

Yet, it's constant.

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Some consideration on language:

I wrote this text in January 2024, originally in French with the title “Et pourtant, il est contant.” Translation is difficult to convey both the message and the style. I’m then asking my readers to be nice enough to tell me the mistakes they might see, so this short story can keep improving.

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The end of winter.

The spring sun was shining down on the winter snow. The melt flowed faster and faster, quickly forming a small stream along the rock face. The forest below threw its bare branches into the sky, and the sap began to flow again.

Suddenly, a sinister cracking sound penetrated the forest, drowning out the muffled sound of the wind in the branches or the crystalline sound of the drops falling to the ground. The boulder was falling, it had broken free from the cliff, surely unbalanced by the winter ice and freed by the tentative heat. It rolled for a while, crushing everything in its path, bushes and shrubs. It was too early for the first flowers, but the bulbs were hit anyway, destroying the budding shoots that had fallen asleep in the autumn.

Finally it came to a halt, bumping into an old oak, so old, so big, that it barely shook its majestic trunk.

Springtime.

Eiche was thinking. As always at the end of this dazzling season, she was trying to regain her bearings, to observe what she hadn't been able to follow. She could feel her whole body preparing for the slow period when she would finally be able to replenish her reserves and grow a little taller.

"To be honest, it doesn't do me much good to gain a few square metres, but it's so good to feel Ra feeding me."

Then she noticed a wound she didn't know she had. In the middle, where her subterranean self met her aerial self, her skin had been crushed, even shredded in places. She tried to think about it a little more, but the incessant flickering of the light prevented her from doing so. The days were still passing at breakneck speed, preventing any sense of continuity. No sooner did a question arise than the night took over again, making her forget any critical thoughts. It was clear that she was still unable to do much other than prepare for the big season.

She abandoned her idea and concentrated on carrying everything her body needed to feel ready as soon as possible. She let her reflexes take over. "Nature is good. Our bodies know what's good for them."

The season progressed. The days were getting longer and the sun's rays brought a little more strength to the blossoming forest. The trees were covered with leaves in many shades of green. On the ground, too, the bushes were regaining their colour and the grasses were racing upwards to take advantage of the sun's strength before the canopy finally plunged the forest into shadow.

Eiche had resumed her social activities. She was no longer concerned only with her own rebirth, but also with her neighbours. They exchanged news of the dazzling time. As every year, some acquaintances had disappeared. They had been unable to shake off their torpor as time slowed down.

It was during one of these conversations that she pointed out to Ulme, a neighbour, the rock that was now leaning against her.

- Oh, that must be it. I too have been injured during the blistering season!

- How's that?

- You see, when I regained my strength, I noticed a fluid leak...

- I know, but why do you think it's related, Ulme?

- It's a rock, it's coming from somewhere. Objects are falling. I'm higher up the hill than you. It could have fallen from up there, hit me and come down to you.

- That's an interesting hypothesis.

- Yes, and it explains why I have nothing to justify my injury. It's there, but I don't know why. Everything moves so fast during the fire season that the rock could have fallen without anyone seeing it.

The following weeks were particularly pleasant for the oak. It reached the peak of its growth and began to produce acorns. It was always a celebration to feel the potential of life unfolding.

However, unlike in previous years, she was unable to take full advantage. The origin of the rock leaning against her trunk weighed heavily on her and the future seemed bleak. Using both airborne pheromones and mycorrhizal network communication, she projected her question into the surrounding area and quickly realised that her neighbour's hypothesis seemed to be confirmed.

Some fungi reported the disappearance of their partner shrub, a trail of bushes was still suffering, while on the contrary, grasses were taking advantage of the windfall provided by the lack of competition. Her efforts enabled her to draw up a fairly accurate map of the rock's path.

She presented her findings to the Committee of Wise Men, who were quite pleased with her results. A remarkable piece of work, so early in the year. But she was still worried. If another boulder fell, would she be so lucky this time?

Summer.

The storm had passed by late afternoon. It had been a beautiful, slow, productive day. First, the wind had picked up and shaken the forest, tearing off leaves and the most fragile branches.

