

Temporal Disorder

U.S. American Time-Travel Narratives

from Edward Bellamy to Stephen King

Room and time: Seminar Room (Attems-gasse 25, Top Floor), Friday, 4:00-5:30 p.m.

First session: October 16, 2015

Course number: 512.255

Lecturer: Univ.-Prof. Dr. Stefan Brandt · **Office hours:** Thursdays, 4-6 p.m. (Room DG-0036) · **Email:** stefan.brandt@uni-graz.at

Description: Going back in time and undoing events from the past belong to the greatest fantasies of humankind. U.S. American literature, in particular, has been fascinated with the conundrums of time traveling. Washington Irving's short story "Rip Van Winkle" (1819) and Edward Bellamy's novel *Looking Backward* (1888) are examples of a literary genre that has attempted to combine historical fiction with utopia or sometimes dystopia. Since Albert Einstein's discovery that time is a relative quantity that may be 'bent' and 'shortened,' the amount of time-travel narratives has multiplied. Postmodern American literature, cinema, and television are full of colorful texts that explore the possibilities and potentials of traveling in time. Examples include the popular ABC TV series *Time Tunnel* (1966/67), the Zemeckis trilogy *Back to the Future* (1985/89/90), and Audrey Niffenegger's bestselling book *The Time Traveler's Wife* (2003). A most recent version of the genre, that combines historiography, romance, and science fiction, is Stephen King's unusual novel about the Kennedy assassination, *11/22/63* (2011). As exemplified by these texts, time-travel fiction is "the most discursive of popular genres" (Wittenberg, *Time Travel* 206), since it capitalizes upon the analogy between time traveling and book reading. Through the genre, key questions concerning storytelling, temporality, history, and subjectivity can be negotiated.

Teaching and Learning Method: This is an interactive course. Participation in group discussions as well as contributions to the discussion forum on the Moodle course site will be part of the final grade. Each meeting will be held by 'experts' who organize the session by means of questions, games, illustrations, video clips, and group work. The most relevant facts will be conveyed in a short information block (or, alternatively, a fact file on a handout). Experts upload their questions 6 days in advance!

Materials: Participants are asked to purchase Stephen King's novel *11/22/63* (2011) as a hardcopy (7,95 EUR on Amazon) or as an e-book. All other relevant texts will be made available on **Moodle**.

Aims: The course aims at discussing the main characteristics as well as the aesthetics and cultural function of U.S. American time-travel narratives.

Assessment: **A.) regular attendance** (no more than 2 absences!) and **active in-class participation** as well as **9 substantial entries** in the **discussion forum (1/3)**; **B.) presentation** as part of an **expert session** plus **3-page handout** and **online questions (1/3)**; **C.) research proposal** of 2 pages and **final paper** of 10-12 pages (1/3). You need to pass each section to pass the whole course.

Deadline for Final Papers: Friday, January 29, 2016 in class. There is no (!) extension of this deadline.

Syllabus

16 October "If I could turn back the clock..." – The 'Time-Travel' Discourse in American Literature and Culture

Basic texts:

David Wittenberg, "Time Travel and the Mechanics of Narrative" (2013), pp. 1-32. [Moodle]

Stan Love, "Time Travel in Theory and Practice" (2013). [Moodle]

23 October Mazes and Traps – Early Time-Travel Fiction

Main text (required):

Edward Page Mitchell, "The Clock That Went Backward" (1881). [Moodle]

Keywords: Clock Image; Cultural Heritage; Dutch Clock: Time 'Machine'; Hegel; Temporal Paradox.

30 October "The Future Seems so Bright..." – Idealist Visions of a Socialist America

Main text (required):

Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward, 2000-1887* (1888); chapters I-III, X, XX, XXVIII & postscript. [Moodle]


Additional text (optional):

E. Bellamy, "How I Came to Write *Looking Backward*" (1889) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/4239113.pdf>

Keywords: Atavism; Progressivism; Sleep/Dream Metaphor; Socialism; Time Travel as Didacticism; Utopia.

06 November No class!

Please join our **International Conference "Soundscapes and Sonic Cultures in America"** / **Austrian Association of American Studies (AAAS)**.

