



DRONES, CLONES AND ALPHA BABES: RETROFITTING *STAR TREK'S* HUMANISM, POST- 9/11

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4: Techno-maternalism

Families are becoming cyborgian; their very forms are mediated or determined by technoscience. Just as different types of cyborgs are now proliferating, so are cyborg families. – Chris Hables Gray, *Cyborg Citizen*, 143.

AS ALREADY NOTED, Janeway's *Voyager* as social space is very different from Picard's *Enterprise*. Children appear on Picard's bridge from time to time – usually evoking strong reaction from the Captain who, by his own admission, is uncomfortable in the presence of children. Children on the bridge serve as a reminder of the separation of public and private spheres on the *Enterprise*. The gender coding of professional and domestic life figures as a theme in several *TNG* episodes, the most interesting of which are those that deconstruct the public/private binary. One of these is “The Offspring,” in which Data decides to become a parent. This episode was rated the eleventh most popular among *TNG* audiences in a survey conducted by *TV Guide* in 1994 (*Farewell... 85*) – perhaps because it challenges a whole series of gendered binaries: in addition to the public/private opposition, technology/biology, reason/emotion, and fathering/mothering are questioned in interesting ways.

Initially, Picard is incensed that Data has not consulted with him before undertaking the task of building a new Soong-type android. “I have not observed anyone else on board consulting you about their procreation, Captain,” explains the bewildered Data. Picard is appalled that Data insists upon regarding this new technological construction as his child. Counsellor Troi takes a posthumanist position on the issue, advising the Captain to reign in his humanist bias: “Why should biology rather than technology determine whether it's a child? Data has created an offspring – a new life out of his own being. To me, that suggests a child. If he wishes to call Lal a child, then who are we to argue?” But Picard cannot understand how a

complex piece of technology with the strength of ten men can possibly be regarded as a child. “You’ve never been a parent,” Troi pointedly reminds the ship’s patriarch. Picard’s behaviour is indeed surprising, given that he has been instrumental in challenging Federation law to recognize Data as a legitimate life form and won for him the rights, responsibilities, and privileges guaranteed to all humanoid citizens of the Federation (“Measure of a Man”).

Counsellor Troi’s only concern upon first meeting the new android is that Data has not given it a more human appearance, for in this early stage of its construction it has not yet been given primary and secondary sexual characteristics, nor does it have skin colouring or facial features. Data explains: “I have decided to allow my child to choose its own sex and appearance.” This is especially significant in the context of our knowledge that Data himself came into existence in an almost totally opposite way. He was created precisely in the image of the egocentric Dr. Noonian Soong, the cyberneticist who built him. Actor Brent Spiner, who plays Data, also plays his “father,” who shows up from time to time to exert further control over his technological son and heir. By contrast, Data takes his offspring to the holodeck to “try on” several thousand available subjectivities before a holographic mirror. This scene has important race and gender implications, since Lal chooses to be both human and female. That she decides to be human rather than Klingon or Andorian – two other choices she favours – is understandable, since her father is modelled on a human being and has invested much time and energy in becoming more like biological humans.

But it’s Lal’s choice to be female that defines the limits of *TNG*’s deconstruction of gender. Part of Data’s charm is that he has no emotional awareness: he is the perfect embodiment of Enlightenment reason and human reason’s highest technological achievement, and he has been programmed with the sum of human knowledge. Moreover, he flatters us in his attempt to be more like us and often expresses the android form of regret that he is incapable of experiencing human emotions. However, audiences don’t share this regret – indeed, if *Star Trek* newsgroup participants are any indication, female fans are especially appreciative of Data. He is a man no woman has to fear: not only is he soft-spoken and polite to a fault; he’s incapable of experiencing emotional injury and flying into a violent rage. In this way, Data is a unique exception to the failure of traditional males to make real the illusion of themselves as “the rational sex.” Lal’s choice in favour of femaleness implicitly identifies her with “the emotional

sex”; hence, it’s hardly surprising that when she spontaneously develops emotional awareness, she is doomed. Technology is coded masculine, and at this point in the evolution of *Star Trek’s* humanist philosophy, the writers are still cautious about this gender distinction. It will have to wait until *First Contact* and *Voyager*.

