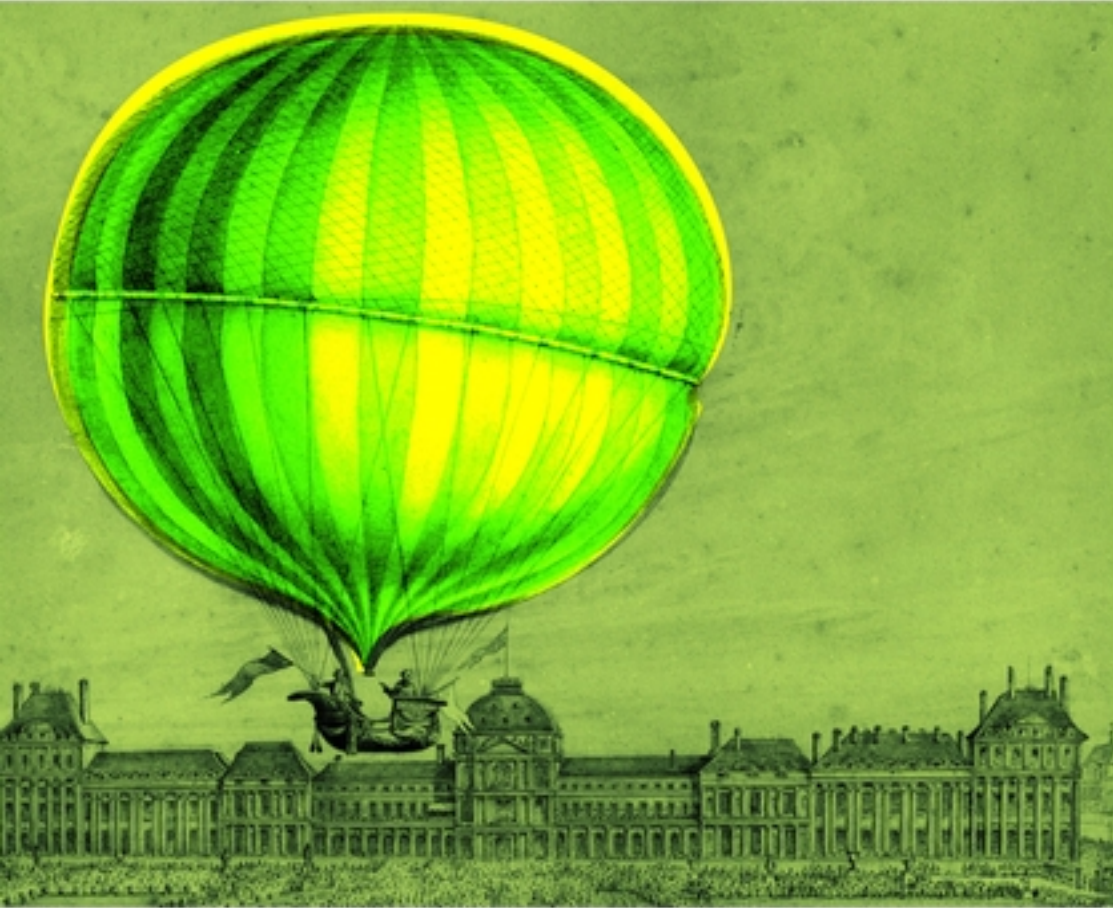


BRITANNIA TEXTS IN ENGLISH
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**Great Expectations: Futurity
in the Long Eighteenth Century**

**Mascha Hansen
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(eds.)


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EXTRACT

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INTRODUCTION

Mascha Hansen

A Man who confines his Speculations to the Time present, has but a very narrow Province to employ his Thoughts in. For this Reason, Persons of studious and contemplative Natures often entertain themselves with the History of past Ages, or raise Schemes and Conjectures upon Futurity. For my own part, I love to range through that Half of Eternity which is still to come, rather than look on that which is already run out; because I know I have a real Share and Interest in the one, whereas all that was transacted in the other, can be only Matter of Curiosity to me. (*The Tatler*, 152, 28-30 March 1710)