- 13 November** **The ‘Butterfly Effect’ – The Imaginative Power of Alternate Histories**
 Main text (required):
 Ray Bradbury: “A Sound of Thunder” (1952). [Moodle]
 Additional text:
 Ursula K. Le Guin, “Another Story” (1994). [Moodle]
 Keywords: Alternate Histories; *The Butterfly Effect* (film); Ripple Effect.
- 20 November** **Ontological Paradoxes – Causal Loops and the Boundaries of Identity**
 Main text (required):
 Robert A. Heinlein, “All You Zombies” (1959).
 Keywords: Bootstrap Paradox; Intersexuality; *Predestination* (movie).
- 27 November** **Tunnels in Time – Television and Technological Progress**
 Main example (watching required):
Time Tunnel (ABC TV series), episode “Rendezvous with Yesterday” (1966).
 Additional example (optional):
The X-Files, episode “Triangle” (6th season, 3rd episode) (1998).
 Keywords: *Quantum Leap* (NBC, 1989-93); *Star Trek* television franchise (CBS, 1966-2005); Technological Progress; Television; *The Twilight Zone* (TV, 1959-64).
- 04 December** **War, Trauma, and Time Traveling**
 Main text (required):
 Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five, or The Children’s Crusade* (1969), chapters 2, 5, 10. [Moodle]
 Keywords: Existentialism; Extraterrestrial; Fatalism; 4th Dimension; Postmodernism; Time Loop; Trauma; WW II.
- 11 December** **Society and Madness – Feminist Time-Travel Fiction**
 Main text (required):
 Marge Piercy, *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976), chapters 1, 2, 15, 19, 20. [Moodle]
 Keywords: Ethnicity; Feminism; Hybrid Identity; Liminality; Madness; Psychiatry; Utopia/Dystopia.
- 18 December** **‘It’s All Been Done’: Popular Music as a Time Machine**
 Main text (required):
 Jason Heller, “Music for Time Travelers” (essay) (2013). [Moodle]
 Additional text:
 Zager & Evans, “In the Year 2525” (pop song) (1969).
 Keywords: Anachronism; Escapism; Memory; Nostalgia; Radio; Retro; Temporal Paradox; Time Travel Music.
-  **Deadline Research Proposal TODAY, December 18!**
- 08 January** **Cyberpunk and Alternative Realities – Postmodern Time-Travel Narratives**
 Main text (required):
 William Gibson, “The Gernsback Continuum” (1981). [Moodle]
 Additional texts (optional):
 Isaac Asimov, “What If” (1952). [Moodle]
 Harry Turtledove, “Forty, Counting Down” (1999). [Moodle]
 Keywords: Alternative Realities; Photography; Postmodernism; Speculative Fiction; Space-Time Continuum.
- 15 January** **Rabbit Holes and Loops in Time – Contemporary Time-Travel Fiction, Part I**
 Main text (required):
 Stephen King, *11/22/63* (2011); esp. chapters 2, 8, 9, 12, 13. [Please purchase book!]
 Keywords: *Alice in Wonderland*; American Fifties; Eisenhower Era; Rabbit Hole; Wormholes.
- 22 January** **The ‘Obdurate Past’ and Its Strange Harmonies – Contemporary Time-Travel Fiction, Part II**
 Main text (required):
 Stephen King, *11/22/63* (2011); esp. ch. 17, 21, 23, 26, 28, 29, 30 & last chapter (“Citizen of the Century”).
 [Please purchase book!]
 Keywords: Alternate Histories; Dystopia; Harmonies; Kennedy Assassination; Obdurate Past; Strings.
- 29 January** **Jumpers and Loopers – Hollywood and the Time-Travel Paradigm**
 Main example (watching required):
Looper (dir. Rian Johnson, 2012) [Watch in Media Archive!]
 Keywords: Alternate Timelines; Action Thrillers; *Donnie Darko* (movie); *Heroes* (NBC series); *Jumper* (movie); *12 Monkeys* (movie); *Terminator* movies (1984/91/2003/09/15).

 **FINAL PAPER DUE TODAY**