Where “The Offspring” does begin to prefigure *Voyager’s* family values theme is in its representation of Data’s parenting skills. Data turns out to be the best mother a father can be. The most obvious feminist reading of this would be that since the onset of the women’s movement, popular culture has responded with multiplying images of men who turn out to be better than women at being women – including being better at mothering. Hollywood set this particular form of feminist backlash in motion with *Kramer versus Kramer*, and later films and TV series – *Diff’rent Strokes*, *Boyz N the Hood*, and *Mrs. Doubtfire*, for example – perfected it. The Data of “The Offspring” is therefore nothing new. But two things stand out for me. First, when Lal experiences difficulties relating to other children, Data seeks out advice from a mother rather than a father. Dr. Crusher shares her parenting experiences and advises Data that when especially difficult problems arise, the most important thing is to give the child guidance and love. “I can give Lal guidance,” he tells her, “but I am incapable of giving her love.” “Now, why do I have so much trouble believing that?” Dr. Crusher says to herself as Data exits her office.

Secondly, for my purposes here, what is interesting about Data’s excellent parenting is that it reaches out across the human/posthuman divide and establishes the theme of techno-parenting – which is then carried forward in *Voyager*. Children do not appear on Janeway’s bridge, in part because *Voyager* does not accommodate families of crewmembers, as the ship is not equipped with family quarters. Also, we need no reminders of a public/private split, as it is less of an issue in *Voyager* since the arrival of Seven of Nine. The flashbacks to the *Raven* had shown us a ship where professional life and family life were completely collapsed into each other because of the vessel’s tiny size. Little Anika has trouble sleeping because she has to listen to her parents discussing their work and arguing about their options. In the final flashback, trembling in her bed, Anika is forced to listen to the rising panic in her parents’ voices as the Borg detect the *Raven’s* presence and prepare to assimilate the ship.

Despite the absence of family quarters, there are nevertheless children aboard *Voyager*, acquired *en route*. In Season Two, Ensign Samantha

Wildman gives birth to her daughter Naomi, conceived back in the Alpha Quadrant. While Ensign Wildman is human, Naomi's father, who also serves in Starfleet but not aboard *Voyager*, is Katurian. Ensign Wildman is, in effect, a single parent of her "hybrid" child. As Naomi's godfather, Nelix fills in as best he can. From her biological father's side of the family, Naomi has inherited distinctive Katurian facial features and a short maturation period. Naomi matures rapidly so that at the age of two, she is more like a human child of seven. At first intimidated by "that Borg-lady," Naomi eventually develops a bond with Seven of Nine, who gradually takes over from Nelix the responsibility of Naomi's education. "Naomi Wildman," asks Seven with characteristic abruptness, "do you consider me to be family?" "Well, uh, *yes*," stammers the child, "is that okay?" "I have no objection," says Seven curtly. "Do you think of *me* as family?" Naomi nervously asks. "Yes," replies Seven and walks away, leaving Naomi to bask in the joy of having a big sister. As for Seven, this exchange is an example of the Borg-like efficiency with which she manages all her relationships, both professional and interpersonal ("Survival Instinct").

The interplay of sameness and difference played out in the mutual mirroring of Borg collective and ship's company is given an added measure of complexity in episodes that further explore the question of Borg family values raised in "Dark Frontier." *Star Trek* embraces the logic that all humans are individuals but not all individuals are human. This has implications for the definition of family that emerges in the context of Seven of Nine's recovery. For her, the task of recovering her humanity involves reconnecting with human emotions, which are both repressed and underdeveloped as a consequence of her Borg experience. The subtler emotions – the ones associated with love and related intimacies – give her particular trouble. To her, such emotions are "irrelevant," but under this dismissal lingers her fear of them. For example, in "Survival Instinct," she comes into possession of a small collection of Borg parts, "synaptic relays," she says, "from my original Unimatrix." Examining them, she experiences strange flashbacks and can't make sense of the imagery. "Isn't it possible," B'Elanna Torres asks her, "that what you experienced was simply nostalgia?" Seven hotly denies this: "I have no feelings for the past!" She quickly recovers her composure and apologizes. "You may not be nostalgic about the past," Torres advises, "but I'd say you definitely have feelings about it. Strong ones."