Joseph Addison was not the only one who preferred to let his thoughts roam over “that Half of Eternity which is still to come,” even if the notion of half an eternity may seem somewhat puzzling to modern readers. Ordinary people were less concerned with the time span of eternity, but even they reacted violently to a seeming attempt to steal a part of their future: “Give us back our eleven days,” rioting mobs shouted when England finally adopted the Gregorian Calendar in 1752, “dropping” the eleven days between 2 and 14 September.¹

It may seem somewhat paradoxical to look back into the past to find out about the roots of modern notions concerning the future. Yet there is little doubt that the future has been considered to be enormously important in Western societies, perhaps now more than ever before. G. J. Whitrow points out that children generally learn words referring to the near future (“soon”) before they can speak about past events.² He cites the case of George Steiner, whose discovery, as a young child, of being able to make statements about the far future resulted in a kind of mental vertigo that to Steiner seemed similar to the excitement caused by contemplating very large numbers.³ Modern boys and girls are encouraged to plan for their futures; already during their last years at school they are expected to know which professions they wish to choose. Family-planning is a term so familiar that its impossibility until very recently in history is almost forgotten now that the pill is as easily available as ovulation tests. The future, to modern men and women, is a task that requires careful planning, as well as some effort, and is considered to be, to a large extent, the result of one’s earlier actions rather than of an uncertain fate, even if jobs are no longer as secure as they used to be.

1 See Dan Falk, *In Search of Time: The History, Physics, and Philosophy of Time* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books/ St. Martin’s Press, 2008), p. 50.

2 Whitrow, *Time in History*, p. 6.

3 Whitrow, *Time in History*, p. 13.

Mere ‘drifting’ is certainly frowned upon: today, the feeling of being unable to influence one’s personal future is considered to reveal an unhealthy tendency to depression.

Our (Western) concept of the future, our understanding of time in general, are historically contingent: astronomical time, clock-time, circular time, linear time, social time, work time, leisure time, living time, psychological time:⁴ the concepts of time now distinguished are manifold, and most of them can be traced back to early modern or even medieval times.⁵ The eighteenth century was thus ushered in by new notions of time and time-keeping: clocks began to appear in every household, changing not only daily habits but even our way of thinking. The quantitative aspect – how is time to be measured? – fascinated the enlightenment as clocks spread and pocket watches multiplied.⁶ To Lewis Mumford, “[t]he clock, not the steam-engine, is the key-machine of the modern industrial age.”⁷ From the fourteenth century onwards, he claims,

[a]bstract time became the new medium of existence. Organic functions themselves were regulated by it: one ate, not upon feeling hungry, but when prompted by the clock: one slept, not when one was tired, but when the clock sanctioned it. A generalized time-consciousness accompanied the wider use of clocks [...]. (p. 17)

The late eighteenth-century also saw public transport revolutionised: the first regular system of stage-coaches running to strict timetables began to operate in 1784.⁸ To understand the meaning of the term ‘futurity’ to eighteenth-century people, it is thus necessary to briefly consider more general early modern notions of time.

Historians now tend to distinguish between two broad concepts of time: cyclical and linear time, or organic and mechanical time, the one relying on repeti-

4 On circular and linear time, see, for instance, Falk, *In Search of Time*, pp. 93-95 and 99.

5 For the many concepts of time, see John Hassard, “Introduction,” *The Sociology of Time*, ed. John Hassard (London: Macmillan, 1990), pp. 1-20 and *passim*.

6 Nigel Thrift, “The Making of a Capitalist Time Consciousness,” *The Sociology of Time*, ed. Hassard, pp.105-29, here p. 110. According to his biographer, Richard Westfall, Isaac Newton still preferred to watch the shade rather than the clock to tell the time even at the end of his life (Westfall, *The Life of Isaac Newton* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993], p. 16).

7 Lewis Mumford, *Technics and Civilization* [1934], introd. Langdon Winner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), p. 14.

