

The Time Traveler as 'Outlander'

How time travelers influence time

with a case study of Diana Gabaldon's *Outlander* series

BA Thesis Literary Studies

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Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to find out what the impact of time travelers on the past is in fiction, with a case study of the first three books of the *Outlander* series by Diana Gabaldon. In these novels, the protagonist Claire accidentally travels over two hundred years into the past and has to adapt to the differences between what she is used to in the twentieth century and the way society works in the eighteenth century. She has knowledge of the future and because of this she wants to change it. Supported by theories concerning time travel by Paul Nahin and David Lewis and concepts like the grandfather paradox, this thesis researches if fictional time travelers can change the future when they travel into the past, and what they can do. The first two sections consist of a discussion about time and time travel and the differences that the time traveler encounters. These are followed by a the third part which discusses if the time traveler can change or influence the future. The thesis concludes that time travelers cannot change the future, because it already happened, but that they can influence the future because of their knowledge. However, it is shown that having knowledge is not always a blessing. It can cause doubts for the time traveler and distrust from the people of that time.

Table of contents

Introduction.....	4
History and <i>Outlander</i>	6
What is time travel?	7
Differences	11
Changing the past.....	15
The grandfather paradox.....	18
Conclusion	21
Bibliography.....	23

Introduction

“To travel in time. Could there possibly be a more exciting, more romantic, more wonderful adventure than that?” (Nahin, *Time Machine Tales* 1). With these words, Paul Nahin opens his book *Time Machine Tales: The Science Fiction Adventures and Philosophical Puzzles of Time Travel*. Indeed, who does not want to be able to travel in time and see what happened in the past and know what the future will bring? Therefore, it is not surprising that stories about time travel are popular (Nahin, *Time Machine Tales* 2-3). Novels in which time travel is possible are worth to do research on, because there are no limits to what is possible since time travel is only speculation. Anything can happen in time travel novels. It can bring people who are long dead back to life, and events can be relived. Paradoxes, the complications of changing the future and playing with chronology are three other features of time travel in novels that are relevant for literary studies, because in time travel, the chronology of events can deviate. Therefore, this thesis will explore some aspects of time travel and what can happen in time travel stories, with a case study of the first three novels of the *Outlander* series by Diana Gabaldon. These are *Outlander* (1991), *Dragonfly in Amber* (1992) and *Voyager* (1994). There are five more novels in this series, with a ninth book on the way (Gabaldon, *Go Tell the Bees That I Am Gone*). In addition, there are several prequels and short stories that are set in the same world (Gabaldon, *Chronology of the Outlander Series*). The *Outlander* novels are currently being adapted into a television series, with the first three seasons already broadcast as of October 2018, and at least three more seasons to go (IMDb).

I have chosen these three novels because they are connected. They tell the story of the first journey of the protagonist, Claire, into the past. In *Outlander*, Claire is on her second honeymoon with her husband Frank Randall in Scotland, in 1945.¹ She accidentally travels into the past through a circle of standing stones and appears in 1743. To protect her from an English dragoon, Jonathan Randall, she has to marry James (Jamie) Fraser to make her a Scottish citizen and she falls in love with him. She starts to care for the people she meets in

¹ In the United States version of *Outlander*, the ‘present’ for Claire and Frank, from where Claire departs through the stones, is 1945, while in the United Kingdom version, it is 1946. According to Diana Gabaldon, Reay Tannahill, a Scot, made her aware that 1946 seemed a more probable year for the novel, given circumstances in Scotland as Gabaldon showed them. However, it was too late to change the date in the version of the United States, while it could still be changed in the United Kingdom version. For this thesis, the United States version is used of all three novels and therefore, when Claire travels through time, it is regarded as 1945 (Gabaldon, *FAQ*).

the eighteenth century and she warns Jamie about the Jacobite rising which will end in the Battle of Culloden, in 1746. In this battle, many Scottish men will be killed and life in the Highlands will be changed forever. In *Dragonfly in Amber*, she sets out to prevent the Jacobite rising from happening, together with Jamie. A part of *Dragonfly in Amber* and *Voyager* describes the Battle of Culloden and the aftermath of the battle and thus if Jamie and Claire managed to change the future.

