

## ENP11026 *Experiments with Time*

<b>Module type</b>	Optional (approved module: MPhil in Modern and Contemporary Literary Studies)
<b>Term / hours</b>	Michaelmas / 22
<b>ECTS</b>	10
<b>Coordinator(s)</b>	Prof Darryl Jones ( <a href="mailto:drjones@tcd.ie">drjones@tcd.ie</a> )
<b>Lecturer(s)</b>	Prof Darryl Jones
<b>Cap</b>	Depending on demand

### Module description

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.

### **Assessment**

The module is assessed through a 5,000-6,000-word essay.

### **Indicative bibliography**

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; 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 2014)

Victoria Stewart, 'J. W. Dunne and Literary Culture in the 1930s and 1940s', *Literature and History* 17/2 (2008)

## Learning outcomes

Upon successful completion of this module, students should be able to:

- LO1 Demonstrate critical skills in the close reading and analysis of texts.
- LO2 Display knowledge of a range of texts, genres, and critical approaches.
- LO3 Show an ability to discuss a range of texts in their intellectual, historical and critical contexts.
- LO4 Show an informed awareness of formal and aesthetic dimensions of literature and an ability to offer cogent analysis of their workings in specific texts.
- LO5 Demonstrate a sensitivity to generic conventions and to the shaping effects on communication of historical circumstances, and to the affective power of language.
- LO6 Show an ability to articulate knowledge and understanding of concepts and theories relating to the texts studied.
- LO7 Demonstrate an ability to articulate and substantiate an imaginative response to literature.
- LO8 Display skills in critical reasoning, including the ability to assess other critical readings.
- LO9 Show skills of effective communication and argument.