

The Clockwork Man: Reification, Relativity and Redemption in 1920s Fiction

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"Science fiction story in which a man from the future with a clock (defective) installed inside him disrupts a cricket match." George Locke summarizes *The Clockwork Man* (1923) accurately enough, in his survey of fantasy literature, but scarcely makes it sound an enthralling contribution to the genre (168). Nor has its author, E.V. Odle, enjoyed an enduring reputation. On the contrary, Odle is one of surely fairly few writers celebrated mostly through being mistaken for someone else. For several years past, a persistent Internet rumour has claimed that "E.V. Odle" was a disguise employed by Virginia Woolf – a *nom de plume*, or perhaps *nom d'horlogerie*, supposedly adopted for a brief departure from her modernist writing, in favour of science fiction, early in the 1920s.

Odle and his novel deserve more attention – in particular, for some entirely genuine affinities and proximities to modernism. Undoubtedly a real person – rather than a mere avatar of Virginia Woolf – Edwin Vincent Odle was a bank-clerk turned actor, playwright and theatre critic, and already the author of a successful first novel, *The History of Alfred Rudd* (1922), before *The Clockwork Man*. He went on to edit the short-story magazine, *The Argosy*, throughout the later 1920s, and to maintain at least some familial connections with the modernists. His elder brother, the artist Alan Odle, married Dorothy Richardson, and his own wife, Rose, eventually became Richardson's literary executor.

As this article will go on to indicate, the real interest of Odle's career, and of *The Clockwork Man* especially, is in illuminating some of the contexts and stresses shaping modernist fiction. Odle's novel nevertheless offers several other interests still relevant in the twenty-first century, along with some engaging and unusual imaginative qualities generally. One of these is immediately evident in the weirdly comic cricketing episode George Locke mentions. Odle's vivid opening describes a nervous batsman's critical distraction by a "strange figure" apparently materializing "out of the sky", just above the sight-screen, "like a scarecrow dumped suddenly on the horizon" (19, 29). This "Clockwork man" compensates for the batsman's dismissal by hitting a succession of stupendous sixes for the home side – one is later found to have travelled three miles – but then deals too vigorously with their opponents, and the umpire, by running amok with his bat. Then he simply runs away. Descriptions of his ungainly, disjointed movements recall Charlie Chaplin's robotic demeanour in *Modern Times* (1936), helping to establish a principal appeal of Odle's novel: that in describing a "semi-mechanical being" from 8000 years in the future, it is often as funny or whimsical as it is weird (48). Even minor details add to its humour, sometimes all the more so for twenty-first century readers. The long-established hat-maker Dunn Brothers, for example, appears to have continued trading for several millennia – though in reality it failed to outlast even the twentieth century – while the Clockwork man's obsessive muttering about "nine and ninepence" suggests pre-decimal currency has somehow survived just as long (25, etc).

Odle's humour can be more unsettling. Encounters with his "semi-mechanical being" are experienced by other characters as "certainly funny . . . grotesque", but also

"uncanny . . . you had to laugh at the odd-looking figure, or else feel cold all over with another kind of sensation" (30). Resembling "a wax-work come to life", or "one of those mechanical toys come to life" (28, 55), the Clockwork man extends to extremes the kind of comedy Henri Bergson identifies in *Le Rire* (1900), deriving from human bodies behaving like objects or machines. Comparisons might also be made with Franz Kafka's imagination – distinguished, as critics often emphasize, not only by disturbing fantasies, but the ordinariness of their setting: among the unruly bedclothes, for example, which still seem Gregor Samsa's chief concern, despite his recent metamorphosis into a huge insect. Like Kafka, Odle presents scenes which, in the novel's description, "mixed up with . . . queer unreality the most ridiculous tangle of purely human circumstance" – often emphasizing their banal, homely aspects more than uncanny ones (42). The mood of much of the novel is established by that opening, describing a figure of utter strangeness who is nevertheless principally troubling only to a man worried about cheap dismissal in a village cricket match, and to a couple of its puzzled spectators. Before long, prosaic country-dwellers are worrying that the Devil may be among them, or simply that "'T'aint possible . . . not for a bloke to 'ave machinery inside 'im" (56). Yet most of them find the "bloke" concerned little more than a passing distraction from their daily lives and romances. "Abnormal phenomena", a character realizes, "might be presented to human beings in the form of a sort of practical joke" (42). The advantages of this "appeal to the comic instinct" are emphasized when, years later, the same character's sober, factual account of the Clockwork man is rejected by a magazine because it fails to "introduce a little humour" – a shortcoming thoroughly and enjoyably avoided in Odle's novel itself (38, 129).

