

Colby



Colby Quarterly

Volume 15
Issue 1 *March*

Article 3

March 1979

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Recommended Citation

Colby Library Quarterly, Volume 15, no.1, March 1979, p.7-18

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Edna St. Vincent Millay

“Being Born a Woman”: A New Look at Edna St. Vincent Millay

by PATRICIA A. KLEMANS

*I, being born a woman and distressed
By all the needs and notions of my kind,
Am urged by your propinquity to find
Your person fair, and feel a certain zest
To bear your body's weight upon my breast:
So subtly is the fume of life designed,
To clarify the pulse and cloud the mind,
And leave me once again undone, possessed.
Think not for this, however, the poor treason
Of my stout blood against my staggering brain,
I shall remember you with love, or season
My scorn with pity,—let me make it plain:
I find this frenzy insufficient reason
For conversation when we meet again.¹*

THIS SONNET, written by Edna St. Vincent Millay, was first published in *The Harp Weavers and Other Poems* in 1923. It is an excellent place to begin in looking at Millay as not only an important poet but also as a poet with contemporary appeal.

The subject matter obviously proclaims a feminist philosophy. While a passionate woman might be ruled at times by her natural sexual impulses, she has not necessarily lost her reason or powers of discrimination. Men have been proclaiming this philosophy—and practicing it—for centuries, but it was news when a woman said it. The terse conclusion, “I find this frenzy insufficient reason / For conversation when we meet again,” characterizes a woman who refuses to conform to society’s dictates. Millay, like the persona of her sonnet, was an independent spirit. Whether she was resisting a new style in poetry or philosophy, or insisting on her own life-style, she remained an individualist until she died.

Edna St. Vincent Millay shocked many people with the sexual honesty in her poetry and in her personal life. By 1923, when this poem appeared, she was one of the best known literary personalities in Amer-

1. Edna St. Vincent Millay, *Collected Poems* (New York: Harper & Row, 1956), p. 601. All subsequent quotations from Millay’s poetry are taken from this edition. The poems are copyright 1923, 1931, 1951, 1954, 1958 by Edna St. Vincent Millay and Norma Millay (Ellis), and are reprinted by permission of Norma Millay (Ellis).

ica. She had made a name for herself at the age of twenty when her first serious work, *Renascence*, was published in *The Lyric Year*, to great critical acclaim. The attention precipitated by the poem led to a scholarship to Vassar as well as many contacts with the literary leaders of the time. After graduating from college she headed for Greenwich Village where, becoming involved in acting as well as writing, she became an influential member of the contemporary art scene. With the publication of *A Few Figs from Thisiles*, Millay became a sensation. The verse from that collection,

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.

seemed to epitomize the sexual defiance of the post-war generation. Millay's poetry suggested that she was a hedonist and her life-style seemed to confirm this view. Because of her many love affairs and avoidance of marriage, as well as her physical attractiveness and dramatic abilities, she was a subject of great interest and criticism. Her fans loved her and couldn't wait for her next volume of poems; her critics dismissed her as being frivolous, narrow, and tradition bound in her poetic forms.

In 1923, after returning from a year in Europe and publishing *Harp Weavers*, Millay became the first woman to win the Pulitzer prize and she married Eugen Boissevain, the widower of the suffrage leader, Inez Milholland. The poet of "I, being born a woman" was not only a woman of perception, as all poets must be, but also of experience. She had, by the age of thirty-one, led a life of personal and sexual freedom generally reserved only for men in our society. Her poetry presents this new viewpoint to literature—the liberated woman's view. In the nineteenth century we have the idealization of Elizabeth Barrett and Christina Rossetti and the obliqueness of Emily Dickinson to explore a woman's emotional life. In Millay we get a different view of "the needs and notions of my kind."

The work which best illustrates this unique contribution to literature is *Fatal Interview*, a sequence of fifty-two Shakespearean sonnets. The title is taken from John Donne's "Elegy 16": "By our first strange and fatal interview, / By all desires which thereof did ensue."² Published in 1931, Donne's tercentenary year, *Fatal Interview* not only relies a great deal on Donne's love poetry for its imagery and philosophy, but more importantly, presents a persona which is the first female counterpart to Donne's sophisticated lover. Millay's speaker is a realist; she is a woman of experience who presents her observations honestly, devoid of roman-

2. *Donne Poetical Works*, ed. Herbert J. C. Grierson (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1971), p. 99. All subsequent quotations from Donne's poetry are taken from this edition.

ticizing or rationalizing. Unlike the 1923 sonnet, which describes a passionate but casual sexual encounter, *Fatal Interview* is concerned with the all-important love in a woman's life—a love that not everyone experiences personally, but one that everyone can relate to vicariously through reading this superb group of poems.

