The Reform of Time

Magic and Modernity

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Contents

List of Figures vi
Acknowledgements vii

Introduction: Superstition and Progress 1
Superstition 5
Progress 9

1. Clocks, Calendars and Centralisation 19
The Clock 22
The Calendar 25
The Future 33

2. Fortune-Telling 40

3. The Interpretation of Dreams 59
The Status of Dreams 59
Books of Fate and Dream Books 65
Women and Superstition 70
Condemnation of Dream Books 74
Dreams and Rationality 80
Conclusion 83

4. Timeless Cultures 84
The Wandering Tribes 87
Timeless Cultures 92
The Future 100

5. Calendar Girls 103

Conclusion 126
Notes 131
Select Bibliography 148
Index 157

Introduction: Superstition and Progress

In the 1840s Samuel Bamford, who had been at various times a sailor, a weaver and a political radical, published his autobiography, one of several working-class memoirs to appear in Britain during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Bamford's story is marvellously entertaining, the account of a young man rushing passionately through life: time spent in prison, escaping from the press-gang, his baby girl put into his arms the morning after his wedding day. Among the most distinctive features of the narrative is his interest in popular belief, or superstition. He reports a horseshoe put up over a door to prevent the entry of witchcraft, the disappearance of a man thought to be stolen by witches, the death of a young lad who dabbled in magic in order to make a girl fall in love with him. In all these stories, Bamford's own attitude is complex. He neither dismisses such accounts from an educated point of view, nor offers them unproblematically as authentic. A modern editor refers to his 'half-belief', and Bamford himself describes his role as that of 'an enquirer and listener' rather than one who disputed what he was told.[1] His ambivalent fascination with the supernatural is a perfect example of modern, rationalist ideas overlaying an earlier world of popular belief. In particular, the uneasy coexistence of fate and free will consistently appears as the central motif of these stories. Could the church sexton who saw his own ghost on All Souls' Eve (when the spirits of all who are to die in the coming year are said to appear) have escaped his own death? Was it destiny or his own uneducated fear which caused the unfortunate man to go home and fall ill? Was the awful fate of the young men who attempted magic in Boggart Hole Clough a sign to all that spirit meddling was wrong, or did their success in making the young woman fall in love testify to the power of their spells?[2]

Bamford's memoir highlights one of the persistent problems in conceptualising human agency, that of the interplay between determinism and free will. These Herculean pillars of philosophy define the parameters of discussions ranging across the whole

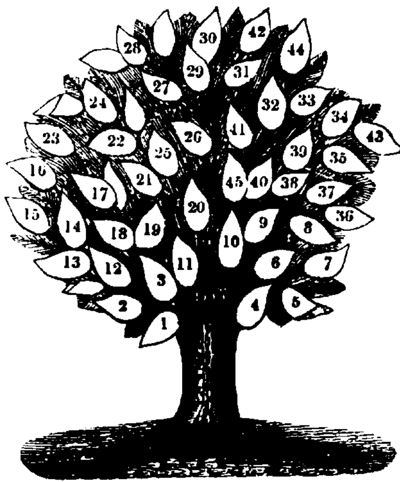
THE TRUE

FORTUNE TELLER;

OR

UNIVERSAL BOOK OF FATE.

Containing besides other valuable information, directions by which any one may know under what planet he was born.—An account of the evil and perilous days of every month of the year.—How to choose a husband or wife by the hair, eyes, &c., &c.



GLASGOW:
PRINTED FOR THE BOOKSELLERS.

EXPLANATION OF THE TREE OF FATE.

OBSERVE.—That you may either pick a number blindfolded amidst the leaves of this valuable tree, or throw for them with dice; if you pick for them and get among the branches, or in the blank leaves, it shows a speedy misfortune or disappointment at hand. The mark number of 1000 shows a great advancement in life, if you are so fortunate as to hit on it.

1 Gifts of Money
2 Prosperous run of business
3 Speedy Marriage
4 Many Children
5 A good partner in marriage
6 You will become rich
7 Money through love
8 Cash by Trade
9 A rise in Life
10 A long journey
11 Anger and discontent
12 An important journey
13 A letter that will alter your present circumstances
14 Mind what you say to a lover
15 Present from a distance
16 Dispute with one you love
17 A law suit
18 Visit from a distant friend
19 Party of pleasure
20 Preferment
21 Love at first sight
22 A prize worth having
23 Wealth and dignity

