



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

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5: Queen Bees

We probably have no cause to fear (or hope) that The Family will dissolve. What we can begin to ask is what we want our families to do. – Jane Collier et al., “Is There a Family?” 80.

SEVEN YEARS INTO their adventure in the Delta Quadrant, the crew – with the exception of Janeway and Harry Kim – is all but resigned to the probability that *Voyager* will not reach home in their lifetime. “Don’t you *want* to get home?” Harry asks Tom Paris. “Harry,” he replies, “I *am* home.” Tom has finally emerged from his state of arrested adolescence and has settled down with B’Elanna Torres, who is now in an advanced state of pregnancy. The Captain and Seven have ironed out most of their difficult mother-daughter differences, and Seven is ready to leave the nest and start thinking about a family of her own. Finally having discovered – at least, within her surrogate mother’s humanist paradigm – that recovering her humanity means recovering her femininity, she and Chakotay are playing the dating game. Nelix has recently left *Voyager*, but keeps in touch: he tells Seven that he is thinking of getting married to the single mother he met three episodes ago. But Captain Janeway is still conspicuously unattached, and she is about to discover that the condition may be permanent.

As in *First Contact*, “Endgame” features the element of time-travel. This brings Captain Janeway face-to-face with an older version of herself. The two-hour episode opens in San Francisco on the tenth anniversary of *Voyager*’s return from twenty-three brutal years in the Delta Quadrant. Janeway has been assimilated – not by the Borg, but by elite and stifling Starfleet headquarters society. She has been promoted to Admiral, but she doesn’t wear a uniform. We see her first in a fashionable cocktail dress, complete with obligatory pearls; later, in her tasteful but sterile apartment, she wears a polyester pantsuit in pale lilac. Her hair is silver, professionally styled, and sprayed stiffly into place; the flesh at her neck has lost its

elasticity; her waist has thickened. She is nevertheless strikingly elegant, a quality which enhances her matriarchal authority. She is reported to be very excited about team-teaching with the tedious Reginald Barclay at Starfleet Academy. But a brief demonstration of her lecturing style suggests that a life of grading undergraduate papers is probably not the best career move for “one of the most decorated officers in Starfleet history.”

Chakotay and Seven, two of Janeway’s three closest friends, are dead. The third, Tuvok, has lost his mind and is confined to a private room at Starfleet Medical. Janeway visits him once a week, but he doesn’t know who she is. Because these tragedies are all directly related to her failure to get *Voyager* home sooner, guilt is her constant companion. She has ways of punishing herself – for example, she deprives herself of coffee (Houston 2001). She had once been addicted to the stuff, which had kept her mind sharp and her body perpetually on the verge of jumping to warp. Now, she drinks only tea. When the newlywed Doctor suggests she try marriage, she brushes it off: “Oh, it’s a little late for that. Marriage is for the young....” This image of the superannuated Janeway evokes the theme of family values in that we see her as the retired career woman, single, restless, and alone. But a husband is not the answer. For Janeway, there is only one solution to this bleak existence: get back in uniform, return to the past and the Delta Quadrant, take command of *Voyager* again, and rewrite history.

Two things stand in the way of Admiral Janeway’s plan: Captain Janeway and the Borg Queen – two women every bit as formidable as the Admiral herself. As we already know, both are fierce mother figures, but they hold mutually conflicting views on the meaning and purpose of family. The Admiral’s primary concern – to get the *Voyager* family back to Earth intact as quickly and directly as possible – comes into conflict with each of those views in turn. Her younger self shares this concern but wants to combine the operation with a much riskier one: destroying a massive Borg transport network of warp conduits, even while using it to catapult *Voyager* directly into the Alpha Quadrant. For the Captain, this is the preferred option, as it’s her conviction that the family has responsibilities that exceed its concern with its own welfare. She wants her family safely back in the Alpha Quadrant, but she also wants an Alpha Quadrant that is safe from the threat of assimilation by the Borg, whose technological superiority continues to expand, despite some recent defeats suffered as a consequence of imperial overreach. By contrast, the Borg Queen is exclusively dedicated to enhancing the perfection of her collective, her “family.” She is totally

indifferent to the families, communities, cultures, planets, and star systems the Borg annihilate in pursuit of this objective. In the context of the Borg's collective consciousness, this is – quite literally – a “single-minded” goal.