This case study is relevant for the thesis question, which asks what the impact of time travel into the past is in fiction. It will discuss if – and how – time travelers can change or influence the future because of their knowledge. *Outlander* is a relevant case study because it is about a woman who wants to change history as she learned it. To answer the question, this thesis consists of three sections. The first one focuses on time travel theory, and more specifically, how it can be applied to the *Outlander* series. In the second part, time travel will be discussed with regard to the novels. The corresponding sub question regards how well time travelers, like Claire in *Outlander*, fit into the time they visit. The third part will focus on a specific paradox concerning time travel into the past: changing the past. The sub question that is treated in this part of the thesis is: can the past be changed, and if so, how? Claire is not the only time traveler from the twentieth century who arrives in the eighteenth century. Geillis, another time traveler, traveled on purpose into the past to help the Jacobite rising. Claire, on the other hand, wants to prevent it. They both want to change history, because they both know that many Scots will be killed in the final battle and the consequences this will have for Scotland and its citizens. Can they change the past, or do they make the past come true? This part also discusses one particular paradox in time travel theory, the grandfather paradox, which concerns the question if it is possible to change the past, as well.

In this thesis, time travelers are assumed to be ‘outlanders’: people who do not belong in a time and a place because of the differences between their own culture and the other culture that they encounter. Nahin describes in his books *Time Machines: Time Travel in Physics, Metaphysics and Science Fiction* and *Time Machine Tales* many differences that different time travelers have to deal with. He discusses general time travel theory, with a focus on traveling through time in machines. Although the time travelers in *Outlander* do not travel by machine but through ‘magic’, his overview of the problems that time travelers encounter during their travels because of the differences between times and cultures, is useful for my analysis. Because time can be measured in different ways, and because it is

difficult what exactly the present, past and future are in a time travel story, David Lewis' article "The Paradoxes of Time Travel" will be used as well. His focus lies on what the past is and how time works, which contributes to the clarifying of what the present is in time travel.

History and *Outlander*

While the *Outlander* series is fictional, some of the events described in the novels have actually taken place. In 1745 and 1746, the Scots fought for Charles Edward Stuart to reclaim the throne. The rebellion ended in disaster for the Jacobite clans in 1746 (Haywood 122-123).

What makes the aspect of time travel in *Outlander* so appealing, according to James Cateridge, is that time travel is used to return to a time "before a national trauma takes place, and the possibility of a different past and therefore present and future" (Cateridge 10). This national trauma in *Outlander* is the Battle of Culloden (Cateridge 10), in which many men died and which had severe consequences on the life of the Scottish people afterwards. Haywood describes the measures that were taken to ensure that the clan system lost its power. The lands of the clan chiefs who took part in the rebellion were seized and the power of the other clan chiefs was limited. What we now perceive as 'Scottish', "playing bagpipes, wearing highland dress and speaking Gaelic" (Haywood 123), was forbidden. Furthermore, to ensure that no uprising would be possible in the future, English garrisons were stationed in the Highlands until the nineteenth century (Haywood 122-123). Afterwards, the 'Highland Clearances' disrupted the old clan system even more by evicting Highlanders from their lands (Haywood 124-125).

What is time travel?

This thesis will first discuss what time travel is, how it works, and define what the past, present and future in time travel are. The present can, for example, be the time where the time travelers originally come from, but also the time that they arrive in. In the case of *Outlander*, Claire travels from 1945 to 1743, so both years are at one point her present. What is the past at her departure, becomes her present and her future. As the tagline of the TV series adaptation aptly states: “[w]hat if your future was the past?” (Cateridge 3). To avoid confusion in this thesis, the eighteenth century is regarded as Claire’s present, because that is where most of the events happen in the novels that are discussed here. Then remains 1945: is that the past or the future? Because 1945 is Claire’s past, it will be regarded as such, with everything between 1743 and Claire’s past as the future. However, when Claire is in the eighteenth century, life in the twentieth century goes on. The next paragraph will explain how this works.

Lewis provides insight as to how this difference in time may work. He discerns external time and personal time. He defines external time as “time itself” (Lewis 146), while personal time is “that which is measured by [the time traveler’s] wristwatch” (Lewis 146). This assumes that the wristwatch is infallible, and for a time traveler, if he has travelled, say, an hour, the wristwatch records an hour, whether he arrives years into the future or into the past (Lewis 146). In *Outlander*, then, the personal time of both Claire and Frank continues even when Claire travels into the past. She is in the past for about three years, and during that time, Frank’s life in 1945 continues as well. For him, not being a time traveler, the external time is the same as his personal time. Claire, however, travels almost two hundred years into the past, and a few years later, she travels back (and twenty years later, she goes back to the past again, to find that about twenty years have passed there, as well). Therefore, Claire’s personal time is non-linear because of her time travels, for which Lewis uses the following metaphors:

We may liken intervals of external time to distances as the crow flies, and intervals of personal time to distances along a winding path. The time traveler’s life is like a mountain railway. The place two miles due east of here may also be nine miles down the line, in the westbound direction. (Lewis 147)

Therefore, in order to understand how the two different kinds of measuring time work, it can be said that the external time indeed continues, which accounts for the fact that in *Outlander*, time goes on in the twentieth century, while it also does so in the eighteenth century. It is linear, and therefore, when Claire is in the past, time passes at the same speed as it does in the twentieth century. This also explains why the same amount of personal time passes for both Claire and Frank in the nearly three years that Claire is gone.

