

## A Speculative History of No Future: Feminist Negativity and the Queer Dystopian Impulses of Katharine Burdekin's *Swastika Night*

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**Abstract** The theme of this and the previous special issue has been a flashpoint in the interdisciplinary field of queer studies since Lee Edelman's influential *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004). Edelman argues that to be queer is to oppose futurity, coining the term "reproductive futurism" to describe the tendency to define political value in terms of a future "for the children" and insisting that the power of queer critique inheres in its opposition to this narrative and therefore to politics as we know it. This assertion inspired extensive debate on relationships between queer artistic and political movements and discourses of futurity. This article argues that the conversation changes when feminist writings on the politics of reproduction and the genre of speculative fiction are taken into account, as they have not been so far. Drawing on Katharine Burdekin's dystopia *Swastika Night* (1937), the article suggests that the history of feminist speculative fiction offers a counter to twenty-first-century queer scholarship's sometimes reductive approaches to gender and reproduction. Burdekin's book is best known for its prescience in imagining the horrifying prospect of a Nazi victory before Britain's entry into World War II. It prefigures many concerns of queer studies in its disturbing depictions of homoerotic love among Nazi soldiers and women reduced to mindlessly reproductive bodies. Focusing on the significance of the women in her

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narrative, the article argues that Burdekin's speculative critique of fascist futurity turns saying no to the future into an effective form of feminist resistance — one that does not require a refusal of politics itself.

**Keywords** feminism, queer studies, dystopia, speculative fiction, 1930s

Who *would*, after all, come out *for* abortion or stand *against* reproduction, *against* futurity, and so against *life*?

Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*

### Destroying the Future

“If you want a picture of the future, imagine a boot stamping on a human face. Forever” (Orwell 1989 [1949]: 280). George Orwell, in a memorable line from his canonical dystopia *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, envisions a futureless future: a worst-case scenario where violent repression reinforces the novel's themes of endless war and ideological coercion. If a boot can stamp on a face “forever,” does this mean that a single moment of violence can eliminate the possibility of any future at all for the “face” whose liveliness will be continually, repetitively obliterated? In everyday conversation and speculative fiction alike, to say that a given idea, institution, or social structure has no future is to mean that things are looking grim and ought to be replaced with something else. Though we may not see the way there, we assume some other future lies in a new direction toward which it would be possible to turn. In making one crystallized moment stand for “the future” writ large, Orwell's line refuses this luxury. For the action of violent destruction pauses in a “picture” that lasts “forever,” separated from anything that might be happening before or after. We are not simply contemplating a possible future of oppression in which the wearers of boots will triumph over those crushed under their heels. Instead, slipping for a moment outside the novel's narrative timeline, we are asked to imagine what it would be like if there were no future at all. This article is concerned with the cultural, political, and aesthetic implications of sustaining such counterintuitive — perhaps impossible — acts of imagining.

The depiction of an unbearably violent future in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* has set the terms for dystopia's connotations in Anglo-American academic criticism and popular culture, with Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) providing an additional template for technologies of falsified happiness that cover up coercion.<sup>1</sup> Contemporary versions of these tropes permeate popular culture

1. See Claeys 2010 for an account of Orwell's and Huxley's influence in critical and popular conceptions of dystopia.

through film adaptations like *The Hunger Games* (2012) and *Divergent* (2014). Dystopian speculation has long been shorthand for state-sponsored oppression, technological surveillance, and the traitorous pleasures of capitalism and consumption.<sup>2</sup> In extrapolating current trends into terrifying consequences, such dystopias imply a need to preserve traditions of the world as it is in the face of frightening changes. Yet I argue in this essay that dystopian imaginaries center on a radical core of negativity: the idea that the future, as it is possible for us to know it, could be destroyed. The nihilistic standpoint evoked by the smashed face in Orwell's image is a perspective explored with great depth and complexity both in recent queer scholarship and in the history of feminist speculative fiction.

Orwell's "boot" belongs to a figure we most often associate with the systemically violent obliteration of minorities' futures in the twentieth century: the fascist in uniform, the uniformed cop or soldier who obliterates weaker subjects. The booted figure of sovereign power routes the violence of dystopia through a masculine body, signifying state authority. But this is only one figure for futures' violent endings. Others carry different gendered connotations, and I focus on a feminized version of dystopian futurity that also depicts human faces ground down by authoritative violence. One of the most memorable works to emerge from an underappreciated history of feminist popular dystopian fiction,<sup>3</sup> Katharine Burdekin's *Swastika Night* (1937), which has been slowly growing in influence since its republication in 1985, depicts an intensely negative dystopian future whose resemblance to Orwell's vision has often been remarked (Patai 1984; McManus 2009). Because Burdekin's writings have not been part of the genre canon that shapes readers' expectations of a dystopian future, returning to her work highlights the presence of multiple genealogies for speculating about the politics of absent, refused, and undesirable futures in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Burdekin's novel depicts a Nazi takeover of Europe, presciently envisioning what became a popular alternate-history plot in the decades after World War II. In her version of the future, women exist as mindless reproductive bodies, while men of the master race operate a society organized around homosocial bonds. Through her portrayal of gender's relationship to the imagined version of patriarchal fascist authority she is critiquing, Burdekin invites her readers to contemplate a counterintuitive

2. There is much more to say about these texts' adaptations of classic dystopian tropes than I can get to here, especially regarding gender. See Morrison 2014 on their tendencies to reinforce the status quo while appearing to promote rebellion, however.

3. I address other writers contemporary to Burdekin in an extended version of this essay that forms one chapter of a book manuscript I am presently in the process of completing.

idea whose implications I will spend the rest of this essay unpacking: a feminist embrace of futurity's end.

The notion of *no future* has different histories and connotations in dystopian fiction and in queer theory.<sup>4</sup> Burdekin's work makes connections between the two while also challenging both. I begin by laying out some of the differences between queer and dystopian futurities along with images and concerns that these two discourses share—particularly the occurrence of metaphorical and literal depictions of fascism and Nazism in both. Then I unpack the relationships among reproduction, gender, politics, and nationalism that thinking *no future* through a feminist dystopian frame reveals. In the history of speculative antifuturism that my reading of Burdekin brings to the fore, to have no future can mean several things: to take the human race in the wrong direction, to occupy a space of political negativity, or to be in a state of hopelessness and despair. In the closing section of the article, I consider the implications of Burdekin's refusal to either embrace or repudiate this negativity.

The convergence of reproductive oppression with homoeroticism and nationalism in Burdekin's work resonates unexpectedly with twenty-first-century concerns and conflicts in queer studies over the ways nonheterosexual bodies, communities, and politics have participated in the perpetuation of racial and colonial violence.<sup>5</sup> Emphasizing the often discomfiting ways desire lines up with politics, Judith Halberstam (2011: 161) has explored what is at stake in late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century queer uses of an erotic iconography associated with Nazism's genocidal ascendancy. I read Burdekin's work as an earlier engagement with such questions whose historical and geographic context—she wrote from a provincial, domestic, yet rebellious position in an England responding to the rise of Nazism—can open a space for insights into temporalities of gender, power, and pleasure that carry forward into the twenty-first century. In particular, my interpretation of Burdekin allows for a feminist reconfiguration of Lee Edelman's (2004: 151) representation of queer antifuturism as opposition to the conservative "reproductive futurism" he identifies as "the fascism of the baby's face." While remaining attentive to the cultural context of 1930s responses to the rise of European fascism and of early twentieth-century feminist reproductive politics, my overall aim in this article is to analyze Burdekin's work as an intervention in both historical and contemporary discussions of queerness and futurity.

4. Siobhan Somerville's (2011 [2007]) essay "Queer" in *Keywords for American Cultural Studies* provides a brief yet thorough summation of queer theory's disciplinary formation.