What I have come to appreciate about these three matriarchal figures is the way in which their significations change with the context in which they are read. The two Janeways can be seen to signify positions within a political debate that has preoccupied Americans since the end of the Cold War – namely, the national security of the United States versus its role in the wider world as the only remaining superpower. Admiral Janeway represents the former position and Captain Janeway the latter. But the radical changes in American foreign policy since 9/11 throw a slightly different light on the debate. The Queen's transwarp hub is, in effect, a delivery system for her weapons of mass destruction, and it's the Captain's responsibility to interpret if and how the Prime Directive applies in this vast expanse of space beyond Federation jurisdiction. To what extent do the Borg represent an imminent threat to the Alpha Quadrant in general and Earth in particular? Does Captain Janeway have the right to act unilaterally against the Borg? To whom or what does she owe her allegiance?

But whether we read “Endgame” in the pre- or post-9/11 context, what makes it unique is that it is mother figures who are actively involved in the conflict. This can be read as challenging the traditional way in which American ideology makes connections between militarism and motherhood. The sentimentalization of America's “Gold Star Mothers,” women who have sacrificed sons to “the cause of freedom,” plays an important role in promoting the ideology of militarism – almost as important a role as inculcating in young men a connection between militarism and filial duty: “Most men went to war, shed blood, and sacrificed their lives with the conviction that it was the only way to defend those whom they loved,” writes Vietnam veteran Sam Keen (47). This ideology is consistent with the root meaning of the word “patriotism”: whether it's your life or the life of your son, sacrificing it for the patriarchal state is the noblest act of all. But in “Endgame,” it's mothers and families themselves who are on the front line. Not only do they seem perfectly capable of defending themselves; they also seem capable of deciding on whose behalf sacrifices should be made and who should make them.

The older Janeway's goal appears to have more in common with the Queen's, for the Admiral opposes the Captain's dual-purpose plan. Moreover, the Admiral's strategies for getting her own way are not all

that dissimilar from those used by the Queen on Seven of Nine in “Dark Frontier.” An electrifying confrontation between the two Janeways – a scene for which Mulgrew must be commended, as she plays both roles – stakes out their irreconcilable positions. “We have an opportunity to deal a crippling blow to the Borg,” says the Captain; “It could save millions of lives!” But the Admiral stands her ground: “I didn’t spend the last ten years looking for a way to get this crew home earlier so you could throw it all away on some intergalactic goodwill mission!” The Captain can’t believe what she’s hearing: “I refuse to believe I’ll ever become as cynical as you!” But Admiral Janeway is not above using psychological violence to win this power struggle with her younger self. After all, she does have the advantage: her knowledge of the future. She ruthlessly blurts out the fate of Seven, Chakotay, and Tuvok in her timeline and watches as the Captain’s confidence begins to evaporate: “Even if you alter *Voyager’s* route, limit your contact with alien species, you’re going to lose people. But I’m offering you a chance to get *all* of them home, safe and sound, *today*. Are you really going to walk away from that?” The Admiral is similarly brutal with Seven of Nine. She informs Seven that she will die if, in destroying the Borg facility, the Captain also destroys their shortcut home. “My future is insignificant compared to the lives of the people we’d be saving,” says Seven. To the charge that she’s acting selfishly, Seven replies: “*Selfish?* I’m talking about *helping others*.” “Strangers, in a hypothetical scenario!” the Admiral shoots back; “I’m talking about real life: your colleagues, your friends – *people who love you!* Imagine the impact your death would have on them.”

But emotional blackmail can’t win it for the Admiral. Neither her coercive tactics nor pulling rank on the Captain has managed to weld *Voyager’s* crew into the kind of obedient collective that appears to give the Queen such a strategic advantage. Indeed, contrary to the Captain’s declaration in an earlier episode that the *Voyager* command structure “is not a democracy, I can’t take a poll every time I have to make a decision,” the Captain decides to seek consensus among her officers – another significant departure from her behaviour in “Scorpion” and “Dark Frontier.” For the present situation has little to do with blind obedience and everything to do with the values that make a family strong: trust, loyalty and, above all, respect for differences of view. Despite these differences, the crew elects to remain true to the values it is sworn to uphold and unanimously agrees to the Captain’s plan; the Admiral must admit defeat. And over her first cup of coffee in ten years, she strategizes with the Captain, who insists that

“There’s got to be a way to have our cake and eat it too.” “There might be a way,” replies the Admiral provocatively, “I considered it once, but it seemed too risky.” She peers into her coffee cup and reflects: “I don’t know why I ever gave this up.”

