

TIME TRAVEL ORIENTATION



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Welcome to the twenty-first century, chrononaut! The stories collected herein were all originally published within the last decade (2005–2014 CE) and reflect what early-twenty-first-century short-form fictioneers imagine (or perhaps know/knew/will know) concerning time travel.

Despite my claim on the back cover, I'm not really sure humankind has always been fascinated with the idea of time travel. The desire to go backward to an earlier era or forward to a future date—or even travel to an alternate timeline—probably requires that one (at least initially) consider time as more or less linear.

Although the subject is currently debated among Egyptologists, there is a school of thought positing that ancient Egyptians considered time as measurable for mundane reasons, but, cosmically, as cyclical, unquantifiable, and not tied to space at all. Ancient Greek philosophers had varying views on time: Antiphon the Sophist wrote, in the fifth century BCE: “Time is not a reality (*hypostasis*), but a concept (*noêma*) or a measure (*metron*).” Parmenides of Elea, who lived around the same time, considered existence as timeless; motion and change were illusions—what our senses told us were false.

The Buddha (c. 563 BCE or c. 480 BCE–c. 483 BCE or c. 400 BCE) said, “Life is ever changing, moment to moment. The only constant is change.” Thus, since reality is fluid, possibility is unpredictable, and the past nonexistent—“now” is all there is.

Even in historical Western science and philosophy there are different points of view—the “realist” perspective or “Newtonian time,” and the “relational theory” to which Gottfried Leibniz (1646–1716) and Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) adhered:

[Sir Isaac] Newton . . . did not regard space and time as genuine substances . . . but rather as real entities with their own manner of

existence . . . To paraphrase: Absolute, true, and mathematical time, from its own nature, passes equably without relation to anything external, and thus without reference to any change or way of measuring of time (e.g., the hour, day, month, or year). [Rynasiewicz, Robert: Johns Hopkins University (12 August 2004). “Newton’s Views on Space, Time, and Motion,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Stanford University.]

Leibniz postulated: “. . . space and time are internal or intrinsic features of the complete concepts of things, not extrinsic . . . Leibniz’s view has two major implications. First, there is no absolute location in either space or time; location is always the situation of an object or event relative to other objects and events. Second, space and time are not in themselves real (that is, not substances). Space and time are, rather, ideal. Space and time are just metaphysically illegitimate ways of perceiving certain virtual relations between substances. They are phenomena or, strictly speaking, illusions (although they are illusions that are well-founded upon the internal properties of substances) . . . [Burnham, Douglas: Staffordshire University (2006). “Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716) Metaphysics–7. Space, Time, and Indiscernibles.” *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.]

Still—I suspect individual human imaginations have always considered going “back” to the past for one reason or another and yearned to take a peek at what “the future” holds.

[Editorial Note: All dates from this point on stated as CE.]

As a fictional theme, time travel is a concept that has existed in English-language literature at least since 1843 when Charles Dickens’s character, Scrooge, traveled back and forth in time (was it all a dream?) in *A Christmas Carol*. In one of Edgar Allan Poe’s early (and lesser) works of short fiction, “A Tale of the Ragged Mountains” (1844), a character named Bedloe can inexplicably recount being at a battle in India in 1780. Although not a dream, the time travel is ambiguously explained: perhaps “galvanic shock” or mesmerism or even reincarnation is the answer.

Edward Page Mitchell’s story, “The Clock That Went Backward”—more easily defined as a true time-travel tale—was published in 1881. But the concept gained a firm grip on popular imagination with H. G. Wells’s

novella *The Time Machine* in 1895. (It was inspired by his earlier—1888—short story, “The Chronic Argonauts.”)

Just a decade later, in 1905, Albert Einstein published his theory of special relativity . . . and time travel (of a sort) suddenly seemed, if not probable, at least possible. The “time-dilation” effect of special relativity (now proven) is most easily and commonly explained with a tiny fiction: There is a pair of twins. One stays on Earth, the other—traveling at close to the speed of light—takes a trip into outer space and back that lasts ten years as far as the Earth-bound twin is concerned. But for the space-voyaging twin, very little time has passed at all. The stay-at-home twin has aged a decade while the traveler leaped ten years into the future and does not age.

And, as we now know but don’t really notice, we are all traveling into the future at different infinitesimally small (but real) rates. The universe is structured so that we have to be traveling into the future all the time.

Visiting the past, or coming back from the future—well, that’s a different matter. But now, we can now at least consider the possibility, thanks to scientists who—starting in the mid 1980s—have theorized the possibility of “traversable wormholes” in general relativity. Since then, many highly theoretical ways to warp space and time have been proposed . . . and challenged . . . paradoxes noted . . . and countered.

Meanwhile, science has both inspired and been ignored by fiction writers and filmmakers who have never stopped imagining time travel. Nor, evidently, has it lost its allure for the public.

