



## TEMPORAL PARADOX IN THE FILM *THE TIME TRAVELER'S WIFE* (2009)

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### Abstract

This research paper aims to examine the temporal paradoxes portrayed in the film *The Time Traveler's Wife* (2009), a cinematic adaptation of the 2003 Audrey Niffenegger's novel of the same name. The film follows the story of Henry, an involuntary time traveler who, uncontrollably and unpredictably, travels through his life timeline. As he travels back and forward in time, Henry occasionally meets his wife, Clare, through her different stages of life, starting with her as a six-year-old child. The occasions in Henry's time-travelling life create some temporal paradoxes in both Henry's and Clare's life timelines. A temporal paradox occurs when there is an apparent or logical self-contradiction as a result of the idea of time travel, further classified into bootstrap paradoxes, grandfather (or consistency) paradoxes, and Newcomb's paradox. This study takes the data of lines from the film's screenplay, written by Bruce Joel Rubin, that express or imply temporal paradoxes. The film touches upon all three types of paradoxes in different degrees. Bootstrap paradoxes include: (1) the meeting of Henry and Clare; (2) winning the lottery and buying the house; (3) the meeting of Henry and Dr Kendrick, a geneticist who helps Henry's Chrono-Impairment disorder condition; and (4) the naming of Alba, their only daughter. Each of the bootstrap paradoxes involves a causal loop—events whose causes are their own effects. The grandfather paradox deals with Henry's inability to change the past despite being a time traveler who can travel back to the past. Newcomb's paradox discusses all of the paradoxes and their relation to free will, especially Clare's choice to marry Henry. By engaging with elements of time travel in a film, this paper offers a new insight into research on time travel narratives in literary works.

**Keywords:** Temporal paradox, time travel, causal loops, bootstrap paradox, grandfather paradox, Newcomb's paradox

### INTRODUCTION

*The Time Traveler's Wife* is a 2009 science fiction romantic drama film directed by Robert Schwentke based on the screenplay by Bruce Joel Rubin. It is a cinematic adaptation of the 2003 novel of the same name by Audrey Niffenegger. The film follows the relationship between Henry DeTamble (Eric Bana), a Chicagoan librarian with a genetic disorder that causes him to involuntarily time travel, and his wife Clare Abshire (Rachel McAdams). Due to his disorder, Henry often unexpectedly disappears from Clare's life, uncontrollably appears at various points in both his and Clare's life timeline, and unpredictably returns to the present. As he travels back and forward in time, Henry occasionally meets Clare through her different stages of life, starting with her as a six-year-old child. Despite the challenges posed by Henry's time-travelling condition, both Henry and Clare overcome the problems and continue to navigate their relationship.

While the film primarily centers on the romance between Henry and Clare, it also incorporates some common elements of time travel in science fiction. These include Henry's ability to travel to the past and the future, both Henry's and Clare's ability to tell the future to one another, and Henry's comments on whether his ability to alter the past. Although *The Time Traveler's Wife* does not delve deeply into the intricacies of time travel physics in the way that hardcore science fiction might, the time-travelling scenarios throughout the film create some instances that could be interpreted as temporal paradoxes to enhance the storytelling, without neglecting the logics of time travel. A **temporal paradox** is a paradox (an apparent or logical self-contradiction) associated with the idea of time travel or other foreknowledge of the future. There are commonly three types of temporal paradoxes: bootstrap paradoxes, grandfather (or consistency) paradoxes, and Newcomb's paradox (Faye, 2015). The film touches upon all three ideas in different degrees; thus, this paper will cover each paradox.

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A **bootstrap paradox** is also known as an *information paradox*, an *ontological paradox*, or a *predestination paradox*. The concept of a bootstrap paradox revolves around situations in which the normal flow of time is disrupted by events that appear to violate causality. Any future event, such as an action, information, an object, or a person, influences the past, as the result of time travel, and ultimately causes itself. The word 'bootstrapping' derives from the idiom "pull oneself up by one's bootstraps" (Klosterman, 2009). For example, A travels back in time and gives B a gift that A once got from B. In the future, B, who already received the gift, gives A the exact gift, inspiring A to travel back in time and give B the gift. The gift is passed back and forth through time and seems to "come from nowhere" or "created from nothing". This can also be called a **causal loop**: events in the past are influenced by actions from the future, and in turn, the past events shape future actions. This leads to a cycle where cause and effect are intertwined without a clear origin or starting point. However, a causal loop, if it is the result of time travel to the past and precognition, does not possess the ability to change events (Klosterman, 2009). Therefore, causal loops are *self-originating* and *unchanging*.

A **grandfather paradox** is also known as a consistency paradox, in which future events influence the past to cause an apparent contradiction. The name derives from a supposition where a time traveler travels to the past to kill their grandfather, before their grandfather has a child, which would be their father. The time traveler's father would not be born, and thus, neither would the time traveler. If the time traveler were not born, they would not be possible for them to kill their grandfather in the first place. Different from bootstrap paradoxes, grandfather paradoxes only occur when changing the past is possible. A possible resolution for this paradox is the Novikov self-consistency principle, which states that if an event exists that would cause a paradox or any "change" to the past whatsoever, the probability of that event is zero, thus it would be impossible to create time paradoxes (Sfetcu, 2023), which was proposed by Igor Dmitriyevich Novikov. Therefore, a time traveler *can* do anything that *did happen*, but *cannot* do anything that *did not* happen (Smith, 2013), and anything a time traveler does in the past must have been part of history all along.

**Newcomb's paradox** was created by William Newcomb in 1960 and first analyzed by Robert Nozick in 1969. It was originally a thought experiment involving a game between two players. One of the players is able to predict the future. William Lane Craig extends this paradox to explore causality and free will. This paradox allows the existence of "perfect predictors": if perfect predictors of the future exist (for example a time traveler who ever sees the future where the choices are made, or the "perfect predictions"), perfect predictions appear to contradict free will because decisions apparently made with free will are already known to the perfect "predictor". Some argue there can be no free will since choosers will do whatever they are fated to do. Retrocausality (as in bootstrap paradoxes) can occur because the chooser's choice can be said to have *caused* the predictor's prediction (Craig, 1987; Craig, 1988).