8 See G. J. Whitrow, *Time in History: Views of Time from Prehistory to the Present* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 159. Whitrow points out that this led to the new problem of synchronising local times: as “towns went by local or ‘sun’ time”, the difference between London and country schedules could be twenty minutes or more (p. 160). Eventually, stage-coaches were provided with timepieces checked at regular Post Offices to solve the problem.

tion, the other on (seeming) progress.⁹ The change from one concept to the other is usually considered to have taken place during early modern times, even if the notion of linear time was already introduced by St Augustine of Hippo in the fourth century AD. According to Nigel Thrift,

It is a piece of academic folk-wisdom that is often elevated to the status of fact that there is nothing more foreign to [medieval] pre-capitalist communities than the representation of the future ‘as a field of possibilities to be explained and mastered by calculations.’ But it is more accurate to say that only one future would have been envisaged and that would have been the model of society that already pertained. [...] [T]he future would have been imagined to be in the same form as the past.¹⁰

To him, the change towards a capitalist- or linear-time society occurred in the period from 1550-1750 (p. 110), bringing a future with it that could be planned, as well as the fact that now time was strictly measured by the clock: “Clock-time was fetishised. Meal-times, work-times, dressing-times, visiting-times; all activities were made temporally exact and exacting” (p. 112). G. J. Whitrow considers the change towards the notion that time is a valuable commodity (“time is money”) to have begun already in the late middle ages. He quotes Lewis Mumford, who sees not only a change from cyclical to linear time, but a turning away from the contemplation of infinity: “Eternity ceased gradually to serve as the measure and focus of human actions.”¹¹ Mumford, however, surmises that the change ironically came about not with the emergence of capitalist thinking but because medieval Christians hoped “to provide for the welfare of souls in eternity by regular prayers and devotions” (p. 14).

Apart from the clock, or perhaps – if Mumford is right – because of the clock, philosophers introduced a new, scientific concept of time.¹² Isaac Newton

9 On cyclical or organic time, see Mumford: “While mechanical time is strung out in a succession of mathematically isolated instants, organic time [...] is cumulative in its effects. Though mechanical time can, in a sense, be speeded up or run backward, like the hands of a clock or the images of a moving picture, organic time moves in only one direction – through the cycle of birth, growth, development, decay, and death – and the past that is already dead remains in the future that still has to be born” (Mumford, *Technics and Civilization*, p. 16). On the various concepts of time, see also Falk, *In Search of Time*, p. 90.

10 Thrift, “The Making of a Capitalist Time Consciousness,” p. 108.

11 Mumford, *Technics and Civilization*, p. 14. Mumford is quoted in Whitrow, *Time in History*, p. 110.

12 “[B]y its essential nature, [the clock] dissociated time from human events and helped create the belief in an independent world of mathematically measurable sequences: the special world of science. There is relatively little foundation for this belief in common human experience [...]. In terms of the human organism itself, [...] time is measured not

opened the debate on absolute versus relative time and space with his famous explanation of time in the *Scholium* to definition VIII of the *Principia*:

Absolute, true and mathematical time, of itself, and from its own nature, flows equally without relation to anything external, and by another name is called duration: relative, apparent, and common time, is some sensible and external (whether accurate or unequable) measure of duration by the means of motion, which is commonly used instead of true time; such as an hour, a day, a month, a year.¹³

Newton's explanation of time as something absolute and real, i.e. independent of events and even of the universe, was not uncontroversial, as the Clark-Leibniz debate, in which Leibniz defended his relational theory of time at the beginning of the eighteenth century, proves, but according to H. G. Alexander, the debate died down after a while: as Newton's mechanics proved to be correct, his theoretical foundations were accepted as well.¹⁴ In Alexander's opinion, eighteenth-century (natural) philosophy was mostly concerned with the ontological question "What is time?" and with the problem of the most useful concept of time in physics rather than with "the epistemological, or perhaps psychological, question of how we come to acquire our knowledge of space and time."¹⁵ He sees Kant as the first to have addressed all three questions.¹⁶

In the *Essay concerning Human Understanding* (1689), however, John Locke already addresses the question of how we understand time.¹⁷ Accepting Newton's definition, he regards time as measured duration, independent of motion:

§ 16 [T]he notice we take of the *Ideas* of our own Minds, appearing there one after another, is that, which gives us the *Idea* of Succession and Duration [...].