The critical response to "Fatal Interview" at its publication was generally favorable. Although Millay's popularity had ebbed somewhat since its high point in the early Twenties, a new book by her was still greeted with great interest. Harriet Monroe in *Poetry* began her review with these words:

This book is the record of emotional experience, done in terms of precise and measured beauty. It would be impossible to over-praise the consummate art with which Miss Millay has taken over the much-practiced form of the Shakespearean sonnet and made it her own as no other poet has, perhaps, since Shakespeare himself.³

Allen Tate said in the *New Republic*:

It is doubtful if all of Miss Millay's previous work put together is worth the thin volume of these fifty-two sonnets. At no previous time has she given us so sustained a performance. Half of the sonnets, perhaps all but about fifteen, lack distinction of emotional quality. None is deficient in an almost final technique. From first to last every sonnet has its special rhythm and sharply defined imagery; they move like a smooth machine, but not machine-like, under the hand of a masterly technician. The best sonnets would adorn any of the great English sequences. There is some interesting analysis to be made of Miss Millay's skillful use of the Shakespearean form, whose difficult final couplet she has mastered, and perhaps is alone in having mastered since Shakespeare.⁴

And finally, Genevieve Taggard ends her review in the *New York Herald Tribune Books* by saying:

We remember always a poet's best, his high water mark—his poorest vanishes like mortal speech. Her best is in the world of Shakespeare's sonnets, and, in her own field—she cannot be excelled. Immortality here is defined, served and achieved.⁵

Although all three of these critics agree without reservations that Millay is a master of the Shakespearean sonnet form, they do not all agree on the total worth of this collection. Miss Monroe's review is the most glowing in its praise of *Fatal Interview*. She calls it "one of the finest love-sequences in the language" but also makes the following comment:

Because we have, in Miss Millay, a poet of very unusual scope and power—moreover, a woman poet of an epoch which no longer verifies Byron's line, "Man's love is of man's life a thing apart, / 'Tis woman's whole existence—" because of these facts which make a demand upon her, we have a right to feel in *Fatal Interview* her scope has narrowed from the broad ranges of her youth; and her power, however intense, however creative of perfection, accepts lower ground for its exercise.⁶

This criticism by a woman of a woman is very revealing. Monroe's

3. "Advance or Retreat?," *Poetry*, XXXVIII (July 1931), p. 216.

4. "Miss Millay's Sonnets," *New Republic*, XLVI (May 6, 1931), p. 336.

5. "A Woman's Anatomy of Love," *New York Herald Tribune, Review of Books*, April 19, 1931.

6. "Advance or Retreat?," p. 219.

choice of Byron's line suggests that she wants a woman poet of her "epoch" to deal with topics which are worldly, philosophical, "masculine." By Millay's choosing to write a book about love, a traditionally "feminine" preoccupation, the poet had, in Monroe's estimation, betrayed her early promise. One of the most frequent comments made about *Renascence* was that it was unbelievable that it was written by a young woman. Its subject, a poet's vision of the world's grief and her reconciliation with the universe, as well as its great poetic proficiency, seemed beyond the range of a twenty year old girl from a small town in Maine. Monroe sees, therefore, *Fatal Interview* as a narrowing, an acceptance of "lower ground." Unfortunately, Monroe was unable to recognize how truly innovative the work was in presenting a feminine view of a subject for which the ground rules had been set by men. Instead she has reservations about how important a woman's love affair might be to the rest of the world.

Alan Tate makes it clear how important he feels it to be—not very. He damns Millay with faint praise, then compares her unfavorably with T. S. Eliot who he believes "penetrated to the fundamental structure of the nineteenth century mind and shows its breakdown." He continues, "Miss Millay assumed no such profound altercation of the intelligence because, I suppose, not being an intellect but a sensibility, she was not aware of it." Tate's review is primarily an essay about his poetic tastes rather than an analysis of *Fatal Interview*. He spends more time discussing Eliot and Yeats than Millay, who is of course in his eyes a "sensibility" rather than an "intellect," whatever that means.