Some major challenges in time travel narratives are maintaining consistency in the timeline and establishing certain rules of time travel. The film provides interesting ideas and insights with its expressed and implied time travel, telling a coherent story in which all causes and effects fall into one history. The occasions in Henry's time-travelling life create some informational bootstrap paradoxes in both Henry's and Clare's life timelines. Henry explains to his younger self what happens when he has just experienced time travel for the first time. He gives younger Clare the name of the geneticist who is working on his cure, who later gives it to him, resulting in him tracking down the doctor and persuading him to take the case. When Henry and Clare are shopping for a home, he very quickly determines that the first two are not right by looking out a window for something he sees at the third, as if he already knows something about the house in which they will live in the future. Henry also gets their daughter's name, Alba, before she is born by travelling to the future and meeting her. Nothing ever changes; Henry even comments several times that he has attempted to change events in the past and failed to do so (Young, 2015). In contrast, Clare also comments several times about her inability to change her future, which is to be with Henry.

This research paper aims to examine the temporal paradoxes portrayed in the film *The Time Traveler's Wife*. This paper identifies and analyses the instances of temporal paradox within the film from each type of bootstrap paradox, grandfather (or consistency) paradox, and Newcomb's paradox by exploring the circumstances of time travel in the context of the film's narrative construction. The main question of the bootstrap paradox is, "*Which one comes first, the cause, or the effect?*", while the grandfather paradox is, "*If a time traveller changed the past, how could they come back and try to change as it never happened in their future?*", and the Newcomb's paradox is, "*Does knowing the choices made in the future contradict free will?*". By engaging with elements of time travel in a film, this paper offers a new insight into research on time travel narratives in literary works.

**METHOD**

This study uses a descriptive qualitative method. The data used in this study are the lines from written scripts of the film *The Time Traveler's Wife* (2009) that express and imply temporal paradoxes of bootstrap paradoxes, grandfather paradoxes, and Newcomb's paradox. The main data source is taken from the screenplay of the film *The Time Traveler's Wife* (2009) written by Bruce Joel Rubin. First, the author watched the whole film to gain an understanding of the time travel scenarios. Second, the author employed an intensive and comprehensive reading of the film's screenplay to gain a better understanding of the film's narrative construction. Third, the author collected the data by identifying the lines that show the instances of temporal paradox that are scattered in the film's scripts. Fourth, the author generated the data by timecoding the lines and combining the different lines into related temporal paradoxes. Fifth, the author classified the data into bootstrap paradoxes, grandfather paradoxes, or Newcomb's paradox and analysed each instance by applying the theories of respective temporal paradoxes. Sixth, the author interpreted the data and visualized each paradox by making figures to help the readers understand.

**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

This section is divided into three parts according to each type of temporal paradox: (1) "Instances of Bootstrap Paradox"; (2) "There Is No Any Grandfather Paradox"; and (3) "Newcomb's Paradox: Defying the Loops?". The four bootstrap paradoxes discussed in the first part are: (1) the meeting of Henry and Clare; (2) winning the lottery and buying the house; (3) the meeting of Henry and Dr Kendrick; and (4) the naming of Alba. Each of the bootstrap paradoxes involves a causal loop, in which there is no clear origin for which one comes first. The second part deals with Henry's inability to change the past despite being a time traveller who can travel back to the past. The third part discusses all of the paradoxes and their relation to free will, especially Clare's choice to marry Henry.

**Instances of Bootstrap Paradox**

The following table shows the four instances of bootstrap paradox found in the film that will be discussed further:

Table 1. Findings of bootstrap paradoxes

<i>Discussions</i>	<i>Questions</i>	<i>Earlier Events</i>	<i>Future Actions</i>
The meeting of Henry and Clare	"Henry meets Clare first, or Clare meets Henry first?"	Young (6 to 18) Clare receives the visits of older, married Henry, with specified dates of his visits that are later written in her diary.	20-year-old Clare gets to 28-year-old Henry at the library based on what older Henry has told her previously, marking the first time they meet for Henry.
Winning the lottery and buying the house	"Henry buys the lottery ticket because it is going to win, or he wins because of buying it?" "Henry buys the house because he has ever been there in the future, or he is there because he buys the house?"	Henry travels forward where he sees the lottery number chosen, remembering it when he returns to the present. Using the money from the lottery, he buys a house he has ever been to while travelling forward.	Henry buys the lottery ticket with the exact number that is going to win that he has seen earlier in the future and he wins. He owns the house because he has bought it, in which the earlier versions of him later travel forward to the house.
The meeting of Henry and Dr Kendrick	"Henry tells Clare about Dr Kendrick, or Henry meets Dr Kendrick because Clare tells so?"	Older Henry tells younger Clare about his disorder condition, which is being treated by Dr Kendrick.	Clare mentions Dr Kendrick based on what older Henry has told her previously, which later inspires Henry to meet Dr Kendrick.
The naming of Alba	"Henry names his daughter 'Alba' because of Alba, or his daughter's name is	Henry travels forward and meets Alba for the first time, asking her name and learning that 10-year-old Alba is his	The encounter inspires Henry to name his daughter 'Alba', while Henry and Clare are choosing their daughter's



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Alba because Henry daughter. name.  
names her so?"

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## The Meeting of Henry and Clare

This stems from the question, “Henry meets Clare first, or Clare meets Henry first?”

