Umeå University

This is an accepted version of a paper published in *Extrapolation*. This paper has been peer-reviewed but does not include the final publisher proof-corrections or journal pagination.

Citation for the published paper:

Leavenworth, V. (2012)

"Utopia, Relationality and Ecology: Resurrecting the Natural in *Battlestar Galactica*"
Extrapolation, 53(1): 61-81

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3828/extr.2012.5>

Access to the published version may require subscription.

Permanent link to this version:

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Utopia, Relationality and Ecology: Resurrecting the Natural in *Battlestar Galactica*¹

Van Leavenworth

The re-imagined television series *Battlestar Galactica* features few natural environments and Earth is only a half-conceived idea in the human characters' minds for the bulk of the narrative. However, in this article I examine how the dream of Earth supports belief in an ideological boundary between humans and Cylons and, simultaneously, how affective relationships between humans and humanoid Cylons increasingly function to subvert the foundation of this boundary. Within the context of these conflicts, which I examine from an ecological perspective, I demonstrate how the discovery of a utopian Earth resurrects an ideological distinction between organic humans and "artificial" Cylons.

There are two interrelated conceits in the re-imagined television series *Battlestar Galactica* (*BSG*) that are the foundation for its popular and critical appeal. The first is the ongoing conflict between humanity and the Cylons that makes even mundane events implicitly a matter of surviving until a better future. The second is the series' ambivalent presentation of the humanoid Cylons. Unlike the robotic Cylons of the First Cylon War with humanity, to the humans the humanoid Cylon models are visually and, with a few exceptions later in the series, medically indistinguishable from humans, and many actually believe that they are human prior to learning that they are Cylon. In contrast to these and other points of similarity, the humanoid Cylons are also depicted as mechanical others, distinct from biological humanity, particularly from the point of view of several human characters who regard them as soulless machines. Coupled with the constant crisis situation in the narrative, this flickering "othering" dynamic allows the series to examine contemporary social issues from multiple perspectives and without providing simplistic answers. These conceits have led to many critical investigations of the series' interrogation of

¹ This is the author's post-print version and should not be cited. The final version was originally published in *Extrapolation*, vol. 53, issue 1 (2012) © Liverpool University Press (<http://liverpool.metapress.com/content/122345>).

identity formulation and the social, political, and ethical dynamics of engaging with and (de)constructing “others” in a world in turmoil. But what happens to the narrative’s treatment of these complex themes when the future arrives and the conflict is settled? For most of the series the human survivors are searching for Earth, a planet named in religious scriptures. In the final season they discover it, only to find that it is a nuclear wasteland, but manage then to go on to resolve the war with the Cylons and, in the final episode, locate a habitable, lush planet that they label “Earth.” This surprising discovery unexpectedly reasserts the ideological distinctions between humans and humanoid Cylons that have been increasingly blurred in the narrative prior to this point. In this article, I claim that the dream of Earth supports belief in an ideological boundary between humans and Cylons and, simultaneously, that affective relationships between humans and humanoid Cylons increasingly function to subvert the foundation of this boundary. Within the context of these conflicts, I demonstrate that the planet named “Earth” represents an ideal form of Nature that resurrects an ideological distinction between organic humans and “artificial” Cylons.

Although the narrative features few natural environments and Earth is only a half-conceived (though prominent) idea in the human characters’ minds for the bulk of the series, I contend that an ecological interpretation of the narrative will help demonstrate how the distinction between human and humanoid Cylon is sustained, subverted, and then powerfully resurrected in the final episode. Ecological criticism addresses how humans relate to nature or the environment. Lawrence Buell argues that science fiction’s specialization in “world-making” and interest in “humankind’s relation to the nonhuman world” make its narratives pertinent for ecological readings (56). However, only a few scholars, most notably Kelly Meyer and Kim Middleton in their reading of the pastoral yearnings at the end of *BSG*, have employed

environmental concepts to explore the series. This article addresses this gap by providing a more comprehensive consideration of how ecology impacts the flickering othering dynamic in the series as a whole.¹ Current trends in ecocriticism acknowledge the difficulty in moving beyond assumptions about “nature” as well as the importance of doing so, given how central the concept is to perceptions of civilization and society. One assumption, inherited from the Enlightenment, is that nature is pure and thus incompatible with artificial human culture. Though simplistic, this dualism persists to varying degrees in contemporary narratives and often functions to qualify relationships between nature, the human and the nonhuman/other. Helen Merrick indicates the complexity of these relationships in an article investigating ecofeminist science fiction.

“Nature” is, of course, a very slippery term, which shades from descriptions of the world to symbols of “wilderness”, homilies on “natural” (pre-given, normalized) behaviour, or a way of signifying that which is “outside” culture. The “human” [...] is at once a part of “nature” (the organic) and what is “natural” (god- or biology-ordained), but it is also apparently separate from it as the purveyor and originator of “culture” and discourse. The ways in which we define “human” are obviously complexly intertwined with our definitions and codifications of “nature” and how we separate the “human” from the non-human/other. (219)

Merrick implies the mutual dependency of these concepts, though it is clear that “nature” is fundamental in this triumvirate. These relationships are visible in *BSG*. The organic humans and “inorganic” humanoid Cylon others are defined, in part, by an understanding of Earth as an ideal type of nature.