Strange humour – and strange imagination generally – help justify Brian Stableford's judgement that *The Clockwork Man* is "perhaps the outstanding scientific romance of the 1920s" and "of the many works of scientific romance that have fallen into utter obscurity . . . perhaps the one which most deserves rescue" (144-5, 266). This "rescue" has been facilitated by a new paperback edition, published in 2013. In its Introduction, Annalee Newitz offers further reasons for renewing attention to *The Clockwork Man*, in the twenty-first century, when she describes it as "one of the first cyborg novels ever written" (11). Her claim might seem exaggerated: interest in "semi-mechanical beings" obviously appears much earlier – perhaps even with Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) – and is fairly widely evident by the later nineteenth century. It figures, for example, in Villiers de l'Isle Adam's descriptions in *L'Ève future* (1886) of a "magnéto-électrique . . . Andréide" (93, 95), and in H.G. Wells's speculations about what he describes in *The War of the Worlds* (1898) as "intelligent mechanisms . . . human machines" (48). For Roger Luckhurst, such interests may even be fundamental to the entire genre of science fiction, which he defines as "popular literature that concerns the impact of Mechanism . . . on cultural life and human subjectivity" (3).

Newitz's conclusion is nevertheless justified by the particular construction of the Clockwork man – distinguishable as a cyborg on account of the installation of machinery within his otherwise human frame – and by the scale of the novel's attention to the issues involved. Long discussions between its characters assess "the possibility of introducing mechanical reinforcements into the human body" – concluding that "the drift of scientific progress is slowly but surely leading us in the direction of some such solution of physiological difficulties . . . a logical step forward in the path of material progress" (48, 81). As Odle anticipated, this "drift" of progress remained a concern throughout the twentieth century, accelerating in the twenty-first. Much general debate has recently resulted about boundaries between human and machine, along with growing numbers of fictional reflections of the concerns involved. A long line of

anxiety, or wonder, or both, connects *The Clockwork Man* with Donna Haraway's "Manifesto for Cyborgs" (1985), for example, or – in fiction – with *Westworld* and many other twenty-first century cinematic or televisual imaginings of a future dominated by robots, androids, cyborgs, and artificial intelligence generally.

The Clockwork Man demonstrates how far such concerns about the future originated in "material progress" and an "impact of Mechanism" already well established in the early twentieth century, and widely influential on writing in the 1920s. Consistently with Luckhurst's definition of the genre, science fiction early in the decade makes this impact particularly clear – in at least one instance, perhaps diverting attention from Odle's novel when it was first published, in April 1923. Rose Odle suggests as much in her autobiography, *Salt of our Youth* (1972), when describing the first London production of Karel Čapek's robot play *R.U.R.* – also in April 1923. "All seemed set for success" for *The Clockwork Man*, she recalls, "but almost concurrently, appeared a far more powerful work – 'The Robots', a play by Karl Kapek [sic], that all London flocked to see; this was a case of Goliath slaying David" (148). Another "Goliath" was soon to follow – Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* (1921), first published in English in 1924. Though *We* is not entirely science fiction, nor altogether about robots, it describes a futuristic society regimented so mechanically that its citizens could easily be mistaken for cyborgs, or for the "living machines" described in *R.U.R.* (25) – artificial, but made of flesh and blood.