Genevieve Taggard's review, on the other hand, focuses on Millay and her poems but it too makes some ambiguous statements. After praising her for her skill as a sonnet writer, Taggard criticizes Millay for the very reasons that she has said she was effective. She says:

It seems to me that Miss Millay worships only one thing—perfection. Such a worship throws difficulties in the path of human love, but it suits the ardors of the sonnet-writer and the lover of beauty alike. She does not value uniqueness, she has no patience with rebel esthetics, new forms, naturalism which loves irregularity, which everywhere opposes logic and the almost machine-like perfection of detached art. Odd insights are awkward to her. Her preferences are for those elegiac and harmonious gestures of the greatest Greek sculptures. I should even dare to push the statement further and say that Miss Millay is interested in perfection, not people, in art, not in life—her courage and self scorn testify to her own self-rejection for the sake of her first principle. Is it not natural then that Miss Millay should choose the sonnet form which demands in the very act of writing, this attitude?⁸

Taggard undoubtedly got carried away with her own rhetoric. Given the known facts of Millay's life, her many and varied experiences, her close personal relationships with her family and friends, as well as the

7. "Miss Millay's Sonnets," p. 335.

8. "A Woman's Anatomy of Love."

very personal and moving quality which characterizes *Fatal Interview*, it was certainly inaccurate and unfair to accuse her of being uninterested in life and in people. One wonders if Taggard would have charged Petrarch, Spenser, or Shakespeare with this attitude. Or is it the woman who Millay characterizes in her poems that bothers this critic? A woman of pride and principle; a woman of courage and arrogance; a woman some would find difficult to sympathize with. Millay's speaker rejects the games that lovers play and in doing so undoubtedly antagonizes some, including women.

In looking at the reviews of these contemporaries of Millay we can see reflected the tastes of the time. Millay was writing perfect love sonnets at a time when love seemed trite and the sonnet was "out." In 1923 Millay won the Pulitzer prize for *Second April* and Eliot won the Dial prize for *The Waste Land*. The great difference in these two books marks the great parting of the ways for Millay and Eliot. In 1920, both poets were expressing a philosophy of despair and were greatly attracted to the Elizabethans, especially Donne and Webster, for their ironic, worldly view. By 1923, however, Eliot had turned to nihilism as a philosophy, and symbolism and fragmentation as a technique. Millay took a different road. Her view of the world was not more optimistic than Eliot's. She too saw the disintegrating forces of her times but unlike him, she turned to nature and the past to form a defense against them. Instead of reflecting the disintegration in her poetry, her object was to "put Chaos into fourteen lines / And keep him there."

In *Fatal Interview* she puts the chaos of a love affair into fifty-two tightly constructed, interwoven sonnets; she also illustrates her personal poetic philosophy. She believed that her poetry, like herself, must be honest and intelligible. In Sonnet CLXV from *Mine the Harvest*, published in 1954, four years after her death, she expresses her views on contemporary poetry:

It is the fashion now to wave aside
 As tedious, obvious, vacuous, trivial, trite,
 All things which do not tickle, tease, excite
 To some subversion, or in verbiage hide
 Intent, or mock, or with hot sauce provide
 A dish to prick the thickened appetite;
 Straightforwardness is wrong, evasion right;
 It is correct, *de rigueur*, to deride.
 What fummy wits these modern wags expose,
 For all their versatility: Voltaire
 Who wore to bed a night-cap, and would close
 In fear of drafts, all windows, could declare
 In antique stuffiness, a phrase that blows
 Still through men's smoky minds, and clears the air.

During her lifetime, poetic taste swung toward Eliot and experimentation and away from Millay and tradition. These three reviewers reflect

this swing in their granting her skill yet being blind to the truly innovative aspects of the poems contained in *Fatal Interview*.

The sequence tells a moving story. The speaker, who first appears in Sonnet II, finds herself in the grips of a passion which she foresees from the very beginning as being ultimately disastrous. Although unable to free herself from her obsession, she refuses to conform to the expected behavior patterns associated with the woman's role in a love affair. She refuses to use guile to capture her lover and says in Sonnet III:

Liever would I you loved me for my worth
Though you should love me but a little while,
Than for a philtre any doll can brew,—
Though thus I bound you as I long to do.

And, in Sonnet VI, the speaker becomes very assertive when she chides her lover for finding it safer to love the women of literature, Cressid, Elaine, and Isolt, than to respond to her in whom passion pounds all day long. Here, and throughout the sequence, the woman is an initiator, honest and fearless. No coy mistress she; it is the man who seems to require the urging. In Sonnet XI she insists that the lover's relationship will be honest and direct, "Love in the open hand, no thing but that, / Ungemmed, unhidden, wishing not to hurt."