As Earth is essentially unknown for most of the narrative, a planet that the humans hope to find, its representation of nature is tied up in its function as a utopian dream. A utopia is a perfect, hopeful, and desired fantasy (location) that functions as a critique of the limitations and problems of the social system within which it is born (Moylan 1–2). At the same time, utopia “is by definition impossible, an unachievable ideal, a fanciful dream, unrealistic and naïve” (Ashcroft 411), and so represents something to strive for rather than a goal. Utopian ideas are often explored in science fiction narratives and utopian locations frequently align with the nature/culture dualism by featuring pristine or pure images of nature, often figured as allusions to Eden and/or the “frontier” of settler narratives (Bukatman 324; see Katerberg). The view of Earth in *BSG* draws on these associations in order to present Earth as a *human* promised land, sanctified by its mention in religious scriptures and actualized as a real place by Commander William Adama, the military leader of the fleet, when he claims knowledge of secret information about its whereabouts. Adama tells this lie willingly as a means of unifying the human survivors around the possibility of a future after the Cylon conflict. The image of Earth in *BSG* thus represents an idyllic future for humanity where Cylon existence, emblematic of “bad” human culture, is denied or forgotten. This utopian vision calls for an investment in an ideology that posits human and humanoid Cylon as categorically different entities. However, this segregationist perspective is untenable, in part because it is bound to the “unrealistic and naïve” utopian vision of Earth, and as the series progresses it is increasingly apparent to the viewer that humans and humanoid Cylons have more rather than less in common with each other.

In contrast to the rigid categories of nature (organic Earth, organic human) and culture (inorganic Cylons created by human artifice) implicit in the utopian vision, the relationships between humans and humanoid Cylons that develop throughout the series reflect an inclusive

view of ecological connectivity. Developing in spaceships and various realistic (i.e. non-ideal) natural environments, these individual bonds are shown to be valued over ideological differences and they posit the fluidity of interpersonal connections between entities within any environment (natural or not). In environmental criticism this relational approach is visible when it is paired with alternative social theories or ideas. For example, Louis Palmer uses Donna Haraway's model of the cyborg to develop an ecological perspective which sees "the interconnectedness of all natural systems" without privileging the "difference between the artificial and the natural" (171). This new ecological model blurs boundaries, including "the nature/culture boundary," and makes it "impossible to make claims about nature as a pure or originary state" (171). This model of ecology does not allow for any fundamental assumptions about the human, nature, or culture. Instead, there is only a web of connections that are not governed by imposed ideological boundaries. Timothy Morton presents a similar take on ecological relationality in his conception of a "queer ecology." Life-forms constitute a "*mesh*, a nontotalizable, open-ended concatenation of interrelations that blur and confound boundaries at practically any level: between species, between the living and the nonliving, between organism and environment" (275–76). Boundaries, particularly normative boundaries, become irrelevant within such a system. Without privileging a cyborg or queer approach, I assert that ecological relationality, broadly conceived, underpins the relationships between humans and humanoid Cylons in various environments in *BSG*. As such relationships are shown to conflict with or overshadow the duties of rank or office and undercut the perceived ideological difference between human and Cylon, this relationality is a threat to the future suggested in the utopian vision of Earth.

The contrary ecologies of the utopian dream and relationality are emphasized, to varying degrees, throughout the series. However, the narrative increasingly champions the realistic

sustainability of a relational ecology over the ideological boundaries inherent to the utopian vision. The discovery of “Earth” in the final episode of the series therefore unexpectedly resurrects the ideological differences between human and Cylon within the framework of a frontier-style pastoral yearning for pure nature, unsullied by the corrupting influences of advanced human culture. In actualizing “Earth” as a utopia, *BSG* demonstrates that perceptions of nature are fundamental to creating the social categories of human and other.

Investing in the Utopian Frontier

Coded with Edenic qualities, the idea of Earth represents a future return to how things should be for humanity, a “normal” condition that has somehow been lost. Hope for this utopian dream and the chance to “start over” qualify the present conflict with the Cylons as abnormal or incorrect. This makes the present something to merely survive, and so the vision of Earth can be said to impose restrictions on existence where personal fulfillment is delayed until the fantasy is achieved. The utopian desire draws on American frontier narratives and posits ideas about the purity of nature and the threat of culture that serve to reinforce an ideological distinction between human and Cylon. However, as the series repeatedly demonstrates the open-ended and unresolved complexity of human–Cylon relations, this utopian view of Earth, while consistently appealing to many human characters, is increasingly shown to be untenable in its facile perfection.

From very early in the narrative, the motivation for humanity’s survival is a belief in a future home that reinforces a historical difference between human and Cylon existence. Earth becomes a promised land for the survivors when the battlestar *Galactica* and the fleet manage to escape the Cylons at the end of the miniseries. At a funeral for those who died in the attacks, led

by the priest Elosha, Commander Adama responds to the depressed mood of the survivors as they think about the dead:

Adama: Are they the lucky ones? That's what you're thinking, isn't it? We're a long way from home. We've jumped way beyond the red line into uncharted space. Limited supplies, limited fuel, no allies and now, no hope? [...] Elosha, there's a thirteenth colony of humankind, is there not?

Elosha: Yes. The scrolls tell us a Thirteenth Tribe left Kobol in the early days. They traveled far and made their home on a planet called Earth, which circled a distant and unknown star.

Adama: It's not unknown. I know where it is. Earth! [pause] The most guarded secret we have. The location was only known by the senior commanders in the fleet, and we dared not share it with the public, not while there was a Cylon threat upon us. For now, we have a refuge to go to, a refuge the Cylons know nothing about. It won't be an easy journey. It will be long and arduous. But [...] we shall find it. And Earth will become our new home. ("Battlestar Galactica, Part 2" M.02)²

Earth becomes the emblem of hope both for its mythical significance in religious teachings and for representing a potential future without the Cylons. The Cylons are temporally contained as an aberration of humanity's present. Fredric Jameson suggests that utopias have a central cleansing function; they present "visions of happy worlds, spaces of fulfillment and cooperation" with the intention of showing "what is to be accomplished after the demolitions and the removals" of the roots of evil in society (*Archaeologies of the Future* 12). Adama's speech makes this cleansing

implicit: Earth may only be discovered after a “long and arduous” journey that, by necessity, involves escaping from or defeating the Cylons.

