

Time is love

We live in time, but when we love we are always out of time. If we have learned to truly love, we always have time for the beloved. Yet, we also feel that there's never enough time for this. This is the paradox of time.

If we lack love towards others, then we are merely doing time with them. Not knowing how to love is like bars that imprison us in our own emptiness; it becomes walls keep out those we are supposed to love.

Time drags on, ceaselessly ticking, when we seek for someone to love us. Time holds us in its cyclic face: this is self-centred time. Only in showing love to others, do we break out of time's hold on us.

Love is timeless; any true lover knows that. This is the stuff of true beauty hidden away in the greatest art, poetry, music, literature and gestures, teased out only by those who themselves know how to love.

If we truly love another, whether a soul-mate or a friend or simply someone before us, we must learn to wait. For waiting is what makes the time right. Sometimes we need to wait for someone far behind us, slow in many ways. Sometimes we need to wait to catch up with someone ahead of us, we are ourselves slow in some ways.

We are each moving in our own time like the Henry DeTamble (a librarian), the time-traveller and his wife, Clare Anne Abshire (an artist).¹ This is a love story about a wonderfully patient loving woman who constantly and unfailingly waits for his love, a man with a genetic disorder (called chrono-impairment) that causes him to time-travel unpredictably.

Henry begins his involuntary time-travelling at the age of 6, jumping forward and backward relative to his own timeline. His destinations are tied to his subconscious, so that he most often travels to places and times related to his life. One of his time-travel triggers is stress. So he often goes jogging to stay calm and in the present.

Like Henry, we have no real control of our time. We busy ourselves, or give excuses, to keep out those we do not love or not love enough: we have no time for them. However, we always find the time to be with loved ones. Where there's love, there's always the time.

Yet, with those we love or care for, when we react negatively (like blaming them rather than understanding conditions beyond our control), we fall into a time-slip. We feel as if we are misunderstood, or we are unable to understand the other party. We have each been drawn into separate time-zones, as it were. We feel out of synch.

In his travels into the future, Henry even searches for a medicine – even consulting a geneticist – so that he may be able to take control of his time-travelling. He cannot take anything with him when he time-travels. He always arrives naked, as if reborn, then struggles to find clothing, shelter, and food. This is a cycle he learns to cope with. He teaches himself some survival skills, such as lock-picking, pick-pocketing and self-defence, most of which he learns from older versions of himself. These he uses only when truly necessary or in emergencies.

We are not only born naked, bringing nothing with us. Beneath our clothing and appearances, we are but naked. Below the thin veneer of wealth and power, we are but naked. Behind our titles and talks, we are but naked. Often we do not even know this, but in time we will; that is, if we catch up with time, before time catches up with us.

Since time separates people, it can be difficult to learn from others. However, if we openly accept our numerous selves or past "lives," we can learn a great deal from them. In a matter of time, we are our best teacher, who know us best, most true to us. That is, if we find that quality time to be with just ourself. If we truly love ourself, we must give us time.

¹ From Audrey Niffenegger, *The Time Traveler's Wife*, San Francisco: MacAdam/Cage, 2003. It was made into a successful movie of the same title in 2009.

Time is Love by Piya Tan

In the book, 28-year-old Henry “first” meets 20-year-old Clare in the library, and at once become as thick as thieves. Henry then starts to time-travel to meet Clare as a child and as an adolescent. On one such visit, Henry gives her a list of the dates of his appearances. She writes them down in her diary so that she will remember to provide him with clothes and food when he arrives.

In time, Clare and Henry marry. Clare, however, has trouble bringing a pregnancy to term because of Henry’s genetic anomaly. After six miscarriages, Henry has a vasectomy to save Clare further pain. A past version of Henry visits Clare one night and they make love. This gives them a daughter, Alba. She too has chrono-impairment but, unlike Henry, has some control over her time-travels. Before she is born, Henry travels to the future and meets ten-year-old Alba and learns that he dies when she is five.

We know we will die; our loved ones, too, will die. We know this because all others before us have died. We have seen even our beloved pets die. While we live, we still have the time to love the living. If we love the living while we live, time is with us. Time is love.

On New Year's eve 2006, Henry time-travels into the middle of a woods in 1984 and is accidentally shot by Clare’s brother, who mistakes him for an elk. Henry returns to the present and dies in Clare’s arms. She is devastated.

Often, the reason for such a regret – for missing someone when he is gone or dead -- is that we have not shown our unconditional love for him when we could. We hesitate too long and too often. Less important events are more important to us: so we lose what is really important to us. We lose what is meaningful to us. Time makes us see this meaning, which brings purpose to our lives. Then, our love is still there, growing, healing, despite the lost time.

Later, Clare finds Henry’s letter asking her to “stop waiting” for him, but at the same time promises her a future meeting. The last scene in the book occurs when Clare is 82 years old and Henry is 43. She waits for Henry, as she has done most of her life.

The Time Traveler’s Wife is a metaphor about the author’s own failed relationships, as she tries to make sense of them. The story’s theme came to her suddenly and the novel’s title later. The novel, which is both science fiction and romance, uses time-travel to explore miscommunication and distance in relationships, and examines deeper existential questions, especially issues of love, loss, fate and free will.

As a first-time novelist, Niffenegger had trouble finding a literary agent. Twenty-five publishers rejected her book. She eventually sent the novel unsolicited to MacAdam/Cage, a small San Francisco publisher. After an auction for the rights, a giant corporation made the best offer, but Niffenegger selected MacAdam/Cage as her publisher because of its dedication.

After an endorsement from popular crime writer and family friend Scott Turow on *The Today Show*, the book became a bestseller, and won the Exclusive Books Boeke Prize (2005) and a British Book Award (2006).

Like Henry the time-traveller, we too have no real control over many things in our lives. Yet all such events are subject to time, they must change; we too must change. We may not be able to change things or other people: we just don’t have the time, the experience, the wisdom. But we can change our attitude towards them. We need not time-travel to do this if we understand how the present works. Only when we live in the present, do we understand our past and shape the future. The present is the best gift we have, the best gift we can give: the loving gift of time.²

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² See also “When love is truly blind,” R24 (*Simple Joys* 2009: 4.4): <http://dharmafarer.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2009/11/R24-08-0220-Love-is-blind-4.4.pdf>