Contradictory to this linear perspective of Claire's time, however, is how time works for Gillian. She travels from 1968 to several years before 1743², and when Claire arrives in Castle Leoch, Gillian had changed her name to Geillis and was already married to Arthur Duncan. In 1743, when she is tried for witchcraft and condemned to death, she had managed to divert nearly 10,000 pounds for the Jacobite cause. Shortly after Gillian's departure into the past, Claire goes back into the past as well, for the second time. For Claire again, time has passed in a linear way, because around the same amount of time has passed in the eighteenth century as has when she was in the twentieth. But Geillis does not travel the same amount of years into the past as Claire, which indicates that time does not necessarily have to work the same for different people.

What is typical about a time travel story, is that it can cause paradoxes. One example from *Outlander* is that Claire is alive in 1743, years before she was born. She is married in the twentieth century, but her husband Frank is also not born yet in the eighteenth century. Claire explains this in the eighteenth century by saying that her husband is dead. Nahin argues that in time travel stories, paradoxes can indeed occur. He defines a paradox as follows: "[a] paradox, according to the usual dictionary definition, is something that appears to contain contradictory or incompatible parts, thus reducing the whole to seeming nonsense. And yet, truth is also evident in the whole" (Nahin, *Time Machine Tales* 189). The paradox here is that Claire is alive in a time when she is not yet born, and married to someone who is not born yet, either, but he is also not dead. In *Outlander*, there is truth to this, but it is also contradictory.

² The time travel of Geillis also has two different years in the novels, as does Claire's departure. In *Outlander*, Dougal tells Claire a message from Geillis, "one, nine, six, and seven" (Gabaldon, *Outlander* 691). It was especially important that he did not change the order of the numbers, because in this way, Geillis tells Claire from what year she came: 1967 (Gabaldon, *Outlander* 691). However, in *Dragonfly in Amber*, Claire goes back to Scotland in 1968 and sees Gillian stepping through the stones (Gabaldon, *Dragonfly in Amber* 940-941). Because 1967 is just mentioned once and most of *Dragonfly in Amber* is set in 1968, I will use 1968 as the date of Gillian's departure.

Outlander, however, is not a “standard” time travel story. There are two time travelers, Claire and Gillian, who travel independently from each other through the same standing stones. Neither travels through time with a time machine. These machines are frequently used in stories about time travel, as Nahin’s books show. This also accounts for one of the genres in which time travel generally occurs, which is science fiction (Wittenberg 26). *Outlander* instead is, according to Gabaldon, difficult to put into just one genre. She declares that it is not ‘romance’; she prefers just the label ‘fiction’ on them (Gabaldon, *FAQ*).

Claire travels involuntarily through time. She hears a noise coming from the stones, and when she steps through a cleft stone, she is thrown backwards in time (Gabaldon, *Outlander* 49-50). Because Claire does not travel voluntary or with a machine, she has no idea that she travelled through time, until the evidence that she arrived in the eighteenth century becomes too much to ignore (Gabaldon, *Outlander* 71). The Scottish men she encounters are all wearing kilts and they use words like “musket ball” and “chirurgion” (Gabaldon, *Outlander* 59; 62). Her wonder at these words indicate that they did not belong in 1940’s English vocabulary. Another piece of evidence are the city lights of Inverness, which are missing in the eighteenth century (Gabaldon, *Outlander* 67). Lastly, Claire meets Jonathan Randall, whom her twentieth-century husband Frank regards as his ancestor. She does not recognize Jonathan Randall (except that he looks a lot like Frank), which makes her wonder who he is, because she thought that she had already met all of Frank’s British family members. Moreover, Jonathan Randall’s sword looks very authentic for a movie prop, because Claire’s first thought upon arriving in the eighteenth century is that she has stumbled into a battle scene on a movie set (Gabaldon, *Outlander* 51-54). Her arrival at Castle Leoch, with its primitive conditions and her room without electrical fittings (Gabaldon, *Outlander* 81; 90-91), confirms her suspicions, however irrational they may be: she arrived in the eighteenth century.