5. Examples of this field in queer scholarship include Reddy 2011; Holland 2012; Hanhardt 2013.

### Dystopian Impulses, Queer Negativity, and the Fascism of the Baby's Face

Why are writers and artists drawn to imagine futures unbearably worse than the present? Summing up modern fictions of imagined futures, Gregory Claeys (2010: 307) describes dystopia as a twentieth-century literature of fear, writing that after the “grotesque slaughter of the First World War, . . . enlightenment optimism respecting the progress of reason and science was . . . displaced by a sense of the incapacity of humanity to restrain its newly created destructive powers.” If *the future* stands for an imagined end point to enlightened progress narratives, *no future* is what we are left with when those narratives break down. Yet Claeys’s narrative does not acknowledge the uneven distribution of “progress” itself. The “optimism” of enlightenment relies on what Walter Benjamin (1968 [1940]: 262) calls a “homogeneous, empty time” that presents the story of history’s winners as a positive timeline of human development. To see the present as the triumphant culmination of evolutionary development, where the fittest have survived to tell stories that justify their victory, is profoundly dystopian for those who have been defeated. The “oppressed” people to whom Benjamin’s historical materialism speaks are the “working class” (257, 260), but enlightenment models of humanity and history have had most power as justifications of empire. In *Toward a Global Idea of Race*, Denise Ferreira da Silva (2007: xii) demonstrates that colonial hierarchies of civilization rely on a developmental temporality in which white, European subjects can perceive themselves as autonomous and self-determining, because colonized people of color have become the material on which enlightened subjects act: racialized others who are “without a future” in and of themselves. The loss of enlightenment optimism that Claeys associates with World War I is also, then, an effect of the realization that white, Western subjects can be dehumanized in the ways that seem natural for racialized others.<sup>6</sup> The power of homogeneous, empty time is felt in warnings against degeneration as much as in narratives of progress and hope. In the quotation with which I opened, for example, Orwell’s boot stamping on the human face is portrayed as a future to fear. Yet as we are invited to contemplate the horrors of the future, our attention is directed away from real faces already ground into oblivion in the present and in the past. Though this is not the only possible reading of Orwell’s text, it shows the potential for speculations about negative futures to perpetuate uneven power relations in the present.

6. W. E. B. DuBois (2003 [1920]: 63) wrote about this in “The Souls of White Folk,” published in *Darkwater*, where he describes the horrors of the trenches as “not Europe gone mad . . . not aberration nor insanity” but “the real soul of white culture.”

Dystopian fictions may invoke or challenge enlightenment progress narratives, but the purpose of imagining the end of the world has often been to set the stage for political transformation—or at least to make transformation more imaginable. Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan (2003: 7), writing about feminist science fiction from the 1970s to the 1990s, describe “critical dystopia” as a genre of futuristic fiction that enables “a space of contestation and opposition for . . . subjects whose class, gender, race, sexuality, and other positions are not empowered by hegemonic rule.” They coin the term *critical dystopia* because the negativity of the traditional dystopia, where a horrific possible future underlines the necessity of the present, fails to account for the transformative potential of hope. If hopeful impulses and plans for better things generally come under the heading of utopia, Baccolini and Moylan suggest that dystopia’s usefulness is in the same realm. In other words, imagining things getting worse is part of what it means to make them better. Dystopias become outgrowths of what Ernst Bloch (1986 [1954]: 196) calls the “utopian impulse”: an active “longing” that we can mobilize into work that changes the world. Yet the affective power of dystopian negativity—our response to the violence of the boot on the face—is poorly served by the reduction of dystopia to the opposite of redemption. Building on the notion that *no future* can be an important starting point for thinking the politics of history from the perspective of those excluded from dominant narratives, I want to ask what kind of approach a *dystopian* impulse might produce. One description of this impulse from the realms of Marxist theory is Fredric Jameson’s (1990: 249) celebration of the “bile” of Theodor Adorno’s critique as “a joyous counter-poison and corrosive solvent, to apply to the slick surface of what is.” This is a dystopian impulse: a negative critique that seeks to dissolve presumptions that the present’s political problems are eternal and inevitable, even when the contestation consists of railing against present wrongs without any suggestion of a positive outcome. Conceptualizing a dystopian impulse leads us to ask: What do speculative narrative futures look and feel like *without* either a redemptive kernel of hope or an implicit acceptance of the way things are? And what pleasures (Jameson uses the word *joyous*, after all) and politics grow from this kind of speculation?

The perverse pleasures of negative imagination have been extensively explored in a body of queer analysis that has sought to critique assimilationist, normalizing politics by homing in on refusals, debasements, and impossibilities. Filled with dystopian impulses, the antifuturist mode of queer activist critique appeared first in the writing of the French socialist and gay liberationist Guy Hocquenghem (1993 [1978]) in the 1970s before it was taken up by the US queer theorists Leo Bersani (1987, 1995) in the 1980s and 1990s and then Lee Edelman (2004) in the 2000s. Bersani and Hocquenghem both

understand gay male sexuality as an exemplary force for the ways sexual desire unmakes commonsense notions of social, historical, and political progress. Hocquenghem (1993 [1978]: 148) writes that “the gay movement is . . . not the signifier of what might become a new form of ‘social organisation,’ a new stage of civilised humanity,” but instead “demonstrates that civilisation is the trap into which desire keeps falling.” Drawing from Freudian psychoanalysis, Hocquenghem argues that straight society sees gay sex as endangering civilization through a “frightening non-humanity” that carries a message of humanity’s end: “a fear that the succession of generations, on which civilization is based, may stop” (148, 150). Choosing to embrace this negative perception rather than argue for the inclusion of gay communities in dominant culture, Hocquenghem places queer sex’s negating force in the service of revolution. He refigures seemingly homophobic perceptions by insisting that to end “civilization” by embracing homosexual desire is to break through capitalist oppression and exploitation—the basis of which is the family and its breeding ground for consumer psychology. Hocquenghem’s dystopian impulse destroys in order to build, insisting that a revolutionary new order is possible, though it must be structured so differently from the old that it will no longer be understandable as “civilization.”

Like Hocquenghem’s, Bersani’s version of gay negativity springs from the connection of male-male desire to the absence of female bodies with their connotations of fecundity and life. Written at the height of the AIDS epidemic, when gay men were both dying and viewed by the straight public sphere as contaminant sources of illness and death, Bersani’s “Is the Rectum a Grave?” (1987) embraces the anus as a zone of waste and shame whose association with pleasure and death might have the power to unmake the social world. Both Hocquenghem and Bersani revel in the end of the future by insisting that sexual pleasure unconnected with reproduction, engaging parts of the body that not only are nonreproductive but also are associated with waste and death, must constitute a dystopian impulse on the level of biology. Gay male antisocial critique is not without its glimmers of utopian possibility, however. Hocquenghem’s dystopian impulse finds destructiveness in pleasure, insisting that any possible new order will be so different from the old that it cannot be imagined in existing terms, yet his work is also a revolutionary project predicated on the notion that it is imperative to imagine just such a new world. Bersani makes several gestures toward the possibility that acts of debasement and refusal could engage in a kind of world making, creating new futures that would do something different than reproduce homogeneous time. He closes his book *Homos* by suggesting that “in a society where oppression is structural, constitutive of sociality itself, only what that society throws off—its mistakes or its pariahs—can serve the future” (Bersani

1995: 180). The future that he imagines sociality's underside to be serving is not explicated in detail but stands as a moment of flash utopianism, a gesture rather than a plan: a merger of negativity and hope.

