UNIVERSIDAD DE SALAMANCA

FACULTAD DE FILOLOGÍA

GRADO EN ESTUDIOS INGLESES

Trabajo de Fin de Grado

"The Contrast between Femininity and the Feminine in Troi, from *Star Trek: The Next Generation*"

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Salamanca, 2015

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This thesis is submitted for the degree of English Studies

22nd June, 2015

Tutor: Olga Barrios

Vº Bº

Signature

Acknowledgements

I would first like to express my gratitude to Prof. Olga Barrios, my tutor, for her invaluable contribution to this paper, but mostly for being an inspiration both inside and outside the classroom with her enthusiasm, patience, commitment and wisdom. I would also like to thank the rest of the professors in this degree, for contributing with their knowledge and work to my growth as a student, a professional and a person.

I also have to thank my friends and family for their support during these years. They are my crew in this on-going mission to explore new worlds, to seek out new life and new civilizations, and I could not ask for a better one.

 Last, but not least, I would like to make a few special mentions:

To my partner, Sancho, who constantly expands my mind.

To my brother, Nicolás, who gives me purpose.

To my father and my grandmother, who are there every day, even when they do not understand what I am doing.

And to my wonderful mother, who teaches me day after day that there is strength and value in being a good listener, a patient friend and a generous person.

ABSTRACT [EN]

This paper is an analysis of the character of Deanna Troi, from *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (1987-1994) as a positive representation of the feminine side present in Taoism and psychology, while at the same time acknowledging the problems of her sexualisation throughout the show. Troi's appearance obeys to the requirement of TV producers of having an attractive sexualised female in their shows. In this case, Troi is objectified through what could be understood, from the perspective of Simone De Beauvoir's theory of *female as other*, as a frame of double Otherness: she is a female alien and an exotic beauty. However, within the fictional universe, her looks are depicted as part of her identity in the vein of third-wave feminism. Moreover, in a world dominated by masculine qualities such as authority, pragmatism and assertiveness, Troi has a high military rank and occupies an important position in the crew of the flagship vessel of the Federation, something unusual for a counsellor with empathic abilities and a sensitive, quiet and caring nature. Through her, the feminine is presented as essential to the functioning of the ship, the crew and society in general. The duality of her character as half-Betazoid and half-Human, furthers this idea of the balance between opposites, as her heritage reflects the feminine and masculine sides of the self. As a result, Troi stands as a flawed but important strong female character whose strength lies not in imitating male characters, but in developing her femininity and inviting other characters to do the same.

KEY WORDS: Alien, Duality, Feminine, Femininity, Feminism, Otherness, Sexualisation, Star Trek, Taoism.

RESUMEN [ES]

Este ensayo es un análisis del personaje de Deanna Troi, de *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (1987-1994) como una representación positiva del lado femenino, definido según el Taoísmo y la psicología, sin negar por ello los problemas de sexualización del personaje a lo largo de la serie. La apariencia de Troi obedece a la exigencia por parte de los productores de tener a un personaje femenino sexualmente atractivo. En este caso, Troi es doblemente objetificada, ya que siguiendo la teoría de Simone DeBeauvoir de *la mujer como el Otro*, Troi es presentada como alienígena y belleza exótica. Sin embargo, dentro del universo ficticio, su apariencia forma parte de su identidad, tal y como defiende la tercera ola de feminismo. Por otro lado, en un mundo primordialmente masculino en el que se valoran el autoritarismo, la asertividad y el pragmatismo, Troi goza de un alto rango militar y un puesto importante en la mejor nave de la "Federation", algo poco frecuente para una psicóloga con habilidades empáticas y una naturaleza sensible, tranquila y protectora. A través de Troi, lo femenino se muestra como esencial para el funcionamiento de la nave, la tripulación y la sociedad. La dualidad de su personaje como mitad humano, mitad Betazoid refleja el equilibrio entre lo masculino y lo femenino en cada individuo. En última instancia, pese a los problemas de objetificación, Troi es un personaje femenino cuya fuerza no reside en imitar las características de sus equivalentes masculinos, sino en desarrollar su lado femenino y animar a otros personajes a hacer lo propio.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Alienígena, Beauvoir, dualidad, femenino, feminidad, feminismo, Sexualización, Taoísmo

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INTRODUCTION

In 1986, Paramount decided to bring the Star Trek franchise back to television. Like most TV shows during the 1980s, *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (1987-1994) focused on an ensemble cast (Nemecek 13). As a consequence, and to be more attractive to female viewers among which *Star Trek: The Original Series* had been successful, the new show would start its run with three main female characters.