Because Claire is not used to these examples, she is more of an ‘outlander’ than other time travelers who might have been able to prepare themselves for their journey. They might have been able to learn the language and customs of that time, like Geillis Duncan. Geillis traveled voluntarily through the stones because she wanted to change history and help the Jacobite rebellion to succeed. Since there are many years between Claire’s departure in 1945 and arrival in 1743, there are bound to be differences in the

culture, morals and knowledge of that time. In the next part, these differences will be discussed in more detail.

Differences

In *Outlander*, Claire is regarded as a 'Sassenach', which means an English person, or an 'outlander' (Gabaldon, *Outlander* 6). She is in more ways an outlander than just being an English person, because she is not, certainly when she arrives, adapted to customs in the eighteenth century. Nearly two hundred years difference in time accounts for differences in habits. These differences are there regardless of the country the time traveler, in this case Claire, arrives in, whether it is her own country, England, or another, Scotland. Some of these differences are more significant, for example those that will impede her medical abilities. She has the knowledge, but not the tools that are necessary to perform the treatments. Other differences are Claire's own behavior and speech, and the values that she is used to in the twentieth century.

There is a difference between medical knowledge in the past, present and future. In 1945, the knowledge of medicine and healing is much more advanced than it is in 1743. In the Second World War, Claire was trained as an army nurse and she developed an interest in medicinal plants after the war. However, even though she has all this knowledge, she encounters many difficulties in treating people in the eighteenth century: she sometimes knows that things can be treated with modern medicine, in a hospital. Since she does not have access to that, she is not able to help everyone. A case like this happens during a boar hunt, where a man's intestine is punctured. In the 1940's, he would have had a chance at survival. However, without an operating room and antibiotics, with only eighteenth-century medicine, his death was inevitable (Gabaldon, *Outlander* 195-196). Nahin supports this difference in medical abilities with an example about a time traveler who travels into the past, but who has tuberculosis. At that certain point in the past that the time traveler arrived in, it was untreatable because knowledge was not yet as advanced as it was in the time that the time traveler came from, where it was treatable (Nahin, *Time Machines* 18-19). Another time traveler has their appendix removed before undertaking the journey to the past, because that could not be done then, either (Nahin, *Time Machine Tales* 5). Another example where Claire knows what to do, but the necessary supplies are not at hand – or even known – is when Claire treats Jamie's shoulder, right after arriving in the eighteenth century when she is still confused about what happened, and she has not yet come to terms with her fate:

“The wound needs to be disinfected first, then bandaged with a clean cloth, if there are no sterile bandages.” Eyebrows rose all around. “Disinfected?” said the small man, carefully. “Yes, indeed,” I said firmly, thinking him a bit simple-minded, in spite of his educated accent. “All dirt must be removed from the wound and it must be treated with a compound to discourage germs and promote healing.” “Such as?” “Such as iodine,” I said. Seeing no comprehension on the faces before me, I tried again. “Merthiolate? Dilute carbolic?” I suggested. “Or perhaps even just alcohol?” Looks of relief. At last I had found a word they appeared to recognize. [...] I knew the Highlands were primitive, but this was nearly unbelievable. (Gabaldon, *Outlander* 64-65)

After this incident, Claire soon learns what to say to make people understand her, because some of the supplies that she needs are available in the eighteenth century, just not under the same name as it is in the twentieth. Another difference is what healers do when there is an infection. There is a moment when Claire sets Jamie’s fingers instead of amputating them. While it had not even crossed her mind to amputate Jamie’s fingers, he had expected to lose them. Claire then remembers the chest of Davie Beaton, Castle Leoch’s healer who died before Claire came to 1743, which was full of saws and knives that he used for amputating, which was common in a time when there were no antibiotics that could be used against infections (Gabaldon, *Outlander* 140; 838-839). Lastly, there is a problem with healing that Claire herself encounters: when she gets pregnant, Jamie sends her back through the stones right before the battle of Culloden (Gabaldon, *Dragonfly in Amber* 892-894). Had he not done that, if Claire had remained in 1746, both she and the child would probably not have survived the birth, but in the twentieth century, they did (Gabaldon, *Dragonfly in Amber* 897).