The most expansive queer critique of futurity to date has been Edelman's. He extends Hocquenghem's and Bersani's frameworks from the sexually specific into a universalizing critique of reproductivity itself, disavowing utopia, politics, and hope entirely for their excessively positivist visions of the future. Edelman's *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004) has dominated the past decade of scholarship on sexuality and time. My work on queer speculation charts alternatives to the set of relationships between queerness and futurity that have come to seem like common sense in the wake of debates instigated by his work. Edelman's analysis of political futurity names the way an image of "the Child" functions as a guarantor for political projects through a universal temporal politics he names "reproductive futurism." Heterosexual reproductive sex is, here, the alibi for a re-production of political and social structures that ensures a conservative propagation of things as they are, complete with systemic inequalities. One need not be straight to stand up for reproductive futurism, but to oppose it is to be marked as queer regardless of sexual or political identifications. I do not intend my analysis of dystopian antifuturism as a direct rebuttal of Edelman, yet a sustained engagement with the specific examples and connotations through which he works out his analysis is necessary to understand the history of no future on which his work implicitly—and mine explicitly—builds.

Naming and shaming the forces that reproduce politics as heterofuturity, Edelman uses a 1938 conversation between Bertolt Brecht and Benjamin to explicate his memorable phrase "the fascism of the baby's face." Brecht wrote to Benjamin in 1938 that futurity was fundamental to both fascism and its opposition, because "they [the Nazis] are planning for the next thirty thousand years." Benjamin (2007 [1938]: 218) remembered Brecht invoking reproduction to denounce a fascist futurism that wished to "deform the baby in the mother's womb," in the struggle against which "we must under no circumstances leave out the children." For Edelman, Benjamin's description of "a power that has its source no less deep in history than fascism" shows the flattening universality that comes from emphasizing children and threats to children as justification for any politics, any future. Invoking fascism for the figure of reproductive futurism adds an emotive rhetoric to Edelman's (2004: 151) insistence that "whatever the face a particular politics gives that baby to wear—Aryan or multicultural, that of the thirty-thousand-year Reich or of an ever expanding horizon of democratic inclusivity," all "political programs" are defined by reproductive futurism, "programmed to reify difference and thus to secure, in the form of the future, the order of the same."



If the worst possible imaginable thing is always the deformation of childhood, then the same images define both fascist and antifascist politics.

Neither fascism nor antifascism is easy to define outside the specific historical referents from which Edelman rapidly abstracts them. In twenty-first-century Anglo-American popular culture, to describe a political project as “fascist” is to insist that it has no future—or that any future to which it is liable to lead should be avoided at all cost.<sup>7</sup> Edelman’s analysis can help us see why. If all political programs are characterized by an authoritarian enforcement of the forms of social reproduction they wish to fulfill, then elements of the fascist imaginary can be identified and denounced at will. Similarly, Edelman’s notion of the queer as negative antireproductive force becomes that which opposes fascist politics by virtue of its opposition to the baby’s face, even if queerness in and of itself has no political content. Yet Edelman’s image of queer negativity as that which would shatter the “fascism of the baby’s face” remains unsettlingly close to Orwell’s depiction of fascist futurity as a “boot stamping on a human face.” This proximity should remind us that Edelman’s analysis of social-psychic structures of futurity is intended as an upheaval and a challenge to conceptions of politics rather than a contribution to political discourses themselves. It is a commentary about the chilling effects exerted by baby-faced iconography on what can be legitimated as political, not a discourse on either fascism or procreation as such, although it aims to intervene in a particular historical context.

Regardless of his claims to universalism, the historical context of Edelman’s *No Future* is tangible. Affiliating his queer critique with feminism via the key US political issue of abortion, he takes the opportunity to critique the pro-life/pro-choice binary when he describes himself feeling interpellated by a billboard remonstrating against abortion rights, called out as a negation of the “biblical mandate” to “be fruitful and multiply” (ibid.: 15). “Who would . . . stand *against* reproduction, *against* futurity, and so *against life?*,” he asks, before insisting that it is the role of queers to do so (16). And yet this “pro-life” logic is not as universal as Edelman seems to think once we look away from the billboard toward more complicated contexts, as Nina Power (2009) has done with regard to British politics. No baby and no future do not mean the same thing for every gendered and racialized body, and to take

7. In US politics in particular, right-wing rhetoric accusing Barack Obama, feminists, or anyone with an investment in the welfare state of being simultaneously fascist and socialist suggests that the term has lost all meaning save a vague dystopian threat. The transatlantic bogey of “Islamofascism” may have something to do with historical memory of fascist military expansion and anti-Semitism, but as a racist and xenophobic construct it remains without a concrete referent. Even far-right European nationalist movements that appear to be direct heirs to twentieth-century European fascist organizations often avoid the term, insisting that the true fascists are others whose politics are far more deplorable (Slane 2001).

mainstream American culture's pronatalism at its universalizing face value is to elide that continuing fact. The Child may be the singular sign of futurity on which most if not all politics rely, but an analysis of the intersecting gendered, racial, and national investments that create narratives of reproductive futurism must show that it does not come without a figurative family that is also politically—and unevenly—deployed. The concern that motivates my contribution to these debates is with the mothers in that family.

To jump from futurity to children to mothers is certainly on some level to participate in a heterosexual logic of (re)generation in which the future is indeed “kid stuff” and kids' only meaningful connections are to the presumptively heterosexual bodies from which they emerged. Yet to ignore (as theories of gay male negativity often do) the bodies from which queer and other subjects literally emerge is to risk participating in racialized and classed dynamics that elide the question of who disproportionately carries out reproductive labor. Predictions and projections of the future of the human race have never been innocent of racialized and nationalistic understandings that seek to determine which kinds of humanity ought to be most desirable. And we should be able to look at those projections in a way that takes this into account while remaining attentive to a queer critique of reproductive futurism.

To develop this critique I turn to Burdekin's feminist dystopian impulses and to the larger context of feminist reproductive critique in which *Swastika Night* is situated. Feminist theory has long challenged women's relegation to a reproductive position subordinate to men's historical productivity.<sup>8</sup> Shulamith Firestone's polemic *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970) is an important example. Not only does Firestone call for the abolition of gestation and its replacement with cybernetic wombs, but she also insists that childhood itself is an oppressive dystopian structure that ought to be abolished. Childhood for Firestone (2003 [1970]: 85) is the imposition of adult fantasies of innocence on individuals who should be acknowledged for their existence, not only for their potential. When Firestone talks about reproduction, she is as much concerned with the reproduction of social relationships, the perpetuation of means of production and ways of life through reproductive labor as understood in the Marxist sense, as she is with baby making. She insists that the only way to reproduce a future that would not continually oppress women would be to separate the former from the latter senses of the term. And because “the heart of woman's oppression is her child-bearing and child-rearing role,” biological reproduction must be ended to stop women being

8. In a discussion of gendered embodiment in a footnote, Edelman (2004: 165) argues that queer antifuturism is most often embodied by male figures because of “a gender bias that continues to view women as ‘naturally’ bound more closely to sociality, reproduction, and domesticating emotion.”

dehumanized by their roles as incubators for the future of the human race (65). Few feminists have seriously contemplated demands as revolutionary as Firestone's call to abolish children and mothers, but they have often imagined what it might mean to reconfigure the gendered politics of reproduction.<sup>9</sup> Queer scholarship and activism, on the contrary, has tended either to skate over feminist critiques of reproduction or to take them as a given, moving immediately to the ways reproduction can be resisted and alternative temporalities and futurities explored. Queer worlds seem self-evidently not to include reproductive futures (Halberstam 2005; Muñoz 2009). Yet reproduction and heterofuturity are not always so easily equated.