The affair runs a passionate and tumultuous course with the speaker's emotions alternating between ecstasy and despair. Even at the risk of losing her lover she will not compromise her principles. She says in Sonnet XXIII:

I know the face of Falsehood and her tongue
Honeyed with unction, plausible with guile,
Are dear to men, whom count me not among,
That owe their daily credit to her smile;

This woman Millay characterizes is a new personality in love poetry. She is no innocent virgin, religious zealot, shrinking violet, or scheming man-hunter. She is direct and forthright with a personal morality she will not compromise. When the inevitable break between the lovers comes, in Sonnet XXXIX, she again offers her lover her hand, but this time it is to say farewell. She internalizes her pain and accepts the inevitable.

The final poems trace the process the speaker must go through to regain the self-esteem she has temporarily lost in her abandonment to love. In Sonnet XL she says:

You loved me not at all, but let it go;
I loved you more than life, but let it be.
As the more injured party, this being so,
The hour's amenities are all to me—

The suffering is long and intense but she is a survivor. In Sonnet L she

reflects that it has been a half year since her heart “broke in two; / The world’s forgotten well, if the world knew.”

This account of a love affair from a passionate woman’s point of view creates a rich and illuminating experience for the reader. Each poem of the sequence leads logically into the next while being itself a lyric expressing a particular theme. Read independently, each poem is a complete experience; read in context, it is part of a complex design. *Fatal Interview* offers something new expressed in the framework and terms of the old. It presents love from a woman’s point of view, yet it treats love as an ageless and natural experience. The poems are extremely personal, yet not private. Millay accomplishes this universality by interweaving the woman’s experience with classical myth, traditional love literature, and nature.

The framework of the sequence is the legend of Selene and Endymion. The first and final sonnets have as their speaker the moon goddess who fell hopelessly in love with a shepherd. Unable to have him for her own, Selene enchanted him with eternal sleep and suffered the pain and anguish of mortal love forever. There are direct references as well as echoes of the tale throughout the work. Other characters from mythology are also present. In the poem celebrating the consummation of passion, Sonnet XII, the lover is likened to Jove when the speaker says:

Olympian gods, mark now my bedside lamp
Blown out; and be advised too late that he
Whom you call sire is stolen into the camp
Of warring Earth, and lies abed with me.

This passage is also reminiscent of the story of Cupid and Psyche in which Psyche is not allowed to see her lover and must extinguish her lamp when Cupid comes to her bed. Cupid and his mother, Venus, are directly referred to in Sonnet XV when the speaker says, “My worship from this hour the Sparrow-Drawn / Alone will cherish, and her arrowy child.” This sonnet uses myth to emphasize the desperate plight of one who has abandoned herself to love. She says of Venus and Cupid:

How have I stripped me of immortal aid
Save theirs alone,—who could endure to see
Forsworn Aeneas with conspiring blade
Sever the ship from shore (alas for me)
And make no sign; who saw, and did not speak,
The brooch of Troilus pinned upon the Greek.

The effectiveness of this passage depends on the reader’s knowledge of the stories of Aeneas and Dido and Troilus and Cressida. Millay assumes that her reader will know two of the greatest love stories of our culture and so she uses this comparison to emphasize the agelessness of her plight as well as the indifference of the universe.

Structuring her sequence on myth gives it a pagan base. The afterlife

in Millay's sonnets only appears in a dream of the Elysian fields where the speaker meets the women who have been raped by Jove. The Gods which the speaker invokes are those of Greek mythology. Millay's world is pre-Christian and the Gods she acknowledges are indifferent to the plight of mankind. Her speaker does not have a personal deity who cares for her or promises her eternal life. She has no such consolation and so is as isolated from religious comfort as early pagans or twentieth century atheists.

There is a link in the poems with Christianity, of course, because that too is part of tradition. Millay alludes directly or indirectly to the literature of all ages but there is a particularly heavy emphasis on Donne and other metaphysical poets for the philosophy and imagery of the poems. It is not necessary that the reader of *Fatal Interview* be familiar with seventeenth century love poetry, but it adds a fascinating dimension to the sequence if one has such knowledge. The metaphysical poets are characterized by their wit—an ingenuity in literary invention, an ability to discover clever, surprising, or paradoxical figures. Millay is witty in that she uses the images of these early poets to create her own unique view of the subject. In Sonnet III she employs the compass image that Donne had made famous as a symbol of the perfect relationship between lovers. In "A Valediction Forbidding Mourning" he had likened himself and his love to a compass: "Thy soule the fixt foot, makes no show / To move, but doth, if the other doe." The woman is the fixed foot which only moves to follow the bent of the man.

