

Title – *Einstein's Dreams*: A Thought Experiment on Humanity's Perceived Control of Time

Program of Study – Science Fiction

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Abstract: Science fiction as a genre has received a great deal of critical literary attention since the 1960's and 70's; however, more recent authors and novels that push the boundaries of the science fiction genre are, at times, overlooked. Alan Lightman, acclaimed physicist and author of *Einstein's Dreams*, is such an author. In his novel, Lightman, through the narrative of Einstein's imagined dreams from April to June of 1905, re-creates our world with new sensations of time, establishing logical hypothetical worlds where time has been altered in different ways. This paper and its accompanying research offers a nuanced exploration of Lightman's novel, critically analyzing how Alan Lightman uses the science fiction theme of time to explore how time impacts humanity's sense of control. This impact manifests itself in the concepts of memory, determinacy, and age, and has poignantly relevant implications on how humans are controlled by their desperate need for empowerment and autonomy over their own existence. This research concludes that Lightman's thought experiment shows how our society enforces its control over time specifically through their use of memory to establish an identity, how they impose a system of order or chaos on the world, and how humans live under the crippling anxiety of impending mortality. While very specific to Lightman's one novel, my research will hopefully create a space for further exploration of his other works; furthermore, it will give additional fodder to the exploration of thought experiments in science fiction. The research will hopefully broaden the

horizons of the science fiction genre and allow for more liminal works to be included in the genre.