Hope for the utopian future qualifies the present condition as compromised and something to survive. Characters who believe in finding Earth exist in a sort of stasis where wish-fulfillment is postponed to a “correct” future condition. However, the conflict is just a symptom of the larger problem of having lost their homes and ways of living. Earth is the solution to this problem. The future-hope trajectory of this sort of self-deprivation becomes apparent in the episode “Flight of the Phoenix” when several of *Galactica*’s crew members overreact to small problems or seem inexplicably moody. Adama tells his best friend and XO Colonel Saul Tigh: “Months on the run and what do we have to show for it? Casualties, deteriorating conditions [...] It’s finally hitting them, Saul. Our old lives are gone. The only thing we have to look forward to is this” (2.09). The future Adama refers to is more proximate than the fantasy horizon, of course; what people can expect are the incessant hardships of their journey to find Earth. These hardships include the constant state of military conflict, or at least the potential for it, but also the difficulties of the artificial environments on board the space ships, many of which were never designed to carry passengers. The lack of a natural environment is so problematic for many that when self-centered genius Dr. Gaius Baltar proposes settling a barely habitable planet as part of his platform for presidential election, many people are willing to forget Earth and do so. This is because, as advisor Tory Foster tells incumbent President Laura Roslin, people want to breathe “real air,” grow “real food” and live “in a house instead of a ship” (“Lay Down Your Burdens, Part 1” 2.19). However, this planet turns out to be a less than ideal natural environment and the Cylons soon join the humans there, cancelling out any dream of recreating a purely human society.

Such hardship in the present requires belief in a large reward for the human survivors, one that is inspirational and suggestive of a radically different situation. Elizabeth Cooke claims that hope for this fantasy future is essential to the human survivors in *BSG* because it fulfills a desire for “something greater” (218). Ernst Bloch describes such hope as the promise of a wish-fulfillment that “lies beyond the available given world” (75), something almost impossible to imagine. Earth is an ideal symbol of hope because it is known from the scriptures and yet enigmatic enough to accommodate sublime imaginings from the humans. Finding Earth implies finding the Thirteenth Tribe, the lost branch of pre-Cylon, religiously coded humanity. The righteousness of this *human* quest is suggested once Elosha likens Roslin to the prophesized leader described in the scriptures who will “guide the caravan of the heavens” to humanity’s “new homeland” (“The Hand of God” 1.10). As a religious pilgrimage, the heavenly trek to a new world implies a transformation of humanity as well. This is a principal component of hope as it aims “at the very configuration of the world in general or (what amounts to the same thing) at the future disposition or constitution of the self” (Jameson, *Marxism and Form* 127). As the increasingly religiously prescribed new homeland for humanity, the utopian image of Earth becomes a sanctified ideal natural environment.

Another attractive component of Earth’s new world properties is the moral redemption it offers as a place to start afresh. The Cylons were produced by humanity and so the humans perceive a maker–machine relationship that includes a sense of moral responsibility, as Adama indicates when he claims that “[y]ou cannot play God and then wash your hands of the things that you’ve created” (“Battlestar Galactica, Part 1” M.01). Humanity must therefore remedy the situation, either by destroying their unnatural creation or escaping to a promised land where Cylon existence can be forgotten. The former remedy is explored when the humans have a

chance to obliterate the Cylons with the aid of a virus. Some characters resist the plan as unethical, but Roslin asserts its moral validity because the Cylons are humanity's "mistake" and, if left alive, will almost certainly be "coming to Earth" ("A Measure of Salvation" 3.07). Roslin's willingness to annihilate the Cylons is underpinned not only by a sense of responsibility but also by a utopian vision of humanity freed from such responsibility in the future.

The latter remedy, escape, is proposed by Adama's son, Lee "Apollo" Adama, in a situation that indicates the incredible power of the redemption offered by the vision of Earth. Apollo, then commander of the battlestar *Pegasus*, attempts to convince Adama to turn his back on the Cylons and tens of thousands of human prisoners on Cylon-occupied New Caprica. Apollo contends that their primary "responsibility is to the survival of humanity," and clarifies that humanity no longer includes the survivors on the planet but only "the 2000 people huddled in those civilian ships that managed to get away when the Cylons came back" because they are the "safe bet." He further warns Adama that if he tries to rescue the humans on the planet then they "lose" and humanity "just stops" ("Precipice" 3.02). This willingness to disregard so many human lives anticipates the power of Earth's utopian promise of renewal and redemption. Apollo's arguments also point to the stasis involved in hoping for Earth, a play the "safe bet" *modus operandi* that does not include striving for something better now but merely surviving until a better future.