To what is the Admiral referring? Is it just the coffee, or is she talking about command of *Voyager*? Is she finally being upfront with the Captain, or is this just another one of her psychological games? This is, after all, “Endgame,” and thus far we’ve heard several games referred to and seen several others in progress. We’ve seen Seven at her weekly game of Kades-Kot, the board game she plays with Nelix over subspace. We’ve watched Icheb beat Tuvok at the intellectually demanding game of Vulcan Kal-Toh. As already noted, Chakotay and Seven are playing the dating game; they play according to very strict rules researched by Seven – and they even cheat a bit. Harry wants to squeeze in one more game with Tom on the holodeck before the latter gets too busy with fatherhood, and the whole crew are gaming – laying bets on when B’Elanna will give birth. In the Admiral’s timeline, her Academy students play the silly freshman game of “We double-dare you to ask the lecturer a dumb question”; and the Doctor reminds Barklay that their golf game isn’t until next week. And those are only the recreational games; the others are all deadly serious.

The Klingon Korath plays games with the Admiral. In exchange for her influence in getting him a seat on the Klingon High Council, he promises to provide her with the illegal time-travel technology she needs for her trip back to *Voyager*. After she has moved heaven and earth to get him that seat, he changes the rules of the game: now he wants her to throw in the shuttlecraft she’s had specially refitted for the trip. But she’s a lot better than he is at this kind of game. Agreeing to his new terms, she demands to be shown the device before she relinquishes the shuttle. He falls for it – and in a flash, she attaches a tiny mobile transporter to the device and snatches it out from under his greedy nose. Then, there’s her elaborate game of deceit: she escapes San Francisco, leaving a trail of lies behind her, and when she’s caught and confronted by Harry Kim – a middle-aged Starfleet captain in the Admiral’s timeline – she tells him that her journey into the past will be a one-way trip. Now, here she is in the Delta Quadrant playing every psychological game in her repertoire – pulling rank, blackmailing, lying – to get herself a window seat on the return flight. So, what is she up to now? How is she planning “to have her cake and eat it too”? What is it she sees as she gazes into that cup of coffee?

As it turns out, what the Admiral sees is her redemption. Together, the two Janeways hatch a plan to which we are not privy at this point, but we do suspect that if indeed both of them are plotting in good faith, the probability of *Voyager's* success in destroying the Borg installation while simultaneously getting home has just doubled. For if Captain Janeway is Mother-in-Chief aboard this vessel, Admiral Janeway must be its Grandmother Supreme. Their combined matriarchal power should be enough to ensure their success. However, it will necessitate a confrontation between Admiral Janeway and the Borg Queen, who turn out to have even more in common than we have seen thus far. A traditional "family values" argument has it that blood is thicker than water – as Janeway had suggested to Seven of Nine in "Survival Instinct." If this is so, then the Captain's and the Admiral's blood must be the thickest of the thick, since they share identical genes. But as we have seen in the case of Seven's Borg family values, in the cyborgian age, technology sometimes does blood one better, and this is certainly borne out in the similarities between the Admiral and the Queen, both of whom have the technological ability to project virtual-reality versions of themselves into the consciousness of their adversaries. This invasion of the Other gives new expression to the idea of "the enemy within" – thus extending both Houston's and Russell and Wolski's readings of the Borg. Just as the two flesh-and-blood Janeways can be read as a schizoid split within the Captain, so too do these projections of Self into Other transform the physical conflict between *Voyager* and the Borg into psychological conflict within the self.

In a scene that takes place shortly after the Admiral's arrival on board *Voyager*, the Queen projects herself into the mind of Seven of Nine as she regenerates in her electronically outfitted alcove, a device which also makes her accessible to Borg visual transmissions. The purpose of this virtual visit is to discover why the Admiral has come, and to warn Seven – and thereby the *Voyager* crew – against invading the nebula where the Borg transwarp network is hidden. When Seven demands to know the reason for this visit, the Queen asks: "Do I need a reason to visit a friend?" "We're not friends," Seven counters. "No, we're more than that: we're family," breathes the Queen seductively, the light reflecting evilly off her metallic eyes. Seven shoots back with a reminder that she is no longer a drone: "I don't answer to you!" The Queen's appeal to family having failed, she falls back on what she does best: outright sexual seduction. Jim Wright's online review of "Endgame" captures the spirit of the scene:

Like a cobra, the Queen strikes; she launches herself at Seven of Nine – but not in anger. This Queen prefers the old-fashioned approach to assimilation – heart and soul. And she’s willing to take the time to tease away one’s self-control. “You’ve always been my favourite, Seven,” purrs the Queen, as she caresses Seven’s cheek, then both cheeks – then runs her hands over Seven’s arms and other parts as she whispers evil nothings into her ears. “In spite of their obvious imperfections, I know how much you care for the Voyager crew, so I’ve left them alone.... Imagine how you’d feel if I were forced to assimilate them.” (Wright)

Within the strict heterosexual imperative that governs the *Star Trek* universe, women would appear to have an advantage when it comes to the Borg. Unlike Picard and Data, Seven of Nine, who is currently getting acquainted with her feminine sexuality, is impervious to the Borg Queen’s sexual advances. Perhaps more interesting in this scene is the way in which some of the evil of the Queen’s patriarchally constructed sexuality rubs off on the ideology of “family.” In Alice Krige’s interpretation, the seductions of family and the seductions of sex do not differ in kind: they are interchangeable strategies for exploiting human vulnerabilities. Hers is an interesting spin on the phallic mother, for these twin seductions and the desires they exploit illuminate “the depth of cultural anxiety about species reproduction” represented by the cyborg (Balsamo 148). Impervious to the kind of sexual and familial needs she exploits, the Queen destroys in order to reproduce her kind. As we saw in “Dark Frontier,” she is in possession of Seven’s “natural family,” now assimilated, and she is not above tempting the former drone back into the collective by brutally thrusting into Seven’s consciousness her father’s borgified image. In that episode, Janeway bursts in on the scene and inserts herself between Seven and that powerful temptation, thus preventing her from succumbing to it. Here, however, Seven no longer requires Janeway’s matriarchal intervention. Having developed some of her own maternal potential, she shows only contempt for the Queen’s tactics. After all, family is as family does, and Seven’s brutalizing past appears to have taught her that the best family is sometimes the family one ends up choosing.

Admiral Janeway is also something of a cyborg, and she uses this advantage to project herself into the mind of the Queen. Activating a computer chip implanted in her brain – a “synaptic transceiver” which, in

another application, allows her to “pilot a vessel equipped with a neural interface” – she projects her virtual-reality self into the cyberspace of the Borg collective, where her confrontation with the Queen takes place:

An interesting bit of blocking is going on here. The Admiral and the Queen, both doing the same power play – ducking and weaving, feinting and attacking, slinking and purring. It’s a dance of seduction as much as of power. Here are two ageless Alpha Babes vying for dominance, with the stakes being the fate of the entire bloody galaxy...
(Wright)

As the Queen quickly discovers, she cannot assimilate the Admiral, for her body remains in her shuttlecraft, not far off but cloaked and undetectable. The Admiral’s role in this sting operation is to keep the Queen distracted while the Captain gets *Voyager* into position. She has come, she claims, to make a deal with the Queen: “I’ve become a pragmatist in my old age. All I want is to get that crew back to their families.” This reference to family resonates with the Queen, who replies, “You wish to ensure the well-being of your collective. I can appreciate that. I’ll help you. But it’ll cost more than you’re offering.” They negotiate an exchange: the Queen’s help for the Admiral’s shuttlecraft – technology which is, of course, twenty-six years in advance of anything currently possessed by the Borg.

