important members of the crew. In Torres, passion and reason are brought together to create a passionate yet moral woman. She is both human and animal, vulnerable and strong, instinctual and rational. Similarly, as idealized mother and captain, Janeway is both body and soul, physicality and emotion, nature and culture. She brings together the essences of feminine and masculine through the conventional associations of mother with care and nurture, and of captain with reason and power.

As the poles come together, femininity and masculinity, humanity and animality are transformed. As the poles move toward each other, the masculine loses some of its reliance on control and certainty. Certainty and mystery, power and limitation are all important aspects of the new blend of masculine with feminine. As the human and animal come together, proximity of humans to nature becomes more acceptable and value of nature itself is increased. Although essential characteristics remain recognizable as they are merged in Janeway and Torres, the way they are used expresses an attempt to imagine a new type of woman whose gender does not depend on identification with a single type of essence or pole, male/female, human/nature, subject/object. Thus, Torres shows the development of a female character who is both a

\(^{15}\) From the Voyager episode titled "Faces."
passionate, strong woman and a moral, intelligent human being, and Janeway emerges as both a
caring captain and a rational/powerful/wise woman.\textsuperscript{16}

III. Honoring Embodiment, and Embeddedness

The merging of poles in Janeway and Torres and the turn in the journey toward home suggest a
new emphasis on embodiment in Star Trek. The reconciliation between the human and animal
halves of Torres, for example, show the need to recognize and value the repressed reality of
human being as natural and instinctual, characteristics that come not from being feminine as
opposed to masculine, but from being embodied. This recognition serves to reinforce the
environmental theme in Voyager and is compatible with the scientific worldview that is an
important aspect of the science fiction genre. An emphasis on embodiment and Voyager's many
references to dependence on the land point to a recognition of human embeddedness in and
inseparability from the natural environment.

But, this recognition is incompatible with contempt for the land. Thus Voyager also
expresses a belief in the intrinsic worth of nature, of the non-human other, biological species and
their habitats and cultures. Missions away from the mother ship provide opportunities to show
how the land should be treated. As second in command, Chakotay often leads "away missions." In
"Tattoo," he re-discovers his Native American roots in an encounter with a tribe whose ancestors had traveled to Earth millennia ago and given Chakotay's people a special gift of
memory in honor of their respect for the land. These ancestors taught ways to honor the land and
to give thanks whenever something is taken from it for human use. Respect for people and other
creatures and respect for the land are tied together in this view: respect for the land is motivated
by respect for the people and animals who live there now and those who will live there in the
future, and for the spirits of the land itself.

This spiritual view of the land evokes a sense of sacred reality. Chakotay encounters this
as he sees a large face in the storm clouds of the ancestors' planet, representing a sacred spirit of
the land. This anthropomorphization of the land in the image of a human face is a way to
understand the land as sacred reality. The land itself has spirits, in other words, it is internally
animate. Respecting the land means recognizing this and living in mutuality with it, honoring her
gifts with gratitude, care, and restraint.

Respect for others also requires a recognition of the human capacity for evil. Humans
harm and oppress others not only by intent, but by lack of foresight and attention to non-human
others, especially in an anthropocentric concern for our species and the self-interest of our
community. Recognition of this is translated into action in Voyager whenever the crew lands on
a planet's surface.

Respect for the land shows evolution of the Prime Directive from a rule against
interfering with the laws and cultures of other self-conscious species to a respect for the
biospheric integrity of the land itself. Both Chakotay's and Janeway's ways of understanding and

\textsuperscript{16} Many feminists would object to this development of new women characters through the
use of essential feminine imagery. I do not intend to defend it, but only to show how it has
made new images of women possible in this particular case.
respecting the land are opposed to a frontier ethic of mining, plowing, harvesting, and transforming the land at will, and therefore, opposed to a capitalist ethic of increasing expansion and unlimited use.