Although the Cylons eventually adopt the search for Earth, it is not an ideal natural environment for them in the same way as it is for the humans. Earth becomes a spiritual endpoint for the humanoid Cylons when the quasi-oracular Hybrid reveals that it is the former home of the final five Cylons, and it is also hopefully described as "our new home" and a "new beginning" by humanoid Cylons ("Torn" 3.06; "A Measure of Salvation" 3.07). However, the humanoid Cylons

have no need of a new environment as they form their own ecosystem with the bio-mechanical basestars and are able to mentally project whatever surroundings they wish to occupy on to the clinical, minimalistic interiors (“Torn” 3.06). Unlike the humans’ restricted sense of mere survival, life in space for the humanoid Cylons is as full of potential as life in a natural environment, given their ability to project. This is indicated by the argument a Six uses to encourage the final five to form a Cylon civilization separate from humanity. She argues, “[e]ven if we don’t find a planet to colonize, we can live indefinitely on the baseship,” which suggests that the options are comparable (“Deadlock” 4.16). While the humanoid Cylons appear to desire a future life on Earth, the narrative makes it clear that Earth is humanity’s needful dream.

Although it alludes to many religious narratives of journey and redemption, the story in *BSG* is likely to be recognizable to many viewers as a recreation of the American frontier narrative. Frontier narratives emphasize the discovery of a new land, an idea given additional meanings in *BSG* due to the restricted existence of life on a space ship and magnification of the concept of “land” to the planetary scale. Although other habitable planets are presented in the series, they are alternatively destroyed (e.g. the “algae planet”) or else shown to be poor locations for humanity’s ideal future because the Cylons find them (e.g. Kobol, New Caprica). Earth is thus the correct final destination, the ideal “land” to settle. As the human survivors are presented with very little inhabitable land in *BSG*, its value increases, so that the typical pastoral nostalgia inherent in the frontier narrative is magnified in the series to indicate even more strongly the desire for a return to a “natural” existence, without the limiting burdens of artificial environments and synthetic enemies. In other words, the nature/culture dualism is inherent to the vision of Earth. Indeed, the typical description of the nature/culture dualism is reminiscent of utopia’s imagined perfection as a solution to society’s complex problems. Palmer claims that the dualism

typically posits “nature (usually with a capital N) as a pure, innocent, self-correcting, balanced system best preserved as wilderness with no contamination by culture, which is imagined as human-influenced, corrupt, polluting, destructive, and out of balance” (168). For those human characters who invest in the utopian image of Earth the Cylons are “human-influenced” culture, humanity’s mistake, out of balance with nature. They must be left behind somehow in order to reach the natural frontier of Earth.

The utopian vision is powerful enough for many characters to maintain it nearly until the end of the series, despite the narrative’s increasing emphasis on its limitations. However, as Carl Silvio and Elizabeth Johnston argue, “in the case of *BSG* the relationship between the utopian and the hegemonic—utopia’s role as “bribe”—is intentionally made explicit so that the viewer might see—and begin to ask questions about—the ideological function utopian narratives serve” (50). Silvio and Johnston refer to a potential Marxist utopia but their point is nonetheless salient here as the American frontier narrative is such a familiar construction. The more the vision of a future utopian frontier is reinscribed in the narrative, the more it is seen as restrictive in its ideology and incompatible with the “reality” of a human–Cylon present.

Threatening Utopia: Relational Ecology in the Now

In contrast to the restrictive ideological differences that sustain the fantasy of a utopian future, events in the present in *BSG* increasingly explore individual bonds between humans and humanoid Cylons. These relationships seem to develop whether characters want them to or not, whether it is known if those involved are Cylon or not, and in this manner point to a fundamental problem with the wish-fulfillment restrictions incumbent to utopian investment. The narrative repeatedly indicates that this relational ecology is both inevitable and a more realistic picture of

existence beyond the human–Cylon conflict than the one offered in the vision of Earth. Specifically, the relational ecology threatens the stability of the utopian vision through the development of trust, caring, and love in human–humanoid Cylon relationships.

Trust between a human and a humanoid Cylon is seen as a threat to those who believe in utopia because trust requires an uncertain reliance on another individual, a reliance that may affect any perceived certainty about the future. For example, when the humanoid Cylon Sharon opts to return to the fleet with human pilot Karl “Helo” Agathon she learns of the extremely lenient punishment a human crew member received for murdering an identical copy of her model, Sharon “Boomer” Valerii, a Cylon sleeper agent who shot Adama. Sharon and Helo consider the ramifications of this light sentence:

Sharon: They don’t see it as murder, Helo. That’s what I’m trying to tell you. That’s what you’re not hearing. To him [Adama], to the President, to all of them. Cylons aren’t people. I’m not a person to them, I’m a thing.

Helo: I won’t just stand by and let them kill you like the other Sharon. Okay?

Sharon: I believe you Helo, I do. But if we’re gonna have any future together, any at all, I’m gonna have to take matters into my own hands.

Helo: What are you talking about?

Sharon: Do you love me?

Helo: Yes.

Sharon: Do you trust me?

Helo: Yes.

Sharon: Then don’t ask me what I have to do.

Helo: Sharon, what the frak are you— [she shushes him with a hand to his mouth]

Sharon: Trust me. Trust us. (“Home, Part 2” 2.07)

Mutual trust in the present creates an open-ended rather than a pre-determined future. Indeed, Sharon emphasizes that trust ultimately requires a willingness to accept not knowing what will happen or what the other person will do. She makes another point that trust may lead to a realistic future when she unexpectedly points a gun at Adama then purposefully surrenders it to demonstrate that she is not Boomer (“Home, Part 2” 2.07). Whereas Boomer, as a mechanical enemy, must be negated in a utopian view of the future, Sharon, as a different *person*, is someone Adama may trust and perhaps develop a future relationship with. Sharon eventually wins the trust of Adama and others on *Galactica*, and is sworn in as a Colonial officer. Although Juliana Hu Pegues argues that this act may be seen to represent a rebirth and assimilation of part of the fragmented Boomer figure into the human “nation” and military complex (204), viewing Sharon as a separate person indicates that this increasing trust is developed along personal rather than group lines. Before Sharon is made an officer Adama implies his close friendship with her over tea (“Occupation” 3.01) and immediately after she is sworn in she is given the task of single-handedly infiltrating the occupied settlement on New Caprica (“Precipice” 3.02).