### *Henry Meets Clare First*

From the timeline of Clare’s life, it is Henry who meets Clare first as a young girl in her father’s house meadow. Starting in 1977, older, married Henry travels back to Clare’s childhood and adolescence in South Haven, Michigan, when Clare is only six years old:

*“HENRY: Ow! Clare, I’m not gonna hurt you. Just please don’t throw anything at me.*

*CLARE: Who are you, how do you know my name, and why can’t you come out?*

*HENRY: Can you just hand me the blanket?*

*CLARE: Maybe I should call my mom.*

*HENRY: No, no, no. Don’t call your mom, please. Just hand me the blanket and I’ll leave.*

*CLARE: What do you need the blanket for?*

*HENRY: I’m a time traveler. I come from the future. And when I do, I don’t get to bring my clothes.*

*CLARE: There’s no such thing as time travelers.*

*HENRY: Yes, there is. In fact, you and I are friends in the future.*

*[...]*

*CLARE: Prove you’re from the future.*

*HENRY: Well, your name is Clare Abshire. Born May 24th, 1972. Your parents are Philip and Lucille...*

*CLARE: So, you know things. That doesn’t prove you’re from the future.*

*HENRY: Okay. This weekend, your brother, Mark, who’s a real pain in the ass... falls out of a tree and breaks his arm.*

*CLARE: Yeah, but I won’t know till then if you’re telling the truth or not.*

*HENRY: Well, if you hang around long enough, you’ll see me disappear.*

*CLARE: But you just got here.*

*HENRY: I’ll be back again. Lots of times. In fact... I’ll be back next Tuesday at 4. And it’d be great if, when you come then, you could bring me some clothes. Something your dad won’t miss.*

*Nice to meet you.”*

*(The Time Traveler’s Wife, 00:14:08–00:00:16:12)*

On one of his early visits from Clare’s perspective, Henry gives her a list of the specified dates he will appear in the meadow and she writes them in a diary so she will remember to provide him with clothes and food when he arrives. This is because Henry cannot take anything with him into the future or the past, including clothes, which means that he always arrives naked. The diary is later revealed by older Clare herself when they date for the first time at the restaurant:

*“CLARE: I wrote down every time that you came to visit me. Which I gather I did, or will do, fairly often. The last time that I saw you, I was 18. Seems that you go back to the same places a lot.*

*HENRY: Yeah, it’s like gravity. Big events pull you in.*

*CLARE: I was a big event.”*

*(The Time Traveler’s Wife, 00:10:25–00:10:48)*

Child Clare develops a crush on Henry, only to be upset to learn that he is married (with future Clare, obviously, but Henry never explicitly tells her). Over time, they develop a close friendship, until Henry’s last visit in 1989, when Clare turns 18. This is when older Henry kisses her for the first time, leading her to realize that he is her husband in the future. They were then separated for two years until their meeting at the library in 1991.

Henry meeting Clare first means that Henry is the reason for their meeting. The reason that the older, married Henry travels back and meets young Clare (and thus creates his meeting with Clare for the first time) is the fact that older Clare is his wife. Older, married Henry would not fall anywhere else but Clare because of the condition that he is married to Clare. This is suggested by Clare herself (before they get married, but after realizing that Henry would be her husband in the future), as she is “a big event” that “pulls Henry in” (as seen in the dialogue above). If Henry had not come to visit Clare in the past, Clare would not have known Henry in her life at all, and their meeting at the library, as explained next, would not have happened. However, Young (2015) proposes that Clare is not the big event that keeps Henry drawing to the meadow, but Henry’s later death (in

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which he is fatally shot by Clare's father in the woods near the meadow for being mistaken as a buck while hunting) that brings him to the place; and Clare just happens to be nearby, since Henry later learns from her that he first met her in the meadow.

### *Clare Meets Henry First*

In 1991, 20-year-old Clare is overjoyed to get to 28-year-old Henry in the library where he works. Although Clare has known Henry most of her life, he has never seen her before. Clare knows that present Henry, who currently works as a librarian, will not understand the situation, since, from Henry's perspective, it is the first time they meet:

*"HENRY: Can I help you?"*

*CLARE: Henry?*

*HENRY: Yes?*

*CLARE: Henry. It's you. You told me this would happen. I'm supposed to act normal, but I'm not really acting very normal.*

*HENRY: I'm sorry. I really have no idea who you are.*

*CLARE: I'm Clare. Clare Abshire. Now, I know... I know you don't know me. Look, I know how odd this must be for you. It's odd for me. But, um...would you like to have dinner with me, and I'll explain? Henry, we've been planning this dinner for a long time.*

*HENRY: We have?*

*CLARE: Go to the Beau Thai. It's your favorite."*

*(The Time Traveler's Wife, 00:05:34-00:06:48)*

Clare is smart enough to understand his condition for not knowing her. She asks Henry to have dinner at his favourite restaurant, Beau Thai, to explain the situation to the clueless Henry. Clare explains that she frequently met older, future Henry when she was a child and that he informed her that they would meet in the future for Henry's first time, which is happening now. However, it is certainly not Clare's first time, since Clare has met the older, married-to-Clare Henry:

*"HENRY: You do understand why it is I don't know you?"*

*CLARE: Uh, of course. When you're older, you'll travel back to when I'm a little girl. For me, ahh... I mean, I've known you since... Since I was 6 years old. Since, um, you appeared in the meadow behind my parents' house... where I used to play.*

*[...]*

*HENRY: Clare, right?*

*CLARE: Yeah.*

*HENRY: Could we pretend just for a minute that this is the first time we've met?"*

*CLARE: Okay. Sure. It's just that... It's just that you're my best friend. I've been in love with you all my life."*

*(The Time Traveler's Wife, 00:09:24-00:11:29)*

Their first 'natural' meeting at the library and the subsequent dinner at Beau Thai were foretold and planned long before by older Henry. The older Henry himself told younger Clare that one day she would meet him for the first time in the exact described situation. Older Henry also told her that younger Henry would not recognize her since it was their first meeting for him. Meanwhile, older Henry was able to tell younger Clare because he had already been through that position.

