



# The Child to Come: Life after the Human Catastrophe

*Rebekah Sheldon*

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Generation Anthropocene. Storms of My Grandchildren. Our Children's Trust. Why do these and other attempts to imagine the planet's uncertain future return us—again and again—to the image of the child? In *The Child to Come*, Rebekah Sheldon demonstrates the pervasive conjunction of the imperiled child and the threatened Earth and blisteringly critiques the logic of catastrophe that serves as its motive and its method.

Sheldon explores representations of this perilous future and the new figurations of the child that have arisen in response to it. Analyzing catastrophe discourse from the 1960s to the present—books by Joanna Russ, Margaret Atwood, and Cormac McCarthy; films and television series including *Southland Tales*, *Battlestar Galactica*, and *Children of Men*; and popular environmentalism—Sheldon finds the child standing in the place of the human species, coordinating its safe passage into the future through the promise of one more generation. Yet, she contends, the child figure emerges bound to the very forces of nonhuman vitality he was forged to contain.

Bringing together queer theory, ecocriticism, and science studies, *The Child to Come* draws on and extends arguments in childhood studies about the interweaving of the child with the life sciences. Sheldon reveals that neither life nor the child are what they used to be. Under pressure from ecological change, artificial reproductive technology, genetic engineering, and the neoliberalization of the economy, the queerly human child signals something new: the biopolitics of reproduction. By promising the pliability of the body's vitality, the pregnant woman and the sacred child have become the paradigmatic figures for twenty-first century biopolitics.

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