24 Visit to a foreign land
25 Profit by industry
26 Prosperity by marriage
27 A multitude of cares
28 By friends you will profit
29 Second partner better than first
30 Surmount many difficulties
31 A false friend
32 A pleasing surprise
33 A change in your affairs
34 A ramble by moonlight
35 Scandal
36 Unpleasing tidings
37 Loss in a short time
38 A christening
39 Get rich through a legacy
40 [illegible]
41 New wearing apparel
42 A [illegible] present
43 News from sea
44 Pleasant paths in future
45 You will be asked a question of importance to-morrow

20 Preferment
21 Love at first sight
22 A prize worth having
23 Wealth and dignity
43 News from sea
44 Pleasant paths in future
45 You will be asked a question of importance to-morrow

Figure 1: *The True Fortune Teller, or Universal Book of Fate* (1850)
Fate or free will? Chapbooks such as this showed that for many ordinary readers in the nineteenth century the dictates of fate were an important concern. In the later nineteenth century writers and reformers commented that books of fate and interpretations of dreams seemed to be amongst the most popular titles, competing with the romances and ballads that dominated the market. The potential outcomes listed here show most issues to be about money and love, with friendship and travel following close behind. There are no references to health, perhaps because of the huge literature already available specialising in health and quack medicines.

spectrum of human enquiry, from religion to genetics. This book explores the tension between them from a historical perspective that focusses on the relationship of time and modernity. It argues that each of these positions – on the one hand, a belief in the possibility of creating one's own life; and on the other hand, the belief that external conditions limit individual freedom – assumes different concepts of the future. In one, when agency is stressed, the future seems full of potential. In the other, when human action is limited by overarching structures or divine blueprints, the future is seen as more bleak. Social systems may not in themselves be a hindrance to

progress, but they have often been portrayed as at odds with individual struggle, and therefore the source of at least short-term suffering. All of those in Bamford's autobiography who attempt to defy what seems to be their destiny meet with some kind of affliction.

Yet the tension between a belief in a preordained fate and the future as *tabula rasa* is not only a nineteenth-century phenomenon. It is still an important factor in political and theoretical debates about the comparative importance of individualism and social structure. To what extent can we be truly free to make choices about our lifestyle, aspirations, and experiences when class, ethnicity, gender, and global capitalism hedge us about with limitations and, more insidiously, with the discursive confines of our own culture? The struggle between these two ways of conceptualising social change – agency and structure – constitutes what one writer has called 'the contradiction which is at the heart of the dominant modern experience and which permeates our lives as a constant existential tension'.[3]

This book does not make any grand claim to resolve the agency vs structure debate. It does, however, point to one way in which, historically, a belief in agency has been strengthened. In the modern world we are all expected to be optimistic. The roots of this obligation lie in nineteenth-century Europe, whose culture embraced the credo that everyone should work towards improving their lives, a view which seems to reach its apogee in 1920 in the motto on the wall of the psychiatric clinic run by Émile Coué: 'Every day and in every way, I am getting better and better'. The immediate forebears of this philosophy were the nineteenth-century reform movements which represented free will as the individual's potential for self-improvement and an essential part of his or her contribution to the wider social good. A fundamental duty to improve can be seen in the work of, for example, the Society for the Suppression of Vice, which expressed its aims in terms of moral and social ideals, but was built on a belief in the desirability (if not the inevitability) of progress. Samuel Smiles's *Self-Help* (1858) is perhaps the most famous expression of this ideology, but a myriad of preachers up and down the country spread the same message.

Of course, to suggest the need for personal improvement is not necessarily an argument for free will, since it may be a matter of simply obeying natural laws, but the power of the individual to withstand vice and temptation was emphasised even by those who

expressed a belief in social determinism. In fact, in a century when adherence to social and economic laws was often considered supremely important, several writers thought it necessary to argue that individuals were not the mere victims of these forces. The possibility that it might be 'society [that] prepares the crimes and the guilty person is only the instrument' was a frightening thought.[4] The answer, as Ian Hacking has shown in his historical study of statistics, was to stress the difference between determinism and fatalism. The future was not fixed; rather it could respond to human understanding of fixed laws. Certainly determinists taught that 'men's minds and circumstances ... are subject to laws as invariable as gravitation'; but this did not mean that 'circumstances' could not change. In the 1850s several writers forced a path through statistical determinism to suggest that human action also played a part. William Farr wrote:

> Introduce a system of ventilation into unventilated mines, you substitute one law of accidents for another ... As men have the power to change the conditions of life, and even to modify their race, they have the power to change the current of human actions within definite limits which statistics can determine.[5]

Despite the major nineteenth-century project of uncovering society's laws, then, individual agency would play an important part in human progress.

