



eduresourceza.com

How does the poet powerfully convey the sorrow of human life in 'Sonnet 29' (by Edna St Vincent Millay)

Pity me not because the light of day
At close of day no longer walks the sky;
Pity me not for beauties passed away
From field to thicket as the year goes by;
Pity me not the waning of the moon,
Nor that the ebbing tide goes out to sea,
Nor that a man's desire is hushed so soon,
And you no longer look with love on me.
This have I known always: Love is no more
Than the wide blossom which the wind assails,
Than the great tide that treads the shifting shore,
Strewing fresh wreckage gathered in the gales:
Pity me that the heart is slow to learn
What the swift mind beholds at every turn.

Millay conveys sorrow of human life in Sonnet 29 using the nature imagery and symbolism. She uses nature as a metaphor for the ending of relationships, growing older, unrequited love. All of these are a source of sadness in life. Millay uses the movements of the sea to mirror her own struggles with love and growing older. She uses the description of a garden to show aging.

She uses the metaphor of a garden to show her struggles with growing old. She says, "beauties passed away | From field to thicket", this shows the transformation of the garden and by extension, herself changing from manicured, and clean to wild, and dirty. This symbolizes her view on growing older, she sees it as something terrible and devastating. This is proved by the imagery of an overgrown garden, filled with dense bushes. She fears that her beauty will fade and become as ugly as the thicket. She views growing old as sad. The use nature imagery to symbolize growing old emphasizes that growing old is a part of life and is natural. The nature imagery of an overgrown garden, though ugly, has wisdom in its bushes. She further emphasizes this by the repetition of "Pity me not", showing that she does not want to be looked down on something that is natural. Growing older is inevitable and it is sad that she along with others, view it as sad. Millay shows the sorrows of growing older by using nature imagery to show this as something inevitable yet a concept people are scared and sad of.

The light at the beginning of the poem is personified, "the light of day | At close of day no longer walks the sky". The light "walks" like a lover walking or running away at night, perhaps to have an affair or to leave. It could also signify the loss of a loved one, who passed away on a whim. The next line after this is, "beauties passed away", showing that she could have noticed the changes and realized that the man was going to leave. The "waning of the moon" is an effective way to portray the loss of a loved one or the diminishing love between couples. The "waning of the moon" is the stage of the moon cycle where the moon become smaller. This moon represents fertility and as the moon wanes, the fertility and loves also reduces. The "ebbing tide" also shows the loss of love, or death of a close person. The tide washes away the youth, passion and life they had/have. This can be backed up the quote, "a man's

desire hushed so soon” and “you no longer look with love on me”. The man’s desire also wanes and ebbs away. She compares the “ebbing tide” and the “waning of the moon” to the “man’s desire hushed so soon” showing that, just as naturally as growing older, desire and love is also washed away. Millay makes this segment of the poem especially devastating as it shows how love fades away, how it could be natural, and the pain it can cause other.

The quotes, “you no longer look with love on me” is the first sentence to mention the pronoun “you”. This is the most simplistic, straightforward sentence in the sonnet. It shows that Millay is at loss of words or has no motivation to use imagery to cover up the true meaning. This sentence is very effective, mainly due to its simplicity. It conveys the worst of sentiment, in a hard blow compared to its previous lines which is coated with imagery to soften it. The sibilance in “man’s desire hushed so soon”, the alliteration of letter /l/ and the assonance in “no longer look with love”, combined creates a sad sound. The sibilance imitates the sound of the “ebbing tide”, while the assonance makes the sound deep and moaning. Using various alliterations, Millay makes the sound of sadness and heartbreak, powerfully conveying the sorrow of human life.

The “wide blossom” creates a delicate image, since these are small, delicate, pink flowers. Blossoms are a symbol of youth, springtime and their beautiful pink colour gives them a feeling of tender, young love. This delicate image is harshly contrasted by “wind assails”. Assail is assault, showing that the “wind” can tear apart the “wide blossom” very easily. It shows that love is delicate and can be torn apart easily. The “shifting shores” could show how love changes and evolves. The “shifting shores” hints at erosion which could show that after a while, love erodes away. This calmer image is juxtaposed by the violent, “fresh wreckage gathered in the gales” which makes the reader think of a shipwreck which symbolizes the destruction of love. The guttural /g/ alliteration shows the harsh wreck of the ship, showing the pain the poet felt. The juxtaposition between delicate and harsh show the heights to which love can go and how it will cause you pain. The last two lines breaks the rhyme scheme and gives the poem finality: “Pity me that the heart is slow to learn || What the swift mind beholds at every turn” showing that Millay is not only angry at her lover, but also herself. These last two lines show the inevitability of death which every person knows of in their mind but not their heart. This suggests that Millay’s loved ones have passed away but she still mourns their death even though she knows that dying is the circle of life. This conveys the strong sadness felt by humans on their journey for love.

In conclusion, this poem very powerfully conveys human sorrow using metaphors of nature and the repetition of “Pity me”. Millay uses violent and calm imagery side-by-side to show the juxtaposition of love and how swiftly yet knowingly it can change. It shows that life is ephemeral yet the human heart can’t grasp it. The penultimate line in the sonnet starts with “Pity me” instead of the usual “Pity me not” showing that this is something that everyone deals with, and that people should be supported when a loved one passes away, since dealing with death is never easy. This poem very powerfully conveys the depth of human sorrow.

eduresourceza.com