Similarities in these works, and their near-simultaneous appearance, consolidate Patrick Parrinder's location of the emergence of a "Post-Human era" in the early 1920s, and invite further enquiry into the contemporary anxieties involved (56). Any such enquiry might readily focus on experience of the Great War, recalled by one 1920s commentator as "a machine-war" (Garrett 45). "What made that war so terrifying", he adds, "so destructive, so extensive, was the power of the machine . . . Man in contrast with the machines he served was pitifully insignificant" (45). Yet the experience of tanks, aircraft, and machine-guns tyrannizing over human agency, and over the fragile frame of the human body, in some ways only accentuated processes developing throughout industrialized societies since the later nineteenth century, as several commentators have emphasized. In *Bodies and Machines* (1992), for example, Mark Seltzer traces the emergence of a "machine culture" after the 1870s (156), while in *The Human Motor* (1992) Anson Rabinbach outlines views of a "human machine" developing throughout much the same period (247). A factor particularly influential in these developments is highlighted by the Clockwork man's "peculiar internal arrangements", revealed as he flees the debacle of his cricketing debut (38). Tumbling over while rampaging off across the landscape – and inopportunistically losing his Dunn Brothers hat – he reveals that the back of his head has been replaced by an extraordinary clock, with many "[h]ands and figures . . . going round very fast" (52). Odle's central figure turns out to be a very specific sort of "semi-mechanical being": one whose controlling intelligence and cerebral functions have been comprehensively supplanted by complicated clockwork.

In one way, this might merely suggest that in an age before computers, clocks remained among the most complex forms of machinery readers could readily conceive. But it also shows *The Clockwork Man* reflecting stresses originating in "machine culture" well before the Great War, and remaining deeply implicated in its conduct and in everyday life in the years that followed. These are summed up in another work published concurrently with Odle's: Georg Lukács's essay "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat" (1923). Since the introduction of clocking-in machines and Taylorist time-and-motion studies in the 1890s – later supplemented by

the influence of Henry Ford – “rational mechanisation”, Lukács considered, had extended “right into the worker’s soul”. “The subordination of man to the machine”, he adds (quoting Karl Marx), ensured that “time is everything, man is nothing” – merely a “reified, mechanically objectified” operative whose hours and minutes are measured, commodified, and exchanged for money in the form of wages (88-90). By the 1920s, for Lukács, the clock had thus become the controlling agent or intelligence of a whole industrial civilization: a ubiquitous agent of reification and rationalization, mechanically ordering body and soul for the workforce; ultimately, the life of an entire working world.

Odle’s Clockwork man provides an apt emblem of this intrusive, controlling role within modern working conditions – one likewise emphasized by Zamyatin, and by Čapek, whose coinage of the term “robot”, Parrinder notes, derives from the Czech “*robotá*”, originally meaning “forced labour” (60). A credo of Čapek’s robot society in *R.U.R.* is that

if the time-table holds good, human laws hold good, divine laws hold good, the laws of the universe hold good, everything holds good that ought to hold good. The time-table is more than the Gospel, more than Homer, more than the books of all the philosophers. The time-table is the most perfect product of the human spirit. (54-5)

Zamyatin’s “chronometrically perfect” future society in *We* – organized “in accordance with Taylor . . . keeping time, like the levers of a single immense machine” – likewise extols “the *Railroad Timetable*” as “the greatest of all monuments of ancient literature that has come down to us” (81, 33, 12). Zamyatin was directly acquainted with working “in accordance with Taylor” in the shipyards of Newcastle and Glasgow, where he was seconded from the Russian navy during the Great War. Odle acquired similar experience at the time through employment in munitions factories, including Woolwich Arsenal, and discusses the kind of pressures involved – though mostly more light-heartedly than Čapek or Zamyatin – at several points in *The Clockwork Man*. “The many absurdities in modern life that result from a too mechanical efficiency” concern the Clockwork man himself – though, ironically, it is the inefficiency of his own clock, noted by Locke, which has left him “feeling very run down” and accidentally dispatched him from the far future into the 1920s (74, 63). Other characters are likewise concerned that “the human organism shows signs of breaking down under the strain of an increasingly complex civilisation” (48). They find this strain particularly amplified by a “curious problem of existence. You were always up against time . . . the clock, in fact, was another tyrant . . . that was why people said, when they consulted their watches, ‘How’s the enemy?’” (59).¹

Enmity towards the clock, in 1920s literature, of course extends well beyond science fiction. Odle’s Clockwork man might have reminded contemporary readers not only of the robots of *R.U.R.*, but also of D.H. Lawrence’s *Women in Love* – published two years previously, in 1921 – and specifically of the figure of Gerald Crich. Lawrence characterizes this “industrial magnate” as both agent and victim of processes of mechanization retraced to the 1840s, in *The Rainbow* (1915), and followed into the early twentieth century in *Women in Love* (237). Their result, by the end of *Women in Love*, is a “clockwork man” probably less sympathetic than Odle’s – although, in a broadly naturalistic novel, Gerald’s mechanical qualities are only metaphoric, highlighted largely through the nightmare reflections of his lover, Gudrun. Her general resentment of “the terrible bondage of this tick-tack of time . . . the terrible clock . . .