The evocative bits of techno-junk have been brought aboard by three Borg escapees, formerly "Two of Nine, Three of Nine, and Four of Nine,"

members of Seven's old Unimatrix. Although they are separated from the Borg collective, their parietal lobes are still linked together in a "collective triad," and they want Seven's help in separating them. But the procedure is highly risky, as it would involve Seven's linking in with her former colleagues and possibly getting trapped in the neural link. Seven is loath to take this risk but nevertheless "feel[s] compelled to help them." "Do you think of these people as family?" inquires Janeway. Seven asks why this should be relevant. "There's an old saying: 'Blood is thicker than water.' It means that the ties of family run deeper than any other kind of relationship. We'll often do things for our family we'd never dream of doing for anyone else." Janeway is raising the possibility that for Seven, her Borg Unimatrix is the technological equivalent of the crew's biological families back home. As it turns out, the situation is more complicated than that, but we are nevertheless left with the impression that if Seven is to possess true individuality, she must be allowed her cyborgness – which, indeed, she never relinquishes.

In "Drone," this techno-emotional theme gets played out in an episode on the theme of New Reproductive Technologies in which a Borg drone is conceived on *Voyager* as a result of a transporter accident that causes a "random convergence of technologies." This convergence involves the "infection" of the Doctor's mobile emitter by some of the Borg nanoprobes (cellular-size robots) that flow through Seven's veins – with a dash of human DNA from a male crewmember thrown in to determine the sex of the offspring. Merely a kind of sperm-donor, however, this male crewmember is quickly written out of the episode. The Drone is a Superborg by virtue of the twenty-ninth-century technology of the mobile emitter, a souvenir picked up on one of *Voyager*'s treks through time. As the superfetus floats in the green amniotic fluid of its Borg maturation chamber, Seven reports to Janeway: "The drone possesses superior technology. It will fully mature in less than two hours. However, its Borg shielding is not yet active. We can still terminate it, but we must act quickly." Janeway, however, takes the pro-life position: "This is the most advanced drone ever to exist! We could teach him our values, Seven! We could show him what it means to be an individual." Janeway gives this job to Seven, but her logic is lost on Seven: "I am to instruct the drone in the ways of humanity," she replies in a tone of utter scepticism. "Think of it as first contact – and you are our ambassador," says Janeway – *end of discussion*. Thus does Seven of Nine – with the father out of the picture – become a single parent.

Technologically determined, the drone has some initial trouble with the concept of individuality, but Seven enculturates him with megadoses of data which the hungry drone gobbles down like techno-pablum. Soon, echoing Hugh of Borg, the drone names himself “One,” signifying his emerging individuality. But his Borg technology asserts itself, and while he’s regenerating, his neurotransmitter automatically activates and transmits One’s coordinates to the collective. A Borg sphere responds, and soon Janeway finds herself engaging the Borg. However, having bonded with his mother and the rest of his *Voyager* family, One puts his advanced technology to work upgrading the ship’s shields and weapons systems. In order to disable the sphere, he transports himself over and destroys it. Protected by his advanced multi-spatial shielding, One survives – but not for long. He ends up in sickbay, in dire need of surgery, which he refuses: “No! I should not exist.” The Borg are now aware of his existence, he argues, and they will come for him: “As long as I exist, you are in danger. All life on *Voyager* is in danger.” Choosing to ignore this argument as similar to the one she herself had made in “Dark Frontier,” Seven commands One to comply. But One expires, and Seven now faces another unwelcome lesson in dealing with emotions.