Progress, which still dominates the discourse of the so-called 'West', is the main concern of this study. Despite occasional prophecies of doom, progress, particularly in its technological form, is constantly held up to society as the justification for the advance of capitalism. The way in which this 'doctrine' of progress, during the period of its establishment, marginalised popular beliefs, especially those which represented the future as potentially bleak and foreboding, is the central motif of these chapters.

One way in which the cause of self-improvement was helped was in the labelling as 'superstition' of beliefs which did not advance that agenda. Progress required qualities such as independence, industriousness and honesty, which reformers suggested would all be undermined by the apathy promoted by superstition. This was a view put forward in the literature of social and moral reform, which, to judge from working-class autobiographies, was highly successful. Many self-educated artisans, looking back on the superstitious stories

of their childhoods, bemoaned the uneducated belief in fate that had once been held by their contemporaries. Although he did not join in this disapproval, Bamford was typical of such a nineteenth-century autodidact, the working-class man who grasped the benefits of education, often against enormous odds. One of the gifts which such education provided, we are told again and again by those who struggled to achieve it, was the idea that each individual could forge their own future. Although the term 'agency' was not a contemporary one, the power of self-improvement was expressed in terms of achieving independence and respectability, criteria by which the struggling worker judged success.

Superstition

It is the contention of the following chapters that the struggle to confirm historical optimism as the foundation of social and economic endeavour in nineteenth-century Britain reveals the political agenda underpinning the definition of knowledge. In identifying superstition as undesirable, social reformers were not only demonstrating what they believed to be the difference between 'truth' and 'error', but were promoting a wish for the working classes to subscribe to a desire for self-improvement, a project that had economic implications, most obviously in the development of modern consumerism. The nineteenth-century struggle against superstition serves as an example of the fact that hegemony's first step is simply the placing of limits on what counts as knowledge.[6]

In the late eighteenth century the meaning of the term 'superstition' changed. Rather than conveying 'bad religion', as it had formerly done, it now suggested more a sense of 'misplaced assumptions about causality stemming from a faulty understanding of nature', as the *Encyclopaedia of Religion* describes it.[7] However, that faulty understanding was not solely linked to causality. It was also important to understand the workings of the natural world in order to be able to predict the future. 'Superstition', according to this new understanding of its meaning, actually made prediction more difficult, since it was premised on mistaken representations of the world. Accurate prediction was important – it lay at the heart of rationalism. Max Weber, foremost theorist of modernity, postulated that the principle of development inherent in the process of 'civilisation' was driven by the use of calculation as a strategy of

social action.[8] Calculation, clearly, is dependent on the expectation of outcomes. Weber's concept of rationalisation, referring to the rise of a culture of planning, is, in fact, a form of secular prediction.

Those who promoted concepts of rational knowledge formulated an opposing concept of the 'irrational' which subsumed within it practices which may have had very little in common, other than the desire to know the future. The broad categories that are now used for forms of unorthodox belief within English-speaking cultures – superstition, the occult, magic – are a product of nineteenth-century reform. The arcane terminology of specific techniques (for example, scrying, geomancy, horary and genethliacal astrology) has been superseded. It was the desire to know the future, or the claim to be able to reveal it, that was the most important aspect of each belief as far as its opponents were concerned.

The phenomenon of prediction, then, once the preserve of magic and prophecy, has become crucially important to modern, secular society, but its change in meaning has not gone uncontested. This book argues that what futures studies have termed 'the colonisation of the future' lies at the heart of the conflict.[9] In appropriating the previously magical functions of prediction, modern forecasting has become a powerful means of excluding alternative interpretations of the future. The so-called decline of magic, in the West at least, has allowed a linear, exclusive teleology of progress to dominate. The case studies presented here will trace early stages of this process of exclusion to a genesis within the reform of popular culture in Britain, and will suggest that this was further developed in British colonial policy as the Empire found a rationalisation for its governance within a hegemonic definition of knowledge, one in which alternative conceptualisations of predicting the future could not be accommodated.

The reform of superstition was, in fact, a major player in the advance of individualism, and helped to mask the structural features which were likely to be determinants of the particular life. It is ironic that modern versions of many of these older popular beliefs have taken on board a stress on individualism, and now promote the virtues of personal responsibility in much the same way as those who disapproved of such beliefs once did. Late nineteenth-century influences, notably psychology and European fascination with Hinduism, have created a modern 'occult' which promises health, wealth and happiness if the subject thinks and acts in ways that transcend material conditions. The most extreme form of this 'New

Age' teaching even suggests that illness and disability result from inappropriate thought, either in this life or a previous one. In concentrating on individual 'error', these 'descendants' of magical tradition overlook the structural history of magic: its connections to class, gender, and culture.