Long a plot point for myriad television episodes and a few series over the years, the concept of time travel was integral to the recent series *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles* (2008–2009) and *The Fringe* (2008–2013). *Doctor Who*’s time- and space-traveling “Time Lord” and his vehicle, the Tardis (1963–current), are cultural icons.

Time travel has also remained an entertaining, if not always in-depth, consideration in films. Among the recent: *The Butterfly Effect* (2004), *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (2004), *Meet the Robinsons* (animated, 2007), *The Time Traveler’s Wife* (2009), *Star Trek* (2009), *Frequently Asked Questions About Time Travel* (2009, UK-only), *Looper* (2012), *About Time* (2013), *Time Travel Lover* (short, 2014) and *X-Men: Days of Future Past* (2014).

Nor has the (probably) most popular (and possibly the best) time-travel movie been forgotten. The now-venerable film *Back to the Future*, released in 1985, will debut as a stage musical in London’s West End in 2015, the thirtieth anniversary of the film’s release.

Time travel has remained a theme, if not exactly a staple, of novels. Only two novels—Stephen King’s *11/22/63* (Scribner, 2011) and Audrey Niffenegger’s *The Time Traveler’s Wife* (actually published in 2003, but the 2009 movie has kept it on bestseller lists)—have reached huge reading audiences.

The outstanding *Blackout* and *All Clear* (one novel in two volumes; Spectra, 2010) by Connie Willis won the Nebula, Hugo, and Locus Awards. The duology—part of Willis’s fiction involving a mid-twenty-first century time traveler from Oxford, England—has reached a more than respectable readership, but not sold the hundreds of thousand copies King and Niffenegger have.

The same can be said for Charles Yu’s *How to Live Safely in a Science-Fictional Universe* (Pantheon, 2010).

The Shining Girls by Lauren Beukes (Umuzi, South Africa; HarperCollins, United Kingdom; Mulholland Books, US; 2013)—which received both high praise and some mixed reviews—has gained considerable readership, but has not yet made a major impact.

The late Kage Baker’s historical time-travel science fiction stories and novels of “The Company” (first novel: *In the Garden of Iden*, Harcourt, 1997) have continued into this decade, most notably with the novel *The Empress of Mars* (Tor, 2009), collections *Gods and Pawns* (Tor 2007), *The Best of Kage Baker* (Subterranean, 2012), and—with the assistance of her Baker’s sister, Kathleen Bartholomew—*In the Company of Thieves* (Tachyon, 2013). Novella *The Women of Nell Gwynne’s* (Subterranean, 2009) won the Nebula and Locus Awards, and was nominated for Hugo and World Fantasy Awards. Baker’s work has, so-far, achieved at least a cult-level popularity.

Other notable time-travel novels of the period include: *The Plot to Save Socrates* (Tor, 2007) and its sequel, *Unburning Alexandria* (JoSara MeDia, 2013), by Paul Levinson; *Man in the Empty Suit* by Sean Ferrell (Soho Press, 2013); *The Beautiful Land* by Alan Averill (Ace, 2013) and *Child of a Hidden Sea* by A. M. Dellamonica (Tor, 2014).

Time travel is also a popular theme in the romance genre, but the chronological is considerably outweighed by the carnal (or merely starry-eyed) in these plots, so I shan’t delve into them here.

Plotwise, the same is often true with recent young adult titles, but some emphasize adventure and/or intrigue more than romance. A few bestselling titles from the last few years in this latter category include *Revolution* by Jennifer Donnelly (Random House Delacorte Books for Young Readers,

2010), *The Here and Now* by Ann Brashares (Delacorte, 2014), *The Glass Sentence* by S.E. Grove (Viking Juvenile, 2014), and—for even younger readers (8-12 years)—the Newbery Award-winning *When you Reach Me* by Rebecca Stead (Yearling, 2009).

As for the short form—time travel fiction in the current era offers vast variety and a wealth of choices, as I hope this volume helps substantiate. Solid theoretical physics underlies some stories, others eschew the scientific for either the fantastic or the ambiguous-or-only assumed science. Nor is the theme always taken completely seriously. Motivation for chronological wanderings or observations are just as diverse. Thus, in these eighteen stories, you will find the need to acknowledge history combining with political complexity and mixing with theoretical physics . . . an ancestor's heroics inspiring one chrononaut while recording history itself fascinating another . . . only the details of properly dressing time travelers is considered in one story . . . vacations are taken to observe dinosaurs and repair relationships . . . experimental trips taken . . . viewing the past is a struggle to save the world . . . time travel is controlled by bureaucracy . . . love makes a man go back and try to alter the history . . . history is merely recorded . . . a scientific breakthrough is used to learn of a personal past and glimpse one's own future . . . art is saved from destruction . . . the past is sometimes changed and the future altered, or not . . . time travel is one of the many layers of rip-snorting, action-packed, retro-Mars adventure . . . and much, much more.

So enjoy your many journeys, but don't lose track of when you are.

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