The character of Deanna Troi was problematic from the beginning. There was a struggle between the desire to include an emotional, feminine intelligence in the crew and the requirement of having a sexualized female alien to cater to the masculine audience. Creator Gene Rodenberry pitched Troi as "a four-breasted, oversexed hermaphrodite", but writer D.C. Fontana strongly opposed to this (Engel, 226-227). When the show started, Troi was a half-human half-Betazoid Lieutenant Commander that worked as a counsellor and had empathic abilities. However, the writers had trouble writing for the character of Deanna Troi. Actress Marina Sirtis, who played the role, stated that "Troi was supposed to be the brains. . . [W]hen the cleavage came, all that left, and I became decorative" (ConPanels).

Previous work on the character of Troi (Roberts; Joyrich) analysed her psychological and physical qualities together, mixing the two ideas behind her creation. The aim of this paper is to separate and contrast these two sides in the character of Deanna Troi: on the one hand, a positive representation of the feminine side (nurturing, empathetic, with emotional intelligence) that deserves recognition and is balanced with the masculine side of the self; on the other hand, a traditional and sexualized depiction of femininity. By doing this, it is possible to see a balance of the feminine and the masculine within Troi herself that makes her a functional and empowered individual.

1. TRADITIONAL FEMININITY AND THE FEMININE SIDE

In this section, I will deal with the concept of femininity through the different waves of feminism. Then, I will explain how traditional femininity is applied to the character Troi. Finally, I will separate the concept of femininity from that of the feminine side as understood in Taoism and in psychology, on which I will base my analysis.

1.1. TRADITIONAL FEMININITY: FROM SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR TO SCIENCE FICTION

In feminist theory, femininity is understood as a social construct consisting of the expectations placed upon women's appearances and behaviour. Simone de Beauvoir's quotation, "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" summarizes the idea that society perpetuates this image of what a woman should be, and sees this set of forced standards as a tool to keep women in a submissive position (295). This perpetuation takes place, as explained by Judith Butler's theory of "gender performativity", by the repetition of certain patterns associated to each gender (136). All the characteristics linked to this idea of femininity are meant to shape the woman into an object of desire for men: beautiful, helpful, eager to please.

During second-wave feminism (1960s-1980s), femininity suffered a severe backlash in America, where the book *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan brought to light how the pressure of fitting a fictional image of womanhood was causing unhappiness, depression and mental illness to many housewives. Any behaviour that conformed to the idea of femininity was condemned by radical feminists. This hard reaction against everything related to femininity led, in the nineties, to an opposite reaction from some movements within third-wave feminism, like lipstick feminism, which reclaimed make-up and provocative clothing as

empowering. For third-wave feminists, the behaviour and characteristics associated to the social construct of femininity were valid as long as the woman embraced them because they made her feel better with herself.

This distinction in the perception of femininity by both waves of feminism is necessary to understand how, as I will explain later, Troi's conformity to traditional feminine traits is framed within the diegetic universe as a part of her identity. However, Troi's appearance is designed to cater to the heterosexual male audience. This objectification is reached by a reinterpretation of traditional femininity within the science fiction genre by mixing two tropes: the female alien and the exotic beauty.

De Beauvoir's idea of femininity originates in the idea of the female as Other, that is, everything that is not male (16). This Otherness is translated into science-fiction universes by having the aliens be female, and thus doubly other: non-human and non-male. The female alien tends to have some sort of supernatural powers and an aggressive sexuality that make her threatening to the human males. In the case of Troi, however, the Otherness of her alien heritage has been framed within the stereotype of the exotic beauty.

The exotic beauty is another frame of "female as Other" (Beauvoir 16). This female is defined by everything that marks her as different and alluring. In the case of science fiction, these markers of Otherness are magnified, as the origin of the female alien is literally otherworldly.

As the analysis will show, Troi's femininity is framed as an empowering part of her identity in the spirit of third-wave feminism within the diegetic universe, while outside of it she is objectified by a double layer of Otherness—alien and exotic.