§ 17 Having thus got the *Idea* of Duration, the next thing natural for the Mind to do, is to get some *measure* of this common *Duration* [...]. This Consideration of

by the calendar but by the events that occupy it" (Mumford, *Technics and Civilization*, p. 15).

- 13 Extracts from Andrew Motte's English translation of Newton's *Principia* (1729) are reprinted in *The Leibniz-Clarke Correspondence*, ed. H. G. Alexander (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1998 [1956]), pp. 143-171, here p. 152.
- 14 H. G. Alexander, "Introduction," *The Leibniz-Clarke Correspondence*, ed. Alexander, p. xxxiii. See also Whitrow, *Time in History*, pp. 128-29.
- 15 Alexander, "Introduction," pp. xxxii-xxxiii.
- 16 Alexander, "Introduction," pp. xxxii-xxxiii. See also *The Human Experience of Time: The Development of its Philosophic Meaning*, ed. Charles M. Sherover (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1975), p. 118.
- 17 For Kant's notion of time, see also *The Human Experience of Time*, ed. Sherover p. 102. Sherover assumes that Kant worked with the concept Newton called "common time."

Duration, as set out by certain Periods, and marked by certain Measures or *Epochs*, is that, I think, which most properly we call *Time*.¹⁸

If time is to be measured, duration must be divided into “apparently equal Portions, by constantly repeated Periods,” he continues (§ 18), arguing that

[b]y being able to repeat those Measures of Time, or *Ideas* of stated length of Duration in our Minds, as often as we will, we can come to *imagine Duration, where nothing does really endure or exist*; and thus we imagine to morrow, next year, or seven years hence. [...] By being able to repeat any such *Idea* of any length of Time, as of a Minute, a Year, or an Age, as often as we will in our own Thoughts, and add them one to another, without ever coming to the end of such addition, any nearer than we can to the end of Number, to which we can always add, we come by the *Idea of Eternity*, as the future eternal Duration of our Souls [...] (II, xiv, § 31, pp. 195-96).

Leibniz immediately criticised Locke’s theory, too, as he did not accept the premise that the succession of ideas (Newton’s “flow”) is in any way even or regular.¹⁹ Leibniz, too, accepted that, to use Alexander’s words, “time is the order of successive phenomena,” but to him, this time is ideal, not real:²⁰ “Nothing of time ever exists,” Leibniz wrote to Clarke, “but instants; and an instant is not even itself part of time. Whoever considers these observations, will easily apprehend that time can only be an ideal thing.”²¹

The eighteenth century has been characterised as a forward-looking age – writers like Condorcet believed progress to be inevitable, even if sceptics such as Voltaire and Swift ridiculed such *naïveté* – discarding the conviction that the golden age lay in the past for a more utopian vision celebrating the certainty of progress.²² “Utopian thought has flourished usually among rising classes and strata, such as the middle classes of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries,” Lewis and Rose Coser assert in an essay on the time perspectives of particular social groups.²³ Such utopian visions, Bourdieu explains, rely on the belief in (future) possibilities:

Utopia, like the desire for progress or revolution, rests on the determination to adopt the perspective of the possible, putting in suspense and in question the pas-

18 John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), II, xiv, p. 187.

19 See *The Human Experience of Time*, ed. Sherover, p. 103.

20 Alexander, “Introduction,” p. xxv.

21 *The Leibniz-Clarke Correspondence*, ed. H. G. Alexander, L. V. 49, pp. 72-73. The Newton/ Clarke-Leibniz debate is also described in Falk, *In Search of Time*, pp. 126-34.

22 Whitrow, *Time in History*, p. 147 and, more generally, p. 136, 177.

23 Lewis Coser and Rose Coser, “Time Perspective and Social Structure,” *The Sociology of Time*, ed. Hassard, pp. 191-202, here p. 201.

sive acquiescence and spontaneous submission to the current order, whether social or natural. The projection of the possible is the basis of every belief in progress [...].²⁴

The belief in progress thus flourished not only in the field of technology and science, it also fanned the flames of radical utopian thinking, a topic Michael Szczekalla's essay in this volume is going to address (see below).

