DAVID GANGE, STATEMENT OF INTEREST, UBIAS INTERCONTINENTAL ACADEMY: TIME

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I am a historian with particular interest in how past societies have used history. I have a strong track record in dealing with conceptions of time, but my future work on the subject demands a wider disciplinary sweep than I have developed to date. UBIAS Intercontinental Academy: Time offers an unrivalled opportunity for me to engage with scholars from an exceptionally wide range of backgrounds on a topic that is central to both my past and future scholarship.

My proposed contribution to UBIAS Intercontinental Academy: Time is entitled 'Life's Cycle and Time's Arrow: Placing Death in Time in the 1890s'. This is the subject of my next monograph: *Books of the Dead: Narrating Death, 1890-1914*. The study begins from the observation that large numbers of extra-European ideas about death began to circulate widely through European cultures in the 1890s. These included the Epic of Gilgamesh and the Egyptian Book of the Dead, but also ideas from the Avesta and Buddhist traditions; this occurs at the same time as the popularisation of new scientific and theoretical ideas from cell theory to psychoanalysis.

These efforts to reconceptualise death all involved new visions of the place of the self in time. Many were ventriloquised into extra-European forms (Nietzsche's Zarathustra is one among many examples): this was a recognition of the inadequacy of European traditions concerning time. Some thinkers pursued conceptions of infinite, iterative time. Others sought to introduce cyclical elements into more linear (often social evolutionist) frameworks. Some maintained inflections of eschatology, seeking new ways of placing earthly life between conjectures on timeless worlds before and after. Ideas associated with existential time, Nietzschean time and 'the end of time' jostled together in unprecedentedly vibrant competition.

This quest for new approaches often involved a realisation that existing metaphors for the nature of time - cycles or straight lines - were inadequate for mapping the timescapes in which the brief span of human life took place. In investigating the intense debates that took place when diverse thinkers sought to balance unprecedented innovation in notions of time with the continued appeal of tradition, my study treats German and British cultures; it focuses, in particular on the circulation of ideas between the two.

This topic speaks to broad questions concerning existential time, in particular the relationships between death, the self and time. Different cultures have very different ways of conceptualising the relationship between the human life cycle and more expansive patterns of time: of placing the self in time. In these, death usually performs a dramatic function. It can denote the transition from finite time into the infinite; it might mean the 'resetting' of human time and the beginning of a new cycle; or it can imply closure: a thread of personal time severed and replaced with nothingness. Almost all societies employ multiple modes for relating death and time, intertwining figurative and literal language and drawing on

religious, scientific and literary modes of thought. They develop cartographies of time that are far too complex for terms such as 'linear' or 'cyclical' to capture.

One illustration of this is found in British obituary writing in the late nineteenth century. This was the first generation of obituarists who attempted to commemorate non-Christian individuals with non-Christian obituaries. British Buddhists, Muslims, Jews and atheists were no longer (as they had been earlier) merely accorded the traditional consolations of Anglicanism.

One technique obituarists produced for avoiding Christian conventions was to draw on cyclical time and the transmutation of human life into other forms. Nietzsche's Eternal Recurrence was sometimes (eccentrically) equated with Buddhist metempsychosis, and these were intertwined with Darwinian thought. The traditional language of the obituarist had been heavily deterministic: the moment of death was dictated by providence. Life was an allotted timespan that could not be exceeded. However, newer modes also featured powerful forms of determinism. These often transferred the language of providence to the realm of biology. The inevitable dissolution of the human body was written into its cellular structure at birth: the particular moment of natural death or death from disease was predestined by science. A trope that became particularly popular in the 1890s featured the transfer of the life force of human cells into other life forms: usually the yew trees of the churchyard. The limited regenerative capacity of the human cell is overcome, its life extended to infinity in the cells of trees and subsequent organisms. In one text on the death of Nietzsche, part of the philosopher is reborn as a poisonous red berry every spring. This is in itself a reflection of something new: life and death are not being conceptualised on the level of the organism but (at a point where cell theory is still quite new) on the level of its constituent parts. These new modes do not amount to the replacement of one mode of relating death, the self and time with another. Instead the possibilities of thought were multiplying.

My previous work on time has analysed the expansion of historical time through the discovery of pre-classical societies. For instance, I published a monograph on nineteenth-century conceptions of ancient Egypt with Oxford University Press in June 2013. The reviewer for the *Times Literary Supplement* called this 'the definitive history of the study of ancient Egypt in nineteenth-century Britain', describing it as a 'masterly synthesis' which 'brings...alive' the ways in which Egyptology was implicated ' in debates about the nature of time, history, religious beliefs and human origins'. I have included a chapter on time in my forthcoming Beginner's Guide to nineteenth-century Britain and teach theories of time to both undergraduates and postgraduates in my modules on historical theory and historical methodology.

This prior work has combined perspectives from history, literary studies, philosophy of history, theology, archaeology and Egyptology. Although this disciplinary range sufficed for

my work to date, it is not comprehensive enough for my future plans. My next projects require substantive input from philosophy, psychology and the history and philosophy of science (among others). This is why UBIAS Intercontinental Academy: Time would be an indispensable opportunity. The March 2015 meeting promises to be a peerless gathering of diverse expertise on the theme of time. Engaging in debate with so rich a field of scholars from so wide a range of disciplines promises a great deal in terms of my own personal development.

I also relish the possibility of contributing my own particular perspective to the range of ideas on offer. Because of the interdisciplinary work I have conducted to date, this perspective is more or less unique. I am well versed in several treatments of patterns of time in the philosophy of history (including major German texts from Koselleck onwards, and poststructuralist works in the French, American and British traditions). My work deals with religion and the concepts of time employed in both the theology and popular belief of the past. Most of my publishing has been interdisciplinary in nature: I have published on modern epic poetry in a journal of literary scholarship, and on the challenges currently facing the discipline of Egyptology in an Egyptological journal. My monograph was published in the series 'Classical Presences' edited by scholars of the Graeco-Roman classics. I spent three years (2007-2010) working in a Cambridge University Leverhulme funded interdisciplinary research group entitled 'Abandoning the Past: Past vs Present in an Age of Progress' which brought together literary scholars, historians, classicists and historians of science. All this means that I am used to discussing conceptions of time with those outside my discipline, and am aware of where my own treatment of the concept sits in relation to other fields. This past record shows how avidly I pursue the kind of collaborative interdisciplinarity of which UBIAS Intercontinental Academy is an exceptional example.

I am 32 years old and received my PhD from the University of Cambridge in 2007. Other key career details include the publication of my first monograph with Oxford University Press in 2013 and an edited collection with Cambridge University Press in the same year. Also in 2013-14 I have been promoted to Senior Lecturer, won the University of Birmingham's Aston Webb Award for Outstanding Early Career Academic, written for the *Times Literary Supplement* and appeared on BBC2 in the two-part documentary 'Bible Hunters'. I have acted as an advisor on research applications for bodies including the European Research Council. My ability to communicate clearly and engagingly are demonstrated in the award of both my department and my college's teaching excellence prizes in 2013.

Thankyou for your consideration, yours,

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