

BOOK REVIEW

Drones, Clones and Alpha Babes: Retrofitting Star Trek's Humanism, Post-9/11.
Diana Relke. Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2006; xxi + 168 pages; ISBN 1-55238-164-1; \$29.95 (paper).

Relke's detailed analysis of *Star Trek: The Next Generation (TNG)*, *Star Trek: Voyager (Voy)*, and recent *Star Trek* films is a welcome addition to *Trek* scholarship. She applies feminist readings to the Federation's battles with the Borg collective in "Alpha Babes," a psychoanalytic analysis of the post-oedipal *TNG* and pre-oedipal *Voy*, the feminizing threat that the Borg poses to masculinist liberal humanism, and to reclaiming values of mothering. In "Drones" she calls scholars to move beyond postmodern critiques and attend to "morally and ethically impoverished futures struggling...to be born" (154) - specifically to trans and posthumanism.

Phrases such as "the human condition," "feminine values" and "feminine authority" will sit uneasily with scholars taught to distrust grand narratives, but Relke forewarns that the essays included in her book are "soft on essentialism" and "insufficiently respectful of anti-foundationalism" (x). "Alpha Babes" subverts *Voyager's* postfeminist future: Capt. Janeway, the first female - and most fallible - Captain of a *Trek* series is highly gendered. Relke traces the series writers' development of Janeway's power: "was it sexual, was it maternal, or did it - like Captain Picard's [of *TNG*] - draw upon the rationalism of liberal humanist ideology?" (21). Relke argues that Janeway's power comes to be constructed as maternal, one of the reasons *Voy* has generally been dismissed as essentialist and sexist by feminist commentators. Relke, however, argues against "mother-blaming" and illustrates how *Voy*, set against the backdrop of neo-con "family values," the culture war of the 1990s, and the clash between modernity and postmodernity, perpetuates and challenges discourses about the family, motherhood, gender and power. One of the great strengths of Relke's argument is the deftness with which she negotiates many nuanced readings of her texts.

"Drones" is less explicitly feminist. Relke highlights the philosophical questions and lessons that posthumanism and the transhumanist movement can glean from *TNG* and *Voy* in order to carry humanist ideals (freedom, integrity, moral conscience) into a posthumanist world. A post-9/11 reading seems to be tagged on, however, and there are gaps. The analysis of the film *Nemesis* is an example: the imperialist Federation's Captain Picard is faced with the threat of his clone, created without his knowledge (the ultimate Enemy Within - our own DNA, used against us); the clone bears the Orientalist name Shinzon - Shinzon's ship is the *Scimitar* - and he plans to annihilate Earth with a biological weapon of mass destruction. None of these tropes are recognized, and Relke reads Shinzon as imperialist. She argues that *Nemesis* failed because "the theme of the illegitimate leader launching illegal wars of aggression against sovereign nations / planets might appear timeworn and

irrelevant” (152). One would think nothing could have been more relevant in 2002 when the film was released, and Relke’s assertion may be ironic. Despite lacking a sustained analysis of post-9/11 tropes and their affects on reception, the book successfully expands scholarship and asks us to rethink current philosophical positions in preparation for a potentially dangerous future.

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