Trusting a humanoid Cylon has the potential to subvert the utopian dream because of the risks it entails. For those characters who assert an ideological distinction between humans and humanoid Cylons, trust is inherently inappropriate and only suggests the gullibility of the human involved. For example, when Roslin assures a Cylon named Leoben who claims to have a bomb in the fleet to “[t]rust me [...] and you will live,” he tells her what she wants to know and she immediately has him killed (“Flesh and Bone” 1.08). Roslin appears to have no remorse for the

killing because trust cannot exist between a human and what she refers to as “a deadly machine,” a product of humanity. As the foundation for a caring relationship, trust is also a threat to the utopian dream because it provides greater wish-fulfillment in the present, reducing the need to invest in a better future. This is particularly well exemplified when Adama and Roslin, who by this point share great intimacy, argue over the former’s fatherly feelings for Viper pilot Kara “Starbuck” Thrace, who was engaged to Adama’s son Zak when he died. Because she inexplicably reappears with claims of having found the way to Earth after being presumed dead for over two months, Starbuck is suspected to be Cylon, particularly by Roslin.

Roslin: Bill, you’ve got to face this. My life is coming to an end soon enough and I am not going to apologize to you for not trusting her. And I am not, I am *not* going to trust her with the fate of this fleet. [pause] You are so buckled up inside. You can’t take any more loss. Your son’s leaving, this, me [pause] I know it.

Adama: No one’s going anywhere.

Roslin: [starts to weep] Okay, here’s the truth. This is what’s going on. You want to believe Kara. You would rather be wrong about her and face your own demise than risk losing her again. (“Six of One” 4.02)

Trust in and caring feelings for an “other” are coded as a sign of personal selfishness and possible foolishness by Roslin, who appears to oppose such emotional luxury with the rational self-inhibition necessary to ensure the survival of the human fleet. The danger of such relationships is that they are undeniable once they develop, rendering otherwise stalwart characters like Adama less certain in their purpose.

While trust and sympathy undermine the utopian vision, love between a human and humanoid Cylon, as the strongest type of relational bond, blocks it entirely. Love (romantic or platonic) is subversive to the fantasy of Earth because it brings future wish-fulfillment to the present and inherently obscures the value of essentialist thinking. Love functions as “something better” in the present that may be worth giving up the future for, which is what Roslin worries about when it comes to Adama’s feelings for Starbuck. In another example, Baltar, who knowingly loves a Cylon, tells Chief Petty Officer Galen Tyrol, who loved Boomer before her Cylon identity was revealed, that “[l]ove is a strange and wonderful thing, Chief. You’d be happy you experienced it at all, even if it was with a machine” (“Resistance” 2.02). Baltar suggests that love emphasizes the vibrant now in inexplicable ways, and so in turn has the ability to override essentialist conceptions of others. In other words, as Sara Ahmed notes, the function of the intensity of emotions like love “is the production of the effect of likeness” as a characteristic that is “assumed to belong” to the individual, regardless of how similar or different s/he was to begin with (52). This is made apparent later in the same episode when Adama asks Tyrol if he loved Boomer. Tyrol attempts to deny he loved her because she turned out to be a machine, but Adama states: “[S]he was more than that to me. She was a vital, living person aboard my ship for almost two years. She couldn’t have been just a machine” (“Resistance” 2.02). Adama’s comments indicate that a loving relationship trumps any belief in an ideological difference and instead reinforces the vitality of the person who is loved. This experience emphasizes fulfillment in the now.

Love’s relational threat to the utopian vision is negatively indicated when human characters who believe that they are fundamentally different from Cylons discover their lovers are Cylons. These discoveries imply uncanny repercussions for other apparently human–human relationships,

and in so doing highlight the naive simplicity of belief in a solely human future on Earth. In addition, they present existential dilemmas for the human discoverers. For example, when they find that the people that they have loved for such a long time are Cylons, Helo and deckhand Cally Henderson both want to escape a world that they no longer perceive as ordinary. Helo keeps Sharon alive only to help him find a way off Caprica, which he describes as a “frakked-up world” (“Kobol’s Last Gleaming, Part 1” 1.12), and Cally attempts to kill herself and her son by opening an airlock after discovering Tyrol’s true identity (“The Ties That Bind” 4.03).

The danger that love poses to the utopian vision is particularly evident when Adama learns that Tigh is a Cylon. There is little doubt that Adama and Tigh love each other deeply, even if it is not a romantic love; they form a homosocial triangle with the feminized *Galactica* and Saul’s wife Ellen bitterly complains of having to compete with Adama for Tigh’s love (“Deadlock” 4.16). Adama’s reaction to Tigh’s revelation is therefore more extreme than Helo’s or Cally’s. The sense that the world has stopped making sense and the threat posed to the future are apparent in Adama’s reactions and he is immediately rendered powerless. After Tigh confesses to being a Cylon and is led away by marines, the viewer sees the normally reserved Adama scream, shove everything off his desk, clench his face and body as if in pain, drink heavily, smash the bathroom mirror and eventually collapse on the floor in sobs. Apollo finds him, takes him into his arms and tries to comfort his father, who continues to sob or weep throughout the scene.

Adama: What have I done? All the people I’ve sent to die. For what? For what?