Eiche had used all her strength to try and discover more. She could already imagine the torrents that were building up on the cliff face, sweeping away small pebbles, then larger ones, and finally creating a wave of mud that not even her strong trunk could withstand. Daffodils twisted in all directions at her feet, even though it hadn't rained yet. She saturated the mycorrhizal network with her fears and asked everyone to inform her of the situation.

In her panic, she hadn't even directed her request. Slowly, a circle moved away from her as the first messages came in. Not all of them were kind.

- An old lady who worries," laughed the young trees.

- So big and so scared, the blackberries sneered.

- Do your work. You take away our light, you can protect us from the wind," replied the strawberries and violets.

The mature trees, however, were more conciliatory and responded more freely, especially as the oak's spring publication had built up a following. Providing a documented analysis of an event was a new approach that deserved attention.

That's how she discovered that trees close to the rain reacted more slowly. Time accelerated as the rain approached. They had fewer thought cycles to react. Shortly afterwards, as the first drops fell on

their leaves, she noticed that the path of the sun, which she could see in the distance, was speeding up.

- Look," she exclaimed! It's fascinating to watch time change before our very eyes.

The summer continued. Other brutal climatic episodes had followed, and each time the Eiche had noticed the same phenomenon. The passage of time had become an obsession. Every evening she watched Ra set and fall, faster and faster as it approached the horizon. Every morning, on the other hand, she watched him slow down as he rose.

It had rained the day before and a light mist had enveloped the forest. This morning, the sun rose quickly. Then, almost instantly, as soon as the mist had disappeared, it slowed down and resumed the speed of the previous days. And Eiche wondered.

"Usually the change is regular. Why wasn't it today?"

She mentioned it to Ulme, who often had ideas to suggest, but lately she'd been more distant.

- Ra decides there's no need to ask any more questions. Just concentrate on growing your acorns.

- Of course, I've been making acorns for almost two hundred years. I know how to do it. I've got time to think about other things.

- That's the problem. You ask everybody a lot of questions. We have to honour Ra by evolving ourselves. That's the most important thing.

- Of course, of course, Ulme. Especially as you're still young. At my age you can see things from a distance. But I won't bother you any more.

Nevertheless, the beech continued her observations, even regularly asking the beech for confirmation on one point or another. In particular, she asked him to measure the angle of Ra's elevation at different times of the day, as well as its angular velocity. All of this had to do with Ra, so she complied without question. She shared the results with all the plants around her, most of them not particularly interested, but some, more religious than others, appreciated the work of these two giants of the forest.

Autumn.

It was early autumn when Eiche asked for an audience with the wise men. The hours of sunshine were shortening and time was passing more quickly. She knew she had to have enough thought cycles to express herself properly, and as the season progressed, she had fewer.

The time set for the meeting coincided with a beautiful day at the end of the season. Her speech in the spring was still fresh in everyone's minds, so she had a large audience from the start.

- Trees, grasses, bushes and all plants, I stand before you today to report on my scientific research for the year. The fall of the boulder during last year's blistering season has clearly played a part in my research, but the discovery it brings is far more fundamental than protection from falling rocks. It has to do with time itself.

A faint chemical rustle ran through the assembly. The interdependent root networks were bonding a little more.

- We all know how the seasons change. The dazzling season, when time passes too quickly for us to do anything, is followed by the season of slowing down, when time gradually slows down, giving us time to grow, to drink in Ra's energy and develop. Then comes the season of slow time, when we can grow, when Ra grants us time for longer term projects such as the gift of reproduction, or for the oldest among us, the gift of reflection. Finally, time speeds up again, and each day we can only prepare for the dazzling season to come, or, like today, share our discoveries to make the forest even stronger.

- By the way," shouted the most impetuous, while the few grasses that had joined the gathering wondered what cycle awaited them.

- I'll get to that. As I said, I'm interested in time, and therefore in change, and more specifically in speed. Change divided by time is speed.

There was only a very light breeze in the forest, created by the sun heating the cliff face. But it would stay low enough on the horizon not to produce the strong gusts of midsummer.

- I began observing Ra and noticed two things that disturbed me. One, long known, is that the elevation of our god in the sky changes with the seasons. The angle of elevation is lowest at the beginning and end of the fiery season, while it is highest at the beginning of the slow season. This correlation between the angle of elevation and the passage of time fascinated me and reinforced my interest in speed. The passage of time is a speed in itself.