Familial formations of reproductive futurism are always entangled with ideas about "the future of the race," meaning the notion that humanity's caliber could be improved through eugenic discourses that mark some bodies as more worthy of reproduction than others.<sup>10</sup> The history of population control has involved plenty of what Edelman (2004: 16) calls "coming out . . . against reproduction" in the form of forced sterilizations of disabled, poor, and racialized women and the demonization of the inappropriately reproductive. The work of Marie Stopes, the British feminist advocate for birth control and sexual pleasure, demonstrates the way eugenics, empire, fascism, and feminism have worked together to create a reproductive futurism in which straight familiarity, nationalism, and colonial time all line up. In *Radiant Motherhood* (1921), Stopes proposes a set of plans to improve life for British women. Her hope is that with family planning, better hygiene, and sexual pleasure available to women, the horrors of poverty and repression could be lifted such that "we at present in the flesh may link hands with grandchildren belonging to a generation so wonderful, so endowed and so improved out of recognition, that the miseries and the depravity of human nature to-day so wide-spread, may appear alike a black and hideous memory of the past, as incredible to them as the habits of cannibals are to us" (Stopes 1921: 244). The pleasures she thinks will build a vibrant nation are only for a few. They suggest images of the irradiated youths stepping over their depraved and nonreproductive elders. Stopes's linguistic rhetoric is a reminder that her argument operates through the temporality of colonization,

9. Hortense Spillers (2003) makes an important critique of the racism inherent in Firestone's argument, particularly her association of the unmarked category "woman" with white womanhood. My analyses of feminist utopian and dystopian thought likewise focus on the ways their reimaginings of reproduction tend to be complicit with various imperial imaginaries.

10. Francis Galton coined the term *eugenics* in the late nineteenth century. Galton (1892: 362), whose work was hugely influential in Europe and America, drew on his cousin Charles Darwin's work to develop eugenics as a scientific means of maintaining what he understood to be the human race's quality, fearing that inappropriate reproduction would mean reversing the temporality of evolutionary progress in a "relapse to barbarism" from imperial civilization.

contrasting races and places on the globe that are already associated with the “cannibal,” the “black and hideous,” with the civilized bodies, radiant with light, that ought to inherit the earth. A danger to the future is “the vast and ever increasing stock of degenerate, feeble-minded, and unbalanced who are now in our midst and who devastate social customs . . . like the parasite upon the healthy tree sapping out its vitality. . . . [B]y ever weakening the human stock, in the end they will succumb with the fine structure which they have destroyed” (ibid.: 245). This vast and ever-increasing stock of degenerates (the eugenically unappealing, the futureless, the excessively reproductive) endangers the future of the human race altogether, risking an end to the future, and it is “in the hands of the mothers” (244) to redeem civilization, to (re)produce the right future. Stopes’s maternalism was a strategic historical intervention, since after gaining many rights due to their work for the nation in World War I, women in Britain as elsewhere in Europe were losing jobs to returning men. And a significantly larger population of women than men raised questions about the fate of the “surplus.”<sup>11</sup> Stopes mobilized traditional gender roles to insist that marriage and childbearing were more noble than any form of industrial employment, because they would grant women responsibility for a racial and national future. Yet through this feminist demand, the fascism of the baby’s face gains the potential to become a genocidal force.

Not only feminist appeals to family and maternity but also antiheteronormative sexual pleasures have participated in the reproduction of conservative futures, as Huxley’s classic dystopia *Brave New World* reminds us. Huxley’s scientist-politician Mustapha Mond is one of the passing examples Edelman (2004: 165) gives of fictional figures who “stand outside the natural order of sexual reproduction,” in opposition to the fascism of the baby’s face. Huxley (1994 [1932]: 7) has childbearing become utterly obsolete, replacing birth with the precision engineering of embryos whose intelligence is calibrated to a precise degree as they are churned out along production lines modeled after Ford factories. The end of the family is a worst-case scenario, where industrial capitalism has run riot, babies “bottled” to ensure homogeneity of production.<sup>12</sup> Mond is the architect of this situation, yet his opposition to sexual reproduction does not stop him from being greatly in favor of making a future “for the children.” Presiding over production lines of embryos while they are prepared through hypnotic suggestion for

11. “By the fall of 1919 three-quarters of a million women who had held jobs by the Armistice had been dismissed . . . by 1921 the proportion of employed women was smaller than it had been before the war” (Adamson 1998: 26).

12. Susan Squier (1994) offers a comprehensive analysis of the significance of such figurative test tube babies in the context of real-world reproductive technology.

their roles as satisfied, promiscuous, genetically predetermined citizens, he smiles fondly at children engaged in “erotic play” (50). Mond in fact stands for industrial-reproductive futurism figured by the idealization of the embryo on the production line rather than the babe in arms but no less keen to reproduce itself through the fascism of a million bottled babies’ faces. The disgust that makes him a useful example for Edelman is reserved for reproduction in the “obscene” confines of the family and for motherhood in particular, which he describes through the misogynist use of animal sexual metaphors: the mother is “a cat that could talk, . . . brooding” over the child at the breast with “unspeakable agonizing pleasure” (33). Huxley uses his expectation of a reader’s shocked reaction to Mond’s disgust to express his fear of the loss of individual potential in an industrialized future where reproduction might follow the same rules as capitalist production, linking that loss to a disappearance of the connection between mothers and children. Yet even as *Brave New World* expresses anxiety for a projected loss of patriarchal gender norms, it also participates in the same raced and classed production of a eugenic future as Stopes’s earlier feminist project. In *Brave New World Revisited*, Huxley (2000 [1958]: 6) makes sweeping critiques of overpopulation, worrying about the fate of the world when “teeming illiterates” cannot be trusted to use birth control and suggesting that the future of *Brave New World* may be neither as dystopian nor as avoidable as that novel implied.

Where cultural reproduction of oppressive futurities takes place through nonheterosexual practices, the neatness of oppositions between queerness and reproductive futurism collapses—and that collapse is, as I have shown, a gendered one. In *The Queer Art of Failure*, Halberstam (2011) argues that the unmaking of subjectivity that Bersani and Edelman celebrate is an unmaking only of masculinity and that it is profoundly challenged through specifically feminine modes of feminist politics (for Halberstam, these frequently depict unmaking the political itself in masochistic art). Sara Ahmed (2010: 65) describes this kind of politics in her writings about the “feminist killjoy,” whose constant reminders of gender refuse to leave a complacent present or future unproblematic. Feminism requires dystopia in this way of thinking. Burdekin’s contribution to popular dystopian narrative prefigures this negative feminism as it unmakes the eugenic time lines of reproductive and fascist temporalities. The path I chart through *Swastika Night* is a killjoy’s, evading narratives of heroism and redemption in favor of the relentless, queer dystopian impulses that surround Burdekin’s portrayal of reproduction.

### Katharine Burdekin's Futureless Feminism

In 1934 the novel *Proud Man* by Murray Constantine used the speculative conceit of a visitor from the far future to criticize Huxley's recent *Brave New World* for its inability to imagine that altering social and familial norms might lead men and women to "change" their natures (Burdekin 1993 [1934]: 226). Constantine's protagonist is a "person" without gender who looks with sympathy and confusion on the antics of men and women in the twentieth century. When the "person" turns to futuristic prediction to learn about society in a less "dogmatic" way, they remark that Huxley's effort at futurism has "no imagination" (227). By implication, Constantine's own imagination offers superior methods for thinking futurity. Murray Constantine is a male pseudonym Burdekin used, publishing ten novels variously as Constantine, Kay Burdekin, and Katharine Burdekin. Daphne Patai (1993) made the connection between the identities and brought some of Burdekin's work back into print in the 1980s. Burdekin lived for much of her life with a woman companion in rural England, preferring to remain outside social, literary, and cultural centers.<sup>13</sup> She cared little for stylistic experimentation, writing for herself to express ideas and editing little. Much of her work went unpublished during her life and remains so; many of her later novels were never submitted to presses (*ibid.*).<sup>14</sup> Though her work remains obscure, much of Burdekin's writing articulates futures for gender and reproduction and attempts greater feats of "imagination" than Huxley did in that it does not assume that meanings or politics will remain historically stable.

