

of us men born of women but in a way you have less in common with me than you do with an ape or an amoeba. Yet I *must* tell you, somehow. It is too late for me, will be too late, has been too late. I am trapped in this eternal hell and I can never escape, not even into death. My life is immutable, invariant, for I have eaten of Temp, the Weed of Time. But you must not! You must listen! You must understand! Shun the Weed of Time! I must try to tell you in my own way. It is pointless to try to start at the beginning. There is no beginning. There is no end. Only significant time-loci. Let me describe these loci. Perhaps I can make you understand....

September 8, 2050. I am ten years old. I am in the office of Dr. Phipps, who is the director of the mental hospital in which I have been for the past eight years. On June 12, 2053, they will finally understand that I am not insane. It is all they will understand, but it will be enough for them to release me. But on September 8, 2050, I am in a mental hospital.

September 8, 2050, is the day the first expedition returns from Tau Ceti. The arrival is to be televised, and that is why I am in Dr. Phipps' office watching television with the director. The Tau Ceti expedition is the reason I am in the hospital. I have been babbling about it for the previous ten years. I have been demanding that the ship be quarantined, that the plant samples it will bring back be destroyed, not allowed to grow in the soil of Earth. For most of my life this has been regarded as an obvious symptom of schizophrenia—after all, before July 12, 2048, the ship has not left for Tau Ceti, and until today it has not returned.

But on September 8, 2050, they wonder. This is the day I have been babbling about since I emerged from my mother's womb and now it is happening. So now I am alone with Dr. Phipps as the image of the ship on the television set lands on the image of a wide concrete apron....

"Make them understand!" I shout, knowing that it is futile. "Stop them, Dr. Phipps, stop them!"

Dr. Phipps stares at me uneasily. His small blue eyes show a mixture of pity, confusion and fright. He is all too familiar with my case. Sharing his desk top with the portable television set is a heavy oak-tag folder filled with my case history, filled with hundreds of therapy session records. In each of these records, this day is mentioned: September 8, 2050. I have repeated the same story over and over and over again. The ship will leave for Tau Ceti on July 12, 2048. It will return on September 8, 2050. The expedition will report that Tau Ceti has twelve planets.... The fifth alone is Earthlike and bears plant and animal life.... The expedition will bring back samples and seeds of a small Cetan plant with broad green leaves and small purple

The Weed of Time

Norman Spinrad

I, me, the spark of mind that is my consciousness, dwells in a locus that is neither place nor time. The objective duration of my life-span is one hundred and ten years, but from my own locus of consciousness, I am immortal—my awareness of my own awareness can never cease to be. I am an infant am a child am a youth am an old, old man dying on clean white sheets. I am all these me's, have always been all these me's will always be all these me's in the place where my mind dwells in an eternal moment divorced from time....

A century and a tenth is my eternity. My life is like a biography in a book: immutable, invariant, fixed in length, limitless in duration. On April 3, 2040, I am born. On December 2, 2150, I die. The events in between take place in a single instant. Say that I range up and down them at will, experiencing each of them again and again and again eternally. Even this is not really true; I experience all moments in my century and a tenth simultaneously, once and forever... How can I tell my story? How can I make you understand? The language we have in common is based on concepts of time which we do not share.

For me, time as you think of it does not exist. I do not move from moment to moment sequentially like a blind man groping his way down a tunnel. I am at all points in the tunnel simultaneously, and my eyes are open wide. Time is to me, in a sense, what space is to you, a field over which I move in more directions than one.

How can I tell you? How can I make you understand? We are all

flowers. . . . The plant will be named *tempis ceti*. . . . It will become known as Temp. . . . Before the properties of the plant are fully understood, seeds will somehow become scattered and Temp will flourish in the soil of the Earth. . . . Somewhere, somehow, people will begin to eat the leaves of the Temp plant. They will become changed. They will babble of the future, and they will be considered mad—until the future events of which they speak begin to come to pass. . . .