Like Data and his daughter Lal, Seven and her son One illustrate the difficulty of reconciling the maternal and the mechanical within a humanist framework in which the biological essentialism of the former and the technological determinism of the latter are in binary opposition. Both Lal and One crash on the rocks of this contradiction. In the end, it’s up to Seven to find a way to bridge the divide – which is, at bottom, the divide between nature and culture. The character of Seven can be – and has been – read as satisfying neither the values of traditional humanism, nor the postmodernist critique of them. But this may also be seen as her strength. If we read her on *Star Trek’s* own humanist terms, it’s possible to see her as signifying culture’s troubled interface with nature. As Terry Eagleton puts it, “Nature is not just the Other of culture. It is also a kind of inert weight within it, opening up an inner fracture which runs all the way through the human subject. We can wrest culture out of Nature only by harnessing some of our own natural energies to the task ...” (2000 110). As *Star Trek’s* premiere icon of fractured subjectivity, Seven can be seen to represent this process in reverse: she struggles to recover her lost “nature” – in this case, her nurturing potential – by harnessing some of her own technological reserves to the task. Such is the “essence” of her techno-maternalism.

Unfolding events in the American news media during the first four months of 2000 provide an interesting context within which to read three “American family values” episodes of *Voyager* aired in February and March of that year, episodes in which Seven of Nine gets to develop her unique kind of mothering skills. In the preceding November, a six-year-old Cuban boy, Elián González, was rescued from the waters off the coast of Florida. He and his mother, along with other refugees, had been fleeing Cuba for Miami when their boat capsized. Elián’s mother had drowned in the mishap, and the boy was delivered by the American authorities into the custody of his mother’s extended family of Cuban exiles in Miami. Elián’s father, grandparents, and the Cuban government demanded the boy’s return. But the child became a political football in a legal struggle between the anti-Castro lobby, led by the Cuban American National Foundation, and the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service. The protracted battle ended on 22 April, when Elián was finally returned to his father.

For an American news media suffering scandal withdrawal symptoms since the conclusion of impeachment proceedings against President Bill Clinton, the Elián story more than satisfied the cravings. Television networks and cable news channels provided the American public and the international community with twenty-four/seven coverage, dramatizing events as they unfolded and exploiting Elián with impunity. In keeping with pro-family American ideology, public opinion polls reported that Americans overwhelmingly supported the return of the boy to his father, but this opinion was challenged by a loudly articulated view of Castro’s Cuba that almost seemed to draw on the Federation’s view of the Borg for its hyperbole. Media elites no doubt felt justified in exploiting the Elián story, and no doubt the American viewing public rewarded them with a significant jump in ratings. For the American pro-family movement had become a well-financed and highly influential force during the 1990s, and had made some spectacular and newsworthy gains during the latter half of the decade.

According to Jennifer Butler, United Nations representative and researcher on issues of gender and the Christian Right, at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995,

Christian Right groups ... protested abortion rights, lesbian rights and the [feminist] concept of gender. Led by Beverly LaHaye’s Concerned Women for America, the Christian Right went to Beijing to discredit

the US NGO community in the eyes of its right-wing base in the US and sympathetic right-wing women's groups internationally. The enthusiasm and spirit of the liberal US women's movement largely drowned out its efforts. (11)

Undaunted by this experience, Mrs. LaHaye's CWA and other conservative American Christian groups, under the pro-family banner, established an effective international coalition with conservatives of other denominations and faiths, including Muslims and Jews. This pro-family coalition declared itself ready "to do battle against those enemies that threaten the traditional family: feminism, sexual liberation, abortion, and gay and lesbian rights" (Butler 9). At their second World Family Forum conference in 1999, the coalition drafted the "Geneva Declaration":

It affirms "that the natural human family is established by the Creator and [is] essential to good society." The natural family is "the fundamental social unit, inscribed in human nature and centered on the voluntary union of a man and a woman in the lifelong covenant of marriage. The natural family is defined by marriage, procreation and, in some cultures, adoption." (Butler 12)

Instead of seeking to undermine or abolish the United Nations, as do many conservatives, the pro-family coalition began to advocate these positions, including their defence of patriarchy and their repudiation of gay and single-parent families, within the UN arena. Thanks to their efforts, the United States postponed indefinitely its endorsement of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and withdrew its support for international children's rights. Is it, then, any wonder that the return of Elián to his "natural" father had such overwhelming public support?