horrible mechanical twitching forward over the face of the hours" extends into a vision of Gerald and his industrial workforce as "wheels within wheels" –

pure machines, pure wills, that work like clockwork, in perpetual repetition . . . the miner, with a thousand wheels, and then the electrician, with three thousand, and the underground manager, with twenty thousand, and the general manager, with a hundred thousand little wheels working away to complete his make-up, and then Gerald, with a million wheels and cogs and axles.

Poor Gerald! Such a lot of little wheels to his make up! He was more intricate than a chronometer-watch. (522-3, 524-5)

Though Gudrun's vision develops particularly comprehensive hostilities towards "the terrible clock", similar feelings figure regularly in modernist fiction later in the 1920s: in Virginia Woolf's descriptions of "shredding and slicing" clocks (113) in *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), for example, or of scepticisms about "time on the clock" (69) in *Orlando* (1928).

The Clockwork Man, in other words, reflects not only a "machine culture" developing since the 1870s, but the related emergence, in roughly the same period, of the "culture of time and space" comprehensively documented by Stephen Kern. Typically of science fiction – often concerned, Luckhurst considers, with "extending or extrapolating Mechanism from the contemporary world" (3) – Odle employs futuristic fantasy to highlight stresses widely apparent in the life and culture of his own age. Yet *The Clockwork Man* also indicates ways these stresses might be resisted or reconfigured. Relativity offered the 1920s an exceptionally promising resource for such resistance. Spectacularly confirmed, or apparently confirmed, late in 1919, Einstein's theories had an immediate impact at the start of the 1920s. As Rose Macaulay notes in her novel *Potterism* (1920), describing newspaper headlines announcing the verification of Einstein's ideas, "space and light, undulations and gravitation" were soon being discussed "in many a cottage, many a club, many a train . . . people were interested" (230). As Michael H. Whitworth demonstrates in *Einstein's Wake* (2001), and Katy Price in *Loving Faster than Light* (2012), Relativity continued to influence imagination at many levels in the years that followed. In *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, published in the same year as *The Clockwork Man*, D.H. Lawrence noted that "the latest craze is Mr. Einstein's Relativity Theory", adding that "everybody catches fire at the word Relativity. There must be something in the mere suggestion, which we have been waiting for" (163). As he suggests, in an age so in thrall to the tyrant clock, the freedom from conventional, measured temporality which Relativity seemed to offer carried a particular, immediate appeal.

The new theories obviously appealed especially directly to authors of science fiction, seeming to offer all sorts of imaginative possibilities of time-travel and mysterious further dimensions. Some of these possibilities were of course not entirely new. As Mark Blacklock explains in *The Emergence of the Fourth Dimension* (2018), interests in further spatial dimensions already figured widely in literature in the later nineteenth century, in response to the n -dimensional and non-Euclidean geometries increasingly concerning mathematicians and scientists at the time. Popularized by C.H. Hinton's *Scientific Romances* in the 1880s, ideas of a Fourth Dimension appear, for example, in H.G. Wells's *The Wonderful Visit* (1895), which suggests that "there may be any number of three dimensional universes packed side by side, and all dimly dreaming of one another" (26). Similar multidimensional thinking underlies Joseph

Conrad and Ford Madox Ford's "unrealized . . . unrealizable infinity of space" (5) in *The Inheritors* (1901) – perhaps also influenced by Conrad's encounter, in 1898, with a Glasgow doctor developing the use of X-rays. Time-travel, too, was scarcely a new idea in the 1920s, but one familiar enough from novels such as Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward: 2000-1887* (1888), Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889), William Morris's *News from Nowhere* (1891), and of course H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine* (1895). As Wells's hero reflects in another time-travel novel, *When the Sleeper Wakes* (1899), a "leap in time" was a possibility which "romancers ha[d] imagined again and again" by the end of the nineteenth century (85). While a mechanized, clock-dominated industrial society directed growing interest on "chronometrically perfect" robots and automata, it naturally also encouraged much imagination about leaping beyond the constraints of time altogether. Einstein's work nevertheless offered this imagination a substantial new impetus at the start of the 1920s, suggesting that ideas once seeming largely fanciful might be supported by science itself. At the very least, reference to Einstein's astonishing, barely-comprehensible theories could provide science fiction with handy, concise legitimation even for its more extravagant departures from conventional life and temporality.