The difference in treatment of women also changes in the course of history. In the eighteenth century, women had a place in society that is different from what Claire was used to in the eighteenth century, especially because of her work during the war. In the eighteenth century, women had to listen to their father or husband. According to Carol Donelan, “Claire [...] perceives the laws regulating life in the eighteenth century as unjust” (Donelan 41). In Scotland in the eighteenth century, when a woman marries, she becomes the property of her husband and before the marriage, she belonged to her father (Donelan

41-43). This is shown through Laoghaire, whose father demands a punishment because of her “loose behavior; consortin’ improperly wi’ young men against [her father’s] orders” (Gabaldon, *Outlander* 110). As Claire came alone to the eighteenth century, she is free before her wedding to Jamie, but she becomes his property. Through their wedding, Claire also becomes a Scottish citizen. However, Claire does not listen to Jamie’s orders and because of that, she brings the men of the Clan MacKenzie in danger. When she tries to escape back to Craigh na Dun, she gets caught by an English Corporal, who takes her to Captain Randall at Fort William. Jamie and the other MacKenzies come to save her, endangering their own lives. Claire remarks on this to Jamie:

“It’s your own fault, for ignoring me and suspecting me all the time [of being a spy]! I told you the truth about who I am! And I told you there was no danger in my going with you, but would you listen to *me*? No! I’m only a woman, why should you pay any attention to what I say? Women are only fit to do as they’re told, and follow orders, and sit meekly around with their hands folded, waiting for the *men* to come back and tell them what to do!” (Gabaldon, *Outlander* 385)

After a tense dinner, Jamie punishes Claire because he is her husband and therefore he is expected to be the one to carry it out. Once Claire is punished by Jamie (which everyone could hear), the MacKenzies accept Claire again (Gabaldon, *Outlander* 392-394). This example shows that Claire disagrees with how women are regarded: that they should only listen to the men, and that their opinion is not valued. Claire’s opinion is later going to be valued, at least by Jamie, once he understands that she comes from another time, and by other people as well, once she is able to prove her knowledge of healing.

Another matter, but one that is connected to the previous argument, is that Claire’s speech is not considered as womanly behavior. Claire shouts “[b]loody fucking hell” (Gabaldon, *Outlander* 16) when she accidentally drops a teapot in someone’s lap in the twentieth century. Frank then, as her husband, apologizes for her, saying that she learned it in her time at the field hospitals during the Second World War (Gabaldon, *Outlander* 15-16). In 1743 it is considered even worse. She calls Jamie a “goddamned bloody bastard” (Gabaldon, *Outlander* 76), whereupon one of the MacKenzie men in Jamie’s company remarks that “I’ve ne’er heard a woman use such language in me life” (Gabaldon, *Outlander*

76). One of the other men says “Your husband should tan ye, woman” (Gabaldon, *Outlander* 77). These reactions show two things. First, that Claire’s cursing is not common in her own time, but even less so in the eighteenth century. The second thing is that the last remark again shows how men are in charge of women, how a woman is the property of her husband, and therefore it is the husband who should teach her not to use such language.

In all the examples described above, Claire’s behavior is regarded as uncommon by the eighteenth-century Scottish people, but their behavior is also strange to Claire. Indeed, the time traveler’s habits can be regarded as unusual by the people of the current time they are in, but the behavior of the other people can be different from what the time traveler is used to, as well. It is important to note that because of Claire’s healing abilities, however, she is accepted more easily. The longer she is in the eighteenth century, the better she fits in, because she adapts to the time as well as she can. There are also women like Mrs. Fitz and Geillis Duncan who accept her more easily than other women. Her marriage to Jamie and thus becoming a Scottish woman helps in the acceptance by the men of the clan. However, throughout the first two books, she continues to be regarded, or even feared, as a witch. Therefore, she seemed to fit in better in the Scotland of her own time. Nahin supports this by giving an example which claims that a home belongs more to time than to space: a time traveler would feel more at home in their own time in a different country, than in their own country in a different time (qtd. in Nahin, *Time Machines* 24).

Changing the past

A question concerning time travel is if it is possible to change the past. If someone goes back in time, what consequences can that have? It would be impossible for a time traveler not to leave a trace, however careful they may be. There are two things that can happen: those traces can have consequences, or not. In the first case, the time traveler may do something that can change the future. When they get back to the future, they can find the future different than it was when they departed. The other option is that the traces left by time travelers have no consequences, because the future cannot be changed. This last option is what several critics argue in favor of, and this is also what happens in the first three *Outlander* novels.

In *Outlander*, Claire tells Jamie what is going to happen in the future. She tells him about the bad things that are to come, like the Jacobite rising and the famine, but she also tells him about benefits of the twentieth century, like cars. Together, Claire and Jamie try to prevent the Jacobite rebellion by ensuring that Charles Edward Stuart, also known as 'Bonnie Prince Charlie', does not get the much-needed financial means to wage war. However, when Claire and Jamie are back in Scotland, Jamie receives a letter, in which Charles writes to Jamie that he is going to reclaim the throne. Because there was not enough time for a letter to reach Jamie and get back to Charles, Charles himself added Jamie to the list of Jacobite chiefs, thereby making Jamie a traitor to the English crown and giving him no choice but to take part in the rebellion (Gabaldon, *Dragonfly in Amber* 583-584). The first battle, that of Prestonpans, went exactly as Claire knew from her history book: the Jacobites win with few casualties. The Battle of Culloden was lost by the Jacobites, which she also knew would happen. With all Jamie's and Claire's work to prevent it, Charles Edward Stuart went to war and as a result, the Jacobites lost the rebellion. History as Claire knew it, has indeed taken place. Claire and Jamie had not been able to change it. A few things can be concluded from their inability to change the future.

The first is that it is impossible to change the past – or the future, depending on where the time traveler is. Several critics agree on this fact, but they have different arguments for this. One of these critics is Nahin, who states that it is impossible to change the past, "because the past is dead and gone and thus unchangeable" (Nahin, *Time Machine Tales* 73). To come to this conclusion, he uses John Earman's (negative) approach to backward causation, that it is impossible because "[b]y definition, a cause is always before

its effect” (Nahin, *Time Machine Tales* 72-73). While the future cannot be changed in *Outlander*, there are other works in which it is possible, like the movie *Back to the Future*.

J. J. C. Smart takes a different approach to the impossibility to change the future. “[S]uppose that someone says, ‘I can change the future. I can do *this* or I can do *that*’. Well, then, suppose that he does *that*. Has he changed the future? No, because doing *that* was the future” (qtd. in Nahin, *Time Machine Tales* 73). What Smart means is that it is impossible to change the future, because what the time traveler may think is changing the future, is making come true what already was the future.

Larry Dwyer also argues that it is not possible to change the past, but he uses a slightly different explanation than Smart does. He claims that all events happen just once, and that if there would be time travelers traveling into the past, they are not able to change the past. When the past happened (which is in time before the time traveler departed to the past), they were already there. Therefore, taking the example that he uses to illustrate his argument, the pyramids were already built in 3000 B.C., but from many years later a time traveler travels to 3000 B.C. and helps to build them. However, this is not changing the past because when the pyramids were built, he already was there (Dwyer 344-345). Nahin also supports this argument. He states that the time travelers are not able to change the future, because they either were not in the past, or, if they were, they did not manage to change it (Nahin, *Time Machines* 189).

The three different theories described above can all be applied to *Outlander*. If Earman’s argument would be applicable to *Outlander*, Claire and Jamie fail in changing the future because it had already happened and therefore, it cannot be changed. According to Smart, Claire and Jamie are unable to change the future because what they did, was actually the future. From Dwyer’s argument would follow that when the Jacobite rising happened in the past (as seen from the twentieth century), Claire already was there and tried to prevent it, together with Jamie, because Claire knew what had happened at the Battle of Culloden. Whichever of these is the ‘reason’ why Claire and Jamie have been unable to change the future, it does not change the outcome of the Jacobite rising, because changing the past is impossible.

The second thing that can be concluded, is that while time travelers cannot change the past, it is not very likely that they do not change anything. Therefore, the time traveler can *influence* the past. Claire, for example, influences the past through her healing. During

her stay at Castle Leoch, she heals many people, including Jamie. Moreover, she instructs the women who help with healing after the battle of Prestonpans that they should wash their hands in between patients and to work as sterile as possible, although she suspects that the women would not follow that advice (Gabaldon, *Dragonfly in Amber* 644). Jamie, however, does take her advice and washes his dirk in boiling water before he uses it for food (Gabaldon, *Voyager* 62) and tries to eat vegetables when he can, because Claire told him that it prevents scurvy (Gabaldon, *Dragonfly in Amber* 608; *Voyager* 138). Claire is also proud that she is responsible for the people of Lallybroch to have their teeth in a good condition (Gabaldon, *Voyager* 504). She may also have saved some people from Lallybroch by advising Jamie's sister Jenny to plant potatoes because of the famine that would come (Gabaldon, *Outlander* 671-672).