The communal aspects of popular belief have been neglected. Owen Davies discusses witch-mobbing as an act of folk culture, and argues that it was a manifestation of extra-legal justice that has received little attention. It would not be carried out, he writes, unless sanctioned by a considerable portion of the community.[10] Similarly, many of the rituals described in the dream books discussed later in this study require the co-ordination of a group working together – for example, a number of young girls all in search of husbands. Going to see a fortune-teller was usually done with a number of friends, and it is certainly possible to interpret this as an active form of recreation and relaxation. This would not mean that those consulting the fortune-teller had no real belief in the efficacy of their undertaking, but simply that the shared nature of the outing was part of a sense of community that contributed to lightening the burden of their everyday lives. This interpretation draws attention to the roles of class and gender in the social function of magic, as a backdrop to the choice of groups with which to identify, in contrast with the more usual explanations of such activity as the mistaken gullibility of the weak and exploited. One account of beliefs amongst twentieth-century factory workers describes prediction as the resort of those who are excluded from power and influence, a means of allaying anxiety about a future over which they have no control. The desire to know the future, this common interpretation suggests, is the recourse of the powerless in a time of uncertainty.[11] Such an analysis underestimates the role of random misfortune in all lives, no matter how powerful they might be. Moreover, the superstition which nineteenth-century reformers so deplored in those who consulted a fortune-teller may actually have been grounded in a robust appreciation of life's limitations, which no amount of hard work or moral endeavour could overcome, and which turned the poor to activities which could provide a shared experience, perhaps even shared laughter.

It has been suggested that the very idea of modern, secular prediction helps to create community by excluding the possibility of difference:

> [T]he act of prediction exhibits a way of thinking that is limited to a certain cultural understanding. Moreover, the act of prediction is part of a cultural worldview that constricts the future to being only one future, by assuming that it is already 'out there' in some sense, waiting to be discovered.[12]

Some non-Western scholars have queried this 'extrapolation-of-the-present' scenario, particularly since the extrapolation is generally done by those whose present is the Western, capitalist world. Such privilege has political repercussions:

> 'Imagining a future', taken literally, does not mean to think about the future in some undefined sense – it means to create an image of what the future will look like. And how will we do this? ... [A] notion of a future is a notion that creates meaning. A picture of the future is a picture with meaning.[13]

The stories told here will reveal individuals who did not expect the future to be a more dynamic continuation of the present, but rather feared decay, decline, and catastrophe. They problematise the restricting 'extrapolation' scenario, and furnish a reminder of how very recent a phenomenon it is.

This book builds on *Visions of the Future*, in which I analysed the rise of the rational almanac, that compendium of statistics and data of which *Whitaker's* became the archetypal example. I argued there that the reasons for the disappearance of the old astrological almanacs which had preceded *Whitaker's* could be traced to middle-class disapproval of 'superstitious' prediction, and that this was in part based on a different understanding of time. The marginalisation of superstition had previously been discussed largely in terms of the rise of scientific knowledge, the spread of education, and increasing technological mastery of the environment, all interpretations that were fundamentally premised on the assumption that the superstitions were wrong, errors to which no educated person could subscribe. In particular, it has been suggested that the growth of towns and cities contributed to the disappearance of old beliefs.[14] Keith Thomas's ground-breaking study of religion and magic in the early modern period places a strong emphasis on the importance of urbanisation as an enlightening factor, arguing that among the reasons for the disappearance of magic from a central and intellec-

tually important position were factors such as literacy and access to the printed word, which promoted the spread of rational ideas.[15]

Rather than beginning from the premise that truth will inevitably triumph over error, then, this book examines the disapproval of popular belief from the point of view of how such disapproval privileged its advocates, with the expectation that this will expose conflict over differing truth systems.

Progress

Comparison with other temporal practices has in the past played an important role in defining one's own culture. For example, the level of accuracy which was achieved by British astronomers in the nineteenth century contributed to the formation of a national identity that was often expressed in disapproval of 'primitive' or uneducated understandings of time. Much early anthropological literature consisted of the observations made by Western ethnographers about the time concepts of other peoples precisely because time-consciousness was considered such an important part of 'civilised' culture. Johannes Fabian's important book, *Time and the Other*, has discussed how the discipline of anthropology itself was premised on the supposition that the observer and the observed understood time in different ways.[16] Recent scholarship has investigated examples of the political use of temporal 'knowledge', from the Spanish conquest of the Aztec empire to the economic disadvantage of Puerto Ricans in New York.[17] If we accept a politics of time, it becomes apparent that cultural constructions of temporality have often provided elites with a vocabulary for 'substantiating the legitimacy of their rule'.[18] In particular, Carol J. Greenhouse finds a common pattern amongst those claiming dominance, in which they represent themselves as embodying progress. The notion of progress is indeed closely allied to hegemony, since it is defined by those in power: the change they bring is, of course, portrayed as a change for the better.

The belief that the passage of time brings improvement can be found throughout history, but there have been particular periods in which this belief has seemed to receive more attention.[19] It is an idea associated above all with nineteenth-century Britain. The *Oxford English Dictionary* lists 1852 as the first appearance of a characteristically Victorian meaning of the 'future': 'a condition in time to

come different (especially in a favourable sense) from the present'.[20] J. B. Bury's influential study of 1920 suggested three phases in the development of the idea of progress: the first period up to the French Revolution, when 'it had been treated rather casually'; the second, following the establishment of scientific positivism, when it was a familiar idea in Europe, but 'not yet universally accepted'; and the third, post-Darwin, which 'established the reign of the idea of Progress' (enthroned with a capital P).[21] In fact, the whole 'Enlightenment project' was based on the fundamental belief that history would deliver increasing understanding and control of the natural world. As one recent writer has put it: 'If there is a core promise the modern world had to keep, it was that reason leads to progress. Reason applied to organising life gives history meaning by making it a story of the overcoming of tyranny and want.'[22]

Generally, discussion of the question of progress has hinged on the idea's accuracy or otherwise. Is humanity likely to experience 'a gradual ... increase of goodness, or happiness, or enlightenment'?[23] Or are we rather unleashing forces which we cannot control, and which are likely to lead to decline, social unrest, and even global catastrophe? In the wake of the twentieth century, older pronouncements of progress may seem to have been naively optimistic. Indeed, some scholars have identified the disappearance of a belief in progress as a hallmark of 'post' modernity.[24]

Rather than simply dismissing earlier belief in social progress as mistaken, however, it might be useful to think about why it was once so widely accepted and still remains part of the implicit underpinning of much of contemporary life.[25] A great deal has been written about its development in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; but in an important and innovative analysis, *The Idea of Progress in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, David Spadafora writes that this body of scholarship is 'a badly flawed torso'. He believes that existing studies concentrate too much on elite ideas, with little social context, and he identifies a tendency 'merely to relate who believed in progress during a given period and to record the words into which those individuals put their belief'.[26] It is common, for example, to find reference to Auguste Comte, who, in the mid-nineteenth century, suggested that it was the rise of scientific procedure in his 'positive philosophy', that is, in sociology, which had allowed progress as the true grand design of history to be identified.[27] In contrast to this concentration on philosophical and elite historiography, Spadafora

pays great attention to social context, and in order to do so coins a useful distinction between the *idea* of progress and various *doctrines* of progress, the former term conveying a belief in improvement or change in a desirable direction, while the latter signifies the expression given to that belief in a particular social group, such as writers on education, or Christian eschatologists.

This study addresses the shortcomings of the 'flawed torso' in a way that is different from but complementary to Spadafora's. It suggests that the idea of progress was constructed in part by a dialectic between elite philosophy, such as that of Comte, and plebeian custom. It sets out to recapture some popular attitudes to time – beliefs of those who were excluded from wealth, power, and status – and it argues that a strong component of such beliefs was the fear that life might become even more difficult. This pessimism was markedly different from an elite desire to portray society as full of promise for individuals who were morally deserving and worked hard. Prosecutions for fortune-telling, usually presented in historical accounts as a simple matter of the social control of vagrancy, were actually part of a wider story of temporal conflict, with middle-class reformers keen to control representations of the future by discouraging the fatalism implicit in popular prediction.

Spadafora writes that Victorian optimism was 'a complicated and fragile mood', which seems to have been 'neither singly focused nor uniformly expressed'; yet, he says, there has been no attempt to determine 'whether at any time there were identifiable social groups or intellectual contexts in which the belief in progress customarily appeared'.[28] Later chapters will suggest that one specific context in which such a belief could be found was that of the social reform movements which sprang up to tackle public and private disorder in the new urbanised centres of industrial Britain.