The journey home is a turn away from the motion of thrusting out into a wilderness that is separate and other. It represents, in my interpretation, a recognition that humans live on the land and are a part of it. The sexual nature of the spatial metaphors of outward thrusting and inward returning fit a sexist culture in which men are seen as the movers/subjects, and women, the moved/objects. This comes from a limited and limiting view of heterosexual relations in which only the man moves in forward penetrating motions, the woman taking him into herself. From this perspective, which dominates in our culture, it appears to be appropriate that as long as Star Trek was about movement outward into the body of space, it should be led by a man, but that when the journey turned back toward the warmth and comfort of home, it should be led by a woman. Thus, a maternal Janeway and a maternal Earth are linked by the body of space as it is sexualized and feminized in the journey home.

In the context of Star Trek, Voyager's turn back toward Earth is a reaction to the sense of separation from nature found in the link between an emphasis on technology and distance from Earth. Janeway and her crew feel a longing and love for home on Earth, and Chakotay anthropomorphizes the land and insists the crew respect it, only taking what they need when that will not disturb or disrupt the habitat as a whole or the creatures who depend on it. I suggest that this distance from Earth so painfully felt by Janeway and her crew represents the pain many Americans feel due to an assumption that humanity is separate from nature. Our ability to create technology seems to imply that we are, in a way, super-natural creatures. The belief that, as rational creatures, we live in the reality of our minds, and in societies that are distinct from and not wholly dependent on nature, supports an understanding of humans as separate and above the natural world, leading to a feeling of alienation from it. This sense of separation from nature is supported by the Christian understanding of humanity as chosen by God to "multiply and subdue the earth" (Genesis) and by the many forms of Platonic dualism.17

In Voyager, then, the desire to return to Mother Earth contains each of several meanings: a return to the mother who will care for us selflessly; a return to practical reason by recognizing that only a healthy planet can sustain us; a return to valuing the inherent worth of the non-human other; and (in my interpretation of space imagery as metaphoric) finding a way to reconcile who we are as technology-making rational humans with who we are as part of a natural world.

This analysis exposes the contradiction in a collapsed image of mother and Earth. For the mother who cares for us selflessly has no worth in herself, since in such a relationship, only the child's (human's) need and the mother's (Earth's) ability to give, matter. This exposes the fallacy of our ideal mother image, as it brings a woman (and the earth) status only by pointing away from herself to the other who is cared for. Without women's equality, leadership, environmental respect, and responsibility, the mother and Earth symbols each become just another example of the usefulness of the feminine and nature for the purposes of patriarchy and capitalist expansion.

17 In Genesis 1:28, God says to his newly created humankind, male and female, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." The message is repeated to Noah and his sons after the flood, in Genesis 9:1-2.
With the portrayal of women's equality in *Star Trek*, we see women accepting the rewards of their labor, displaying skill, talent, and virtue, and being promoted up the ranks. A maternal woman like Janeway is no longer alone in association with domesticity and nurture. She is joined by male members of the crew. Here nurture, by both men and women, serves the common good, a commons in which women's lives are not limited by their sex.

But the Earth has become associated with maternal nurture through her association with home and her symbolic connection to Janeway. While Janeway herself is seen as more than a benevolent mother figure, Earth appears one-dimensional. Janeway's various aspects are reconciled by all wearing the same hat: when she is maternalistic, it is because they are stranded far from home and the crew needs her; when she is militaristic and in control, it is for the same reasons. Her goal in everything is to get the crew home, pointing always to that Earth in the foreground, just beyond view. But Earth herself remains a tragic figure, always out of reach through no fault of her own, waiting passively for the moment of return, when I assume, her arms will open wide, her fields generously giving forth sustenance. Although the desire for mutuality with and respect for nature exists, as we see from its symbolic expression in *Voyager*, the utopian vision maybe incapable of reconciling the two sides of nature, her benevolence and destructiveness, her nurture and indifference.