Yet what did more ordinary eighteenth-century men and women think about when they contemplated the future? The term "futurity," common until the early nineteenth century at least, already suggests that to eighteenth-century men and women, the future in secular terms and the consideration of the soul's immortality were inseparable. The biblical "for whatever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Galatians 6:7-9) was a maxim well-known to the eighteenth century, too, only it was understood in a moral context, hinting at a futurity involving a second life rather than promising an actual impact on one's secular welfare. The future thus was often seen as a serious, moral category rather than an incitement to active planning or ambition, though the latter may certainly be understood as an incitement to reach self-perfection in moral terms as well. In fact, the future could be a burden, too. As Richardson's Pamela, once married, complains: "How much better fitted for the Contingencies of Life, are the gay, frolick Minds that think not of any thing before it comes upon them, than such thoughtful Futurity-Pokers as I!"²⁵

The term itself has paid the price demanded by progress and is now rarely used. It may thus not be amiss to quote the three definitions provided by the OED:

1. The quality, state, or fact of being future.
2. Future time; the future; a future space of time.
3. What is future.
 - a) What will exist or happen in the future; future events as a whole. Also those that will live in the future, posterity.
 - b) *pl.* Future events.
 - c) State or condition in the future. Also, existence after death.²⁶

These general definitions leave room for explorations. (Besides, of course, no sharp delineation between 'future' and 'futurity' is intended to be drawn here.) The bare terms given by the OED yet encompass many more shades of meaning

24 Pierre Bourdieu, "Time Perspectives of the Kabyle," *The Sociology of Time*, ed. Hassard, pp. 219-37, here p. 234.

25 Samuel Richardson, *Pamela: or, Virtue Rewarded. In a Series of Familiar Letters from a Beautiful Young Damsel to her Parents*, 4 vols, 3rd ed. (London: Richardson, 1742), III, 487 (Eighteenth-Century Collections Online, Gale Group, Gale Document no. CW3310615689, accessed 26 March 2012).

26 OED, <http://www.oed.com/>, 'futurity', accessed 14 March 2012.

throughout the long eighteenth century: Predictions and prophecies – not only astrological but also political ones; utopian models of any kind; theological concepts like predestination; progress in the sciences – particularly the discovery of the infinity of time and its promise of perfectibility; (social) betterment not only of squalid living conditions, misery, and poverty but also of health and hygiene; science fiction; the prospects of marriage, child-birth, old age, and (life-after-)death. Who would write on “futura’s blank page” (Rogers)? Do not all types of ‘literature’ – not just *belles lettres* – that supply a critique of the present conjure up either an idealized past or a vision of a better future? The whole idea of ‘relevance’ implicit in the notion of a utilitarian *telos* (the relief of man’s estate) points towards the future, and new sciences like statistics (Sir William Petty) and demography (Gregory King) were intended to make it calculable.²⁷

The more surprising is the comparative lack of works dealing with notions of the future in earlier days. Whereas philosophy tends to focus on the general definition of time as brought about by the Newton/Clarke-Leibniz debate (and the eighteenth-century philosophers who took it up such as Wolff, Berkeley, and later on Kant), literary scholars are more concerned with conceptions of the past and present in eighteenth-century literature. There is no systematic study of the concept of futurity in the eighteenth century. The essays collected in this volume cannot provide such a survey either, but will instead be concerned with several of the above-mentioned aspects of futurity, loosely arranged according to the definitions provided by the OED rather than regimented into any chronological order of subjects and writers discussed.²⁸