In *Men Like Gods* (1923), for example, H.G. Wells updates the views of *The Wonderful Visit*, invoking instead what the novel calls "the latest, finest, thoughts of terrestrial science" to sanction the possibility of numerous "space-and-time-universes, parallel to one another" (45). When his characters realize that they may have wandered into just such a parallel universe, one of them optimistically suggests that "Einstein might make it clear to us" (25). Wells partly endorses this possibility by subtitled his fourth chapter "The Shadow of Einstein Falls Across the Story but Passes Lightly By", acknowledging that readers might appreciate supportive reference to Einstein's theories without wishing – or being able – to encounter their full complexity. Contemporary science fiction authors such as Alexei Tolstoy – in his account of a Soviet expedition to Mars, *Aelita* (1922) – sometimes hazard more thorough explanations of Relativity. Like Wells, Odle refers instead to Einstein only "lightly", though frequently, in accounting for his Clockwork man's "world of many dimensions", or ways he is "independent of time and space" – able to travel freely "not only somewhere, but *somewhen*" (102, 121, 69; emphasis in original). Though the Clockwork man is generally scathing about the "restricted . . . backward" world he encounters in the 1920s – still preoccupied by "old problems of Time and Space", and negligent of "the importance of the machines" – he is delighted to learn it at least enjoys an early awareness of Einstein (100, 64). Like that of the hatters, Dunn & Co, Einstein's reputation has apparently lasted successfully for 8000 years into the future (100, 64). Struggling to comprehend travel from this future into the present of the 1920s, characters reflect that "Einstein could say that we were probably wrong in our basic conceptions", and that "time . . . is a relative thing . . . the future has happened just as much as the past" (82, 48). "Time and Space", they suggest, may instead require understanding in terms of "a new sort of relativity", or ideas explained in a "difficult book" one of them has been reading – presumably one of many early 1920s publications which attempted to elucidate Einstein's thinking for the general public (120, 59). As many as a dozen of these had appeared by 1923.

Despite these popular expositions, Relativity remained mysterious and challenging enough to offer contemporary writers more than just added credibility for time-travel tales. Notions of further dimensions also opened up potentials for transcendence, even vague mysticism: for conceiving plausible worlds related or parallel to the actual one, but somehow beyond its conventions and constraints. This

potential is developed strongly in Odle's closing chapter, in the Clockwork man's descriptions of the multidimensional future world from which he has temporarily been displaced. The mysterious "makers" who control this world, he explains, appeared "after the last wars . . . [and] a great deal of fighting and killing and blowing up" (137). Seeking to avoid further carnage, they establish a peaceful, ideal society by transforming the male population into carefully-controlled, semi-mechanical clockwork beings, while leaving women – more innocent of violence and aggression – just as they are. As Newitz suggests in her Introduction, *The Clockwork Man* is in this way not only a very early cyborg novel, but partly a proto-feminist one. Its highly regulated, pacifistic future might also be compared with the society Aldous Huxley imagines in *Brave New World* (1932). Like Odle, Huxley envisages future life controlled stringently and unnaturally, yet in ways which at least eliminate the "killing and blowing up" chillingly represented early in *Brave New World*, and presumably still painfully remembered by both authors, and their readers, from the recent years of the Great War.

Though "spinning in infinite space and knowledge", the future "world of many dimensions" the Clockwork man describes seems only partially preferable to Huxley's (136, 102). The "makers", he explains, created "the world we wanted", along with the promise of "joys earth has not seen" (138, 139). Yet the closing pages of *The Clockwork Man* also raise many questions – ones still troubling discussions of cybernetics and artificial intelligence a century later – concerning tensions between freewill and automatic behaviour, or human and mechanical agency. In a controlled, largely automated future society – secure but sterile – the Clockwork man's only genuine freedom seems his capacity to wander at will in time: to be "somewhen"; usually, when he is not too "run down", of his own choosing. In this way, while planning with mixed sorrow and relief to go back to the future, he ends the novel as an intriguingly ambivalent figure. Emblematic of clock-driven constraints increasingly reifying life after the Great War, he is also representative of new-found, post-Einsteinian imaginative freedoms, in the early 1920s, to escape or transcend them.