Apollo: For Earth.

Adama: There is no Earth. It’s a frakking joke. There is no Earth.

Apollo: Okay, dad, listen to me. Listen to me. Pull it together [...]

Adama: I can't kill him. I can't kill the bastard. I can't [he sobs] I can't [he sobs].

Apollo: Okay. It's gonna be okay. It's gonna be okay. I'll take care of it.

Adama: I can't [sobs]. ("Revelations" 4.10)

Adama's emotional collapse demonstrates the extent to which human-Cylon differences are ideologically important to him; he reacts as if his long friendship with Tigh has been invalidated by a ruse, despite the fact that Tigh has been consistently the same both before and after the discovery of his Cylon condition. This loss undercuts Adama's professional role, evident in the symbolism of clearing his desk and smashing his reflected image. The specter of this helplessness extends toward the past as Adama reconsiders the military decisions he has made in consultation with his XO Tigh that have led to people's deaths. He also roundly denies the utopian promise of Earth, the hopeful answer Apollo supplies as to the fleet's purpose and why people died. Finally, Adama is rendered personally powerless as well, significantly shown via the breakdown in which his father-son relationship with Apollo is inverted. Adama is emotional, despondent, and helpless, whereas Apollo is comforting, certain, and capable, a fatherly role visually reinforced as he strokes Adama's hair and kisses him on the forehead. These reactions indicate the dilemma between viewing humanoid Cylons as different and experiencing loving relationships with them. Love seems to develop regardless of whether one partner is a Cylon, so why cling to belief in the radical difference between the two species? Since love, once experienced, cannot be denied, the only way to escape the torturing contradiction is to discard the concept of an exclusively human utopia.

Through an exploration of trust, care, and love between humans and humanoid Cylons, *BSG* increasingly advocates the value of a relational ecology over categorical conceptions of

human and Cylon that are derived from the nature/culture dichotomy inherent to the image of Earth. This collapse is in many ways expected, given that utopias are inherently impossible and that the figure of the cyborg in contemporary science fiction usually serves to “interrogate and break down the distinctions between the human and the artificial, between machine and nature” (Nishime 35). But in *BSG* the breakdown of categories is shown to be highly persuasive; even characters who appear to believe in essential differences are forced to reconsider. Apollo, a character who is consistent in his categorical mistrust of Cylons, eventually admits to the priority personal relationships take when he speculates what would happen if his dead brother Zak could come back. He asks Adama: “Would it matter if he were a Cylon? If he always had been? When all’s said and done, would that change how we really feel about him?” (“He That Believeth in Me” 4.01). As Apollo’s realization hints, in a world that includes synthetic life-forms a relational ecology is directly opposed to valuing only the organic as “natural.” In his conception of queer ecology Morton emphasizes this opposition.

Organicism is holistic and substantialist, visualizing carbon-based life-forms (organic in another sense) as the essence of livingness. Queer ecology must go wider, embracing silicon as well as carbon, for instance [...] and show how beings exist precisely because they are nothing but relationality, deep down—for the love of matter. (277)

As relationships, regardless of “species” or “race” classification, become increasingly significant for the characters in the series, *BSG* appears to validate the realistic complexity of a relational society over the simple fantasy of utopia. However, the discovery of the planet the survivors label “Earth” reinvigorates questions about the ideological basis of human and Cylon.

Resurrecting Utopian Ideology

By the middle of the fourth season, the narrative logic of *BSG* points to the naivety of the utopian vision and champions a relational perspective of the life-forms in society. The discovery of the first Earth and particularly the manner in which the discovery is accomplished only serve to reinforce the fallacy of the utopian dream. As a result of a complex series of events including a Cylon civil war, Apollo, who is now President, suggests to the acting rebel Cylon leader that her group and the human fleet join together to find Earth in order to resolve human–Cylon conflict (“Revelations” 4.10). Despite concerns some humans have over this alliance, the allure of Earth is great and there are scenes of cheering when Adama announces arrival at the planet. However, Earth is found to be a nuclear wasteland where a Cylon rather than human civilization died thousands of years ago. The discovery shocks everyone. Social structures fall apart as people brawl freely or slump despondently in *Galactica*’s hallways, and the viewer sees trash everywhere on the previously immaculate ship, as well as the graffito “Frak Earth” painted on one wall (“Sometimes a Great Notion” 4.11). The contrary reality of Earth dispels the dream of a pure, natural frontier and, as it is also revealed that the Thirteenth Tribe who inhabited it were Cylon, the planet’s religious significance as a site of human habitation disappears. Utopia, *BSG* seems to suggest, is impossible to achieve, a treatment of the conceit that aligns the series with contemporary science fiction writing where utopias function only as motivational dreams (see Moylan 8–12). And indeed, environmental problems and ideological differences aside, part of the utopian dream of Earth was a future beyond the human–Cylon conflict—something that is accomplished in the new alliance. With the dismissal of the natural utopia, *BSG* underscores the relevance and need for the relational ecology that has been developing all along.