Burdekin wrote several novels that use a futuristic perspective and long historical scope to look critically at gender relations, including homosexual relationships. Her work in the 1920s and early 1930s engaged with many of the same scientific, technological, and political themes as did Huxley and later Orwell but in a more utopian than dystopian vein. *The Rebel Passion*, published in 1929 under the name Kay Burdekin, depicts a homosexual medieval monk who is taken on a time-traveling tour by an angel and shown the inevitable upswing of European progress, whose traumatic break in World War I will be healed by the League of Nations. In *The Rebel Passion*, as in *Proud Man* and *The End of This Day's Business* (written in 1935 and posthumously published in 1989 under Katharine Burdekin), scientific endeavor is portrayed as part—though not all—of an evolutionary

13. Although, George McKay (1996: 187) writes, "her friends and admirers did . . . include Radclyffe Hall, H.D., Margaret Goldsmith, and Frederick Voight, as well as the Woolfs and Bertrand and Dora Russell."

14. Additional biographical information is taken from Patai's introductions to the reissued novels, where she documents 1980s conversations with Burdekin's unnamed surviving partner.

progress that will lead to a better future. *The Rebel Passion* displays virulent racism in its depiction of slavery as necessary to the development of black Americans and annihilation as the destiny of “the yellow races,” taking its place among the many visions of utopia whose racial and colonial elements highlight the inherent violence of developmental temporalities (Burdekin 1929: 244). *Proud Man* and *The End of This Day’s Business* both represent the future as a more complicated set of possibilities where changes in gender norms bring their own problems: structural discrimination against men in *Business*, the loss of modern gender’s pleasures with its difficulties in *Proud Man*. The most widely read of Burdekin’s novels, however, is the one whose orientation is dystopian rather than utopian. In its intense negativity and its direct, explicit response to current events, *Swastika Night* was a significant departure from Burdekin’s earlier work.

After World War II, alternate-history scenarios asking “What if Adolf Hitler had won?” became commonplace. Yet *Swastika Night*, written before war between Britain and Germany was certain and published under the name Constantine, remains one of the most complex. For Andy Croft (1984: 209), Burdekin’s is “undoubtedly the most sophisticated and original of all the many anti-fascist dystopias of the late 1930s and 1940s.” That sophistication lies primarily in the novel’s engagement with ideas about femininity and reproduction.<sup>15</sup> Like *Brave New World*, *Swastika Night* imagines a future in which alternatives to marital heterosexuality are mandated to guarantee a future for an all-powerful state. But *Swastika Night*’s futurity is little concerned with the tropes of techno-capitalist modernity around which Huxley’s dystopian impulses are oriented. Its industrialization of motherhood takes place not through technology but through women’s enslavement and debasement to animal status. The texture of life in Burdekin’s dystopia is more medieval than modern, shaped by church and farm work, with only an occasional airplane to remind us that we are situated long after the twentieth century. The biggest change seven hundred years into the future is that women’s nature has altered such that they are no longer considered—by men or, it appears, by themselves—to be human beings. And this is not because the human race has evolutionarily degenerated, punished for its racial or sexual sins, but for specific political reasons. Burdekin sees the immediate threat of Nazism as a potential annihilation of scientific, technological, and all other potentially hopeful futures.

15. For detailed discussions of *Swastika Night* in the context of 1930s history and as a feminist text, see Patai 1993; Joannou 1995: chap. 6; Maslen 2001: chap. 2; and Adam Stock’s article in this issue.

Burdekin's fictionalized critique of Nazism shares its gender politics with other feminist writers. *Swastika Night*, whose action takes place almost entirely among men, enacts a direct link between masculine domination and the rise of fascist movements, similar to the connection Virginia Woolf (2006 [1938]) made between military and patriarchal power in England and Germany in *Three Guineas* and to Klaus Theweleit's (1987) exposition of proto-Nazi male bonding and misogyny in *Male Fantasies*. Dystopian extrapolation leads from the glorification of fascist masculinity to Burdekin's imagined annihilation of female personhood in what Keith Williams (1999: 152) describes as the "logical conclusions" of "the Fascist 'cult of masculinity.'" Across the German empire that rules the Europe in which the novel is set, Nazi power is maintained through a religious cult of masculinity that insists that "women [are] not part of the human race at all" (Burdekin 1985 [1937]: 79). Other subjects viewed as less than human (Jews, nonwhites who are not elevated to the status of "subject races") have been completely obliterated, but women remain necessary for procreation, so they must be kept around. Nazi mythology idealizes an image of Hitler as "exploded" rather than of woman born, and so women do not even have the privilege of being respected for their role in incubating future generations (Burdekin 1985 [1937]: 79). Women exist only because Burdekin's Nazis lack the scientific knowledge to develop a viable technique for reproduction without them.<sup>16</sup> Female bodies become pure reproductive conduits with no hope of a future. Kept in cages, their sole function is to be raped when men want children. For the German Knight we see indoctrinating a "herd" of women into their lowly position, the closest they come to humanity is when they mourn for the sons who are taken from them at a young age to learn to be men. The only "human feeling allowed to them" is "the leave to be . . . passionately proud of a male child" (14). Inarticulately, the no longer human women want access to the future whose bodies they birth, even though it is one that excludes them.

*Swastika Night*'s speculative misogyny may seem excessive, but it has clear sources in twentieth-century protofascist thought. In particular, Burdekin drew on the Austrian Otto Weininger's *Sex and Character* (1906), which Hitler and many intellectuals sympathetic to fascist movements admired. Weininger's book draws the reader through carefully constructed logical

16. The idea of reproduction without women was also a seductive one for the Italian futurists, whose complicity with fascism is well documented. Women are associated with the past and tradition that ought to be vanquished and surpassed, but annoyingly the female body is also necessary for bringing the children necessary for life in the future. Reproduction via a machine is the ideal answer, as Clara Orban (1995: 57) demonstrates in her analysis of Filippo-Tommaso Marinetti's novel *Mafarka the Futurist* (1910), whose main character uses technology to engender a son "without the stinking complicity and help of the female womb."



formulations to lead us, apparently inexorably, to the conclusion that women cannot be truly human.<sup>17</sup> “Woman,” whose existence was defined only by a sexuality Weinger found repulsive, embodied utter negation and meaninglessness. Her “demure outward self was a simulacrum constructed in keeping with male expectations and assumed in order to win male esteem” (Sengoopta 2000: 11; for a discussion of Weinger from a slightly different angle, see Ní Dhúill in this issue). This is also the opinion of the German Knight, von Hess, in *Swastika Night*, who declares that “women will always be exactly what men want them to be. They have no will, no character and no souls; they are only a reflection of men” (Burdekin 1985 [1937]: 70). Weinger (1906: 216) associates womanhood with a lack of capacity to engage with history or even with the rhythms of social life, since “woman” is a purely sexual force that gathers men to her and away from their productive autonomy to push either into an undifferentiated reproductive future (if she is a woman of the type “mother”) or into a futureless and narcissistic zone of sexual pleasure (if she is of the type “prostitute”). Women’s reproductive capacity and the families built around it are simply a prop to the real reproduction of social and political life, which is transmitted nonbiologically from men to men. Feminists have shared this analysis of power’s lineages as a way women could challenge the social order from a position outside it, as in Woolf’s (2006 [1938]: 129) demand in *Three Guineas* for women to oppose war through the formation of an “Outsiders’ Society” embracing the notion that women “have no country, . . . want no country” and may therefore belong to “the whole world.”<sup>18</sup> If Woolf’s critique of the patriarchy of fascism found a utopian possibility in the idea that women are excluded from the production and reproduction of the nation, Burdekin’s dystopia unpacks the negative side of this conceit, literalizing the notion that women exist outside history by portraying female figures who appear to lack any consciousness at all.