Then the plant will be outlawed as a dangerous narcotic. Eating Temp will become a crime. . . . But as with all forbidden fruit, Temp will continue to be eaten. . . . And finally, Temp addicts will become the most sought-after criminals in the world. The governments of the Earth will attempt to milk the secrets of the future from their tortured minds. . . .

All this is in my case history, with which Dr. Phipps is familiar. For eight years, this has been considered only a remarkably consistent psychotic delusion.

But now it is September 8, 2050. As I have predicted, the ship has returned from Tau Ceti. Dr. Phipps stares at me woodenly as the gang-plank is erected and the crew begins to embark. I can see his jaw tense as the reporters gather around the Captain, a tall, lean man carrying a small sack.

The Captain shakes his head in confusion as the reporters besiege him. "Let me make a short statement first," he says crisply. "Save wear and tear on all of us."

The Captain's thin, hard, pale face fills the television screen. "The expedition is a success," he says. "The Tau Ceti system was found to have twelve planets, and the fifth is Earthlike and bears plant and simple animal life. Very peculiar animal life. . . ."

"What do you mean peculiar?" a reporter shouts.

The Captain frowns and shrugs his wide shoulders. "Well, for one thing, they all seem to be herbivores and they seem to live off one species of plant which dominates the planetary flora. No predators. And it's not hard to see why. I don't quite know how to explain this, but all the critters seem to know what the other animals will do before they do it. And what we were going to do, too. We had one hell of a time taking specimens. We think it has something to do with the plant. Does something strange to their time sense."

"What makes you say that?" a reporter asks.

"Well, we fed some of the stuff to our lab animals. Same thing seemed to happen. It became virtually impossible to lay a hand on 'em. They seemed to be living a moment in the future, or something. That's why Dr. Lominov has called the plant *tempis ceti*."

"What's this *tempis* look like?" a reporter says.

"Well, it's sort of. . . ." the Captain begins. "Wait a minute," he says, "I've got a sample right here."

He reaches into the small sack and pulls something out. The camera zooms in on the Captain's hand.

He is holding a small plant. The plant has broad green leaves and small purple blossoms.

Dr. Phipp's hands begin to tremble uncontrollably. He stares at me. He stares and stares and stares. . . .

May 12, 2062. I am in a small room. Think of it as a hospital room, think of it as a laboratory, think of it as a cell; it is all three. I have been here for three months.

I am seated on a comfortable lounge chair. Across a table from me sits a man from an unnamed government intelligence bureau. On the table is a tape recorder. It is running. The man seated opposite is frowning in exasperation.

"The subject is December 2081," he says. "You will tell me all you know of the events of December 2081."

I stare at him silently, sullenly. I am tired of all the men from intelligence sections, economic councils, scientific bureaus, with their endless, futile demands.

"Look," the man snaps, "we know better than to appeal to your nonexistent sense of patriotism. We are all too well aware that you don't give a damn about what the knowledge you have can mean to your country. But just remember this: you're a convicted criminal. Your sentence is indeterminate. Cooperate, and you'll be released in two years. Clam up, and we'll hold you here till you rot or until you get it through your head that the only way for you to get out is to talk. The subject is the month of December in the year 2081. Now, *give!*"

I sigh. I know that it is no use trying to tell any of them that knowledge of the future is useless, that the future cannot be changed because it was not changed because it will not be changed. They will not accept the fact that choice is an illusion caused by the fact that future time-loci are hidden from those who advance sequentially along the timestream one moment after the other in blissful ignorance. They refuse to understand that moments of future time are no different from moments of past or present time: fixed, immutable, invariant. They live in the illusion of sequential time.

So I begin to speak of the month of December in the year 2081. I know they will not be satisfied until I have told them all I know of the years between this time-locus and December 2, 2150. I know they will not be satisfied because they are not satisfied, have not been satisfied, will not be satisfied. . . .