The mutiny that occurs shortly after these events further reinforces the narrative's commitment to relationality. Lieutenant Felix Gaeta and Vice President Tom Zarek orchestrate a coup because they strongly disapprove of the human–Cylon alliance. When Gaeta relieves Adama of command the conflict between ideological differences and emotional judgment is apparent. He questions Adama's allegiance to the ship and her crew and berates him for having lost perspective:

For seven years I have done my frakkin' job and for what? To take orders from a Cylon [indicating Tigh]? To let machines network our ship? No. You, you are not the leader that you were when we started. You're just a sad old man that has let his heart and his affection for a Cylon [indicating Tigh] cloud his judgment. ("The Oath" 4.13)

Gaeta's complaints reassert a need for difference in what is likely to be a surprising way for the viewer, given that he has been mainly an open-minded and thoughtful character. However, as the events of the mutiny play out it is clear that the viewer is not meant to support it. The mutineers are painted as racists and even rapists, particularly with the return of Specialist Gage, a character whom Helo and Tyrol previously fought with over his support for an officer who attempted to rape Sharon. Gage berates Helo for backing a "skin-job" over his "own kind," and is shown to look forward to the chance to finally rape Sharon himself ("The Oath" 4.13). In addition, Zarek is now unambiguously shown to deserve the reputation he had as a terrorist when he joined the fleet as he murders the members of the Quorum of Twelve ("Blood on the Scales" 4.14). In contrast to this negative portrayal of the mutineers, other events champion the category-blurring poetics of relational ecology. The viewer sees Starbuck, whose own "inherent" nature is unclear since she

returned from the dead, thrive on the knowledge that only personal relationships matter. Whereas Apollo is flabbergasted that pilots he flew with have turned against him, his close friend Starbuck happily kisses him, then says: “Right now, all we can count on is you and me [...] Feelin’ right for the first time in weeks!” (“The Oath” 4.13). Other examples of characters acting based on personal relationships rather than perceived differences include former crewmate Aaron Kelly’s inability to shoot or detain the humanoid Cylon Tyrol (“Blood on the Scales” 4.14). The negative portrayal of the mutineers and positive depiction of the power of personal relationships, regardless of ideological distinctions, indicate that *BSG* supports relational ecology as the only social perspective that can lead to a realistic and obtainable future.

Unfortunately, this narrative trajectory is ignored, and the sustainability of relational ecology dismissed, when the fleet, including the Cylon rebels, unexpectedly finds a blue planet that viewers easily recognize as the Earth they know in the final episode. This planet, which members of the fleet decide to call “Earth,” re-actuates the ideological beliefs of the utopian fantasy in three main ways: organic nature is valued for being unsullied by human culture; the pastoral urge toward primitivism and renewal is endorsed; and humans and Cylons are, for the most part, actively segregated. To begin with, the environment is depicted as pure, rich, and unencumbered with the dangers of cultural advances. The landscape on the planet is lush, green, and sunny. While surveying an area in a Raptor, Adama tells Roslin that the continent is “rich,” and notes that there is “[m]ore wildlife than all the twelve colonies put together” (“Daybreak, Part 2” 4.20). This remarkable amount of fauna, qualified by the comparison to the colony home worlds, gestures to a world prior to the sort of animal extinction brought on by the evils of advanced human culture. There are people on the planet already, but they lack verbal language (that is, they lack the foundation for advanced culture) and as they serendipitously have

compatible DNA they are seen as a reproductive resource for the settlers. The idea that the Earth people are to be settled like the land is emphasized by Apollo's suggestion that they can give them language, "the best part of ourselves" ("Daybreak, Part 2" 4.20), a desire to improve or cultivate them that Patrick B. Sharp describes as a "'white man's burden' moment that could have been written 150 years ago" (75). These perspectives on the "wealth" of the planet call to mind what Murray Bookchin describes as an uncritical, non-sustainable perspective of nature as a "a storage bin of 'natural resources' or 'raw materials'" to be employed for human use (154), rather than a relational ecology that recognizes the interconnectedness of all things. As nothing in the narrative seems critical of this abrupt shift in ecological perspective at this point, the unreal, fantastic quality of this situation is emphasized.

Against such a fruitful organic backdrop, the settlers from the fleet enact a pastoral return to primitivism. This move suggests a belief that advanced human culture, exemplified by technology, is somehow unnatural and that living in closer harmony with nature will give people a sense of cleansing renewal. William H. Katerberg describes this motivation in frontier narrative as a desire to be freed from the sinful "civilization, history, and tradition" of the Old World via the redemption of a New World "frontier wilderness" that offers migrants "the chance to become a new kind of people, individuals responsible for their own fate and fortune and free to define who they are" (1). The sins of the past in *BSG* are those of a technologically advanced society. Thus, plans to build a city are dismissed, the fleet of ships is sent into the sun and the settlers keep only some clothes and simple provisions to enact what Apollo describes as a "break" in the cycle: "If there's one thing we should have learned it's that, you know, our brains have always outraced our hearts. Our science charges ahead, our souls lag behind. Let's start anew" ("Daybreak, Part 2" 4.20). Idyllic actions and sentiments indeed, but as they occur in a series that

has hitherto presented a universe of complex, messy realism with no easy answers it is hard not to feel that *BSG* is breaking a narrative contract with its audience. Meyer and Middleton describe this “puzzling retrenchment to the pastoral” as frustrating to “those who saw in the series the promise of a new future for an old American story” (n.p.), and Roz Kaveney calls this narrative turn “staggeringly stupid,” quipping: “let’s abandon medicine and live short unhappy lives in the cold” (233). The enactment of these primitive yearnings supports the myth of frontier renewal and resurrects the nature/culture dichotomy inherent to the utopian dream of Earth.

