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Edna St. Vincent Millay: "Nobody's Own"

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Much has been written about the sexual revolution of the sixties. Some writers deny that anything approaching revolutionary change has taken place and contend instead that there is only greater openness about the mores that have existed for many years. A less debatable revolution of manners and mores occurred early in this century, furnishing literature with a New Woman to breathe new life into its subject matter. At this time there appeared on the national scene a kind of woman who challenged so many aspects of the current feminine ideal and who demanded so many of the prerogatives generally held to be masculine that she did truly seem a New Woman. Appearing in significant numbers in the 1890s, these independent ladies did not attract noticeable male sympathy or admiration till after the first world war. In New York City during that period, one young girl came to personify the New Woman at her most magnetic for scores of writers and artists. A girl from a small town in Maine who was to become one of America’s most gifted lyric poets, she elicited a curiously ambivalent reaction from her many admirers. Never quite comfortable with the uniqueness of her personality, each sought to alter it, but, unlike so many of today’s feminine careerists, this one was fiercely uncompromising. She would follow her own bent, doing what she liked and being what she was, no matter what the cost. Her story begins over fifty years ago, not with her birth, but with her arrival in Greenwich Village.

In the fall of 1917 a diminutive young lady arrived in New York City’s bohemian district looking for one of the inexpensive apartments that were said to flourish there. Green-eyed,
auburn-haired and younger-appearing than her twenty-five years, she had come to pursue a career on the stage, a vocation that seemed to her more profitable than her first preference. For she was, then and always, a poet by choice. Recently graduated from Vassar College, where she had enjoyed some success both as an actress and as an author of college productions, the multi-talented girl had even earlier achieved national recognition as a result of the furor which had arisen when the judges of The Lyric Year's poetry contest failed to award first prize to her entry in 1912. Even the winner of the competition, Orrick Johns, acknowledged that the best poem of that year's collection was "Renascence" by E. St. Vincent Millay. The "E," to the astonishment of the many who inquired, stood for Edna; and the poet was then just twenty years old and a resident of Camden, Maine.

Indirectly as a result of that poem Miss Millay was able to attend Vassar: her impromptu recitation of it at a hotel party had so impressed Miss Caroline Dow that the older woman had offered to finance Edna's college education. The fledgling poet had gratefully accepted. Already at 19 she had sensed the limited opportunities afforded her by the poverty of her family and the provincialism of her small-town environment. The entrapment she felt living in this severely circumscribed world is clearly conveyed in "Renascence" by numerous oppressive images of suffocation and claustrophobia. The geographic boundaries mentioned in that early poem—mountains, woods and water—threaten her with physical isolation, but the more serious menace is the narrowness of vision and atrophy of spirit that might well accompany her solitary confinement. Vassar was for her a doorway into a wider world.

Edna Millay enjoyed her years at Vassar, though ironically some of the regulations of that staid institution cut deeply into her accustomed freedom of movement. With her parents divorced and Mrs. Millay out of the home on assorted jobs, sometimes overnight attending the sick, Edna and her sisters were used to considerable independence. Then, too, Edna was several years older than most of her classmates. A minor altercation with the college authorities nearly prevented her graduation at the last minute (she had taken one too many weekends in the city), but an exception was made and she was duly graduated in June 1917. From Vassar she came, almost
directly, to Greenwich Village where the rents were low and the atmosphere intellectually and socially stimulating. Here she could breathe freely and try her literary wings under congenial conditions. Of the many descriptions available of the Village of that day, Alfred Kazin’s best captures the element that made it so happy a setting for Edna. He remembers the Village as “an informal academy, audacious and rakish, but dedicated to a solemn belief in literature and art.”¹ This combination of playfulness and seriousness is particularly characteristic of Miss Millay during her Village years; though the Village did not create these attributes in her, it certainly allowed them both to flourish.

Vincent, as most of her friends called her, was joined in 1918, the year after her arrival, by her two pretty younger sisters—Norma and Kathleen. The presence of three such attractive personalities, reports Allen Churchill, “rocked the Village to its Bohemian base.”² The Millay girls quickly became the Village’s most sought-after dates, the focus of many Village activities. With the publication in 1920 of A Few Figs from Thistles, her first volume of verse reflecting her new milieu, Edna Millay came to personify, for many, the very spirit of the place and the time. To say that these verses and their author were popular, one biographer points out, conveys only the faintest idea of their impact:

Edna St. Vincent Millay became, in effect, the unrivaled embodiment of sex appeal, the It-girl of the hour, the Miss America of 1920. It seemed there was hardly a literate young person in all the English speaking world who was not soon repeating, ad nauseam:

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!