1. Providence, Disturbance, and the Immortality of the Soul

Kevin L. Cope’s essay “Miracle versus Mayhem: Disturbances of the Future in a Long Eighteenth Century That Thought It Might Be Short” offers a more particular twist to the topic that serves as a kind of prologue to the following essays: rather than focussing on the general convictions about the future – the regularity and predictability of experience, the faith that both the laws of nature and human behaviour will remain much as they are now – he introduces two aspects that disturb such easy assumptions: the controversy over miracles and the debate concerning natural mayhem, earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. The belief in progress and predictability is bought at the expense of valuing the force and ferocity of nature – the possibility that the future is less amenable to human wishes than humans like to aver, whether in philosophical or literary debates. In his essay, Cope defines futurity – in defiance of dictionaries, as he says – as “not only

27 I am indebted to Hermann J. Real for many of the suggestions which went into this paragraph.

28 I have added bibliographies to several of the essays in this volume. Errors and inconsistencies in the bibliographies are therefore likely to be mine, not the authors’.

immense but also imperturbable [...] barely reverberat[ing] across a changeless eternity” (p. 28 below). Most eighteenth-century people similarly considered the future to mean eternity, and that to spell either heaven or hell. The first part of the collection will therefore focus on futurity as the immortality of the soul.

In “‘Not in Utopia, Subterranean Fields, Heaven Knows Where’: or, Apocalypse When?” Hermann J. Real explores the seventeenth- and early-eighteenth-century reception of the universalism of Origenes of Alexandria, one of the Fathers of the Church, and his doctrine of universal salvation, known as *apocatastasis*, “according to which Death does not finally decide the fate of the soul and the Creation returns to its pristine, immaculate condition, including *all* sinners” (see below, p. 58). Jonathan Swift responded to Origenes’ universalism in “On the Day of Judgement” (c.1730), but, Real points out, the interpretation of this response depends on the meaning of the last line of the poem.

Patrick Müller’s essay, “Rewriting the Divine-Right Theory for the Whigs: The Political Implications of Shaftesbury’s Treatment of the Doctrine of Futurity in his *Characteristicks*,” continues to be concerned with the problems posed by eternity, claiming that the publication of the *Inquiry concerning Virtue* in 1699 established Shaftesbury as one of the most able critics of the doctrine of futurity: virtue, in Shaftesbury’s view, was to be pursued for its own sake, not in hope of future reward or fear of future punishment. Müller argues that the radical implications of Shaftesbury’s rejection of the doctrine of futurity have not yet been adequately analysed and understood, and that the Earl was rewriting the divine right theory as Whig propaganda.

The third essay in this part, Norbert Col’s “Edmund Burke, Futurity and Providence,” is not so much concerned with the problems of the soul’s immortality but rather ties in with Kevin L. Cope’s descriptions of events that make the future seem a disturbing vision, out of man’s control. Col attempts to relate Burke’s early writings to his later counter-revolutionary politics, explaining that Burke’s early understanding of Providence’s role in shaping the future was undermined by the developments of the 1790s, when the future seemed to develop in directions that escaped man’s control. Edmund Burke attempted but eventually failed to counterbalance his apocalyptic visions with an artificial stability. Burke, Col reasons, hesitated between ancient cyclical and modern linear time – to him, the future was tinged with uncertainty and evil, not progress, and yet his questionable understanding of Providence’s role in shaping the future testifies to his belief in “that mainspring of futurity, ambition” (see p. 93 below).

2. Posterity, Fame, and Existence after Death

Ambition, however, may also be considered the mainspring of fame-seeking. The eighteenth century, Bärbel Czennia maintains in “The Futurity of Fame: Eighteenth-Century Paths to Immortality,” saw the emergence of modern celeb-

rity culture, offering the temptations of fame to a wide range of people lacking the social status of earlier 'heroes.' If more easily won, however, eighteenth-century fame was also more easily lost: the new print media was as quick to forget as to spot the names of the day, be it those of actors and actresses, of poets or adventurers. In her essay, Czennia will thus be concerned with the secular rather than religious paths to immortality, looking at a range of authors beginning with Margaret Cavendish, Aphra Behn and Alexander Pope.