They begin a relationship despite being challenged by Henry's disorder. Among many of his getaways are to visit younger Clare. From the present-day Clare's diary, Henry gets a list of the specified dates when he visited her and gives that to younger Clare so that she can provide him with clothes and food and does not have to wait:

*"HENRY: I was trying to find the dates. The dates that I go to see you. So I could tell the little girl in the meadow. If I'm that important to her...I wanted to tell her when I was coming to see her so she wouldn't have to wait."*

*(The Time Traveler's Wife, 00:22:37-00:22:52)*

Clare later agrees to become his wife, because when she was 18, Clare already realized Henry would be her husband (this will be discussed further in the last part).

From the timeline of Henry's life, it is Clare who meets Henry first as an adult. In this scenario, Clare becomes the reason for their meeting. It is because of Clare, who approaches Henry first at the library and greets him despite Henry's nescience. If Clare had chosen not to meet Henry at that moment, she would not have been married to Henry at all, and how would older Henry have known and visited her as a child?

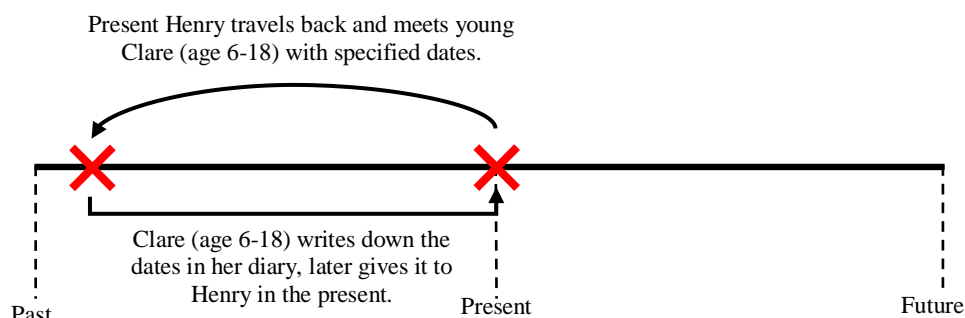


Figure 1. The meeting of Henry and Clare

## Winning the Lottery and Buying the House

This stems from the question, “Henry buys the lottery ticket because it is going to win, or he wins because he buys that ticket?” and, “Henry buys the house because he has ever been there in the future, or he is there because he buys the house?”

### *Henry Chooses the Lottery Number Because It's Going to Win*

Henry's disappearances due to his time travel take a toll on his relationship with Clare. To make up to Clare for this, Henry buys a lottery ticket. As the audience can guess, it is the winning ticket since Henry has had the numbers in advance:

*“MAN [ON TV]: Somewhere in America, moments from now, there could be a new multimillionaire. Good evening, everybody. I'm Dave Long. It's Tuesday...*

*CLARE: You can't be in here.*

*HENRY: We have to watch something.*

*CLARE: The TVs are gonna set you off.*

*HENRY: We have to watch something.*

*MAN [ON TV]: To win, all you have to do...*

*CLARE: What's that?*

*MAN [ON TV]: Good luck.*

*[...]*

*MAN [ON TV]: And our last number is...a 12. So here are your winning numbers: 17, 23, 32, 40 and 12.*

*HENRY: You just won \$5 million.*

*CLARE: You can't do that. It's... It's cheating.*

*HENRY: Okay. Let's rip it up.*

*CLARE: No.*

*HENRY: Look, there are a lot of downsides to my condition, okay? But this is not one of them.”*

*(The Time Traveler's Wife, 00:50:41–00:52:06)*

Henry travels forward where he sees the result of the lottery announcement. He remembers the winning number when he comes back to the present so he can buy the ticket.

### *Henry Wins Because He Chooses the Number*

Henry buys the lottery ticket according to the exact number that is going to win that he has seen earlier in the future. By buying the lottery number that is going to win, he undoubtedly wins. Initially, Clare disapproves of this as she considers this as cheating. Henry suggests that they can just tear the ticket off, but Clare declines. Then, they agree to proceed with the lottery, winning \$5,000,0000.

### *Henry Chooses the House because the House Will Be His*

After winning the lottery, Henry and Clare are house hunting. Henry is ‘not looking’ at the houses. He is walking through them to a back window where he looks out and, not seeing something, recognizes that this is not the house (note the **bold** in the following dialogue):

*“REALTOR: Exquisite plasterwork in every room of the house. Isn't it gorgeous?*

*HENRY: **This is not it.***

*CLARE: But I like it.*

*HENRY: You'll like another one more.*

*REALTOR: Just look at the fireplace. It's got the "wow" factor. The details, the architecture, the windows. Spectacular.*

*HENRY: No. Not the one.*

*CLARE: Uh, thank you.*

*REALTOR: Just look at this landscaping. Wouldn't you love to see it in the spring? Now, it's a little smaller than the other places, but big on charm. Now, the main entrance of this house is actually towards the rear...where there is a charming garden. But look at these features. The fireplace. That staircase, it's so handsome. The wide-plank flooring. Love that.*

*HENRY: Clare. We're home. See the garage?*

*CLARE: Uh-huh.*

*HENRY: That's your studio.*

*CLARE: Aah!"*

*(The Time Traveler's Wife, 00:52:07-00:53:16)*

Henry eventually chooses a house. Somehow, he already knows what Clare's studio will look like before they buy the house, which means he has already seen the house and Clare in it somewhere in the future.

*He Owns the House because He Chose the House*

Henry owns the house because he has bought it. Henry and his family later reside there. Later, the earlier versions of Henry travel forward to the house, letting him know that that is the house he is going to buy.

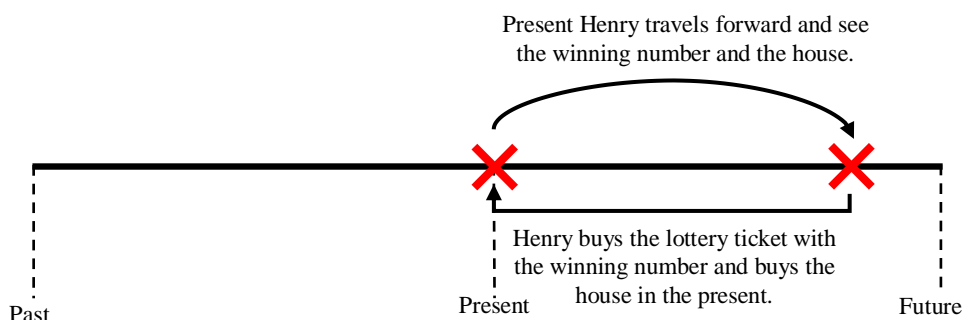


Figure 2. Winning the lottery and buying the house

### The Meeting of Henry and Dr Kendrick

This stems from the question, "Henry tells Clare about Dr Kendrick, or Henry meets Dr Kendrick because Clare tells so?"

*Henry tells Clare about Dr Kendrick*

During older Henry's visits in Clare's youth, older Henry tells younger Clare about his condition. Older Henry reveals that he has a rare genetic disorder, which later comes to be known as "Chrono-Impairment". This disorder causes Henry to involuntarily travel through time. He once mentioned to younger Clare that he was being treated for his condition by a geneticist, Dr Kendrick, according to present Clare.

*Clare tells Henry about Dr Kendrick*

After their first 'natural' meeting at the library, Clare asks Henry to have dinner at Henry's favourite restaurant, Beau Thai. The present Henry still drinks alcohol. Seeing that, Clare mentions the name of Dr Kendrick based on what older Henry has told her previously, that Dr Kendrick advises Henry not to drink since drinking can trigger him to time travel. However, Henry has never heard of Dr Kendrick before, marking the first time Henry ever heard the doctor's name:

*"CLARE: You're not really supposed to drink.*

*HENRY: Why's that?*

*CLARE: Well, you told me that Dr. Kendrick said that you should stop drinking... because it makes you travel.*

*HENRY: Who's Dr. Kendrick?*

*CLARE: He's your doctor. He wins the Berger for his work in genetics. He... He helps you.*

*HENRY: This is too much."*

*(The Time Traveler's Wife, 00:09:46-00:10:11)*

This later inspires Henry to search and seek the advice of Dr Kendrick. Henry explains his diagnosis made by Dr Kendrick in the future to the present Dr Kendrick, although the present Dr Kendrick has no idea of Henry. Henry, knowing the term "Chrono-Impairment" from Clare (in turn, Clare knew the term from older Henry, and

older Henry had known from Dr Kendrick himself) tells Dr Kendrick the term for the first time. This is the clearest example in which Henry illustrates his temporal paradox:

*DR. KENDRICK: How did you say you found me?*

*HENRY: When I'm older...I travel back in time to see my wife when she's a little girl. She says I mentioned a Dr. Kendrick. I found three in the Chicago area: one an ENT, one a podiatrist, so...*

*DR. KENDRICK: I'm a geneticist.*

*HENRY: And I have a genetic anomaly. It's called Chono-Impairment. That's a term you came up with, apparently. That's what she says. Of course, now I've mentioned it, you will call it that...and it'll be hard to tell which came first. You see, that's the thing about time travel."*

*(The Time Traveler's Wife, 00:55:49-00:56:35)*

Henry, fully knowing that Dr Kendrick is his future doctor because his future self has told Clare so in the past, struggles to persuade the geneticist to examine his physical condition. Although Dr Kendrick initially refuses to take the case, thinking it is a joke made by his staff, Henry insists and uses his foretelling ability to Dr Kendrick that Dr Kendrick will be accepted to an institution he is currently applying to, the Berger Grant (while the present Dr Kendrick never tells anyone this personal information). Henry will not have reason to attempt to persuade Dr Kendrick if he has not done so. Later, Dr Kendrick diagnoses Henry's very unusual case. Dr Kendrick becomes Henry's doctor because Henry is persistent, and Henry is persistent because he already knows that Dr Kendrick will be his doctor. This comes to a full circle when Henry travels back and tells younger Clare about the diagnosis, and the present Clare tells present Henry the diagnosis and the name of Dr Kendrick, inspiring him to search for Dr Kendrick and explain his condition to the doctor.

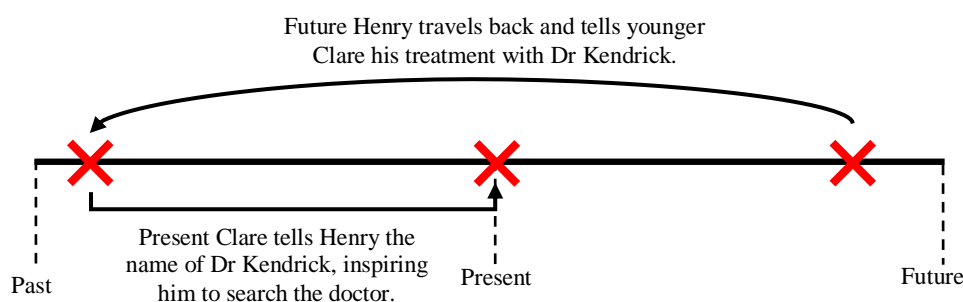


Figure 3. The meeting of Henry and Dr Kendrick

### The Naming of Alba

This stems from the question, "Henry names his daughter 'Alba' because of Alba, or his daughter's name is Alba because Henry names her so?"

*Henry Names His Daughter Alba because of Alba*

When Clare is pregnant, Henry and Clare are choosing the name of their daughter. Before she is born, Henry travels forward and meets a 10-year-old girl on a school field trip, who introduces herself as his daughter, Alba. Alba easily recognizes and calls him, and tells him a few things about the future. This is the first time, from Henry's perspective, he meets Alba:

*"ALBA: Daddy.*

*[...]*

*HENRY: This is the first time we've ever met.*

*ALBA: How do you do?*

*HENRY: How old are you?*

*ALBA: 10. How about you?*

*HENRY: 38.*

*[...]*

*HENRY: It's so good to meet you, Alba. It's so good to see you.*

*ALBA: Me too, Daddy. Me too. I've really missed you."*

*(The Time Traveler's Wife, 01:13:52-01:15:17)*



Alba tells Henry that she is also a time traveller. However, unlike Henry, she has some increasing control over the times and destinations she time travels. Unfortunately, Henry learns that he will die when Alba is five years old, a fact that Henry subsequently hides from Clare.

*Henry's Daughter's Name is Alba because Henry Names Her Alba*

Henry comes back to the present when Clare is still pregnant. The encounter inspires Henry to name his daughter 'Alba', suggesting Clare:

*"HENRY: Alba.*

*CLARE: Alba?*

*HENRY: We name her Alba.*

*CLARE: You met her?*

*HENRY: Yeah. She's so beautiful. And so smart. You're gonna love her so much."*

*(The Time Traveler's Wife, 01:16:40-01:17:05)*

Therefore, the reason that Henry chooses the name 'Alba' is because he meets Alba in the future, and his daughter's name is 'Alba' because Henry chooses the name 'Alba'. Alba is born with her father present and knows him for the first five years of her life. She discovers her own time travelling. Henry probably told Alba that when she was ten years old, they would meet one day at the zoo on her school field trip. In turn, she tells him that he died five years before. Given the information Henry was 38 when Alba was born, and by the time meeting at the zoo, Alba was ten and Henry died five years prior, Henry died when he was 43 or 44 (on the Christmas following Alba's birthday).

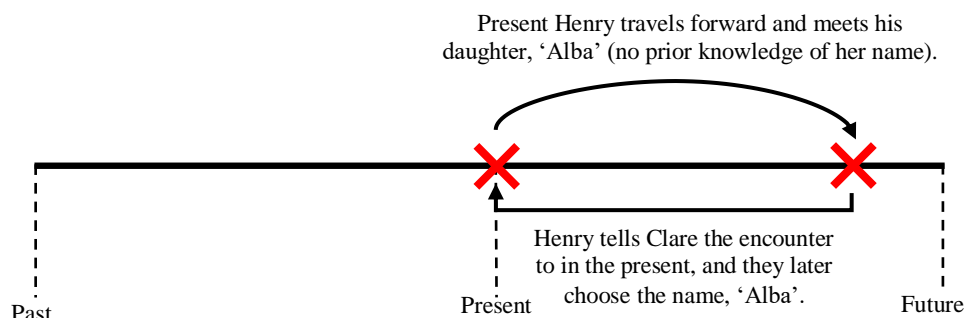


Figure 4. The naming of Alba

### There Is No Any Grandfather Paradox

As mentioned earlier, the difficulties in the time travel narratives are to maintain consistency and establish the time travel rules. One of the most frequently asked questions in time travel narratives is whether the time traveller is able to *change the past*. However, any inconsistency caused by altering the past would raise questions about the grandfather paradox. As mentioned, the grandfather paradox posits the possibility of the time traveller acting on something in the past that could change the future. As a consequence, the paradox would create some alternate, or even competing, timeline. However, if a time-travel narrative hopes to maintain a **single** and **fixed** timeline, it has to eliminate any possibilities of events or references that would raise grandfather paradoxes. Meanwhile, from the causal loops that have been shown and discussed above, the time travel rules here seem to be **fixed**: either Henry knows something in the future and acts upon the information in the present; or Henry knows something in the present and acts upon the information in the past. Although most of the paradoxes explicitly or implicitly displayed in the film are bootstrap paradoxes, some dialogues in the film also touch upon some ideas of the grandfather paradox.

Henry, recognizing his ability to travel back to the past as a time traveller, has always wanted to save his mother from the accident they had. Other people, including Clare and Henry's father, also mention the possibility of him altering the past. Regarding whether he has the ability to alter the past, Henry even comments several times that he has attempted to change events and failed to do so (Young, 2015). The first comment happens during the first minutes of the film, involving her mother's accident and subsequent death. At the time of the accident, an older Henry travels back and meets a younger him, explaining that "there is nothing you can do":

*"YOUNGER HENRY: No! Mommy!*

*OLDER HENRY: Henry. Henry. There's nothing you can do. No. Shh.*

*YOUNGER HENRY: Let me go! Mommy!*

*OLDER HENRY: There's nothing you can do. Listen. Listen to me. I don't have much time. You were in the car. It was spinning. And all of a sudden...you were home and it was two weeks ago...and you were watching yourself. Watching your mom and dad read to you. You time-traveled, okay? Just like I did to come to see you. I'm you, Henry. Understand? When you're grown up. We're the same person. I know that's hard to understand, but you will someday."*

*(The Time Traveler's Wife, 00:02:28-00:03:02)*

Later, Clare also raises the same concern, while Henry, for the second time, still explains he cannot change the fate of his mother:

*"HENRY: Then you seem just like everybody else. Except you're stranded and all alone, just waiting to disappear.*

*CLARE: But you get to see people from the past. People who are gone, like your mom.*

*HENRY: Yeah, but the thing is, you can't change what happens to them. I've tried. It just happens anyway."*

*(The Time Traveler's Wife, 00:19:48-00:20:00)*

Henry's father, Richard DeTamble, also asks the same, to prevent the events from happening in the first place, to which Henry responds:

*"RICHARD: How would you know what your mother would like? You barely knew her.*

*HENRY: I knew her. I still know her now. I've just seen her on the subway. I see her pushing me in the stroller. You know, I see her with you too. This thing I have isn't always a curse.*

*RICHARD: Then why don't you keep her from getting into that goddamn car?*

*HENRY: I would if I could. You know that. I've watched her die hundreds of times. I can never get there in time to change it."*

*(The Time Traveler's Wife, 00:32:08-00:32:43)*

If Henry had saved his mother from the accident, he would have alternated his life timeline (including his father's and other affected people) as he changed anything in the past. This intervention would have raised the concerns of the grandfather paradox: *If older Henry could save his mother right at the time, his mother would not have died. If his mother had not died because of that accident, why did younger Henry see his mother die, later inspiring him to come back to save her in the first place?* The following figure shows how the alternate timeline would be if the grandfather paradox took place.

