

Sophister Module Description Template 2021-22

Full Name: Experiments with Time

Short Name: Experiments with Time

Lecturer Name and Email Address: Professor Darryl Jones; drjones@tcd.ie

ECTS Weighting: 10

Semester Taught: MT

Year: SS

Module Content:

Modernity is fascinated by time. The modern world has gone through profound alterations in thinking about time. Charles Lyell's formulation of geological 'deep time' in the 1830s laid the foundations for modern geology and palaeontology, and therefore for thinking about the archaic status of the Earth and its life. Without Deep Time, the temporal framework which Darwinian evolution required would have been inconceivable. In the 1840s, the imposition of a standardized national (and international) 'Railway Time' became necessary in order for trains to run on time: without a standard and comprehensible railway transport system, the global reach of the British Empire would have been significantly foreshortened. The postulation of a 'fourth dimension' in the 1880s directly informed Einstein's theories of space-time. The discovery by Edwin Hubble in 1929 of galactic red shift, led to the big bang theory of the origin of the universe, and to speculations as to whether its expansion would increase indefinitely and thus lead, in accordance with the Second Law of Thermodynamics, to the inevitable heat death of the universe, black, frozen and remote; or, whether gravity would eventually overwhelm all other forces, making the universe contract back in on itself culminating in a satisfyingly apocalyptic 'big crunch'. Philosophically and culturally, the work of Nordau and Spengler on forms of degeneration and decline, and Bergson on time-flux, and of McTaggart and Broad on the metaphysics of time are very significant.

It is therefore understandable, perhaps, that in *Time and Western Man* (1927), Wyndham Lewis was to criticize what he saw as the Western intelligentsia's misguided obsession with temporality. The same year saw the publication of J.W. Dunne's *An Experiment with Time*. Dunne, a pioneering Irish aeronautical engineer, was inspired by the apparent premonitory quality of his own dreams; coupled with his reading of H. G. Wells and his understanding of the implications of Relativity, this led him to posit with great seriousness the notion of "Absolute Time", with an absolute past, present and future. The present moment of this "absolute time" must contain all the moments, "past", "present", and "future", of all the subordinate dimensions of Time.' His own work, Dunne claimed, contained 'the first scientific argument for human immortality'. After reading Dunne, Jorge Luis Borges wrote a series of essays on time across the 1930s and '40s: 'The Doctrine of Cycles', 'A History of Eternity', 'Time and J. W. Dunne', 'Circular Time', and finally 'A New Refutation of Time'. Reading Dunne also inspired J.B. Priestley to write his series of 'time plays' in the 1930s and 40s: *Dangerous Corner* (1932), *Time and the Conways* (1937), *An Inspector Calls* (1945), and several others. From Hardy and Wilde to Joyce and Woolf to Tolkien and Lewis, few writers were unaffected by these ideas about time. In this module, we will look at a number of these literary responses, from the 1880s to the 1950s.

Week 1: Introduction

Week 2: C. H. Hinton, 'What is the Fourth Dimension?' (1880); Edwin Abbott, *Flatland* (1884).

Week 3: H. G. Wells, *The Time Machine* (1895)

Week 4: J. W. Dunne, *An Experiment with Time* (1927)

Week 5: John Buchan, 'Space' (1911); *The Gap in the Curtain* (1932)

Week 6: H. G. Wells, *The Shape of Things to Come* (1933)

Week 7: Reading Week

Week 8: J. B. Priestley, *Time and the Conways* (1938) and *An Inspector Calls* (1945).

Week 9: Jorge Luis Borges, 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius' (1940); 'Time and J. W. Dunne' (1940); 'A New Refutation of Time' (1946).

Week 10: Dorothy Macardle, *The Unforeseen* (1945)

Week 11: Rumer Godden, *A Fugue in Time* (1945)

Week 12: Philippa Pearce, *Tom's Midnight Garden* (1958)

Learning Outcomes:

- The student will be expected to gain detailed knowledge and understanding of the primary literary texts, and of some of the scientific and philosophical ideas which inform them.

Students studying this module will develop:

- critical skills in the close reading and analysis of texts
- an ability to demonstrate knowledge of a range of texts, genres, and critical approaches
- an ability to discuss a range of texts in their intellectual, historical and critical contexts
- an informed awareness of formal and aesthetic dimensions of literature and an ability to offer cogent analysis of their workings in specific texts
- a sensitivity to generic conventions and to the shaping effects on communication of historical circumstances, and to the affective power of language
- an ability to articulate and substantiate an imaginative response to literature
- an ability to articulate knowledge and understanding of concepts and theories relating to the texts studied
- an ability to demonstrate skills in critical reasoning, including the ability to assess other critical readings
- skills of effective communication and argument

Learning Aims:

We are going to read a selection of literary works from the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, all of which are centrally engaged with the problem of time. In physics, philosophy, social and cultural life, and in industry and business, time was being redefined,

taking on new meanings. Imaginative literature became the perfect medium for exploring some of these new definitions and implications of time.

Assessment Details:

- Number of Components: 1
- Name/Type of Component(s) Essay
- Word Count of Component(s): 5000 words
- Percentage Value of Component(s): 100%

Preliminary Reading List:

John Baxendale, *Priestley's England: J. B. Priestley and English Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007)
Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will* (1889)
J. W. Dunne, *The Serial Universe* (1932)
T. S. Eliot, *Four Quartets* (1936-43)
Trish Ferguson, ed. *Victorian Time: Technologies, Standardizations, Catastrophes* (2013)
Trish Ferguson, ed. *Literature and Modern Time: Technological Modernity; Glimpses of Eternity; Experiments with Time* (2020)
James Gleick, *Time Travel: A History* (2016)
Stephen Jay Gould, *Time's Arrow, Time's Cycle* (1987)
Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880-1918* (2003)
Wyndham Lewis, *Time and Western Man* (1927)
Jesse Matz, 'J. B. Priestley in the Theater of Time', *Modernism/Modernity*, 19/2 (April 2012),
Mark O'Connell, "'How to handle eternity': infinity and the theories of J. W. Dunne in the fiction of Jorge Luis Borges and Flann O'Brien's *The Third Policeman*", *Irish Studies Review*, 17:2 (2009)
J. B. Priestley, *Man and Time* (1964)
Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the Nineteenth Century* (1987; 2nd edn, 2014)
Victoria Stewart, 'J. W. Dunne and Literary Culture in the 1930s and 1940s', *Literature and History* 17/2 (2008)

Please note:

- Curricular information is subject to change.
- Information is displayed only for guidance purposes, relates to the current academic year only and is subject to change.