Eiche paused so that everyone could integrate the ideas she had just shared and search their memories for references to the evolution of the seasons in relation to the angle of Ra.

- I then developed a suitable measuring tool in the form of a perfectly regular sphere of leaves at my apex. This allows me to measure the exact position of Ra in the sky at any given time.

She then transmitted a plan of the instrument she had created. The protesting bushes explained that they would never be able to verify her claims as they were often in the shade of tall trees.

- Thanks to this instrument, I've been able to measure the change in Ra's angular velocity across the sky, or in other words, the speed at which he moves across the sky during the course of a day. The results are undeniable. In the evening and morning, Ra moves faster than in the middle of the day. In fact, the speed of movement appears to be inversely proportional to the sine of the angle of elevation.

Excitement was high. Eiche was proposing a discovery about their god. The more religious were already wondering about the implications and how worship should be adapted. It promised many hours of discussion and controversy.

- The discovery itself is astonishing. Why would Ra change his pace? Change is always difficult. What would be the point of Ra changing his speed throughout the day and through the seasons? It seemed incomprehensible to me, so I continued my search.

The forest buzzed with comments. Some pointed to the discovery of Ra's evolution, while others were shocked that anyone could deny Ra's omnipotence and therefore his ability to change his speed at will.

- One stormy day," Eiche continued, oblivious to the excitement of the audience, "I noticed that time did not pass at the same rate throughout the forest. In the area first

exposed to rain and cloud shadows, time seemed to pass more quickly because my contacts no longer had as many thought cycles to react to me. They were late. And yet, when the storm covered us all, we all returned to uniform weather. This made me wonder again, and in the weeks that followed I studied the drops on my leaves. The conclusion was obvious: the speed at which drops fall is inversely proportional to the sine of the angle of Ra's elevation.

- So what? Why are we talking about rain when we're talking about Ra?

- Water is a useful, even necessary substance, but it's a dead substance. We've never heard it communicate with us in the mycorrhizal system. It's there, but it's passive, just there to be used for our growth. Why should it be affected by Ra? Why should it fall at a different rate depending on the season or the height of Ra in the sky? It's just one thing: like a stone, it should fall at a constant speed. But that is not what we perceive.

A significant part of the audience had now turned away from the presentation, which was becoming too technical or ambiguous for most plants. Only the oldest trees had the experience to back up Eiche's claims. Despite the small number of people remaining, there was a sense of unease.

- In short, any change requires effort, just as we have to make an effort to grow our branches, time passes in the course of the day in proportion to the inverse of the sine

of the angle of elevation, and the rate at which water runs off the leaves follows the same mathematical rule. So my conclusion is this: we are deceived by our senses. Time is constant. It's our senses that are not. They work faster when we have more light from Ra, giving us the impression that everything around us is slowing down!

It was an eruption in the forest. It challenged the flow of time! What about the first prayer to Ra: "Bring us the time of growth". Ra was at the origin of all things, Ra was at the origin of time. The plants could not know all the will of Ra. They had to submit. And if Ra wished to alter time for a reason known only to himself, there was no question of questioning him.

Leaf time.

The tension had not abated in recent weeks. The Oak was at the centre of a systematic cabal. The most religious had branded her a heretic for denying Ra's power over time. At first, only the older trees joined the movement, especially since the season was no longer conducive to grand talk. But as the days went by, the smaller plants joined the consensus, claiming, when asked, that Eiche's ideas were just a load of rubbish that didn't interest them. Only submission to Ra was important.

Eiche had scoffed at first. She had supported his point of view, shared his analyses and measurements, shown how to perform the same experiments independently. But little by little she had suffered ostracism

until it became physical. The symbiotic fungi left her to join other root systems. She couldn't resist for long.

At least her whole body was telling her so. It was time to give up. The moment demanded it. It was time to shed her leaves in preparation for the dazzling season. She couldn't think any longer. So she turned to the clerics and thanked them for saving her from making a mistake on Ra's behalf.

As the frost set in, Eiche had one last thought for this year: "And yet it is constant."