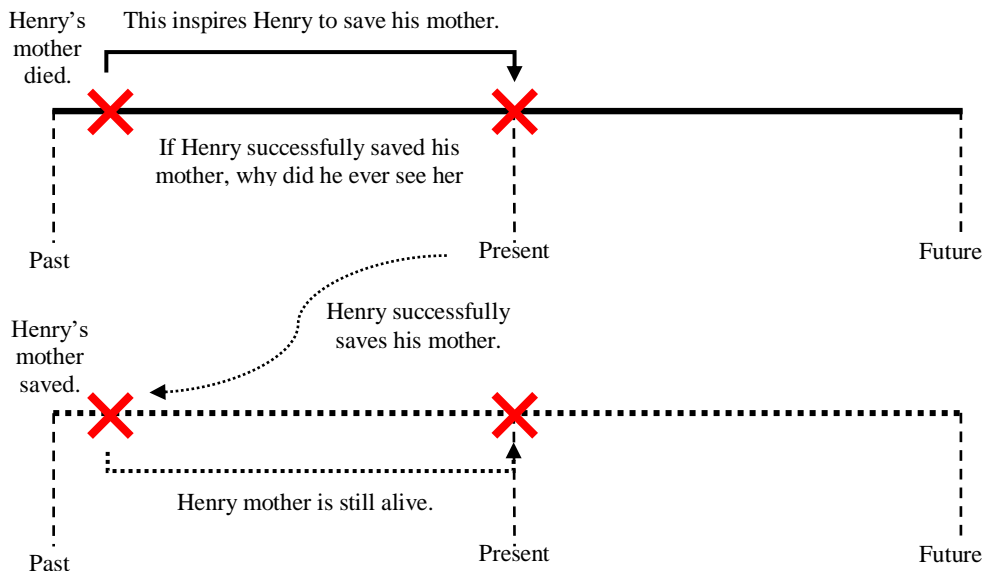


Figure 5. A possibility of an alternate timeline

The very fact that younger Henry sees his mother die, means that she is never going to be saved; thus, nothing ever changes. This film has limited itself to not creating any grandfather paradoxes by 'disabling' Henry from changing anything in the past, including from the event of his own mother's death. This is consistent with the Novikov self-consistency principle, that any actions taken by a time traveller or by an object that travels back in time were part of history all along, and therefore it is impossible for the time traveller to "change"



history in any way. Through this narrative construction, the film tells a coherent story in which all causes and effects fall into a **single** history (Young, 2015).

## **Newcomb's Paradox: Defying the Loops?**

From both the discussions of the bootstrap paradox and the grandfather paradox, we have come to a conclusion that the timeline of the film's time travel is **linear** and **fixed**. Therefore, anything seems perfected; or, borrowing the other name of the bootstrap paradox, 'predestined'. Henry is the only one who is able to see the future, and the one who is able to come back and tell others what will happen in the future. Several times, older Henry (who has the information) travels back and gives younger Clare the information of the future, which, in turn, Clare gives back to Henry, inspiring Henry to give the information back in time. When in the future Clare takes part in giving back to Henry, the storyline seems to be fixed. The film also bars Henry from changing the past, making the story linear. Changing the past would have created another alternate timeline. This leads us to a new question, and this time, not about Henry, but to **people surrounding him**: *do people surrounding Henry take part in the action only to fulfil the paradox?* When we are talking about bootstrap paradoxes, the causal loops, indeed, must be fulfilled. However, do other people really decide to do something, or do they just do so, because they know (from Henry) that one day they will have done it, in order to fulfil the causal loops?

The Newcomb's paradox deals with the problem of free will to choose that the choice or result has been known by the "perfect predictors". One of the perfect predictors can be a time traveller, who has known the choices made by travelling to the future where the decisions have been made. The paradox in this section goes with the single fact: *Clare is married to Henry, a time traveller*. The follow-up question is, "*Does Clare choose to marry Henry?*". The main keyword here is: *choose*. One's power to choose arises from one's exercising their **free will**. Regarding her power to choose, throughout the film, Clare displays some conflicting ideas.

Soon after their marriage, Clare begins to have trouble bringing a pregnancy to term because Henry's disorder is passing on to the foetus. As Henry's genes cause their unborn foetus to time travel, having a child with Clare is seemingly impossible. They seek a renowned doctor's help, but after numerous similar miscarriages, Henry has a secret vasectomy to save Clare from further pain. After his unilateral decision to have the vasectomy, Henry travels back and visits Clare for the last time during her youth (remember that Henry kisses Clare when she turns 18, leading her to realize that he is her husband in the future). When Henry comes back to the present, he tells present Clare about the encounter, while revealing his vasectomy, to which Clare responds:

*"CLARE: How dare you? You tricked me. You... You came to that meadow... and you forced yourself into the heart and the mind of a little girl. What, you think that I wanted this life...this husband that disappears without any kind of warning? Do you think anyone would want that? Who would want that?"*

*HENRY: You have a choice.*

*CLARE: I never had a choice."*

*(The Time Traveler's Wife, 01:06:48-01:07:21)*

Clare surely wants a child, to be a mother, the mother of Henry's child. The fact that Henry had a vasectomy prevents Clare from having what she has dreamed of. When Henry mentions having visited her at 18, Clare accuses him of having forced his way into a child's heart, forcing her to love him. That becomes the ultimate question of their relationship: *Could Clare decide if she wanted to marry Henry? Did Clare become Henry's wife only because when she was 18, she knew Henry would be her husband? Did she find Henry in the library only to fulfil her predestined fate?* Then, the paradox comes: If Clare had decided not to marry Henry, Henry would not have visited her in her youth. By that, Clare would not have known Henry at all. The very fact that now they are together means Clare has known him since her youth, and younger Clare knew Henry because Clare in the future is married to him.

