

# Time's Arrow: The Theory of the Earth in Eighteenth-Century Britain

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Over the course of the eighteenth century, especially in Britain and in France, the metaphor of time's arrow gradually replaced the metaphor of time's cycle as a means of understanding the unfolding of human history. One might say that this movement is central to understanding everything from *A Harlot's Progress* to *Tom Jones* to Haydn's oratorios. This paper traces the emergence of the metaphor of time's arrow in the important scientific subgenre known as the "theory of the earth," as expressed in works by Thomas Burnet, William Whiston, John Woodward, and Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon.