

Poem #6

Sonnet II: "Time Does Not Bring Relief" by Edna St. Vincent Millay

Time does not bring relief: you all have lied
Who told me time would ease me of my pain!
I miss him in the weeping of the rain;
I want him at the shrinking of the tide;
The old snows melt from every mountain-side,
And last year's leaves are smoke in every lane;
But last year's bitter loving must remain
Heaped on my heart, and my old thoughts abide!

There are a hundred places where I fear
To go, - so with his memory they brim!
And entering with relief some quiet place
Where never fell his foot or shone his face
I say, "There is no memory of him here!"
And so stand stricken, so remembering him!



Edna St. Vincent Millay was the first woman to win the Pulitzer Prize for poetry. In this poem, she defies the conventional logic that time heals all wounds.

If this poem seems to much for you, try this very short one, perhaps her best known:

"First Fig" from *A Few Figs from Thistles*

My candle burns at both ends;
It will not last the night;
But ah, my foes, and oh, my friends--
It gives a lovely light!

Taking it apart

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It isn't true
that time
heals all
wounds.

Time does not bring relief: you all have lied
Who told me time would ease me of my pain!
I miss him in the weeping of the rain;
I want him at the shrinking of the tide;

Even though time
goes by, I still miss
him when it rains
and when the tide
goes out – through
all the little things of
daily life.

Even though
the seasons
have changed
and time is
going by, I
still have the
same feelings
inside.

The old snows melt from every mountain-side,
And last year's leaves are smoke in every lane;
But last year's bitter loving must remain
Heaped on my heart, and my old thoughts abide!

I don't want to
go places that
are full of
memories of
him, but when I
go somewhere
that he never
was, I am even
more upset
because I
realize that he
was never
there.

There are a hundred places where I fear
To go, - so with his memory they brim!
And entering with relief some quiet place
Where never fell his foot or shone his face
I say, "There is no memory of him here!"

And so stand stricken, so remembering him!

Later, you will read a poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Although not the one included here, his poem "The Cross of Snow" shares the idea of Millay's work. Eighteen years after his wife's death, he wrote:

Such is the cross I wear upon my breast
These eighteen years, through all the changing scenes
And seasons, changeless since the day she died

Memorizing it

Can you find the rhyme scheme on this one by yourself? How is it similar to that of Donne's poem? This poem has a unique divide for a sonnet – the first two quatrains are grouped together, and then the third quatrain is grouped with the couplet. Do you see a reason for this? What is the connection?

To work on memorizing this poem, say it through out loud three times. First, say it as if you were angry with a particular person. Next, say the first line softly, then the next line loudly. Repeat until the end. Lastly, say the poem with strong pauses at the ending punctuation and blending the lines where there is no punctuation at the end of the line.

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Memorizing it

Every other word has been left blank. Can you fill them in?

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Time ___ not ___ relief: ___ all ___ lied
___ told ___ time ___ ease ___ of ___ pain!
___ miss ___ in ___ weeping ___ the ___;
I ___ him ___ the ___ of ___ tide;
___ old ___ melt ___ every ____,
And ___ year's ___ are ___ in ___ lane;
___ last ___ bitter ___ must ___
Heaped ___ my ____, and ___ old ___ abide!

___ are ___ hundred ___ where ___ fear
___ go, - ___ with ___ memory ___ brim!
___ entering ___ relief ___ quiet ___
Where ___ fell ___ foot ___ shone ___ face
___ say, " ___ is ___ memory ___ him ___!"
And ___ stand ____, so ___ him!