For all that Burdekin draws very clear connections between masculinity and Nazism, she does not exonerate women from complicity with the past and present politics that provide the ingredients for her dystopian future.

17. Weinger insists, fascinatingly, that maleness and femaleness cannot be defined through biology alone, that “female men” and “male women” and any number of “sexually indeterminate types” exist, and that their deviations from a heterosexual norm must be considered fully natural. His critique of the biological basis of gender replaces biology with platonic models of man and woman that allow him to casually dismiss all counterexamples to his arguments as the result of “sexual indeterminacy,” while he bases his claims on an ideal that may not exist in the world but is all the more important for that (Weinger 1906: 9).

18. Marie-Luise Gätgens (2001) expertly unpacks Woolf’s linkage of women’s reproductive role in the family with colonial and fascist power and her insistence that “disloyalty” to both private and public spheres was a necessary route to avoiding war.

*Swastika Night*'s plot revolves around a book of secret history that documents the "Reduction of Women." This history, written by an appalled male observer, describes women as "throwing themselves into" the negation of their own personhood with "conscious enthusiasm." Burdekin (1985 [1937]: 82) does not suggest reasons for women's complicity in their own subjugation other than von Hess's misogynist false-consciousness theory of women's belief that "if they did all that men told them to do cheerfully and willingly, the men would somehow . . . love them still more." But the real history of Nazi femininity offers some suggestions. Claudia Koonz's work on Nazi femininity shows the complicity among women in an ideology of male supremacy where "the blatantly male-chauvinist Nazi Party" was supported by the reproductive labor of "the largest women's organization in history." Koonz (1987: xx) describes Nazi women's organizations' claims to power and describes their feminism, actuated through traditional femininity, in speculative fiction terms as "the nineteenth-century feminists' vision of the future in nightmare form." Indeed, Burdekin's harsh portrayal of femininity is a sharp rejoinder to some feminists' utopian ideas that women devoting themselves single-mindedly to procreation could occupy dominant temporalities in a way that would prove empowering or that dedication to reproduction in the service of a racial project for improved heredity could be potentially good for even dominant-class women.<sup>19</sup> In *Swastika Night*, capitulating to a solely reproductive role leads women not to a separate sphere of feminine power but to their obliteration in a future that is wholly male. They are not even a threat but something totally overlooked. Burdekin asks what would happen if women acceded wholesale to their figuration as bodies on which hypermasculine visions of futurity would be engendered.

Burdekin's nightmare of fascist masculine domination relies on a social world reproduced through relations between men. Both in Burdekin and in many historical analyses of fascism, that homosocial misogyny shades into homoeroticism. The antisociality of fascist violence connected to the antisociality of homosexuality for thinkers who imagined both as rejecting the positive forces of life and reproduction signified by the female body. Wilhelm Reich, for example, wrote that "the most brutal . . . types were those . . . who were either latently or manifestly homosexual," and Adorno declared that "totalitarianism and homosexuality go together" (both quoted in Theweleit 1987: 54–55). William J. Spurlin (2009: 73) describes this kind of thinking as "the discursive reduction of homosexuality to fascism, or to the location of

19. For discussions of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century feminist utopian discourse, which the passages by Stopes cited above perpetuated in the twentieth century, see Lewes 1995; Beaumont 2005.

homosexuality as fascism's source," which he finds to be a reductive "conflation of sexual with political deviance, whereby homosexuality is pathologized as a fascist fascination with the erotics of power, and fascism is reduced to a psychosexual manifestation of homosexual narcissism." The sexual deviance of homosexuality, Spurlin implies, is a benign variation, the political deviance of Nazism is genocidal, and it is certainly horrifying to think that the two could be in any way connected. Erik N. Jensen (2002: 322) calls the idea that "homosexuals . . . formed the backbone of the Nazi movement" a "pernicious myth" that disregards the persecution and murder of gay people under Nazism. The pink triangle, a concrete marker of that murder, has been a vital symbol for the AIDS movement, because it stood for homosexuality denied a future, a denial repeated in the criminal neglect of gay men and others with AIDS. But Stuart Marshall's 1991 essay on the problematic nature of the pink triangle as a logo for AIDS activism is an important reminder that the homoerotic imagery of Nazi and more broadly fascist movements has been both a site of murderous homophobia and a means by which hegemonic state and patriarchal power is maintained. Homosexuality may not consist purely in a pathological fascination with the erotics of power, but such fascinations exist there as surely as they do in heterosexualities. Fascisms may have sought to destroy homosexuality, yet homoeroticism may have been involved in their reproduction.

The erotics of fascist violence are confronted head-on in Bersani's antisocial queer theory. Describing Jean Genet's (1969 [1948]) homoerotic "fascination with what he outrageously calls the beauty of Nazism" in *Funeral Rites*, Bersani (1995: 171) argues that the depiction of Nazi soldiers as erotic objects is "in no way a plea for the specific goals pursued by Nazi Germany." Rather it "insists on the continuity between the sexual and the political" in a way that "superficially glorifies Nazism as the system most congenial to a cult of male power justified by little more than male beauty" but also "transforms the historical reality of Nazism into a mythic metaphor for a revolutionary destructiveness which would surely dissolve the rigidly defined sociality of Nazism itself"(ibid.). When the Nazi Erik and the collaborator Riton fuck, Bersani reads the twinned virtues of Genet's anality and amorality as negatively transformative, nonreproductively bringing forth a future born of society's leavings that will refuse "to accept a relation with any given social arrangement." These are the impulses of queer negativity, then; eroticizing and fucking the Nazi in the ass breaks down the rigidity on which Nazism's violently hierarchical structure relies and by extension breaks down the rest of society's close-to-fascist underpinnings. Though anti-Nazi struggle is rejected with all politics here, the idea that disgusting sex among those considered disgusting could be revolutionary, transformative, dissolving

provides grounding for the suggestive, near-utopian call to “rethink what we mean and what we expect from communication, and from community” with which Bersani’s (ibid.: 183) *Homos* ends. Though its relationship to fascism, sex, and sociality differ wildly from Genet’s, *Swastika Night* develops a feminist version of an antisocial politics. Bersani remarks parenthetically that “the metaphoric suitability of Hitler’s regime for this project can hardly be untroubling”(171). Burdekin places the trouble front and center. While Bersani’s reading of Genet breaks down Nazi and all other socialities through the destructive power of desire, in Burdekin the destructive force of Nazi masculinity produces, through the antisocial practices of its dehumanized others, the seeds of its own annihilation.

The contradictions through which homoeroticism and fascism interweave become clear in Erin G. Carlson’s (1998: 180) discussion of the ways homosexuality functioned as part of the antifascism of W. H. Auden and his generation, who were “alienated by the hypocrisy of the ruling-class values that permitted almost any degree of exploitation, deception, or brutality within the confines of institutionalized heterosexuality, but punished love between men.” Carlson goes on to quote Christopher Isherwood’s recollections of male homosexuality and homosociality under Nazi ultranationalism, where he describes the prospect of an alignment with the two as a tragic misrecognition:

[Christopher] knew only one pair of homosexual lovers who declared proudly that they were Nazis. Misled by their own erotic vision of a New Sparta, they fondly supposed that Germany was entering an era of military man-love, with all women excluded. They were aware, of course, that Christopher thought them crazy, but they dismissed him with a shrug. How could he understand? This wasn’t his homeland . . . No, indeed it wasn’t. Christopher had realized that for some time already. But this tragic pair of self-deceivers didn’t realize — and wouldn’t, until it was too late — that this wasn’t their homeland, either. (180; ellipsis in the original)

Eventually, it was “too late” for the “era of military man-love” to materialize. Same-sex love was dangerous enough to the fabric of Nazi society that it was punished in the same way as all other forms of deviance. But Burdekin, writing about what it might mean to live in a world organized around German masculinity from the perspective of an English woman living outside a heterosexual family structure, could not know how that story would end. Her imagined future creates a world of nationalist homoeroticism that offers precisely that “New Sparta” with its exclusion of women and takes it to its logical extreme. Both in Burdekin’s fiction and in the realities that coexisted with and followed it, the dream of homo-Nazism creates a nightmare. Burdekin attempts to represent the gendered elements of a fascist homoerotic

nightmare without falling victim to the homophobic blaming of fascism on that homoeroticism — and in so doing evades the standard narratives about homosexuality and fascism that members of later gay movements have held. *Swastika Night* cuts through these tangles by imagining a Nazi homosexuality that is not antisocial.