Finally, the natural qualities of Earth are shown to foster, with a few special exceptions, several acts of segregation that gesture to a comprehensive reconstruction of the ideological differences between humans and Cylons. The size of the planet and its several habitable landmasses seems to incur a desire to spread out, even among the humans, and so the nearly 40,000 human survivors are dispersed across different continents (“Daybreak, Part 2” 4.20). This seems a poor strategy for survival, though it will ensure a rustic mode of existence. A more illogical relational break is that between Adama, Apollo, and Starbuck. Despite repeated attempts to keep them close to him throughout the series, Adama unexpectedly leaves his son and “daughter” behind—for good, the viewer is led to believe—when he takes Roslin away to die in an idyllic spot. These separations, seemingly linked to what the environment has to offer, provide the context for more extreme separations that indicate a reasserted ideological distinction between human and Cylon. First, the robotic Centurion Cylons are sent out into the universe in the one remaining Cylon baseship to “find their own destiny” (“Daybreak, Part 2” 4.20). Secondly, although many of the rebel humanoid Cylons remain on the planet they are not seen among the groups of human settlers walking off in different directions across the landscape, which suggests that they set up their own colony. Thirdly, Tyrol, one of the final five Cylons, acts

in a way that completely negates the value of relational ecology as he wants to live alone on an island because he is tired of all people, “[h]umans, Cylons, whatever” (“Daybreak, Part 2” 4.20). Fourthly, although she is not a Cylon, Starbuck’s otherness as a revenant is hinted to be unendurably unnatural when she inexplicably vanishes into thin air in the middle of a conversation with Apollo. These acts of separation, tied in each case to the landscape of the planet or a sense of whether the living being’s destiny is compatible with it, seriously undermine the relational ecology the series developed so carefully prior to this point.

Although not all of the humanoid Cylons separate from the humans, those who remain have unique ties to humanity that make them allowable exceptions to the ideology of difference. Final five Cylons Ellen and Saul Tigh remain with the human settlers. Both are overtly humanized throughout the series, often through their faults, and neither one changes much once they realize they are Cylons. Unlike other Cylons the Tighs, as final five Cylons, are unique. In “No Exit,” the viewer sees Ellen unexpectedly resurrected on a basestar and learns that the final five have been resurrected previously with false memories, things that suggest that copies of their models do exist (4.15). However, the viewer never sees more than one physical copy of any of the final five at any one time and they share a “maker” status with humanity as they were responsible for the creation of the other humanoid models. Humanoid Cylon Caprica-Six remains with Baltar, but they appear to isolate themselves from the human settlers in order to find their own land to farm. Caprica-Six is also overtly humanized. She loves Baltar, she feels great remorse for the Cylons’ treatment of humanity, she makes individual decisions, and she is unusually regarded as an individual among the Cylons. Humanoid Cylon Sharon and her family, Helo and their daughter Hera, appear to go off on their own as well. Like Caprica-Six, Sharon is thoroughly humanized by her love for a human and by the individual decisions she makes. She becomes a

Colonial officer and repeatedly demonstrates her allegiance to humanity. These humanoid Cylon exceptions faintly remind the viewer of the previous complexity of the series, but they do not counteract the otherwise drastic reassertion of the utopian ideology of Natural Earth.

Hera forms an exception to the ideology of difference in a more complex manner. While she symbolizes a limited form of ecological relationality, she also strongly reinforces the utopian myth of “human” renewal. Hera embodies relational ecology as the only human–humanoid Cylon hybrid in existence. In the final episode the viewer sees the narrative jump into the future to our own present day where Hera is presented as “mitochondrial Eve,” the woman from whom all humans descend. Although this seems to suggest a validation of relational ecology, Hera’s humanity and that of her progeny overshadow Cylon traits. As Sharon’s daughter she inherits qualities of a very humanized Cylon. Without knowing whom Hera will mate with, the disposition of people in her surroundings makes it likely to be a human from the fleet or an indigenous person of Earth. Her descendants become known as humans, and, at the end of the last episode, their juxtaposition to artificial technology is reinscribed via a montage of images of present-day humanity’s fascination with robots and automatons. The implication is that the distinction between humanity and artificial life-forms has been reaffirmed, and given the philosophical refrain of the series, “all of this has happened before, and it will happen again,” presumably the human–Cylon conflict will be repeated. At the same time, Hera *is* unique. But her uniqueness and that of her descendants explicitly reinforces utopian ideas of renewal such as the frontier’s ability to produce “a new kind of people” or a reconfiguration of “the self” (Katerberg 1; Jameson, *Marxism and Form* 127). While *BSG* recaptures some of its complexity in the limited ecological relationality of Hera, this is not the broad relationality between all living beings that the narrative championed previously. Instead, the ending portrays Earth as an ideal natural

environment where “humanity” is redefined in a way that ultimately fails to dispel an ideology of difference.

Conclusion

Although sustaining the mythology of the natural frontier may indicate *BSG*’s ultimate difficulty, like much science fiction, in creating a wholly new image of the world, the contrast between this predominantly facile ending and the complexity of the narrative otherwise may also be seen as a reactionary move designed to shore up an ideological stance. In the absence of Earth, and particularly in the negation of the utopian dream with the first Earth, the concepts of pure nature and corrupting culture are shown to be simplistic, wishful constructs. The bulk of the narrative increasingly emphasizes a broad relational ecology that undercuts a belief in ideological differences between humans and Cylons. However, the resurrection of the utopian fantasy of Earth at the end of *BSG* asserts the cornerstone role of Nature, as it is perceived, as the foundational concept from which other concepts of social normalization develop. Through a bizarre return to the past in the season finale, *BSG* demonstrates that a broad relational ecology—an arguably more appropriate conception for the future—may be dependent on the absence of Nature.

Notes

1. When I refer to the series as a whole I am referring to the miniseries and the four subsequent seasons.

2. References to the series will indicate the title of the episode or miniseries segment as well as the season number (or “M” for miniseries) and episode number.

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