1.2. THE FEMININE SIDE: TAOISM AND PSYCHOLOGY[1]

Taking the definition of femininity exposed above, it seems that it is always limited to women or, at least, to those who identify as female. However, Taoism and later psychology associate the feminine to a set of characteristics that, though identified as feminine in our society because of their adscription to femininity, are present in every human being. Complementary to this, there is an opposed set of characteristics corresponding to the masculine. Both sides are necessary in each individual.

Taoism is based on change and balance, on opposite halves that form a unity: the Yin Yang. The Yin represents the feminine, the passive, the receptive, the soft; whereas the Yang represents the masculine, the active, the creative, the hard. The Yin and the Yang have a seed of each other inside of them. The interaction between both sides brings change and growth. On a social scale, this implies that, beyond the classification of individuals into male and female, there is a masculine and a feminine side within each subject, and both sides are equally important.

The idea of the complementary opposites from Taoism made its way into Western psychology through Jung, who translated the Yin Yang balance into the existence of an unconsciousness of the opposite gender within the self, the Anima (feminine) and the Animus (masculine). These inner, unconscious opposites are meant to balance the individual's conscious side, resulting into a balanced human being. Every human needs to develop both the feminine and the masculine sides in order to be functional.

The characteristics represented by the Yin and the Yang in Taoism as explained above are not the same as the ones linked to the feminine and the masculine in Western psychology. In Western cultures, the masculine represents the rational, direct approach, as well as the

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[1] For further information on the Yin Yang balance and Jungian psychology, see Fang (2011) and Jung (1959).

assertive and competitive qualities. By association with the image established by femininity, the feminine represents the emotional, creative qualities, as well as the inspiration, the intuition, the nurturing feelings, all present in the personality of Troi.

The submissive gender role assigned to women through femininity has shaped the perception of the creative, emotional, nurturing characteristics associated to it as weak and devoid of value. This idea is supported, in the Western world, by a predominance of capitalist systems, in which assertiveness, competition and hierarchy are encouraged. As a result, modern society is biased towards the masculine characteristics. In Taoism, this bias towards the masculine is static and sterile, since equality and balance between the opposites is the ideal that brings change and growth.

By separating the concept of feminine side from the idea of femininity as an oppressing social construct in this way, it is possible to re-evaluate the role played by the characteristics of the former in the individual. As I will defend later in my analysis, the feminine characteristics represented by Troi are framed as essential within the crew to balance the masculine qualities presented by other characters and her own self.

2. FEMININITY AND THE FEMININE IN DEANNA TROI

In this chapter, I will analyse the character of Deanna Troi. In the first section, I show how the character is sexualised to please heterosexual men; in the second section, I explore Troi's personality and her professional life as an empowering representation of the feminine side; in the third and last section, I will demonstrate that there is also a balance between the feminine and the masculine within Troi herself that makes her a model of the Yin—Yang equilibrium.

2.1. TRADITIONAL FEMININITY: SEXUALISATION AND EXOTIC BEAUTY IN THE APPEARANCE OF TROI.

As previously stated, the character of Deanna Troi is presented as an attractive female alien. Her appearance has suffered a series of changes throughout the show, all of them designed to emphasize her attractiveness and otherness, framing her as an exotic beauty.

The need for Troi to be attractive and foreign was established as early as the first casting calls:

LT. DEANNA TROI—An alien woman who is tall (5'8—6') and slender, about 30 years old and quite beautiful. . .Deanna is probably foreign. . .with looks and accent to match. . .Her alien "look" is still to be determined. (Nemecek 17)

Troi's attire was very changeable from the start of the show. In the pilot episode, "Encounter at Farpoint" (1987), Troi wore a uniform similar to the one used by all the female characters during *Star Trek: The Original Series* (1966—1969), i.e., a short minidress with boots (see fig. 1). However, this look was considered too outdated and "cheerleaderlike" (Nemecek 27). The minidress was later replaced by a series of suits that enhanced her figure (see fig. 2 for on duty clothes and fig. 3 for off duty clothes). Troi would not wear the standard uniform while on duty until "Chain of Command, Part I" (1992) during season 6 (see fig. 4).

Troi's hair also went through a variety of changes, all of them involving long, curly hair with a lot of volume and hairpieces. The make-up emphasized her big and unusually dark eyes, defined her eyebrows and brought out her cheekbones and lips. She also wore long, manicured nails.

Through all the changes, Troi's appearance was meant to please the heterosexual male audience, a common requirement for TV shows. Her outfits emphasized her mixed alien heritage, making her look different from the rest of the crew. The actress, as established in the casting call, was required to use a foreign sounding accent. This character design framed Troi within the exotic beauty stereotype explained in chapter 1.