However, as Captain Picard discovered in *First Contact*, one does not do deals with the Borg Queen. Her drones triangulate the Admiral’s signal, locate her shuttle, and transport her – *bodily*, this time – into the Queen’s presence, where the Queen thrusts her assimilation tubules into the Admiral’s throat, injecting her with the nanoprobes that will transform her into a drone. But the damage goes both ways. As part of the Janeways’ plan, the Admiral’s blood has been fortified with Icheb’s anti-Borg toxin, and as the Admiral begins to succumb to the nanoprobes, so too does the Queen begin to destabilize – along with the entire collective into which she is networked. “You’ve infected us with a neurolytic pathogen!” gasps the Queen. “Just enough to bring chaos to order,” the Admiral cries out in triumph, thus inverting the Queen’s definition of her collective self as that which brings order to chaos. Her redemption at hand, Admiral Janeway struggles to remain standing as she watches the Queen disarticulate and expire at her feet. At this moment, as the Admiral dies with her boots very much on, in *Voyager*’s sickbay the Chief Engineer delivers her baby girl

into the family. On the bridge, ship's sensors having detected the Admiral's success in setting the endgame in motion, the Captain orders a volley of torpedoes, and *Voyager* streaks into the Alpha Quadrant just ahead of the enormous blast. On Earth, at Starfleet Command, the brass in their grey suits, jaws agape, stare at the spectacular show on their viewscreens.

Having emerged from the collapsing transwarp hub only a few million kilometres from Earth, Janeway resumes her place in the Captain's chair and quietly issues the command we have heard her repeat so many times over the preceding seven years: *Set a course – for home*. Her facial expression in the semi-gloom of the bridge is subdued but otherwise unreadable, thus offering fans a *tabula rasa* upon which to inscribe their own version of the ending – as indeed they did, in a flurry of fan fictions that sprang up on the Internet during the weeks following the airing of “Endgame.” But I was unable to find any that extrapolated from the character of the restless Admiral. These fans were apparently unconcerned about what might be going on in the mind of this intrepid younger matriarch, who has struggled through so many episodes to reconcile the irreconcilable contradictions of American postfeminism.

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Many years ago, while leafing through a German magazine – *Stern*, I think it was – I came to an article entitled “Die elektronische Oma” (the electronic grandma) about the serious consequences of using the television set as a substitute babysitter. I remember none of the details of the article, but the image of the female machine as dangerous grandparent has stuck with me all these years. She combines patriarchy's fear of women, fear of old age, and fear of being rendered obsolete by machines. She signifies the mother-blaming that makes sympathetic accounts of mothering vulnerable to charges of “idealization.” As a cyborg, she is the ultimate phallic mother for our times. This *elektronische Oma* was evoked most vividly for me by the character of Admiral Janeway. I knew from the moment she materialized on *Voyager's* transporter pad that the new script she was bringing with her from the future had her death written into it. But death is preferable to living castrated.

Star Trek writers have always had a problem writing middle-aged female characters, who are invariably either evil or silly, but in “Endgame,”

their prejudices work in the service of their art, rather than against it. Their creation of the sixty-something female action hero, whose motives and methods are ethically questionable, is a *tour de force*. The streak of arrogance and self-righteousness that was only intermittently visible in Janeway's character throughout the series is developed in the Admiral to the point where it dominates her personality, so much so that we're never really sure – until the very end – if she's capable of being straight with the Captain. There are moments in her confrontation with the Borg Queen where we have to wonder if this woman who, as Reg Barclay informs us, “*literally* wrote the book on the Borg,” got closer to her literary subject than was good for her. The irony of her life is that assimilation by the Borg is her only way out of an even worse existence: assimilation by the soul-destroying tedium of superannuation. But perhaps more than anything, what accounts for Admiral Janeway's success as a character is Kate Mulgrew's obvious pleasure in bringing her to life.

Trolling the Internet in the spring of 2001, I was interested to find so little discussion of the Admiral Janeway character – evidence of the *electronische Oma* syndrome, I suppose. Perhaps that syndrome also played a part in the general view of “Endgame” as an unsatisfying conclusion to *Voyager*. Many fans criticized the subdued mood of the closing scene. They wanted loud cheering and other explicit signs of celebration on the bridge, as unseemly as this would have been, given that Admiral Janeway had just made the ultimate sacrifice in order finally to grant her family what Captain Janeway had so dramatically denied them in the pilot episode. But fans' biggest complaint about “Endgame” was that they'd seen it all before: time travelling, going over the heads of the Starfleet brass, outsmarting the Klingons, romancing the babes, violating the Prime Directive, blowing up the Borg, and saving humanity. *Ho-hum...* What most of these churlish critics failed to mention is that what they had *not* seen before is women doing it all. And in the case of *Voyager's* ferociously efficient Chief Engineer, she not only plays the key role in refitting the ship for its encounter with the Borg, but she also manages to give birth to *Voyager's* Next Generation. Was this tepid response evidence of fans moving beyond *Star Trek* in their SF tastes, or *Star Trek* moving on in its sophistication and leaving its fan-base behind?