So I tell them of that terrible December nine years in their future. . . .

December 2, 2150. I am old, old, a hundred and ten years old. My

age-rusted body lies on the clean white sheets of a hospital bed, lungs, heart, blood vessels, organs, all failing. Only my mind is forever untouched, the mind of an infant-child-youth-man-ancient. I am, in a sense, dying. Beyond this day, December 2, 2150, my body no longer exists as a living organism. Time to me forward of this date is as blank to me as time beyond April 3, 2040, is in the other temporal direction.

In a sense, I am dying. But in another sense, I am immortal. The spark of my consciousness will not go out. My mind will not come to an end, for it has neither end nor beginning. I exist in one moment that lasts forever and spans one hundred and ten years.

Think of my life as a chapter in a book, the book of eternity, a book with no first page and no last. The chapter that is my life-span is one hundred and ten pages long. It has a starting point and an ending point, but the chapter exists as long as the book exists, the infinite book of eternity....

Or, think of my life as a ruler one hundred and ten inches long. The ruler "begins" at one and "ends" at one hundred and ten, but "begins" and "ends" refer to length, not duration.

I am dying. I experience dying always, but I never experience death. Death is the absence of experience. It can never come for me.

December 2, 2150, is but a significant time-locus for me, a dark wall, an end point beyond which I cannot see. The other wall has the time-locus April 3, 2040....

April 3, 2040. Nothingness abruptly ends, non-nothingness abruptly begins. I am born.

What is it like for me to be born? How can I tell you? How can I make you understand? My life, my whole life-span of one hundred and ten years comes into being at once, in an instant. At the "moment" of my birth I am at the moment of my death and all moments in between. I emerge from my mother's womb and I see my life as one sees a painting, a painting of some complicated landscape: all at once, whole, a complete gestalt. I see my strange, strange infancy, the incomprehension as I emerge from the womb speaking perfect English, marred only by my undeveloped vocal apparatus, as I emerge from my mother's womb demanding that the ship from Tau Ceti in the time-locus September 8, 2050, be quarantined, knowing that my demand will be futile because it was futile, will be futile, is futile, knowing that at the moment of my birth I am have been will be all that I ever was/am/will be and that I cannot change a moment of it.

I emerge from my mother's womb and I am dying in clean white sheets and I am in the office of Dr. Phipps watching the ship land and I am in the government cell for two years babbling of the future and I am in a clearing in some woods where a plant with broad green leaves

and small purple flowers grow and I am picking the plant and eating it as I know I will do have done am doing....

I emerge from my mother's womb and I see the gestalt-painting of my life-span, a pattern of immutable events painted on the stationary and eternal canvas of time....

But I do not merely see the "painting," I am the "painting" and I am the painter and I am also outside the painting viewing the whole and I am none of these.

And I see the immutable time-locus that determines all the rest—March 4, 2060. Change that and the painting dissolves and I live in time like any other man, moment after blessed moment, freed from this all-knowing hell. But change itself is illusion.

March 4, 2060, in a wood not too far from where I was born. But knowledge of the horror that day brings, has brought, will bring can change nothing. I will do as I am doing will do did because I did it will do it am doing it....

April 3, 2040, and I emerge from my mother's womb, an infant-child-youth-man-ancient, in a government cell in a mental hospital dying in clean white sheets....

March 4, 2060. I am twenty. I am in a clearing in the woods. Before me grows a small plant with broad green leaves and purple blossoms—Temp, the Weed of Time, which has haunted, haunts, will haunt my never-ending life. I know what I am doing will do have done because I will do have done am doing it.

How can I explain? How can I make you understand that this moment is unavoidable, invariant, that though I have known, do know, will know its dreadful consequences, I can do nothing to alter it?