In the late 1970s and the 1980s several historical studies appeared in what might be labelled 'the reform of popular culture' school. These argued that in the late seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries the ruling classes, fearful of the potentially disruptive forces at work amongst the 'people' at large, increasingly demarcated the bounds of their own good taste and gentility, criticising practices and attitudes which they felt were unacceptable. Perhaps the most influential historian to have advanced this thesis is Peter Burke, whose 1978 book, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe,* was one of the first to propose the model;[29] but there soon followed several other studies which extended the same argument to the nineteenth

century, examining the 'reform' of popular recreations, customs, and sports. These demonstrated that a multitude of customary practices (bear-baiting, street football, fairs) became subject to public criticism and attempts by municipal authorities and government to ban them.

This model of reform can be extended to the question of time. Time became a focus of social tension, with the newly emerging middle classes subscribing to beliefs in punctuality, orderliness, and diligence which they often found lacking in the lower orders. As a result, the language of social reform was frequently couched in temporal terms, criticising laziness and advocating the profitable ordering of the day. Clocks and watches, 'the glamour technology of the eighteenth century', were eulogised as expressions of order and dependability.[30] God himself was pictured as the cosmic watchmaker, and the universe as his creation was said to follow immutable, rational laws, like clockwork.[31]

Very often the history of time is relayed as a narrative about technological development. However, time is not only about mechanical precision or scientific realities. Each culture takes the physical phenomena – the passage of the sun, the sequence of the seasons – and tabulates and names them for a variety of different purposes. The nature of time is not simply 'there', waiting to be discovered. It is a component of cultural communication, part of the discourse through which we structure our experiences in order to convey them to each other and to ourselves. Each society formulates its own understandings of different kinds of temporality, and, in fact, contains varieties of temporal understanding that differ from the dominant interpretations, sometimes consciously articulated as forms of resistance, sometimes subverted and shameful.

In nineteenth-century Britain there were popular beliefs about time that ran counter to the ideal of clockwork regularity. One such belief was recorded by the writer Mortimer Collins in 1869. He was experiencing a high attrition rate amongst the bees he kept in his garden, and when he mentioned this to a local labourer, the man asked if there had been a death in the family: 'bees would infallibly die after the death of anyone who cared about them, unless they were told of the event'. This prompted thoughts from a neighbour in whose house a kitchen clock had refused to go since a recent death; and yet another declared that 'on the death of a relation of hers a clock which had been stopped for thirty years revived and struck the whole twelve hours'. Collins was less bewildered about the beliefs regarding bees – somehow any mysteries about their behaviour

seemed natural and 'immemorial'. However, strange beliefs about the relationship of deaths to clocks appeared to him to be puzzling 'in a parish where the three R's are sedulously taught'. Why should clocks stop – or stopped clocks go on again – when people die?[32] The possibility of technological efficiency being influenced in some non-material way by human developments seemed thoroughly incongruous, and although Collins writes with interest about these beliefs, he labels them unambiguously 'superstition'.

Although these stories of Berkshire villagers were couched in terms of clocks, it is clear that it was not mechanical failure that was at issue, but rather something much more intangible, and that time itself seemed to respond to human death. This is not simply some antiquarian curiosity. As Collins pointed out, the existence of such a belief went to the heart of the educational programmes inspired by nineteenth-century rationality; and it was not only rationality that was challenged.

Wherever those who hold one belief dismiss another as superstition, it is certain that the interconnectedness between knowledge and power may be seen. Only a few years after Collins's encounter with these beliefs, the world drew close to a 'unification of time' when an international conference voted to recognise the meridian passing through Greenwich as the prime meridian. Time, surely, had become the most all-pervasive manifestation of modernity, and efficiency in measuring it marked Britain out as the most modern of nations. British authorities were, of course, happy to accept the symbolism of Greenwich as prime meridian. The word 'temporal', after all, has associations not only of time but also of secular power of the most material kind, as distinct from the spiritual realm of the church. Possessing the standard by which all watches and clocks throughout the Christian world were to be measured contributed to the establishment of empire in a myriad of ways. However, just as a counter-imperial discourse was always present alongside the imperial, even at the very zenith of British power, so a counter-temporal discourse can be detected alongside the apparent homogeneity of Greenwich Mean Time.

If time could be experienced in different ways in different places, the authority of British temporal measurement might seem all too local. When time could stand still for a Berkshire clock, what might it do in the most distant regions of empire, where 'natives' might as yet be unaware of its existence? Whether in a colonial context or in reference to the working classes within Britain, 'alternative' tempo-

ralities were indeed identified as dangerous, and attempts were made to contain or disempower them. Temporal heterogeneity was attacked both within Britain and in the colonies as part of the attempt to establish central control and efficient communication.