Whether one wants to read the recurring family motif as progressive or reactionary, there is no question that *Voyager* at least makes us think about what we mean by “family,” a word now thoroughly corrupted by an

advertising industry which is not above selling a multinational corporation or a huge investment conglomerate as “a family of companies caring for you” – a sentiment extended into North American politics during the first week of “Operation Iraqi Freedom,” when the American Ambassador to Canada, annexing Canada as “part of our family,” rebuked Canadians for betraying patriarch Bush by refusing to condone his war of aggression. *The Next Generation* came very close to this conflation of family values and foreign policy by presenting the Federation as a kind of “family of planets” and Federation citizenship as the highest ideal to which the individual family member can aspire. But *Voyager* offers an alternative view by presenting us with a very different style of leadership. As Barrett and Barrett note, “Picard’s authority is rarely questioned”: as he says to Lily in *First Contact*, “the crew is accustomed to following my orders.” By contrast, Janeway encourages the expression of different perspectives among her crew: “I dread the day when everyone on this ship agrees with me,” she says.

That *Voyager* embraces different perspectives does not mean that it has no hierarchical control. Janeway’s leadership demands obedience and those who disobey ... are severely punished. The difference between this system and the version employed in *TNG*, however, is that the loyalty of Janeway’s crew to the ideal of “The Federation,” or any official authority, is far outweighed by their loyalty to each other. Janeway’s decisions, often unpopular, are always in the interests of the crew or in support of the beliefs that they are sworn to uphold, rather than some abstract notion of citizenship. (Barrett and Barrett 179–80)

By representing Janeway’s task as one in which she must chart the best course between her family’s welfare and the family’s responsibility to the wider community, *Voyager*’s writers and producers – like the Janeways – managed to have their cake and eat it too: they remained true to their Republican family-values theme while showing us things about this repressive ideology which, in our increasingly postfeminist present, we may have forgotten. Are we going to focus our energy exclusively on that consumer unit, “the working family,” and leave the bigger issues to the likes of George Bush and Tony Blair? Or do we need to rethink the meaning and purpose of family and its responsibility to those bigger issues? Contrary to the claims of the Religious Right, the return to traditional American family values in this age of globalization and militarization does not nec-

essarily strengthen community. Indeed, since 9/11 the power elite has only increased its control of American families by cultivating even more fear of the hostile Other and the danger it poses to innocent American children. This climate of fear inspires a blind patriotism by dissolving the tension between nation and state – a tension absolutely necessary to the health of a democracy. As suggested by the PATRIOT Act – especially the racist rhetoric of fear it inspired – one needs to keep one’s Muslim neighbours under constant surveillance. So much for the strength of community and the well-being of its families.

The trajectory of the Borg’s gender transformation – from genderless, to masculine, to feminine/sexual, to maternal – may have been merely a matter of expedience on the part of *Star Trek*’s producers and writers, but it nevertheless reveals much about the anxieties that continue to plague a culture which, for the most part, considers itself postfeminist by one or the other of Susan Moller Okin’s definitions of the phenomenon. Kate Mulgrew’s call for an end to “this absolutely endless, nonsensical banter about sexual superiority” illuminates the reactionary nature of those anxieties, just as the erosion of Affirmative Action in the U.S. reveals the persistent anxieties of a nation eager to proclaim that its systemic racism is a thing of the past. Now that a growing majority of Americans, post-9/11, have fully externalized the enemy once more, the *Star Trek* narrative and its emerging self-reflexivity become important as a historical trace of a once-increasing willingness on the part of Americans to examine the enemy within. Political feminism, like the American movement for racial justice, comes and goes in waves, but *Star Trek* will be with us forever – at least, so it seems, given that on any night of the week, one can channel-surf through any number of episode reruns. This provides us with an opportunity – even a responsibility – to read them within the ever-changing culture that surrounds them.