Jonathan Swift's lively satire predicting his own death, the "Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift," looks to the past rather than to the future, Allan Ingram argues in "Suppose me dead; and then suppose ...": Swift in Lively Anticipation." Swift was settling scores and defending his conduct; yet death had long been an important topic in his works – the Struldbrugs in *Gulliver's Travels* personifying the horror of secular immortality – and the poem proves his ongoing concern with the Renaissance notion of the 'good and easy death.' According to this essay, Swift hoped for such a death, while at the same time preparing for his reputation at least a less painful secular immortality than that of the Struldbrugs.

An early rather than an easy death was the concern of Lord Hervey, who also imagined the impact of his death in a lively sketch written to entertain Queen Caroline. In "Lord Hervey, Death and Futurity," Bill Overton points out that Hervey's attitude to the future was composed of three rather divergent branches of knowledge: classical literature, traditional Christianity, and the new philosophy of the Enlightenment. Coming from a family whose mortality rate was high, Hervey's outlook on life darkened in 1731, and his thoughts on his own death, Overton argues, are characteristic of the way in which Enlightenment rationalism and the process of secularisation impacted on the traditional Christian and classical modes of thought still prevalent in the early eighteenth century.

The women who wrote the memoirs considered in my own contribution, "Great Expectations? Plans and Planning in Women's Memoirs," all gained fame of one sort or another, though they were not necessarily out to achieve the 'celebrity' which surprised some of them. There was a price to pay for notoriety, as the so-called scandalous memoirs of the mid-eighteenth century prove, and even reputable women still feared to be considered 'learned ladies.' While it was acceptable in, and perhaps even expected of, men to be ambitious and to strive to achieve something in the future, women were primed to look forward to marriage only – even if many middle-class girls, whose parents could not afford a dowry, would have known that their chances on the marriage market were slim. The lives of Frances Burney, Caroline Herschel, and Mary Somerville may have been exceptional, but they prove that young women could not afford to leave their personal futures in the hands of fate.

3. Progress, Prophecy and Scientific Theory

It has been suggested that Newton, like so many eighteenth-century astronomers, was mostly concerned with predictions.²⁹ Even his theological studies, begun early in life, were focused on “the interpretation of the prophecies.”³⁰ According to Westfall, Newton did not believe the prophecies to be about past or present events but about the future, a notion that was not acceptable at the time: more than a hundred years later, divines such as the Rev. Thomas Falconer still preached and printed sermons on “The Folly and Criminality of Inquiries into Futurity” (1812).³¹ This did not prevent the curious from experimenting with new means and methods of forecasting future events. Physiognomy, now considered a pseudo-science, was popular long before Lavater published his famous treatise, its general acceptability raising the hopes of its being able eventually to provide scientific insights, or more importantly, reliable predictions. Arguing that assumptions about gender led to a division of male and female fortunes in her essay “‘He at first sight cou’d each Ones Fortune tell’: Physiognomy and Fortune-Telling in the Early to Mid-Eighteenth Century,” Katherine Aske considers the various means of telling the future on the basis of physiognomical evidence as outlined by a number of almanacs and other publications concerned with fortune-telling such as *Aristotle’s Last Legacy* (1711), *The Book of Knowledge* (1720), and *The Old Egyptian Fortune-Teller* (1725?).

Sara Read approaches the question of futurity from another field of science: in “‘Only Kept Up by the Credulous and Ignorant’: Eighteenth-Century Responses to the Ancient Beliefs about Menstrual Blood,” she looks at medical hypotheses concerning the supposed dangers of menstruation to show how eighteenth-century physicians and books on medicine moved away from the ancient authorities long considered to be almost infallible towards a more empirical view of medicine, even though physicians and authors continued to present new discoveries by means of examples taken from the corpus of Hippocrates or Galen. The past was gradually reassessed as physicians began to look towards the future of medicine, shedding such myths as that of the poisonous nature of menstrual blood in the process.