Read against the backdrop of the Elián González media extravaganza, *Voyager's* adoption of four "neonatal" drones abandoned by the Borg, their readjustment and recovery of individuality under Seven of Nine's supervision, and the return of one of the children to his biological parents play out the debate over Elián's fate in the context of Alpha Quadrant politics. In "Collective," the Borg collective has judged a group of young drones "irrelevant" and has left them to die aboard an abandoned cube. The adult crew of the vessel has been destroyed by a mysterious pathogen, which

the Doctor is finally able to synthesize for use as an anti-Borg weapon, should the crisis aboard the cube require it. In the complicated process of disarming the young drones and rescuing some *Voyager* crew they have been holding hostage, Seven establishes a relationship of sorts with the drones. The crisis is finally diffused, and the four surviving children – a girl of about nine, twin boys of about twelve, and an older adolescent boy – are transported to *Voyager*. Janeway, who initiates what she expects to be a long search for the children’s families, commandeers Seven’s techno-maternalism, which the Captain regards as essential to the rehabilitation of the children’s individuality. “I’ve never been responsible for children,” Seven protests, “Mr. Nelix would be a better choice.” “From what I’ve seen,” Janeway presses, “you’re the one they’ve established the bond with. They’ll be looking to you for guidance.” Seven relents: “Perhaps I could help them avoid some of the obstacles I’ve encountered” (“Collective”).

For Seven, the task turns out to be almost as difficult as Janeway’s had been with her. Emulating the Borg Queen, in “Ashes to Ashes” Seven attempts to bring order to the chaos that erupts as the children’s personalities emerge. She devises a meticulously detailed schedule of activities “to promote focus and unity.” Every moment is accounted for in the children’s day, and an hour of “Fun” is narrowly slotted between “Exercise” and “Navigation” class. Seven even works out an elaborate system of punishment protocols, which she implements when the children rebel – which is often. “You will exercise punishment protocol nine alpha!” she commands when she catches the twins cheating at a board game during a highly regimented “recreational activities” hour. The two criminals rise, turn, and stand with their faces to the bulkhead. Icheb, the oldest boy, protests, and a palace revolt ensues.

Seven applies to Chakotay for reassignment of duties, reporting: “My attempts to apply discipline only result in further disorder.” Chakotay, perhaps recalling the mayhem of Seven’s arrival on board, takes pleasure in denying her request, reminding her that the children are individuals and advising her to stop treating them as if they were still on a Borg cube. This comparison of her pedagogical style with that of the collective offends Seven, but the message is not entirely lost on her. In sculpture class, the boys are working in an orderly fashion on their sculptures – geometrical shapes, as specified by Seven. Mezoti, however, has decided not to comply with the terms of the assignment. She and her workstation are covered in smears and splatters of clay, but she has produced a fairly recognizable

likeness of Seven of Nine. Seven arrives to inspect. Her irritation with Mezoti visible, Seven claims not to see her resemblance in the sculpture and asks why Mezoti has disobeyed orders. “This was more fun,” says the girl: “Don’t you like it?” “It’s crude,” says Seven bluntly. Mezoti’s features cloud over. “However,” Seven continues, “it does demonstrate ingenuity and individuality... Resume your disorder.” Thus does the *Voyager* method of childrearing score a point against Borg pedagogy (“Ashes to Ashes”).

This sculpture class recalls a scene from “Raven,” in which Janeway attempts to kindle Seven’s creativity by inviting her to help with a bust the Captain is sculpting. Janeway lectures Seven on the importance of art in the liberation of the imagination and, by implication, the nurturing of individuality. Significantly, this lesson takes place in Janeway’s holodeck simulation of Leonardo da Vinci’s workshop and in the context of all that it signifies in terms of Renaissance humanism. But the Captain fails to get through to Seven, who finds sculpture without utility and hence irrelevant. Now, however, two years later, Seven’s decision to include sculpture in the Borg children’s curriculum suggests that perhaps Janeway’s lesson had not gone unlearned after all. The impishness of Mezoti’s defiance is a reminder of just how much more challenging Seven’s resentment and intransigence had been for Janeway.

