

## Mean Time. A personal response

Deryn Rees Jones writes about her favourite poem, 'Mean Time', by Carol Ann Duffy.

### *'Meantime'*

*The clocks slid back an hour  
and stole light from my life  
as I walked through the wrong part of town,  
mourning our love.*

*And, of course, unmendable rain  
fell to the bleak streets  
where I felt my heart gnaw  
at all our mistakes.*

*If the darkening sky could lift  
more than one hour from this day  
there are words I would never have said  
nor have heard you say.*

*But we will be dead, as we know,  
beyond all light.  
These are the shortened days  
and the endless nights.*

Like all of Carol Ann Duffy's poems, the title poem of her fourth collection, 'Mean Time', is written in a simple but allusive language. The title elicits multiple meanings: the times are indeed 'mean' - one dictionary defines the word as ignoble, sordid, lacking dignity, stingy, disobliging, selfish and ungenerous.

In arithmetical terms 'the mean' is one half of the sum of two quantities; the two people in a relationship in this case.

'Mean time' is the interval between two given times, but in this case also refers to Greenwich Mean Time (GMT). The poem is set during the lost hour when the clocks are set back to mark the beginning of winter, a winter which in the poem is both actual and metaphorical. It is within this limbo, this time between seasons, that the speaker of the poem contemplates both past and present.

And while the narrative of 'Mean Time' speaks of the failure of a relationship, it also speaks in wider terms of an awareness of mortality. By the final stanza the 'I' has become a 'we'. The 'endless nights' suggests a desperate wakefulness but also hints at a fervent sexuality and points to the despair at the loss of a shared past while also looking on to the promise of a new future.

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there are words I would never have said  
nor have heard you say.*

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**Article Written By:** Deryn Rees Jones's collections include *The Memory Tree* and *Signs Round a Dead Body*, both published by Seven.

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