Millay's compass is of a different variety and the woman is doing the moving. The speaker says:

My needle to your north abruptly swerved;
If I would hold you, I must hide my fears
Lest you be wanton, lead you to believe
My compass to another quarter veers,
Little surrender, lavishly receive.

Here, instead of using the compass as the symbol of true love, Millay dramatizes man's propensity for wanting what is hard to get. The entire concept of the woman's character is changed from one of fidelity and dependency to one of experience and independence. Donne's compass encloses space; Millay's determines directions.

In Sonnet XI, Millay seems to be conversing with Donne. In "The Token" he had asked his lover to "Send me some token, that my hope may live" and concludes, "Send me not this, nor that, t'increase my store, / But swear thou thinkst I love thee, and no more." Millay's sonnet seems to be a reply to Donne's poem. She denies this request, deprecating his wish for a pledge of any sort. She offers, "Love in the open hand, no thing but that."

To the literary minded, Millay's sonnets abound with allusions to the immortals. Echoes of Chaucer, Virgil, Ovid, and the seventeenth cen-

tury dramatists abound. Reading Millay's sonnets can, therefore, become a kind of game for literary buffs—just the kind of game that intrigued the seventeenth century mind but one which few modern readers have the background to participate in.

It is not necessary, however, for the reader of *Fatal Interview* to be familiar with myth or literary history to enjoy and to feel empathy with Millay's moving love sonnets. The poems are firmly connected and supported by a body of references common to all, that of nature. The fifty-two sonnets parallel the fifty-two weeks of the year during which time there is for all things, a season. It is autumn when the speaker first sees her lover; the consummation of the affair occurs in winter. The love blooms in spring, smolders through the summer, and is touched by frost in early fall. As the love affair ends the speaker longs for winter. She says:

Freeze up the year; with sleet these branches bend
Though rasps the locust in the fields around.
Now darken, sky! Now shrieking blizzard, blow!—
Farewell, sweet bank; be blotted out with snow.

The speaker, throughout the sequence, refers to herself as being close to nature. She knows from the very beginning of the affair that nothing can remain the same. In Sonnet XLVI she says:

Even at the moment of our earliest kiss,
When signed the straitened bud into flower,
Sat the dry seed of most unwelcome this;
And that I knew, though not the day and hour.
Too season-wise am I, being country-bred,
To tilt at autumn or defy the frost:
Snuffing the chill even as my fathers did,
I say with them, "What's out tonight is lost."

This acceptance of the order of things, this resignation, is her way of maintaining her sanity. In her desolation she remembers the "island women" of Matinicus who stood alone in autumn "In gardens stripped and scattered peering north, / With dahlia tubers dripping from the hand" (Sonnet XXXVI). She finds some consolation in the thought that she has shared these common experiences. Like the women, she must accept change. Having experienced great joy, she must now endure the suffering—that is the balance of her world.

Gardens appear in many of the poems. When the affair is over, the speaker's garden is ruined, and the once still marigolds and sturdy zinnias are but "pale and oozy stalks." These details are Millay's observations of her immediate world. She grew up on the coast of Maine and lived on a farm in upper New York state after her marriage. These are rugged areas with early frosts and short summers. The gardens in Millay's world are strong and colorful but short-lived, like the brief but tumultuous love affair she describes.

The sea is even more important and pervasive in this sequence than

the garden. The water imagery creates much of the sensuality of the poetry, as in Sonnet VII when she combines two of her favorite metaphors, the sea and night:

Night is my sister, and how deep in love,
 How drowned in love and weedily washed ashore,
 There to be fretted by the drag and shove
 At the tide's edge, I lie—these things and more:
 Whose arm alone between me and the sand,
 Whose voice alone, whose pitiful breath brought near,
 Could thaw these nostrils and unlock this hand,
 She could advise you, should you care to hear.
 Small chance, however, in a storm so black,
 A man will leave his friendly fire and snug
 For a drowned woman's sake, and bring her back
 To drip and scatter shells upon the rug.
 No one but Night, with tears on her dark face,
 Watches beside me in this windy place.

In this poem, while using nature imagery to describe an emotional state, Millay creates in her female persona a bond with another female, Night. She carries this idea through the sonnets with her many references to women. The only ones who can understand the speaker's love are Selene, Leda, Danae, and Europa; the women of the Irish and Trojan coasts; the women of Matinicus; and perhaps the women reading this poetry. This affinity with women is unusual in any literature but very rare in love poetry where women are usually portrayed as rivals.