Within the fictional universe, however, her appearance is justified by her work and heritage. Troi does not wear a standard uniform or the rank insignia because she wants to seem approachable as a therapist instead of an authority figure. Through her mother, the other Betazoid female that appears in the show, it is made clear that elaborate hairstyles and dresses are part of the Betazoid culture. This association between clothes, hairstyles and alien cultures is very common in the Star Trek universe—other aliens such as Vulcans or Klingons have their own characteristic styles.[2]

By associating her looks with her heritage, the appearance of the character becomes an essential part of her identity, a choice to present herself as a professional and as a Betazoid. Within the fictional universe, as I mentioned in the previous chapter, this physical conformation to traditional femininity is not such, but a part of herself that she feels comfortable with. In the episode "The Naked Now" (1987), Yar, the chief of security, asks Troi for help to change her image because Troi always looks beautiful. Yar has a history of sexual abuse that makes her afraid of romantic and sexual intimacy. What she sees in Troi's appearance is the confidence of the counsellor regarding her feelings and her sexuality. Therefore, and as explained in the previous chapter, Troi's appearance empowers her in the spirit of third-wave feminism.

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[2] In *Star Trek*, the concepts of species, race and culture are treated as one when it comes to aliens. In this paper, we will treat Betazoids and other aliens as species with their own cultures, parallel to the human species and its culture.

A scene that shows particularly well the dichotomy of how Troi's femininity is framed within the fictional universe and outside of it can be found in "The Game" (1991). Troi is enjoying an ice-cream by herself when the First Officer, Riker, joins her and asks about how she is eating. She explains her technique in a monologue full of sexual innuendo, shot with close planes of her face, while Riker (a traditional masculine figure) looks amused and condescending. However, it is clear that she never meant to seduce Riker. Within the fictional universe, she is enjoying herself; in the real world, though, her way of eating is meant to please the male audience.

Troi's love of chocolate is not the only non-physical trait of the character linked to traditional femininity. Her mother is constantly pressuring Troi to leave her career and get married. This, together with the feminine side that I will explore in the next section, points to confusing sex, gender, the psychological qualities represented by the character and the performance of a traditional femininity.

2.2. THE FEMININE IS VALUABLE: TROI AS A REPRESENTATION OF FEMININE QUALITIES

In the second section of the first chapter, I established the qualities linked to the feminine side of the personality in Taoism and Jungian psychology. Here, I will explore how these qualities are present in Troi, and how they make her a valuable part of the crew.

As explained earlier, in Western psychology the feminine is linked to the emotional and creative side of our personality. Troi is genetically empathetic[3], which favoured her emotional development from a very early age. The ability to perceive the emotions of most beings has also made her very intuitive—even when she cannot sense someone, she has the

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[3] Full Betazoids are telepaths, but Troi, being half-Betazoid, only developed empathy. Troi's empathy functions as one of our senses: in the same way that we cannot perceive certain sounds, there are beings she cannot read.

knowledge and the experience to anticipate how others will react. Her career in Psychology complements her natural abilities, and it also shows that she is inclined to take care of those around her.

Her empathy, sensitivity and caring qualities do not make Troi a weak or irrelevant character in the show, as it might seem considering the bias of our society towards the logical side. On the contrary, these characteristics grant her the role of counsellor and diplomat on the ship, and the military rank of Lieutenant Commander. Her abilities are essential in many situations, particularly when the crew confronts hostile aliens. In the episode "Face of the Enemy" (1993), her unique profile makes her the best suited to infiltrate an enemy vessel. In "The Best of Both Worlds, Part II" (1990), she notices that Captain Picard (the leader of the crew) has not being completely assimilated by an alien entity, preventing his death. In "Disaster" (1991), an accident isolates the bridge from the rest of the ship, and Troi takes charge. She opts for a horizontal model of command instead of the traditional hierarchical one. She makes it clear, however, that she is the acting captain: "We will separate the ship when I decide that it's time, and not before." As a result, Troi saves the ship without sacrificing the crew trapped outside the bridge.