The Nazi Empire of *Swastika Night* is suffused with homoeroticism. “Men . . . love boys, nearly all of them, at one time or another, in one way or another” (Burdekin 1985 [1937]: 120). That love is not demonized, but it is not idealized either. One man’s “love” of a boy leads to the boy being battered to death for sullyng his pure flesh with the body of an unclean woman. Though visiting the “Women’s Quarters” is a reproductive duty, no “stigma” attaches to men who avoid it, whose “whole sexual and emotional life [is] lived among men” (166). Male love is a site of pleasant feeling in the extraordinarily ugly world Burdekin creates. As Maroula Joannou (1995: 182) writes, men’s love of men in *Swastika Night* even has the capacity to “destabilise the established boundaries of race and class.” The Nazi Hermann abandons his fatherland and eventually dies for the love of the Englishman Alfred, whom he is expected to despise according to the hierarchies of Nazi ideology. But male love is also, through the erotics of the uniform and the idealization of a virility that abhors the feminine, the vector along which fascist power is transmitted. Power’s transmission through triangulated homosocial desire has been a staple of queer theory since Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s *Between Men* (1985). Burdekin shows a homosocial future in which female debasement is the corollary of male love. She separates a homoerotic masculinity that slots neatly into existing power structures from the kind of gender deviance that would involve men identifying with women’s concerns and imagines a world where the former has become so powerful that the latter is no longer possible.

In *Swastika Night*, male love reproduces the Nazi future, while motherhood and biological reproduction become sites of abjection. Burdekin associates femininity with the antisocial, antirelational force that Bersani finds in what he identifies as the most politically and physically “disgusting” parts of queer sex. Burdekin’s dystopian impulse is to take Weininger’s notion of women’s exclusion from subjectivity to its logical extreme. She places their degradation center stage and offers little prospect that it might be heroically overturned. Caged women are portrayed as “living their stupid lives in little groups of two or three women with their daughters and very tiny sons” (Burdekin 1985 [1937]: 157), but of what those “groups” might do among themselves we are told nothing. Yet they are not without some images of resistance. A little consciousness appears in the figure of Marta, a woman “so old she was no longer a woman at all, and therefore out of reach of all womanly feelings of shame and humility.” Marta “was not free, but per-

haps by mere age had passed out of reach of psychic subjection" (15). She appears on only one page, however, and thereafter leaves the novel to go about her cynical life without spearheading a community in resistance.<sup>20</sup> The protest of the women does not take place through a positive, heroic politics but in a negativity played out on the ground of reproduction. The female birthrate is steadily and catastrophically declining. Von Hess thinks this is "the tragedy of the human race" (70), that women have "destroyed us [men] by doing what we told them" (12), birthing boys without reproducing their subhuman selves. Now "the race is coming to extinction" because of the "unconscious . . . discouragement" of the women (70), and the men cannot admit to this because "if a woman could rejoice publicly in the birth of a girl, Hitlerdom would start to crumble" (14). Even as they wail for their own erasure from the Nazi future their sons will build, the women's very biology protests, and through excess of submission they commit themselves to the end of the world. George McKay (1996: 198) finds this depiction to be "a biologic essentialism, in which women's bodily functions, the sole aspect for which they are valued, refuse to operate." The reduction of women to biology seems to me, however, to be more a commentary on the ways ideology shapes material reality than an inscription of women as mere bodies. As Burdekin decries the reduction of women to breeders, she also insists that the most thorough denial of selfhood and subjectivity nevertheless cannot render human bodies wholly pliable, wholly without volition. Denied the opportunity to refuse, the women's very submission to reproductive dehumanization becomes resistance. Rather than create more of their debased and unwanted selves, they continue the male master race and in so doing bring it closer to its end. By following an evolutionary time line in which the rewarding of masculinity leads to the production of more men, which in turn leads to the failure of human reproduction, they demonstrate the contradiction that Burdekin understands to be at the heart of Nazism and that we might extrapolate to other forms of hierarchy and oppression. It can perpetuate itself only by producing more of those it claims to want to eradicate.

Burdekin uses her female characters' negative resistance to critique Nazism through a feminist lens by framing it as a dead end. Women's futurelessness contains a seed of protest against oppression, but it is one that is routed through impossibility, silence, and a refusal to even exist. Given this negativity, it is interesting that Burdekin's work—which by 2010 could be described as "the best known" of dystopian "fictional satires" written in

20. Women not unlike Marta do spearhead resistance in Storm Jameson's evocative dystopia *Then We Shall Hear Singing* (1942), where old women's memories of a former time keep resistance to fascist occupation alive.

response to the rise of European fascism in the 1930s (Claeys 2010: 126)—has been taken up by critics as a barely ambiguous narrative of feminist hope. Patai (1984), who has written the most about Burdekin, contrasts her to Orwell and other male dystopians because of her narrative of “hope” rather than despair. Similarly, in a review of the Feminist Press edition, Robert Crossley (1987: 98) wrote that the text “should appear on anyone’s short list of the essential works of dystopian imagination, as a novel with as much critical energy and point as either Huxley’s or Orwell’s more celebrated warnings, but built on a substructure more . . . inspiring than theirs.” Yet when the novel was published under a male pen name, a major concern seems to have been whether its pessimism made Hitler’s victory seem too likely. The publisher Victor Gollancz found it necessary to add a note to the frontispiece of the 1940 reissue, insisting that the author has “changed his mind” and now takes a more encouraging and nationalistic view:

While the author has not in the least changed his opinion that the Nazi idea is evil, and that we must fight the Nazis on land, on sea, in the air and in ourselves, he has changed his mind about the Nazi power to make the *world* evil. He feels that, while the material destruction and misery they can and have brought about are immense, they cannot do spiritual harm even in the short run: for they can communicate the disease only to anyone who has the tendency to take it. He further feels that Nazism is too bad to be permanent, and that the appalling upheaval through which the world is passing is a symbol of birth, and that out of it will emerge a higher stage of humanity. (Constantine 1940 [1937]: n.p.)

*Swastika Night*’s negative depiction of a Nazi future in the throes of imminent extinction was too close to a future that the publisher could not risk suggesting as possible. It would have been unpatriotic to imply that Hitler was likely to win the war. And so readers are required to reinterpret the futureless dystopia as a “symbol of birth,” a route toward better possibilities. It did not seem so to readers on its first publication, at least according to a reviewer in the *Guardian*, who described the book as not a “novel” but a “nightmare” (Brighouse 1937).<sup>21</sup>

The hope for dystopia’s maturation into utopia is located by almost all critics of the novel in the fact that, amid all the death and misery, our protagonist—Alfred, the Englishman oppressed by German empire—tries to change things. From von Hess he learns how pre-Nazi history was erased by the new world order. He is astonished to see an image of a beautiful, sentient woman who was once granted the honor of standing next to Hitler.

21. The *Manchester Guardian* reviewer Harold Brighouse (1937) felt that the novel’s nightmarishness caused it to fail as a work of art. Frank Swinnerton (1937) in the *Observer* of the same week found it exemplary of an “original talent.”