Topical, funny, and at least mildly optimistic, *The Clockwork Man* was well enough received when first published, despite the potential distraction of Čapek's *R.U.R.* Enthusiastically reviewed by J.B. Priestley, it was soon translated into French and German, and new editions published in Canada and the United States. Odle records that this reception encouraged him to pursue similar interests in later writing, including another novel which he describes following Samuel Butler in its concern with "living machines" (Locke, 168). Poor health and personal difficulties may have interfered with its completion. In any case, he was unable to find a publisher – despite the success not only of *The Clockwork Man* in 1923, but of *The History of Alfred Rudd*, hailed as a best-seller the year before. Odle attributed this disappointment to a change of mood by the 1930s, remarking in a letter at the time that there was "not much public nowadays for the Jules Verne, H.G. Wells tale of fantasia" (Locke 168).

Several factors might have contributed to this diminished enthusiasm, at any rate among British readers. Science fiction generally continued to extend its appeal throughout the 1920s and 1930s – often empowered by the new imaginative freedoms about time-travel and multiple dimensions described above – but generally developed more strongly in the United States than in Britain. A factor in this transatlantic success may simply have been the United States' greater confidence in the future. Science fiction, obviously, does not necessarily require faith in an entirely good future. Yet it does depend to some extent on faith in an interesting or exciting one, in which human agency and technology continue to extend challenging, transformative influences on

the universe. In the years after the Great War, such a future was probably more readily conceived among readers and writers across the Atlantic than in the weary, trepidatious mood widely shared in Britain by the end of the 1920s, and in some ways ever since 1914. Significantly, several popular science fiction novels published in Britain shortly after the Great War envisage technology contributing not to further progress but to a disastrous regress in human affairs. The hero of Edward Shanks's *The People of the Ruins* (1920), for example, questions the recent achievements of science – Relativity included – along with the “the comfortable belief that mankind was advancing” (59). Cicely Hamilton's *Theodore Savage* (1922) similarly describes the role of technologically-sophisticated weaponry in a catastrophic future war, leaving “civilization laid waste by the agency of science combined with human passion” (180).

Another factor potentially influential by the end of the 1920s was the re-invigoration – though also re-direction – of imaginative opportunities Einstein's work had introduced at the beginning of the decade. Much of this new influence originated in ideas J.W. Dunne popularized in *An Experiment with Time* (1927), while still referring to Relativity as a legitimation of his views. *An Experiment in Time* develops the idea that “modern science” and “the Relativist landslide” had put “the classical theory of Time . . . in the melting-pot”, reproducing in later editions a supportive letter from Einstein's disciple Arthur Eddington, instrumental in verifying Relativity theory in 1919 (224, 87). Dunne was particularly concerned with the belief that “Relativity admits of ‘seeing ahead’ in Time” (128) – one widely discussed during the 1920s. Virginia Woolf's diary, for example, records in 1926 her acquaintances discussing the possibility that “if Einstein is true, we shall be able to foretell our own lives” (68).

Dunne's views of “seeing ahead” may also have derived from unusual personal experience, or the influence of an admirer of C.H. Hinton: P.D. Ouspensky, whose *Tertium Organum* (1912), much concerned with “the mystery of time”, was first translated into English in 1922 (197). Ouspensky suggests the adoption of new, aloof perspectives on temporality – comparable to the views of physical landscape afforded by the vantage of a mountainside, or ascent in a balloon – which might make it possible to “see the past and the future, lying together and existing simultaneously” (42). Dunne's role as a pioneer aviator in the early years of the century – he designed the first British military aircraft in 1906 – regularly afforded him access to perspectives of this kind. In combination with his experience of precognitive dreams, this background may have contributed to his invitation to readers to rise above “the first-term world, where time appears as a succession of simple three-dimensional scenes, with the future entirely hidden” (“Serialism” 483). Dreams and the sleeping mind, Dunne suggests, allow access to a “second-term world . . . brilliant and real”, in which “your past and your future lie stretched out before you like an unrolled scroll” (“Serialism” 483). *An Experiment with Time* supports this kind of suggestion with arcane geometric diagrams, algebraic formulations, and complex scientific arguments – no doubt adding to the credibility of Dunne's ideas among readers accustomed, by the end of the 1920s, to “difficult books” explaining Einsteinian science. It was only later that Dunne admitted to mystic or spiritual aspects in his thinking, alongside supposedly scientific ones. Already, in *An Experiment with Time*, he nevertheless extends his vision of “a second-term world” towards further, timeless planes and dimensions, and ultimately towards asserting the immortality of the soul.

