



No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive (Series Q)

By Lee Edelman

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In this searing polemic, Lee Edelman outlines a radically uncompromising new ethics of queer theory. His main target is the all-pervasive figure of the child, which he reads as the linchpin of our universal politics of “reproductive futurism.” Edelman argues that the child, understood as innocence in need of protection, represents the possibility of the future against which the queer is positioned as the embodiment of a relentlessly narcissistic, antisocial, and future-negating drive. He boldly insists that the efficacy of queerness lies in its very willingness to embrace this refusal of the social and political order. In *No Future*, Edelman urges queers to abandon the stance of accommodation and accede to their status as figures for the force of a negativity that he links with irony, *jouissance*, and, ultimately, the death drive itself.

Closely engaging with literary texts, Edelman makes a compelling case for imagining Scrooge without Tiny Tim and Silas Marner without little Eppie. Looking to Alfred Hitchcock’s films, he embraces two of the director’s most notorious creations: the sadistic Leonard of *North by Northwest*, who steps on the hand that holds the couple precariously above the abyss, and the terrifying title figures of *The Birds*, with their predilection for children. Edelman enlarges the reach of contemporary psychoanalytic theory as he brings it to bear not only on works of literature and film but also on such current political flashpoints as gay marriage and gay parenting. Throwing down the theoretical gauntlet, *No Future* reimagines queerness with a passion certain to spark an equally impassioned debate among its readers.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Queer theory, a fairly recent academic discipline, has been commonly used as an analytic tool to deconstruct literature, film and art, although writers such as Judith Butler and Michael Warner have also applied it to philosophy and sociology to subvert accepted concepts of the "normal." Edelman's slim volume takes this idea further than anyone else to date. Arguing that the traditional Western concept of politics is predicated on making the future a better place and that the accepted—literal as well as symbolic—image of the future is the child, he states that "queerness names the side of those not 'fighting for the children.'" Edelman argues that homosexuality's perceived social threat has to do with its separation from the act of reproduction, yet, he says, this non-reproductive capacity must be embraced as a social good. He illustrates his provocative stance by analyzing numerous cultural artifacts—Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds* (why do the birds keep attacking children?); *A Christmas Carol* (he favors Scrooge over Tiny Tim); the musical *Annie* (with its hit song "Tomorrow")—and by discussing the theories of post-modern writers such as Jacques Lacan, Slavoj Zizak, Jean Baudrillard and Barbara Johnson. While Edelman also focuses on recent events—the murder of Matthew Shepard, the bombing of abortion clinics, the Catholic Church's sexual abuse scandal—most of his book is densely written and theoretical. This is a notable contribution to post-modern theory, but Edelman's knotted, often muddled writing will limit his readership to hard-core academics and students of post-modern thought.

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Review

"The book represents a rigorous attempt to think at once generatively and against tropes of generation, to work at once in irony and in earnest to demonstrate the political's material dependence on Symbolic homology." Whether we decide to follow Edelman's example of rejecting the future or vehemently react against his polemic, *No Future* leaves no doubt that we cannot get around thinking critically about the uses and abuses of futurity. "The book represents a rigorous attempt to think at once generatively and against tropes of generation, to work at once in irony and in earnest to demonstrate the political's material dependence on Symbolic homology." - Jana Funke, *thirdspace*

"One of the great virtues of Edelman's thesis is that it restores the distinction between queerness and homosexuality per se. Edelman goes some way to returning the uncanniness attached to queerness which has been dispelled by the very signifier 'gay' and the cosy, Kylie-loving, unthreatening cheeriness with which it has become associated." - K-Punk

"This is a book, I confess, that I would love to have written. Angry, eloquent, precise, beautifully composed, funny, over the top, and very smart, the four chapters . . . articulate a controversial and disturbingly persuasive figural and rhetorical diagnostic of a moment in U.S. political life." - Carla Freccero, *GLQ*

"Edelman has certainly articulated a new direction for queer theory, making *No Future* required reading both within the field and beyond." - Andrea Fontenot, *Modern Fiction Studies*

“The book represents a rigorous attempt to think at once generatively and against tropes of generation, to work at once in irony and in earnest to demonstrate the political’s material dependence on Symbolic homology.” - Carolyn Denver, *Victorian Studies*

“*No Future* is a nuanced polemic, both ringingly clear in its aesthetic and theoretical explications and simply thrilling to read. I learn so much from the way Lee Edelman grounds a queer ethics and politics outside kinship and reproductive circuits, those spaces of assimilation that use the bribe of futurity to distract us from the ongoing work of social violence and death.”—Lauren Berlant, author of *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship*

“In consistently brilliant theoretical discussions (for the most part, psychoanalytically inspired), as well as in strikingly original readings of Dickens, George Eliot, and Hitchcock, Lee Edelman argues that in a political culture dominated by the sentimental illusions and frequently murderous moral imperatives of ‘reproductive futurism,’ homosexuality has been assigned—and should deliberately and defiantly take on—the burden of a negativity at once embedded within and violently disavowed by that culture. The paradoxical dignity of queerness would be its refusal to believe in a redemptive future, its embrace of the unintelligibility, even the inhumanity inherent in sexuality. Edelman’s extraordinary text is so powerful that we could perhaps reproach him only for not spelling out the mode in which we might survive our necessary assent to his argument.”—Leo Bersani, author of *The Culture of Redemption, Homos*, and, with Ulysse Dutoit, *Caravaggio’s Secrets*

“*No Future* is a highly imaginative, terrifically suggestive, and altogether powerful book. The question at its political heart is an arresting one, not least because it appears so counterintuitive: Must every political vision be a vision of the future? This is the first study I know that submits the rhetoric of futurity itself to close scrutiny. An intellectually thrilling book.”—Diana Fuss, author of *The Sense of an Interior: Four Writers and the Rooms that Shaped Them*

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From the Back Cover

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

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Lise Callicoat:

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coaster you are ride on and with addition of information. Even you love No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive (Series Q), you are able to enjoy both. It is good combination right, you still desire to miss it? What kind of hangout type is it? Oh seriously its mind hangout men. What? Still don't have it, oh come on its identified as reading friends.

Audra Yoder:

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