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.

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

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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.

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.

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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There are a hundred places where I fear
    To go, - so with his memory they brim!
And entering with relief some quiet place
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I say, “There is no memory of him here!”
And so stand stricken, so remembering him!
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!