In this way, Dunne might be compared with Odle, extending ideas of temporal freedom and multidimensionality, partly based around Relativity, towards transcendent, redemptive views of the human condition and its future. Yet he also diverges significantly from Odle, Wells, and other 1920s science fiction writers by locating these

temporal or transcendent freedoms largely within the consciousness and personal experience of individuals, rather than in broader fantasias of entire worlds, parallel or future. This concentration on the individual, and on the temporalities of private life, helps to account for Dunne's wide appeal to contemporary authors who may have had little or no interest in science fiction, or – directly – in Relativity, or even in science generally. As Katy Price suggests, "Dunne's *Experiment with Time* inspired many more literary projects than either Einstein or Eddington did" (192). James Joyce is said to have "regarded highly" Dunne's ideas (Jolas 385). Critics have compared them to T.S. Eliot's views of times past, present and future in *Four Quartets*, noting that further editions of *An Experiment with Time* were published in the 1930s by Faber and Faber, for whom Eliot was currently working as a director. Other contemporary authors whose work suggests an interest in Dunne, or who directly acknowledge one, include William Gerhardie, Graham Greene, James Hilton, Wyndham Lewis, John Buchan, John Cowper Powys, J.B. Priestley, and Rumer Godden. His influence continues to appear later in the century in writing by Vladimir Nabokov and Jorge Luis Borges. In some cases, this influence is substantial: in Buchan's tale of prescience, *The Gap in the Curtain* (1932), for example, or in 1930s plays by Priestley, who professed himself a "Time-haunted man" and acknowledged "an enormous debt" to Dunne, as well as an interest in Ouspensky (viii, 265). Generally, debts are slighter, confirmed by occasional references in 1930s literature to "dim regions where physics, metaphysics and mathematics jostle", described in Buchan's novel (20), or the kind of "real and timeless world in which everything which is to be has been" (30), mentioned in Gerhardie's *Of Mortal Love* (1936).

Dunne might thus be seen as facilitating the absorption within mainstream literature – in a rather diluted form – of radical temporal freedoms which had empowered the "tale of fantasia" at the start of the 1920s. This might explain the shift of interest Odle describes encountering in the next decade. It might also help delimit a period, drawing to its close by the 1930s, when science fiction and other forms of writing – modernist idioms especially – exhibit some particularly illuminating analogies. Unearthly landscapes and fluid temporalities in Wyndham Lewis's *The Childermass* (1928), for example, might have seemed familiar enough to contemporary readers of science fiction. So might the kind of century-hopping practised in Woolf's *Orlando* (1927), or the time-travelling described in Lewis Grassie Gibbon's *Three Go Back* (1932), or even the shape-shifting fluidities of Joyce's "Work in Progress" in the 1920s. In each case, it is the narratives' reconfigured temporalities which make modernist writing and science fiction particularly comparable – a proximity evident even as the two idioms first emerged, as near coevals, in the 1890s. If Wells's *The Time Machine* (1895) initiated modern styles of science fiction, as is often assumed, it was very shortly afterwards that recognizable – and comparable – forms of modernism emerged in the early fiction of Joseph Conrad, often extravagantly anachronic in its narrative tactics.