Von Hess gives him a book to share with others and reconnect the future with the past. Reproducing a new kind of futurity and halting the dominant time of Nazism becomes the work of an archive that passes from an eccentric German Knight to an English rebel to the care of the lowest caste of all, the Christians.<sup>22</sup> Alfred aims to employ the archive to “destroy your [German] Empire” (Burdekin 1985 [1937]: 23). He learns that he must do this by teaching gender history, showing men how desirable—so desirable they could be mistaken for “boys” (67)—women used to be and could be again. He plans also to teach the English how their past was stolen from them, including the beauty of women and, crucially, the fact that they once possessed a great empire (77). After “hundreds of years” (69), gender equality and perhaps also heterosexuality may be rediscovered and the Germans conquered. Whether an English conquest of Germany would truly vanquish the cult of Nazi masculinity is left open for the reader to decide.

Burdekin describes England as a burgeoning site of resistance to Nazism, yet she makes a direct connection between British imperial dominance and the future Nazi Empire even as she mobilizes English nationalism to enable Alfred’s hope for change. Burdekin informs us that “one of the motive forces of German imperialism” was “jealousy of the British Empire,” (106) and one of Alfred’s motive forces is a powerful nostalgia for it.<sup>23</sup> Alfred has developed his own theory of selfhood, which comes to him because he realizes he is not “inferior” to the Germans who oppress him. He thinks that to be truly oneself (which for him means to be a man) one must “know [one] is superior to everything else” (ibid.). For an oppressed subject, this may be a radical conception; attributed to a British man in the twentieth century, it is impossible to separate from a colonizing mentality. On this note, it is worth remarking that the devastated future Europe of *Swastika Night* is wholly white. Jews have long since been eradicated, the role of despised other taken by non-Germans and especially Christians. Asians and Africans do apparently exist, but all are safely outside Europe. The novel’s protagonist is a colonized English subject whose rebellion against his subject state is encouraged by a dissident German aristocrat. Alfred wants England to be the future, to take the place of Germany, and though he declares that the

22. This analysis of the novel through histories, archives, and futures is Patai’s focus in her introduction to the 1985 edition.

23. Barbara Brothers (1993: 259) writes that antifascist “women writers tell us” that in the 1930s “indifference and assent, not lack of knowledge about Nazi brutality, characterized the British.” Although Burdekin does not directly address this, the connections she makes between British nationalist and imperialist masculinity and fascism hint at this critique.



world they will make will be a different one, his hope is rooted in a perpetuation of preexisting hierarchies.

The conjunction of Alfred's efforts to change the future with the women's resistance through refusal makes it difficult to understand *Swastika Night* through a single interpretive lens. Whatever relationships, desires, and philosophies Burdekin's women may have among themselves, the male perspectives that govern the narration will never know. At the end of the novel, looking at the daughter born to the woman he habitually fucks, Alfred tries to imagine a situation in which she might rise to his level, but such a future is unimaginable to him. Women are too mired in oppression to feel the requisite superiority in Alfred's worldview he is sure, and so their position as the negative reflection of men seems to be set. Loretta Stec (2001: 184–85) finds a "utopian impulse" in Alfred's attentiveness to his daughter, drawing from it a reading of the novel as "a hopeful, feminist" suggestion that "when women are more respected a better world will result." Yet when Alfred picks up Edith, his daughter, he discovers that babies do not always represent hopes for better futures:

The feel of the baby in his arms . . . made him feel as if he and his daughter were a unit . . . while Ethel was an outsider. . . . A man could sit with a dog quite indefinitely, but he could not stay with a woman except to satisfy his natural needs . . . one couldn't stand it. . . . Once you've started to think about women, it's intolerable. It has the atmosphere of a stinking bog, heavy and evil and sickening. . . . Edith must live all her life [in the women's quarters]. I hope she'll die. (Burdekin 1985 [1937]: 161–65)

From hope that things might change, Alfred is distracted into disgust. The baby is "his," which suggests the beginning of a patriarchal lineage, but she is also of her mother and like her mother, which bans her from the world he occupies. The contradiction is "intolerable," and Alfred ends his soliloquy by hoping for her death, since if he does not think of the baby as equivalent to a "dog," like her mother, he cannot conscientiously relegate her to the "bog" of femininity. He is forced to realize that a baby does not contain all the hope and potential of a new world when its prospects for life are utterly curtailed from birth. He turns instead to his sons to pass on his new knowledge in what becomes, on the eve of World War II, a project for an English nationalist future. Even if Alfred conquers his disgust, he will rescue his daughter from her contaminated origin and set her up as a hope for a new kind of reproductive futurism, a new normative familiarity of the kind Burdekin had, in her own life, rejected. Once again, the futureless politics of the women offer a dystopian critique more incisive than the politics of hope in narratives of masculine rebellion.

#### 4. Fascist Futures in Queer Times

It is comparatively straightforward to assert that *no future* is a concept with a history. This article has tried to unpack some of the complications involved in taking that history seriously from a feminist perspective. I have focused on the way Burdekin manipulates the politics of her historical moment into a hidden history of no future, where the speculative reimagining of gender leads into critiques of nationalism and empire that resonate in the twenty-first century. Her prescient feminist critique of Nazi genocide develops gendered ways of thinking about reproduction and futurity that challenge these concepts' most common associations, and this has given the novel an interesting contemporaneity in queer studies. In particular, Burdekin's narrative of fascism's homosocial reproduction has resonated with queer scholars' efforts to come to terms with the growing capacity for race- and class-privileged non-heterosexual subjects to be assimilated into neoliberal capitalism and the conservative marital time lines of the reproductive family home. In "Queer Patriarchies, Queer Racisms, International," Heidi J. Nast (2002: 895) invokes the novel's "postmarriage, postfamily state" as a worst-case scenario extrapolated from her analysis of gay transnational adoption as contributing to a globalized segregation of reproductive labor in the early twenty-first century: "If children are increasingly commoditized (as possessions and as concentrated sites for expressions of wealth, to wit the retail explosion of children's goods) and privileged white heterosexual and gay men hold a competitive edge in their purchase, what sorts of politics will emerge in future around poor women's bodies and ownership over their reproductive products? Will a queerly patriarchal scenario similar to that depicted by Burdekin ([1937] 1985) obtain hundreds of years hence?" (896). Burdekin's queer afterlife shows how the constructions of reproductive futurism and futurelessness produced in early twentieth-century dystopian temporalities map onto contemporary discourses at a global scale. In Nast's model, children are idealized, longed for, and claimed in the global North, while they are overproduced in the global South, whose women are imagined as in danger of becoming like Burdekin's: producers of raw human material to reproduce a future that will not be their own. Like any speculative fiction, Burdekin's imagined future is a commentary on the immediate political concerns of her present. Yet when Nast borrows the predictive logic of Burdekin's vision, the historical future gives her a framework to comment critically on the developing shape of a new present. Spending time with imagined futures that stand for roads not taken out of the past provides a lens through which we might come to better see that queer sociality and antisociality are as capable of perpetuating political horrors as heterosexual reproductive norms.

To attend to Burdekin's feminist negativity is not to refuse the validity of other imaginaries: of positive futures, hopes for change, and the perhaps more easily articulated political projects of her descendants in feminist speculation. The futureless politics outlined here show negative possibilities opening out of the foreclosure of futures, cautioning us to recognize when such foreclosures take place and to attend to their complications—the most crucial of which is that the commonplace opposition between queerness, whether understood as homoerotic desire or as deviant gendered subjectivity, and reproductivity does not hold across multiple times and spaces. Queer dystopian impulses matter not necessarily because they hold kernels of hope that might make it possible to reclaim negative futures but because they disrupt too-easy narratives of hope and progress, highlighting their complicities and disappointments. In shining a light on the negativity of the present, the obsolete future endures.

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