The language is inadequate. What I have told you is an unavoidable half-truth. All actions I perform in my one-hundred-and-ten-year life-span occur simultaneously. But even that statement only hints around the truth, for *simultaneously* means "at the same time" and *time* as you understand the word has no relevance to my life. But let me approximate:

Let me say that all actions I have ever performed, will perform, do perform, occur simultaneously. Thus no knowledge inherent in any particular time-locus can effect any action performed at any other locus in time. Let me construct another useful life. Let me say that for me action and perception are totally independent of each other. At the moment of my birth, I did everything I ever would do in my life, instantly, blindly, in one total gestalt. Only in the next "moment" do I perceive the results of all those myriad actions, the horror that March 4, 2060, will make has made is making of my life.

Or... they say that at the moment of death, one's entire life flashes instantaneously before one's eyes. At the moment of my birth,

my whole life flashed before me, not merely before my eyes, but in reality. I cannot change any of it because change is something that exists only as a function of the relationship between different moments in time and for me life is one eternal moment that is one hundred and ten years long....

So this awful moment is invariant, inescapable.

March 4, 2060. I reach down, pluck the Temp plant. I pull off a broad green leaf, put it in my mouth. It tastes bittersweet, woody, unpleasant. I chew it, bolt it down.

The Temp travels to my stomach, is digested, passes into my bloodstream, reaches my brain. There changes occur which better men than I are powerless, will be powerless to understand, at least up till December 2, 2150, beyond which is blankness. My body remains in the objective timestream, to age, grow old, decay, die. But my mind is abstracted out of time to experience all moments as one.

It is like a *déjà vu*. Because this happened on March 4, 2060, I have already experienced it in the twenty years since my birth. Yet this is the beginning point for my Temp-consciousness in the objective timestream. But the objective timestream has no relevance to what happens....

The language, the very thought patterns are inadequate. Another useful lie: in the objective timestream I was a normal human being until this dire March 4, experiencing each moment of the previous twenty years sequentially, in order, moment, after moment, after moment....

Now on March 4, 2060, my consciousness expands in two directions in the timestream to fill my entire life-span: forward to December 2, 2150, and my death, backwards to April 3, 2040, and my birth. As this time-locus of March 4 "changes" my future, so too it "changes" my past, expanding my Temp-consciousness to both extremes of my life-span.

But once the past is changed, the previous past has never existed and I emerge from my mother's womb an infant-child-youth-man-ancient in a government cell in a mental hospital dying in clean white sheets.... And—

I, me, the spark of mind that is my consciousness, dwells in a locus that is neither place nor time. The objective duration of my life-span is one hundred and ten years, but from my own locus of consciousness, I am immortal—my awareness of my own awareness can never cease to be. I am an infant child am a youth am an old, old man dying on clean white sheets. I am all these me's, have always been all these me's will always be all these me's in the place where my mind dwells in an eternal moment divorced from time....

Study Questions

"All You Zombies—"

1. Carefully describe the steps by which the protagonist of Heinlein's story becomes his own father and mother. Is he also his own grandfather and grandmother? Why?
2. Using Heinlein's style of reasoning, show how an entire population could come to be with only one natural birth. Derive some other exotic consequence.
3. Try to write a set of rules for time-travel stories that eliminate the possibility of deriving contradictions from time-travel descriptions. Good luck.

The Weed of Time

1. Theologians sometimes write that God sees all time at once—as if it were spread out in space or illustrated in a mural. Is Temp consciousness like this? Do we see our entire lifetime as if it were portrayed in a mural? What, in addition to this, does Temp consciousness involve?
2. How does it come to be that the protagonist of Spinrad's story is born with Temp consciousness? Given that he has Temp consciousness, is his response to having it a rational one?
3. If there is no difference between past, present, and future—if all coexist—what sense can be made of the notion of causality? In view of the picture of time presented in the story, what sense if any can be made of the claim that eating Temp causes Temp consciousness? Given this picture, can the concept of causality be altered (or replaced by some related notion) in a manner that enables us to make sense of the way in which events are related to one another?