Regarding the facts above, Clare ever comments to Gomez when Gomez finds out that Henry is a time traveller:

*"GOMEZ: Are you saying you know about this?"*

*CLARE: I've known for a very long time.*

*GOMEZ: Okay, I don't know what the hell's going on, all right? I don't need to know how the whole thing works, because I don't care. But, uh, just presuming for a second that we're not all out of our fricking minds... ..whatever Henry has, it's, uh... It's not good.*

*CLARE: I've been waiting for him my entire life, and now he's here. I mean, it's already happened. I couldn't even change it if I wanted to."*

*(The Time Traveler's Wife, 00:26:41-00:27:13)*

There is an interesting point in the conversation above that we can relate to Newcomb's paradox. We may say that Henry is the only "perfect predictor" throughout the film since he is the time traveller. However, at this

time, Henry has not heard anything from Clare about their relationship in the future, nor has he even tried to propose to her. At this time, Henry does not know if he will ever propose to her, let alone know that Clare will accept his proposal. There is also no any future Henry who tells present Henry as such. Therefore, the only "perfect predictor" here is Clare: not only Clare has already known since she was 18 that she would marry Henry one day, but also, she currently is the *only* one who knows exactly when they will get married. She apparently just follows her fate to marry him as there is "nothing she can change": not only does she know she will say "yes" to his proposal one day; but she knows Henry is going to propose to her soon.

Nevertheless, to know whether her marriage to Henry is Clare's own choice or only a mere 'part of the paradox', we can see when Henry proposes to Clare, she says, "No":

*"HENRY: I never wanted to have anything in my life that I couldn't stand losing. But it's too late for that. It's not because you're beautiful and smart and perfect. I don't feel alone anymore. Will you marry me?"*

*CLARE: No. I didn't mean that. I just wanted to try it. I just wanted to say it...to assert my own sense of free will. I... But my free will wants you.*

*HENRY: So, it's a yes?*

*CLARE: Yes."*

*(The Time Traveler's Wife, 00:34:14-00:35:20)*

What is interesting is not that she says "No", nor that he is stunned by this, nor that she immediately changes her answer to "Yes", but the reason she gives for saying "No" and for changing it to "Yes": she wants to see whether she could. She wants to test whether she has what she perceives as "free will" or whether she is forced to do what she is destined to do. She discovers that she can say whatever she wants, but what she wants to say is "Yes". On the one hand, she fears that she has no control of her own life because the fact that Henry travelling to the future strongly suggests that the future is fixed and she is just playing a part in the play. On the other hand, the part she plays is, right now, the part she wants to play (Young, 2015).

Clare's position of being the "perfect predictor" allows her to see the future and act upon it. It is only when Clare accepts the proposal, nobody becomes a "perfect predictor": now Henry knows that they will get married. Later, after they get married, present Henry starts to travel back and tells younger Clare of their marriage. Now, Henry becomes the "perfect predictor": telling younger Clare that they will get married in the future. However, it is different from Clare who never told Henry that one day he would propose to her: this time is because of Clare's choice in the past, by ~~Future Henry travels back knowing they have~~ <sup>Future Henry travels back knowing they have</sup> been married, becoming the "perfect predictor".

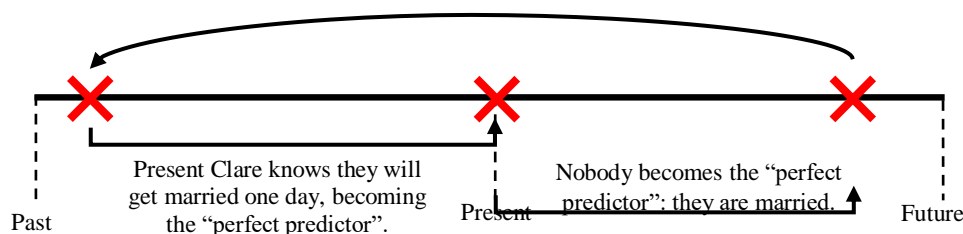


Figure 6. Henry and Clare being "perfect predictors"

## CONCLUSION

The film touches upon all three types of paradoxes in different degrees. From "Instances of Bootstrap Paradox", "the meeting of Henry and Clare" discusses whether Henry or Clare meets the other first: it can be both, since older Henry from the future meets younger Clare in the past, leading Clare to know him first in her life timeline, which in turn makes adult Clare greet adult Henry first at the library, leading Henry to know her first in his life timeline. The foretelling ability derived from time travel consequences makes Henry know the lottery number that is going to win and easily choose a house to buy, as discussed in "the lottery winning and buying the house". A similar thing happens to Alba's, their only daughter's, name, as discussed in "the naming of Alba", and how Henry meets Dr Kendrick, a geneticist who helps Henry's Chrono-Impairment disorder condition, as discussed in "the meeting of Henry and Dr Kendrick". Each of the bootstrap paradoxes involves a causal loop—events whose causes are their own effects. From "There Is No Any Grandfather Paradox", the film has limited itself to not creating any grandfather paradoxes by 'disabling' Henry from changing anything in the past, including from the event of his own mother's death. This is consistent with the Novikov self-consistency principle. For those who wonder if all the things that happen to Clare are just part of fulfilling the paradox, "Newcomb's Paradox: Defying the Loops?" answers the relation between all of the paradoxes and free will, in



which Clare does take a part in Henry's life by deciding to marry him, choosing to do so by asserting her own sense of free will.

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