So this is not changing the future, but it is future knowledge that is used in an earlier time. The other time traveler, Geillis Duncan, married the fiscal of a town near Castle Leoch and managed to collect nearly 10,000 pounds for the Jacobite cause, but this did not change the future either (Gabaldon, *Outlander* 523). Nahin supports this influencing of the past:

You cannot travel anywhere into the past unless you've already been there, and when you do make the trip you will do what you've already done there [...] That does not mean you would necessarily be ineffectual during your stay in the past [...] Not being able to change the past is not equivalent to being unable to *influence* or *affect* what happened in the past. (Nahin, *Time Machine Tales* 209)

In *Outlander*, Claire introduces the concept of 'germs' into the eighteenth century, but the people she explains this to do not listen to her advice (except for Jamie). Consequently, this does not provide a major influence like twentieth-century physics in the eighteenth century, as Nahin describes (Nahin, *Time Machine Tales* 209).

The third thing that can be concluded, is that knowledge of the future does not always have to be an advantage. It may cause the time traveler trouble, if they say something that they should not know, and they can be accused of being a witch or cause the people from the past to distrust the time traveler. Time travelers can also feel helpless, because they know what is going to happen, but they cannot do anything to prevent it, or they do not know if they have already been able to change the past or not. When Claire and

Jamie try to prevent the Jacobite rising from happening, at every point there is the doubt whether they have been able to change the past. A quotation from Claire in *Dragonfly in Amber*, after she and Jamie have already tried to prevent the Jacobite rebellion and therefore may or may not have been able to change things, illustrates this:

While I *thought* I knew what was to come, I had no certainty at all about it. I had been married to an historian [...] and knew just how unreliable historical sources often were. For that matter, I had no surety that my own presence couldn't or wouldn't change anything (Gabaldon, *Dragonfly in Amber* 637).

Claire could not go back to the twentieth century just to check if history had changed. Therefore, there is no knowing if she has been able to change, and if so, what. Indeed, they have not been able to change the future, because Charles Edward Stuart went to war anyway, without some of the much-needed funds.

Claire is not the only one who struggles with knowledge of the future. Maisri, a woman with the Sight, sees what is going to happen as well, but she cannot stop it either. She calls it a curse (Gabaldon, *Dragonfly in Amber* 766). Nahin supports this with an example, about which he also states that knowing what the future will bring can be regarded as a curse (Nahin, *Time Machines* 23). This thus proves that knowledge of the future does not necessarily have to be helpful for the time traveler.

The grandfather paradox

When Claire travels through the stones into the past, she is on her second honeymoon with her husband Frank. In 1743, she meets a man who looks a lot like Frank and who introduces himself as Jonathan Randall – the ancestor that Frank was doing research on in Scotland. He was against the Scottish in 1743 and almost killed Jamie through whipping him, and later almost rapes Claire. Jamie wants him dead, but as long as he has not yet sired offspring, Claire does not want him to die, because Frank would not have been born then. And if Frank would not have been born, Claire could not have married him, and they would not have been on their second honeymoon to Scotland, and Claire would not have travelled through the stones.

This is similar to the so-called the grandfather paradox, “in which an individual goes back in time and kills his or her own ancestor, making it impossible for the traveler him- or herself ever to have been conceived. In its general layout, this is a paradox of causality: the time traveler causes a scenario, the effect of which is to eliminate the cause of that very scenario—namely, him- or herself” (Wittenberg 149). It is a paradox regarding the impossibility of changing the past. According to Nahin, the argument to prevent time travelers from killing their grandfather is that they would fail in killing him: “the gun jams, the knife blade snaps, a wind gust blows the poison dart off target, the murderer faints just before he can do the foul deed, etc.” (Nahin, *Time Machines* 30). These are several of the many ways which would prevent time travelers from killing their grandfather.

In *Outlander*, Jonathan Randall – regarded as Frank’s ancestor – also seems to narrowly escape his death, according to Claire. He was seen to be trampled by cows, but later Claire and Jamie discover that it was actually someone else who died under their hooves. However, before this news reached Claire, she worried because Jonathan Randall should have died in 1746 and married in 1745; if he had indeed died before then, it would have been too soon and Frank’s ancestor would not have been born. One piece of certainty – and a little bit of doubt, as well – for Claire is Frank’s wedding ring. Surely it would have disappeared if Frank would not have been born? Jamie assures Claire then that Frank will be born in another way (Gabaldon, *Dragonfly in Amber* 152-153).