During the 1920s, narrative anachrony continued to develop as one of the characteristic innovations of modernism, though in ways probably not much indebted to the recent influence of Einstein. Modernist authors had sufficient models and incentives of their own, before 1919, for reshaping narrative temporality – possibly including the examples of Conrad or Marcel Proust; the philosophy of Henri Bergson; or, more likely, their own response to the stresses D.H. Lawrence emphasizes in *Women in Love*. Whatever influences may have been involved, their results continue to bear productive comparison with contemporary "tales of fantasia". As one recent critic, Charles M. Tung, has suggested, modernism might even be seen as "itself, in many

hitherto unconsidered senses of the phrase, a time machine" (94). Tung's views, in a way, only extend those of another recent commentator, David Wittenberg, who considers that "one could arguably call narrative itself a 'time machine'", since "even the most elementary narratives . . . set out to modify or manipulate the order, duration, and significance of events in time" (1). Yet modernism, of course, extends such manipulation well beyond the conventions of "elementary narratives". Wells's *Time Traveller* further indicates a particular relevance in Tung's views when explaining that his machine's operation resembles "recalling an incident very vividly", or the abilities of "mental existences" in "passing along the Time-Dimensions" (11). Viewed in this way, Wells's time machine seems readily analogous with modernist uses of memory and recall: with Lily Briscoe's experience in Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927), for example, when she "dipped . . . into the past". It "felt as if a door had opened", she finds, "and one went and stood gazing silently about in . . . a world far away" (195).

In *Mrs Dalloway*, Clarissa likewise finds "doors . . . taken off their hinges" metaphorically as well as literally, allowing her quickly to escape the booming chimes of Big Ben, in the novel's first pages, in favour of her memory's "plunge" into a happier past (5). Such movements into other times – so frequent in modernism, and in 1920s writing generally – suggest the decade's imagination might almost be summed up by the hero of Cicely Hamilton's *Theodore Savage*, reflecting on "a life of the body in the present, and a life of the mind in the past" (177). Whether readers and authors prefer transportation in time through Woolf's "doors", or by means of Marcel Proust's tea-and-memory saturated madeleine, or by the "glittering metallic framework . . . very delicately made" Wells describes in *The Time Machine* (10), might be little more than a matter of taste. Motives impelling movement through time can likewise be compared. The reified, mechanized condition Odle's Clockwork man represents is to an extent redeemed by his freedom to wander backwards and forwards through space and time. The industrialized society Lawrence depicts in *Women in Love*, regimented by the kind of "shredding and slicing" clocks described in *Mrs Dalloway*, makes time-travel similarly rewarding – even when undertaken only metaphorically, through modernism's memorious, analeptic entries into a happier personal past or a congenial remembered world. Reconfigurations of conventional temporality in science fiction and in modernist narrative can be understood in this way as cognate, symptomatic responses to a clock-dominated society, and to the constrained condition of the clockwork men, or sometimes women, who were its inhabitants.

E.V. Odle, in other words, was not Virginia Woolf, nor was meant to be, but *The Clockwork Man* nevertheless shares some key modernist priorities, and might even be supposed close to what Woolf would have written if she had dallied with science fiction. Odle's imagination at any rate exemplifies "the positive links between the modernist time fixation and . . . the science-fictional" which Tung emphasizes – though he may exaggerate slightly in suggesting that there has not been much critical attention to these connections (97). Modernist critics have seldom considered science fiction irrelevant, or somehow beneath their notice. In *Archaeologies of the Future* (2005), for example, Fredric Jameson has compared extensively the utopian motivations underlying modernism and science fiction, as Tung acknowledges. As he suggests, though, there is still scope for fuller comparisons of the areas concerned – ones for which Stableford's proposed "rescue" of *The Clockwork Man* would prove rewarding. Nearly as pessimistic as his wife, Odle did not believe his "little story" would be remembered even for a decade, though he considered it "well received" when first published (Locke 168). Around a century later – with the cyborg future he predicted nearer than ever, the "post-human" daily discussed, and modernism still as compelling

as ever – there is good reason, as one of its characters suggests, “to cherish the memory of the Clockwork man as a legend rich in significance” (129).

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Notes

1. Though it has fallen out of general use, the phrase has a long provenance. In Frederick Reynolds’s *The Dramatist* (1789), Ennui – a character keen “to invent a new mode of killing time” – regularly asks “how goes the enemy” (I, i, etc). Newspapers and other writing in the 1920s suggest that “How’s the enemy?” was an alternative to asking the time which was widely employed in conversation during the decade. As well as in *The Clockwork Man*, it appears in Wyndham Lewis’s *The Childermass* (1928), incidentally suggesting a particular significance in Lewis’s use of “The Enemy” as a public persona during the 1920s (264).

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