Time

Time is an extremely important theme in *Mean Time* and the title itself has several possible meanings. Greenwich Mean Time is the local time on the meridian of Greenwich which is used as an international basis of time-reckoning. Mean is another word for an average but ‘Mean Time’ could also refer to time as a malignant or unkind force. The title also recalls the phrase ‘in the mean time’ which is the time spent waiting for something more significant to happen.

Listed below are some of the aspects of time which appear in *Mean Time*. You will notice that many of the ideas are connected. Try to add to the list and look through the poems to find examples for each one.

- The past
- The way the past affects the present
- The haunting of the present by the past
- The irretrievable nature of the past
- Becoming trapped in the past
- Memory – note the recurrence of photographic and cinematic images as visual records of the past in Duffy’s poems or as triggers for memories. In both ‘Beachcomber’ and ‘The Good Teachers’ photographs are used as a way of reconstructing memories and provide the inspiration for the poems.
- Significant moments in the past
- Change and sameness
- Identity through time – think of the way Duffy is and isn’t the child in the photograph of ‘Beachcomber’. We are the products of our past selves but we are also different from them.
- Nostalgia
- Loss
- Decay
- Death
- Childhood
- Family background
- The adult’s ‘inner child’
- The transition between childhood and adulthood
- Comparing the past to the present – the disappointment of the present in relation to the past
- The inescapable nature of time
- Zeitgeist (the spirit of an age)
- Time as a concept
- Greenwich Mean Time
- Time stopping
- Losing time