There is, however, one thing that Claire had not anticipated, given that she tried to keep Jamie from killing Jonathan Randall to ensure Frank’s birth and the fact that Frank and Jonathan look so alike. Jonathan has a little brother, Alexander, who turns out to be the biological father of Jonathan’s legal son. In this instance where Claire fears to have changed history, history was preserved: Frank is alive in the twentieth century.

The question is, then, is the past changed to preserve the future? Jamie injured Jonathan Randall in such a way that he probably would not be able to father a child, but Jonathan Randall was in Frank’s family tree. In going back to the previous argument, that it is impossible to change the past, and that paradoxes such as the grandfather paradox are prevented, history may again have been influenced, but not changed. Maybe Alexander was originally the ancestor of Frank, but it could possibly be Jonathan, too. In providing Frank with another ancestor, the future was preserved and the Randall line would continue, but

with a different ancestor. This is speculation, but it shows a way in which the future can preserve itself.

Conclusion

Time travel is a popular theme in fiction for at least three reasons. It can encourage feelings of nostalgia to read about times that have gone by. Fiction allows people to go back to a time before a certain incident, like the Jacobite rising in *Outlander* and *Dragonfly in Amber*, and provide hope that things could have been different. The last reason can be curiosity, wanting to know what is to come in the future and what happened in the past. Because time travel does not exist in real life, and because it is fiction, its options are limitless. There are stories that allow for the past to be changed, but there are also stories in which the past is fixed. One of these is the case study of this thesis, the *Outlander* series. Claire and Jamie try to change the past, but they fail in doing so.

A question that can be asked in dealing with a time travel story, is how time works in time travel. This thesis discussed what the present is in a time travel story, and concluded that for this purpose, the present of the time traveler is taken as the present. Time passes in a linear way: everything happens only once, and at least in *Outlander*, for Claire, as much time passes in the eighteenth century as it does in the twentieth, but this is not the case for everyone. Geillis travels back more years than Claire does, for example.

Difficulties for the time traveler prove to be the different habits and morals in the past, especially if the time traveler is not prepared, like Claire in *Outlander*. The more years there are between the time traveler's departure and arrival, the more differences there are bound to be between the times. Nahin argues that a time traveler will fit in better in the time they grew up in than in another time, regardless of the difference in place. This is certainly true for Claire, who fits in better in Scotland in 1945 than in 1743, but the longer she is in the eighteenth century, the better she fits in. The reason for that is that the time travelers get used to the differences and are able to adapt or hide their controversial views and habits.

Despite the knowledge that time travelers have of the future, they are unable to change it. There are stories which allow time to be changed, but most critics have argued that going back into the past and changing the future is impossible, because what has happened, has already happened. Indeed, in *Dragonfly in Amber*, Claire and Jamie fail in their undertaking of preventing the Jacobite rising, while Geillis' 10,000 pounds also have not led the Jacobites to the victory. While the future cannot be changed, the time travelers can leave their mark. When they travel into the past, they bear knowledge of the future, and

Claire shares this knowledge with Jamie and others. For example, she is responsible for the people of Lallybroch's good teeth: it does not change the future, but provides a minor influence on some people. This is one of the good things that knowledge of the future can have, but this knowledge can be a burden as well. The knowledge about what is going to happen is not easy for the time travelers, as the people from that time may distrust them and because the time travelers cannot be sure if they have changed anything, whether accidentally or on purpose.

The 'grandfather paradox' is one of the paradoxes that occur in time travel theory. If the time traveler goes back into the past, they will not be able to kill their grandfather, because if they would be able to, they would thereby prevent their own existence. This is one of the doubts that the time traveler can have. Claire, for example, is afraid that Jonathan Randall will be killed by Jamie, because she fears that Frank would not be born then. However, the past indeed cannot be changed: first, Jonathan Randall did not die before he was supposed to, and secondly, he apparently was not the ancestor of Frank. It can be argued that after Jonathan's injury, he lived but would not father a child, and that the future preserves itself by continuing the Randall line through Alexander instead of Jonathan.

To conclude, anything can happen in time travel in fiction. Because this is just speculation, there are no rules to abide by and authors can take all the freedom they need. The first three books of the *Outlander* series by Diana Gabaldon therefore provide an interesting case study to discover what the impact of time travel in fiction is. It tells the story of a woman who travels into the past and who tries to change the future, but is unable to do so. It may also provide an example of the grandfather paradox, which proves again that the future preserves itself. However, *Outlander* is just one example in a sea full of time travel stories. To be able to make general conclusions about time travel, more research needs to be done about other stories as well.

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