

## **Time for you. Time for me.**

By Aoibheann Kearins

*And indeed there will be time  
For the yellow smoke that slides along the street,  
Rubbing its back upon the window-panes;  
There will be time, there will be time  
To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet;  
There will be time to murder and create,  
And time for all the works and days of hands  
That lift and drop a question on your plate;  
Time for you and time for me,  
And time yet for a hundred indecisions,  
And for a hundred visions and revisions,  
Before the taking of a toast and tea.*

- 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' T.S. Elliot

Time for you. Time for me. Before I knew how to spell my own name I knew that when Mum shook my shoulders it was time for my day to begin. When Dad came home from work, it was time for tea. I knew that when my sister's eyes welled up it was time for a hug. My whole life dictated by a ticking clock, an atom whirling unbeknownst to me. Time is one of the most complex ideas of our universe and yet it is one of the first we grasp. Perhaps it is at the start of our lives we best understand Einstein's relativity. Time for you. Time for me.

Time has changed for me. The hands of a clock hold meaning now; different times carry different feelings. 8am is a beeping alarm, 1pm a coffee with friends, 5pm a call from home, 11pm drunken laughter with strangers. Despite knowing that a second is 9,192,631,770 rotations of a Caesium atom, is this really any more defined than my experience of time as a child? If anything, time has become less objective. The moments between sending a text and receiving a reply hold significance; the years slipping through my fingers at each birthday hold responsibility. I'm now quite happy to be younger than my sisters. Time has weight.

Even as children, we feel the potential of time — Aristotle's 'dunamis'. A hug can become a memory, a teabag can steep into tea, a seed can grow into a tree. 'Dunamis' is the capacity to become, and time is the medium in which it unfolds. Without it, potential remains frozen. With it, life is possible.

I often wonder about how it felt when Dublin Mean Time was observed. I'm sure many students would love to know that they were not five minutes late to a lecture, but twenty minutes and twenty-one seconds early. Humans fear falling behind, and I know it is one of my greatest fears. I worry that I am not learning as fast as my classmates, not falling in love as fast as my friends, not knowing my dream career with certainty like my future colleagues.

And yet, I imagine those at Dunsink Observatory, with its modest dome and rural setting. For decades, Ireland existed slightly out of phase, described as out of sync economically and politically. And yet those scientists found that our very sun had decreed we were living twenty-five minutes and twenty-one seconds behind London. How liberating that must have

felt! To realise that while London ticked toward empire, Ireland ticked to its own clock, stifled by colonialism and the demands for a master schedule. We were not lesser, but simply occupying another position on a rotating sphere. The Earth itself offered perspective before the equations of Einstein ever did.

This idea can apply to our own lives. We all occupy different places in space and moments in time. Each person has their own “now,” their own relational slice. Time is the medium in which potential becomes reality. A seed waits for soil, a student for the lecture, a nation for its people. Even if the universe is a block in which past, present, and future coexist, the moment we inhabit holds possibility. Within it, decisions are made, creation occurs, and change is possible.

We see this in nature, too. Rocks appear solid, yet beneath the surface, they move imperceptibly over millennia. Observed for just an instant, a waterfall seems solid, though each droplet is in constant motion. In the time it takes a Caesium atom to oscillate billions of times, the Earth spins, mountains rise and erode, seasons pass. These vast and varied timescales remind me that what seems immutable is relative; solidity and permanence are only perspectives within a frame. We have time to notice the cascade, the snow, the rain, the sunlight. We have time for tea to brew.

When I seek perspective, I often walk to the Fitzgerald Library in Trinity College Dublin, where the pitch-drop experiment lives. Pitch, seemingly solid, flows so slowly that a single drop takes years to fall. Observing it, I am reminded that time’s passage is relative, and that even what seems unchanging can evolve. No matter the pace at which we move through life, nature moves at its own timescale, and yet we can choose what feels “solid” to us.

Physics formalises this intuition. Einstein’s special theory of relativity shows that time is not universal: the faster an object moves relative to an observer, the slower its clock ticks from that observer’s perspective. General relativity adds gravity: clocks tick differently in different gravitational fields. GPS satellites must account for both effects or risk kilometre-scale errors each day. Time is elastic, physical, and relational.

The relativity of time offers comfort. A note is not high until a low one is heard; a distance is not far until a shorter one is travelled. Time passes at exactly the pace it needs to for each observer. Physics provides constraints — entropy gives time direction, quantum mechanics frames probability — but within those constraints, life unfolds freely. Potential exists because there is time; ‘dunamis’ requires a medium in which to become actual.

Time is both measured and lived. In childhood, I felt it in rhythms of care and attention: the hug, the alarm, the lunch bell. In history, it was the sun over Dunsink, ticking twenty-five minutes and twenty-one seconds behind London. In physics, it is an atom oscillating billions of times per second, a satellite’s clock corrected for gravitational warping, a planet moving through spacetime. In human experience, it is anticipation, memory, responsibility, and joy. Time carries weight and meaning, yet it is always relational, flexible, and personal.

Even as we synchronise schedules and align clocks, each “now” is unique. My experience of time is my own, shaped by velocity, position, perspective, and emotion. The future is not fixed from within this frame; quantum mechanics reminds us that possibility exists before measurement, before decision, before action. Time allows ‘dunamis’ to unfold, the unrealised

to become real. It is both constraint and liberation, measurement and medium, scaffold and canvas.

And indeed, there will be time. Time for learning, for failing, for loving, for creating. Time to pause, to imagine, to feel the weight of seconds and the expansiveness of possibility. Time to inhabit our frame, while recognising that other frames exist, each with its own present. Time to measure, to marvel, to act, to hope. Time to send messages and await replies, to laugh and cry, to watch the sun over Dublin drift later than over London. Time to become, time to exist, time to realise the unrealised.

Time for you. Time for me. Time for all the yellow smoke and the toast and tea, the questions lifted and dropped on our plates, the hundred indecisions and revisions, the heartbeat of a life lived within relativity, within dunamis, within possibility. Twenty-five minutes and twenty-one seconds, a second, a decade — it all matters, because every frame carries its own now, and every now is the medium in which life unfolds.

Time is never entirely innocent, but it is always ours. It is the weight, the stretch, the pause, and the possibility that allows us to be more than mere passengers on a pre-laid track. We are participants, creators, and observers of our own relational now. And perhaps that is the quiet, liberating truth: no matter where we are, or when we are, the time we have is precisely the time we need.