Pregnancy and birth rather than menstruation are the topics of H el ene Dachez’s “‘Let me collect myself, and pursue my journey’: Generation in Laurence Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy*.” She points out that, even while Sterne’s Tristram Shandy tries to tell his life *ab ovo*, the dangers attending every step of the generation process continue to threaten the hero’s future. Shandy, she argues, prefers cyclical or organic time to linear time in his narration in order “to generate fresh links between past, present and future so as to endow past events

29 See also Kevin Cope’s essay, p. 37 below.

30 Westfall, *The Life of Isaac Newton*, p. 125.

31 Westfall, *The Life of Isaac Newton*, p. 126; Thomas Falconer, “The Folly and Criminality of Inquiries into Futurity” (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1812).

with a second life and counteract oblivion, death and the extinction of his line, to which he strives to give a future” (p. 224 below) – to find meanings which can never settled between narrator and reader but keep being generated in the future.

4. Past, Present and Future Enlightenment

The discovery of the importance of the past in its own right, and thus of a new time-perspective, can be traced back to the eighteenth century. The new time-consciousness, as well as new scientific concepts, led scientists and philosophers – among them Montesquieu, Diderot, Buffon, and Kant – to doubt the biblical chronology which declared the earth to be about six thousand years old.³² To them, fossils suggested that the earth was much older than that, and they cautiously began to publish their findings. Late-eighteenth-century thinkers would not have agreed with Addison that they had no share in the half of eternity “already run out.” Contemporary historians such as Condorcet, believing in the concept of linear time, saw reason to rejoice at the progress civilisation had made. Others, like the less-well known Giambattista Vico, already stressed the importance of understanding the past on its own terms rather than reading the past according to the precepts of the present, a notion later also supported by Herder. Vico surmised that history was made up of certain recurring periods that shared basic features, and thus re-introduced a more cyclical understanding of time.³³ Time perspectives and the (re-)discovery of the past are the focus of the essays in this section.

In “The Critique of Utopianism: Gibbon vs. Godwin,” Michael Szczekalla takes up Jonathan Israel’s thesis that revolutionary philosophical ideas developed during the early Enlightenment influenced the making of modernity and combines it with Marilyn Butler’s claim that the radical 1790s imagined a future free from the restraints of secular and religious authorities. He argues that it was the historian Gibbon rather than the political philosopher Godwin who was the ‘true radical’, comparing their studies of past politics to show that where Godwin loses his way in Utopian anarchy, Gibbon used ancient history to highlight the problems of modernity.

In his essay on “‘The Forty-Five’: British Modernisation and the First Glimpses of the End of the Historical Chronotope,” Jürgen Klein revisits an event of the past, the British reactions to the Jacobite uprising of 1745 and Sir Walter Scott’s rendering of the events preceding and following the Battle of Culloden in *Waverley*. Drawing on anthropology and philosophy, Levi-Strauss, Lukács, and Hegel, among others, he explains the past in terms of the future, arguing that historical reality is multilayered: “[The] structural discovery in

32 See Whitrow, pp. 153-54.

33 See Whitrow, *Time in History*, pp. 147-51.

Scott's historical novel can neither be combined with Hegel's idea of historical necessity nor with Scott's occasionally giving the impression that victims are unavoidable in historical developments" (p. 267 below).

Stefanie Schult's essay "'Old lamps for new': The Rise of the Oriental Tale in the Eighteenth Century and Its Influence on English Literature and Culture" moves away from actual historical events to trace the development of a literary genre that proved to be enormously influential: the Oriental Tale. The visions of a strange, exotic world it offered to eighteenth-century readers reverberate throughout literary history. However, Schult argues, it is not only the past that was fascinated by Arabian tales of splendour and daring: these stories opened the way to new genres, reaching out to the future to help create postmodern fantasy literature.

The last essay of this volume, Gerald J. Butler's "Our Own Service in the Empire Pope's *Dunciad* Predicts," is, I hope, less an epilogue to the book than a warning to future critics: Butler takes up the challenge provided by Pope's *Dunciad* to reveal the fulfillment of the prophecy. He argues that the literary and cultural critique implied by Pope, predicting "universal darkness," has come true, especially, as Butler shows, in the provinces of academia. Literary studies are marked by pedantry while postmodern literary theory denies the ties of text and reference, the market dominates the writer while sensationalism and pornography prevail: authoritarianism, he maintains, is only masked as freedom in the "dread empire" foretold by Pope.

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