The enriched environment of *Voyager*’s astrometrics lab – Seven’s duty station and Icheb’s classroom – is a startling contrast to the dusty little agrarian community on the Brunali homeworld, where *Voyager* has located Icheb’s parents (“Child’s Play”). Situated less than a light-year from a Borg transwarp conduit – a superhighway through subspace – the planet resembles a war zone. Several Borg raids have taught what’s left of the planet’s inhabitants how to hide the evidence of their technological know-how, which includes the only kind of advanced plant genetics that can make something grow in this desolate landscape. Icheb’s scientific genius, which is considerable, will just have to be refocused from astrometrics and spatial harmonics to plant biology. But Seven has not been able to break the news to Icheb, who looks forward to continuing his education on *Voyager* and someday reaching Earth. After one failed attempt, Seven grimly appeals to Janeway: “I’d like the data you’ve collected on Icheb’s species so I can prepare him for reassimilation.” Janeway is not impressed with Seven’s choice of words: “Maybe we could refer to it as ‘getting reacquainted with his family.’” But this is a debate which Seven has experienced from both

sides: she knows the difference between *assimilated* and *acquainted* – and she knows Icheb.

Predictably, the reacquainting ritual on the Brunali homeworld goes badly: Icheb abruptly withdraws to *Voyager*; Seven insults his parents; and Janeway is furious. Seven defends herself: “those individuals may not be suitable guardians.” The pro-family Janeway is appalled: “Those ‘individuals’ are his mother and father!” Seven points out that the Brunali will always be at risk of assimilation and should have relocated to another planet long before now. “*It’s their home!*” rebuts Janeway, who is in the sixth year of yearning for her own home and thus admires the Brunalis’ determination to protect theirs. “It’s not worth protecting!” Seven insists: “Anyone who values their own goals over the safety of their children is irresponsible.” Janeway goes for the jugular: “Are we talking about Icheb’s parents or yours?” “It would be naive for me to claim objectivity in this case,” Seven admits, “but I’m not prepared to return Icheb to parents who may be as careless as my own.”

A few more efforts at re-establishing the family bonds pay off: Icheb makes the decision to remain on the planet; *Voyager* leaves orbit; and Seven is again in the grip of feelings she finds difficult to dismiss as irrelevant. Then, quite by chance, she discovers that Icheb’s father’s story of the boy’s assimilation is highly inconsistent with the records retrieved from the abandoned cube from which Icheb and the other neonatal drones had been rescued. Now she must convince Janeway to return to the Brunali homeworld and demand a clarification. Janeway resists, reminding Seven that in the end Icheb *chose* to remain with his parents: “Just because they weren’t completely candid with you doesn’t mean they’re unfit parents,” she argues: “At some point, you have to let go.” The Captain seems to have forgotten that not long ago, despite Seven’s apparent *choice* to return to the collective in “Dark Frontier,” Janeway could not let go, preferring to trust some inconclusive evidence and her instincts instead. Seven presses on: “if there’s a possibility he’s in danger – even a remote one – I have to do whatever I can to protect him. If I don’t, I’ll be no better than my own parents.” Self-insight kicks in, and Janeway relents.

Voyager lays in a course for the Brunali homeworld. They reach orbit and hail Icheb’s parents, who are uncooperative. Janeway orders a scan of the surrounding region of space, and *Voyager*’s sensors pick up a distant transport vessel headed for the Borg transwarp conduit; bioscans register one occupant, unconscious, and read the life-signs as Icheb’s. Seven con-

cludes that Icheb has been sent out as bait to lure the Borg into battle. Janeway extracts a confession from the two Brunali: Icheb is “fighting for his people,” who “don’t have particle weapons or powerful starships at [their] disposal,” and so are “forced to use the only resource [they] have: [their] genetic expertise.” Janeway puts it all together: “Icheb’s not bait. He’s a weapon! The first cube that captured him was infected by a pathogen. Icheb was the carrier, wasn’t he?” *Voyager* lays in a course for the transwarp conduit: they catch up with the transport, snatch Icheb from it in the nick of time, and narrowly escape assimilation by the Borg sphere bearing down upon them.