A history of heterodox time can, therefore, be seen as part of a post-colonial analysis of the nineteenth century. Writers using post-colonial insights have done a great deal to highlight temporal politics. For example, Heather Goodall writes that the people at Ernabella, South Australia, thought that the British nuclear bomb tests of the 1950s caused the measles epidemic of 1948 which killed at least a quarter of their people within two weeks. Goodall does not dismiss this explanation as simply 'wrong', but explores the connections and meaning for the Anangu people. 'In doing so she pits western understandings of chronology and causation against Anangu understandings of colonialism, disease, and death.'[33] In discussing rationality in the discourse of history, Dipesh Chakrabarty has stressed that 'minority' history is not just a matter of being included, but of methodological and epistemological questioning of what the very business of writing history is all about.[34]

It would generally be true to say that those writing with post-colonial methodologies have posited a dominant nineteenth-century idea of progress which has faced challenge since the post-colonial turn. Anne McLintock, for example, in an influential study of colonial race, gender, and sexuality, argues that 'the almost ritualistic ubiquity of "post" words in current culture ... signals ... a widespread, epochal crisis in the idea of linear, historical progress'.[35] Yet resistance to progress has not been only in the 'post' era; alternative temporalities were present throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[36]

As in *Visions of the Future*, which depended chiefly on nineteenth-century almanacs, the major sources used here are literary, but in this case they are fortune-telling and dream books, as well as works of fiction. Each of the chapters describes a conflict at the meeting point of world-views, and each centres on the question of temporality. In total they show advances being made by the idea of progress, and help to provide detail in what has been a broad-brush account of historical optimism.

The first chapter deals with the familiar story of the rise of centralised time. The increasing importance of clock time, the co-ordination of railway company schedules, the establishment of the prime meridian: all these are well-known signposts in what appears

to be the inexorable advance of temporal efficiency. This chapter highlights, however, the extent to which this 'advance' was dependent upon a particular understanding of the future. Indeed, modernity has been characterised as the need to conceptualise and generalise the future.[37] The blank calendars of the late nineteenth century gave very material form to the idea of progress by replacing the crowded historical chronologies of the traditional almanac with spaces on which to record the precise schedules created by the railroad and steamship companies, as well as the many appointments that a busy, modern life would entail. At the same time, the new calendars also symbolised a *tabula rasa* of opportunity, on which individual members of society could write their futures, increasing the emphasis on individual responsibility.

The second chapter examines one of the most visible of the groups which chose to target the fundamental pessimism of popular prediction. The case which the Society for the Suppression of Vice brought against the astrologer Joseph Powell demonstrated fear of the disruptive potential of prediction, as well as disapproval of an array of 'unrespectable' behaviours associated with attempting to influence the future, such as gambling on the lottery. In unravelling the implications of the charges brought against Powell, this chapter shows how respectable fears of 'superstition' were associated with disapproval of a particular understanding of forward planning.

The third chapter looks at the popular chapbook genre of dream books, and argues that this widespread tool for prediction was appropriated at the end of the century by psychoanalysis, when Freud's own 'dream book' revolutionised attitudes to dreams. Like gambling, the interpretation of dreams was a feature of popular culture which claimed to give access to a better future. In the case of dream books this was through the increased knowledge and understanding which they promised their readers. If you knew in advance what your future husband would look like, for example, it would be easy to resist the advances of inappropriate suitors and to wait patiently for destiny to unfold. In finding success for his new, rational lexicography of dreaming, Freud ensured that the power of dreams became focussed on understanding the past, increasing, again, the individual's responsibility to create the future.

The fourth chapter explores the theme of the future's links with national identity. It takes a specific example of the cross-cultural political significance of temporality, examining the use of the word 'Dreamtime' as applied by British anthropologists to the beliefs of

indigenous peoples in Australia. The introduction of the word 'Dreamtime' in the 1890s to describe Aboriginal beliefs should be considered in the light of the long tradition of unrespectability and unrest associated with visionary dreaming in English culture, and in the light of the escalating discussion of the true nature of dreaming. The use of this particular translation reinforced a representation of indigenous culture's position as remote from the enlightened understanding of science and progress. It signalled both a marginality and a threat of disturbance. Aboriginal temporal 'otherness' was presented as a timelessness, a total unawareness of time, which was not only unable to measure time accurately, but was also seemingly confused about the distinctions between the past and the present. Such apparent errors, so the dominant discourse would have it, marked Aboriginal society out as particularly in need of temporal reform. Teaching the virtues of punctuality, regularity, and dependability became the project of missionary and administrator alike. This experience was not confined to Australia. Wherever European explorers and colonists travelled, they took the same temporal certainties about punctuality and progress. Even today, temporal certainties lead scholars to write about other cultures' lack of concern with exactness in time: Navajo, Arabs, Latin Americans.[38] Embedded in this construction of 'lack' lie the same assumptions about other cultures' lack of forward planning. The intellectual high ground of this position has important economic implications, particularly at a time when Western science and medicine negotiate their relationship with non-European modes of thought in a global economy that increasingly requires cross-cultural contact.[39]

