

Keeping Time

Thomas Legendre

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Keeping Time is a rich novel that explores the nature of a marriage and asks whether love is a monolith, a miracle of biology, or an artificial construct.

Alternating between the late 1980s and the early 2000s, the story focuses on a crumbling marriage. After a promising, romantic start, Violet and Aaron's connection has eroded. Two children, several career failures, and health issues sink them into the mire of disappointment. Then an ancient mystery makes Aaron hope that he can travel through time to correct the conflicts that threaten to split his family apart.

Time and voice are critical elements as chapters skip between decades and characters. Both Violet and Aaron have their say: the places where they disagree about what isn't working, and how they interpret their marriage's issues, are expressed in metaphors specific to their professional fields. Violet, a brilliant musician, senses "a different harmonic" when the future Aaron turns up in 1988 to save their marriage; Aaron eyes their neighborhood's "dark and sere" sandstone blocks that are "caramelized by the elements." Repetitive fragments and piled allusions sometimes blur their voices, but a subtle tension is sustained.

Though its ostensible focus is on Violet and Aaron's failing relationship, the novel has much more to say about geology, archaeology, and architecture. Beautiful lines address the natural world as a metaphor for the unspoken truths between the couple as they struggle to find a common language. Passages with asides about science, Aaron's work, and the Scottish landscape are elegiac and more eloquent than the book's circling domestic scenes. Whether that is the nature of time travel or disappointment is unclear, but the terrain of divorce is traveled well.

Keeping Time is a modern story with a fantastic *deus ex machina* at its core: if you could change the past, would you?

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