Troi also encourages male characters such as Captain Picard or the second Chief of Security, Worf, to embrace their feminine side. In the episode "Family" (1990), Picard declares himself recovered from a traumatic experience, and she replies that "[he] cannot achieve complete recovery so quickly. . . [I]t is perfectly normal. . .to spend a great deal of time trying to find yourself again". In "New Ground" (1990), she helps Worf and his son to deal with the grief over the death of the boy's mother: "You both have a lot of healing to do. Perhaps you should think about doing it together".

All these examples show how Troi's feminine side is presented in a positive light as a valuable resource for personal and professional life. It is not a weakness that should be overcome, but an asset that other characters are encouraged to embrace.

2.3. THE HARMONY WITHIN: TROI AS A REPRESENTATION OF BALANCE BETWEEN THE FEMININE AND THE MASCULINE.

Troi represents mostly the feminine side, but as explained in Taoism, both sides are required to be functional. Therefore, it is necessary to see how the Yin Yang duality is present in Troi herself.

Assuming that, as explained in the first section of this chapter, femininity and the feminine have been confused in the conception of the character, we can see qualities such as Troi's high military rank and her ability to control weapons and fight as manifestations of traditional masculinity. In "The Price" (1989), Troi starts a romantic relationship with a part Betazoid negotiator. She finds out that he is using his empathic abilities to cheat in a negotiation, and she decides to put her work first by telling the Captain about it—"And yes, it did put me in a conflict of interest, which I hope I have now resolved", she emphasises. Later, this Betazoid negotiator asks Troi to elope with him, but she refuses; instead, she chooses her life and her career. This prioritization of work above love is another traditionally masculine characteristic. However, the most relevant duality is presented through her hybrid nature as half-human and half-Betazoid.

Moreover, the Betazoid culture is very representative of the feminine side: a matriarchal society that values communication, nature, transparency and cooperation. The human culture, on the other hand, embodies masculine qualities such as hierarchy,

pragmatism and authority. As a combination of both sides, there is a balance in Troi that is reflected in her calm demeanour and healthy personality. She is the only Star Trek character that is truly comfortable with her mixed heritage. In the episode "The Emissary" (1989), when a half-human, half-klingon character says to Troi that they must have grown with a similar feeling of being trapped between cultures, she replies that she tries "to experience the richness and diversity of the two worlds".

In the episode "The Loss" (1990), Troi loses her empathy, her main Betazoid characteristic. She feels unstable: "You [Riker] have no idea how frightening it is to just be here, without sensing you, without sharing your feelings". Without her empathy, the balance between her different sides and identities is broken, and she feels unable to function. At the end of the episode, she manages to help a colony of aliens to find its way home, and her empathy returns. By solving the problem, she restores the balance within herself.

The balance between masculine and feminine represented by the dualities within Troi herself (commander and counsellor, Betazoid and human), and the way in which she tries to help other characters to achieve this balance within themselves, reflects the empowering and essential nature of her feminine side. Although this does not deny the problematic aspects in the physical depiction of the character outside of the fictional universe, separating both sides of the character allows an interpretation of Troi as a powerful symbol of the importance of the feminine side and the balance between the feminine and the masculine.

CONCLUSION

As it is shown in my analysis, the character of Deanna Troi is problematic, but not without merit. There was a struggle between two conflicting concepts: a character with a strongly developed feminine side that shed a positive light on qualities such as emotional

intelligence, communication and the ability to nurture others, and an attractive female character created to please the average male viewer of the show. In an industry that had always portrayed the masculine qualities of physical strength, authority, logic and violence as positive, Troi was a refreshing but a difficult character to write. However, the writers succeeded in making her a valuable piece of the crew and a positive influence on more traditional characters such as Captain Picard or Worf.

Troi has been one of the first examples of a new kind of female character that managed to develop her feminine qualities in a masculine world, creating a balance between the masculine and the feminine within herself and in others. Similar to her are Alicia Florrick in the show *The Good Wife* (2009—present) or Paikea Apirana in *Whale Rider* (2002), women that make a stand for communication, cooperation and nurturing qualities while also embracing masculine qualities such as professional ambition. Troi managed to balance the feminine and masculine sides of her own self as easily as she embraced the duality of her hybrid nature.

APPENDIX

Fig. 1. Deanna Troi in "Encounter at Farpoint" (1987), *Star Trek the Next Generation*.

Fig. 2. Deanna Troi on duty, *Star Trek the Next Generation.*

Fig. 3, Deanna Troi off duty, *Star Trek the Next Generation.*

Fig. 4, Deanna Troi in standard uniform, *Star Trek the Next Generation*.

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