Does the whole earth image stand as an ideal, accepted in only one of her aspects: benevolent giver and sustainer of life? Are recognition of human dependence on a healthy environment and a spiritual need to pay due respects and prevent human destruction of habitats enough to overcome the idealized vision of the ultimate mother? What happens when she is not so benevolent. Do we then turn against her in fear, anger, and loathing?

Although the maternal woman stereotype is relieved of its servility, the maternal Earth is not. However, *Voyager* critique of environmental irresponsibility at least points toward prevention of Earth's destruction from human technology. From its first episode, *Voyager* has dealt with this issue. In its pilot, "Caretaker," for example, a planet's biosphere was destroyed by an alien species' use of environmentally destructive technology. The aliens were travelers who were unaware until it was too late of the destructive potential of their technology. Their inability to know what would happen emphasizes the limited capacity of finite creatures for certainty and control over destiny. Perhaps science was once thought able to provide all the answers, and power to provide control over destiny. But no more. Attempts to overcome natural limitations like mortality and environmental dependence through the use of elaborate technologies are seen, in "Caretaker," as factors potentially leading to biospheric destruction.

Thus, acceptance of human limitation is important to an environmental ethic. Themes in *Voyager* express a move toward this acceptance. The journey back toward home suggests a recognition of human embeddedness in Earth's natural environment as our habitat. An understanding of death as the natural end of life shows an acceptance of mortality, as seen in various episodes. For example, in "Death Wish," a member of the immortal species, the "Q," fights for his right to die because he believes immortality has made life futile, meaningless, and unendurable.

*Voyager* also places an emphasis on embodiment. For example, in "Emanations," Harry Kim encounters an alien civilization that believes in life after death and resurrection of the body, a belief proven wrong when *Voyager* discovers the decaying bodies of their dead. Although the
resurrection of healthy tissue from dead tissue is impossible according to a scientific understanding of the universe, some kind of afterlife may still be possible. Whatever essence may exist within the body during life, such as a soul, may be released in death, but, the story suggests, even that essence does not leave the natural world for some disembodied heaven. *Voyager’s* sensors observe neural energy leaving the alien bodies at death and migrating into an energy field surrounding the planet. Thus, the alien souls not only remain alive but stay in the natural world. They appear to be resurrected, but as they are reborn into a different physical form, energy, resurrection occurs within the limits of nature. Pointing again to uncertainty, Janeway tells young Harry Kim that science does not have all the answers, especially when it comes to death. The answers we can discover through science suggest, however, that the natural world alone is where we live, die, and are perhaps, reborn.

*Voyager* is a new story that carries the frontier myth to a new stage of evolution. It changes *Star Trek’s* emphasis on the mind and movement away from nature to an emphasis on the need for recognition of our reality as embodied creatures dependent on our natural habitat. Women lead the way in *Voyager* to this recognition as the poles of masculine/feminine, human/animal are merged in the characters of Janeway and Torres, and as the characters thus created take on leading roles in this new vision of ideal American civilization. In this vision, certainty and mystery, embodiment and spirit, nature and culture are rejoined. The once lofty hard science and masculinized association of mind and culture are brought closer to their other halves. Embodiment and embeddedness in the earth, aspects of human being that have been repressed as undesirable, are remembered. Although the new perspective on Earth is still anthropocentric, emphasizing only “the good earth”, in her benevolence as ultimate mother, hope exists in the journey home as a representation of the desire for right relations with her.

Finally, in *Voyager’s* return journey, the spatial metaphor of going home points to a feminization of the universe, drawing on feminine associations to bring about an evolution in the *Star Trek* myth as an expression of evolving American concerns and self-understanding. The universe, while still seen through a sexual lens, is no longer associated only with masculinity. And in Janeway and Torres, the once-repressed feminine becomes associated with authority, wisdom, virtue and skill, making women agents of change.

REFERENCES


---

18 See Sam D. Gill, *Mother Earth: The American Story* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). Gill traces the historical roots of the Mother Earth image in American culture, and finds that its use originates in the Euro-American desire for conquest and expansion, as it was an image representing the "good" earth in its generous aspects.