As the calendar approached the turn of the twentieth century, the essentially British nature of faith in the future was conveyed in the popular press. *Punch* began to use the image of the female body as an icon of hope that was closely associated with the imperial destiny. Chapter 5 examines how, emerging from earlier uses of the figures of Britannia and Marianne, *Punch*'s young women appeared in its annual calendar in full-page illustrations welcoming the new year. These images not only conveyed a sense of progress, they also underscored that broadcasting a message of confidence in the future was part of the national destiny. It was part of the national character. This chapter also examines how 'faith in the future' marks Joseph Conrad's Lord Jim out as 'one of us'. It is Jim's 'judicious foresight' and forward planning that are the most important reasons to overlook his failures and accept him as a hero.

It will be clear from the above summary that the chief sources for this study are records of educated commentary on popular culture, often disapproving commentary. In most cases we cannot move beyond these to approach some unmediated primary record of plebeian belief. The clearest example of how dangerous this exercise might be, how far it might lead us from the goal of recreating *mentalités* with anything approaching accuracy, has been revealed by Robert Poole in his excellent unravelling of accounts of the famous calendar riots of 1752. These riots, so the usual story goes, were a result of the uneducated masses believing that the change from Julian to Gregorian calendar, in which the year jumped from 2 September to 14 September, actually deprived them of eleven days of the year. 'Give us our eleven days!' has been an illustration of just how stupid the mob could be, in accounts ranging from Hogarth in the eighteenth century to recent twentieth-century books on the calendar. Poole demonstrates convincingly that these riots probably never took place, and that references to them reveal rather a 'characterization of the common sort as "the mob", with an intellectually debased collective identity ... The construction of the calendar rioters, then, was part of a wider process of cultural stereotyping by which the superstitious and ignorant mob had imputed to it qualities the reverse of those claimed by the enlightened.'[40] The image of the confused peasant is, indeed, 'one of the most misleading and the most eloquent of historical myths',[41] in the sense in which myth conveys both something which is fictitious, but also something which embodies a deep, archetypal aspect of culture. Whether or not Mortimer Collins's neighbouring villagers really believed that deaths could stop clocks is perhaps not the central concern of this present study. What we can say with some certainty is that many middle-class commentators believed that large numbers of the working classes held irrational and odd views on the subject of time. In setting out to change these views, social reformers helped to create a national identity that was fundamentally premised on a sense of temporal superiority.

The role of time measurement in the creation of modern industrial society has been examined from several different perspectives: triumphalist accounts celebrating technological efficiency, anthropological studies making cross-cultural observations, and social histories about labour campaigns to limit the working day. Perhaps the most influential of all analyses has been Edward Thompson's article 'Time, Work-Discipline and Industrial

Capitalism', which argued that in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the controls imposed by clock schedules were internalised by workers, who came to look on the possession of a watch as a mark of status.[42] Here I am following where Thompson led, by arguing that another type of internalisation took place in the nineteenth century, not of temporal accuracy but of temporal uniformity: the expectation that what was 'right' at the metropolitan centre was right for all localities and even across the colonies. Those who administered the British Empire were perfectly conversant with longitudinal variations in the measurement of the day, but there were criteria by which temporal comparisons could be made other than simply the hour on the clock. One of these criteria was a doctrine of rational progress dependent on present-centredness. Certainly the future was to be planned, and a whole array of official activities was devoted to that enterprise (the subject of another book than this). However, the future was not the domain of supersitious prediction, with all its potential to distract workers from present efforts.

The widely held assumption that magic and superstition were replaced by the progress of enlightenment fails to appreciate the extent to which the secularisation of prediction was also a social history of the changing management of time. This history belongs to the story of the rise of individualism, one of the dominant motifs of the society we live in today. We are still taught in our schools that hard work will lead to rewards. Psychological testing 'proves' that children who are able to cope with deferred gratification turn into more competent, stronger individuals.[43] The Protestant ethic is alive and well. The structural limitations on what individual effort can achieve have been much obscured, to the benefit of capitalist production. An older belief in fate may point us not merely to the survival of superstition but also to a very salutary grasp of the limits of individualism and a truer assessment of the structures at work in creating all our futures.