The lover in *Fatal Interview* does not leave the speaker for another woman; he leaves because he cannot love with an intensity and constancy equal to hers. The speaker says in this poem, "Small chance, however, in a storm so black, / A man will leave his friendly fire and snug / For a drowned woman's sake." She suggests that men are not capable of the depth of emotion which women are but are more concerned with comfort and security. This difference between the male and female lover is epitomized in the Selene-Endymion legend. Unlike the Keat's poem which pities Endymion, Millay's sympathies are with Selene. The Goddess is devastated and wanders over the sky, distraught over losing her love; the Mortal sleeps, oblivious to all the pain and anguish he has caused.

Still, Millay is not suggesting that only women can love completely and passionately. She refers to Troilus who broke his heart when Cressida gave his love token away. In this legend it is the man who loved too well. In addition, the close parallels to Donne's love poems in many of these sonnets suggest that Millay considered Donne a soulmate, despite their different points of view. They are certainly in agreement on the effect of a tragic love affair. Donne wrote in "The broken heart";

And now as broken glasses show
 A hundred lesser faces, so

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17

My ragges of heart can like, wish, and adore,
But after one such love, can love no more.

Millay says much the same in Sonnet L: "The heart once broken is a heart no more, / And is absolved from all a heart must be."

Obviously, love is an emotional experience common to both men and women. Most of the great love poetry, however, has been written by men and not until Millay do we have the experience of seeing a personal examination of an affair from a woman's point of view. This view, was not easily accepted by some. The following poem by L. Robert Lind, published in 1935 in the *Sewanee Review*, is an interesting reaction:

AD FEMINAM TRISTEM, SED POETAM

(After Reading Edna St. Vincent Millay's "Fatal Interview")

O come away at last from this lorn love
That will not hear, however sad you speak;
O brood no more for him, you hurt wild dove,
Seeking the lost that comes not though you seek.
Were man so to be longed for and in truth
The inmost object of your grave desire,
And more than merely puppet in the booth
Of sonnet-music, moved by a singing wire,
You could not so your sorrow still rehearse
And ring the changes in one mournful measure,
Exhaust the resolutions of your verse,
Or find in repetition such wry pleasure:
You could but, woman-like, grieve without a word;
Yet, being poet, your mourning must be heard.⁹

Granting that Mr. Lind's main purpose in writing this poem was to exhibit his wit rather than to offer any serious critical insights, it does reveal an attitude that is not uncommon in men's reactions to women's work. He makes the writing of poetry by a woman, at least love poetry, a sort of "Catch 22" situation. If she were really sincere, he says, she would grieve "woman-like" and not write at all. Since she persists in writing, then she cannot be sincere. This attitude supports Millay's speaker who believes that a man is incapable of understanding the passion of a woman.

No one disputes that *Fatal Interview* contains perfectly written sonnets. Many, however, have failed to perceive that the poems are unique and innovative in their presentation of a feminine viewpoint on love. Millay reversed the masculine-feminine traditional stances while working within the traditional forms. Today we have many women poets who are speaking frankly about a woman's nature. In 1931, we had Edna St. Vincent Millay. The unfortunate fact is that many have overlooked the message while appreciating the medium. A Millay poem looks traditional—in form it is. But her characterization of a woman

9. Vol. XLIII (Jan.-Mar. 1935), p. 104. Reprinted by permission of the editor.

who is initiator, aggressor, and controller as well as victim, sufferer, and survivor is unique. The woman of the poems contains within herself the knowledge and experience of the ages. In this sense she is Mother Earth. But she is also a human being with an intellect. Through experience and introspection, she comes to terms with life, finding her truths in nature and its order.

The time has certainly come for a second look at Millay's work, which is both impressive and varied. *Fatal Interview* is only one of the many beautiful and meaningful collections of poetry which speak particularly to a woman's experience. Millay belonged to the generation which saw women finally get the right to vote, a time of feminine idealism which lionized Amelia Earhart for crossing the Atlantic Ocean by plane. Millay spoke for a generation of young women who responded to her standards of sexual independence and feminine heroism. Pushed to the back shelves for so many years, Millay's books deserve a new reading. Millay can speak to the women and men of today as well as to those of the Twenties and Thirties, because her poetry is written with consummate skill and her message of feminine individuality is ageless.

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