In sickbay, the Doctor explains the process whereby Icheb had been genetically engineered to produce the pathogen that had proved so deadly to the Borg. “He’s going to need help coming to terms with what’s happened,” Janeway informs Seven: “Use your maternal instincts. They worked before.” The closing scene of the episode has Icheb searching his soul, trying to come to terms with his parents: “Do you think they will ever forgive me? I could have destroyed that sphere. I failed them.” “You would have been assimilated!” exclaims Seven. “I know,” he answers, “Maybe it was my destiny.” “Perhaps,” replies Seven: “In the future you may choose to fight the Borg. But you’ll do it in your own way. You’re an individual. And you have the right to determine your own destiny.”

This episode, entitled “Child’s Play,” is another debate about the best interests of the child. The role played by Seven in this debate qualifies Cranny-Francis’s view that the “embodiment of Seven of Nine might be seen as a deconstructive analysis of female subjectivity, were it not for the infantilization that constantly robs her of any authority” (158). In “Child’s Play,” however, Seven’s maturity and authority are apparent in the recognition that her own lack of objectivity is not a good enough excuse for backing down in the face of opposition from the *official* authority figure, whose own lack of objectivity is in question. The return to American family values is a return to biblical foundationalism – in this case, the orthodox reading of Solomon’s Judgment, which assumes that the biological mother is the one who puts the child’s welfare before her own. What is at issue here is whether King Solomon’s methodology is capable of revealing the biological mother or just the better one. When Janeway advises Seven to “use her maternal instincts” to help Icheb cope with his first and third potentially lethal encounters with parental irresponsibility – the second one being the collective’s rejection of him as

“irrelevant” – it’s not Seven’s so-called maternal instincts she draws on but rather, the authority of her own experience. “I know how difficult it is to acknowledge your parents’ faults,” she tells him, “but what they did was wrong. You don’t have to forgive them.” Seven could be speaking from her experience as a drone or as little Anika – probably both. As Anika, she knows that maternal instincts – if they exist – are at best unreliable; as for the Borg Queen, her maternal instincts software could use a serious upgrade.

As for Janeway, at least she’s consistent: unexamined assumptions about the superiority of biological parents go hand in hand with unfounded claims for the existence of maternal instincts. And on the question of “destiny,” Seven might well have spoken the word in scare quotes, for she knows from experience that chance has more to do with it. Indeed, as she says at the end of “Raven,” “I find myself constructing scenarios, considering alternative possibilities. What if my parents and I had not encountered the Borg? What would our lives have been? I would have been raised by them, learned from them. They would have influenced what I became – who and what I am.” And if her arguments for Icheb’s remaining within the enriched environment of *Voyager* are any indication, she also knows that Starfleet’s privileged culture is no guarantee of his choice of destinies, but only gives him a better shot at it than does the impoverished material environment of the Brunali homeworld.

Star Trek’s writers – like most writers of popular television series – are skilled at producing narratives that appeal to viewers across the spectrum of public opinion, and are thus quite fearless in taking on themes from current affairs. Perhaps the most melodramatic detail in the media construction of the Elián González saga was the representation of Elián as a motherless child – a boy whose mother had sacrificed her life to deliver her son from the evil of communist oppression to the land of liberty, where his individuality could flourish. This is a variation on a popular theme in American cultural mythology, and the theme upon which the liberation of the Borg children plays. Both Janeway and Seven of Nine are characterized by a uniquely American maternalism. As long as that remains a constant, writers have lots of latitude in choosing what constitutes the American pro-family principles of each character. But all around these two fiercely protective mother figures is the emancipating context in which they exercise their maternal authority – namely,

a context characterized by the absence of male figures with patriarchal authority. Thousands of light-years from “home,” they do not have to contend with fathers or husbands, nor with the Federation President or the Admiral of the Fleet. That this extraordinary opportunity will end is a foregone conclusion. The more important issue is *how*.