Before long Edna’s list of suitors included many young men destined for prominence in the literary world. Beginning with Floyd Dell, whose heart she won when she successfully auditioned for a part in a play he had written for the Provincetown Players, she was loved in turn by the poet Arthur Davison

² The Improper Bohemians (New York, 1959), 262.
³ Elizabeth Atkins, Edna St. Vincent Millay and Her Times (Chicago, 1936), 70-71.
Ficke; by John Reed, even then one of the Village's most flamboyant political radicals, who later earned fame for his sympathetic reports of the Russian revolution; by Scudder Middleton, another poet; by two junior editors of Vanity Fair who roomed together and thus became friendly rivals, Edmund Wilson and John Peale Bishop; by Witter Bynner, whose marriage proposal she once accepted as indeed she had Dell's; and by Eugen Jan Boissevain, the widowed husband of another dynamic feminist and Vassar graduate, Inez Milholland. And there were others. Though there is probably a good deal of whimsical exaggeration and youthful posturing, there is also undoubtedly some autobiographical truth in her sonnet beginning "What lips my lips have kissed, and where, and why,/ I have forgotten," and ending "I cannot say what loves have come and gone,/ I only know that summer sang in me/ A little while, that in me sings no more."4

After interviewing many of the ex-Villagers of that era, Emily Hahn concludes in her recent study of Bohemia that the key to Miss Millay's spellbinding powers over dozens of admirers lay in her symbolic quality. Referring to Edmund Wilson's falling in love with Edna, Miss Hahn asserts, "Of course he was in love with Miss Millay. In his mind, as in the minds of many other young people, Miss Millay was the Village."5 By all reports, she was immensely popular and unfailingly fickle. In his 1952 memoir of her, published shortly after her death, Wilson wrote at some length of "the spell that she exercised on many, of the most various professions and temperaments, of all ages and both sexes."6 More surprising is the lack of animosity which Wilson says was exhibited by the forsaken beaus toward each other and toward her. To explain this, he suggests that the various aspirants for her affection soon recognized that none of them could ever occupy the highest place in Edna's affection; that position was reserved for poetry. Toward the men in her life she exhibited a sort of lofty impartiality. And though this must have exasperated some of them, apparently none of them found her easy to forget. Thus, some fifteen years after his abortive courtship of her, Floyd Dell paid her this compliment: "Edna St. Vincent Millay was a person of

5 Romantic Rebels: An Informal History of Bohemianism in America (Boston, 1967), 236.
6 The Shores of Light (New York, 1952), 751.
such many-sided charm that to know her was to have a tremendous enrichment of one's life, and new horizons.”

Long after her death, people were still pondering why or how she epitomized the Village. In his review of the posthumously published *Collected Poems* of Edna Millay in 1956, Francis Hackett thought back to the young Edna's desires upon graduation from Vassar. She seems to have wanted, Hackett speculates, “what the Negroes wanted, Emancipation.” What did that entail? “The vote was part of it, the latch-key, free love, free speech. This time, after another war, women were tired of the pedestal, they wanted the play of their limbs and the play of their minds.” And how did one achieve this freedom? For the girl from Maine the answer lay in her poetry. Through her poetry, Edna Millay spoke the heretofore largely unspoken mind and heart of a woman longing for a full, and therefore necessarily free, life. Sometimes brashly, often poignantly, but with unfailing wit and grace, Edna wrote her poems and emancipated herself. In doing so she emancipated hundreds of others as well. Unashamedly proclaiming her right and her will to enjoy life—the play of her limbs and the play of her mind—the young girl came to represent for some of the most promising intellectuals and artists of her day the epitome of the New Woman, an indispensable part of the exuberant essence of Village life. This was true despite the shortness of her stay there; she married Eugen Boissevain in 1923 and in 1925 moved to the relative seclusion of Steepletop, their home in Austerlitz, New York, where she died early on the morning of October 19, 1950.

II

Descriptions of the young poet who arrived in the Village in the autumn of 1917 differ markedly from one another. She was not only many things to many men; she was many things to each man—doubtless one source of her attraction. “A New England nun; a chorus girl on a holiday; the Botticelli Venus . . . all of these and more” is how Floyd Dell was later to characterize her. Physically she was small, scarcely five feet tall, and rather fragile-looking. Though her health was evident-

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7 *Homecoming* (New York, 1933), 309.
9 The Improper Bohemians, 264.
good when she came to the Village, long winters with inadequate heat and food and her own youthful reckless disregard of it took their toll, and her health became as fragile as her looks. Was she pretty? Again answers vary. Those who knew her do not agree on the extent of her beauty. Pictures hardly show it at all. But Edmund Wilson explains why many believed Edna lovely. Her features, he says, were not notably good but hers was a mobile face so that while at times she was quite plain-looking (a New England nun), at other times, "excited by the blood or the spirit," she was "almost supernaturally beautiful" (the Botticelli Venus). Like her expressive face, her hair, which she bobbed soon after her arrival in the Village, changed appearance under different lights, so that its color could be described as anything from red-gold to reddish brown. "Her eyes were described as gray-green, yellow-green, blue-green, even hazel. Her skin was very white." Her voice was low, her diction precise; "she had a lovely and very long throat that gave her the look of a muse, and her reading of her poetry was thrilling."12

It was her voice that first enthralled Floyd Dell. Listening to her read for the lead in "The Angel Intrudes," playwright Dell was immediately captivated by that low, resonant voice and, without yet knowing her name, he awarded her the part. Afterwards he remembered in her reciting voice "a loveliness that was sometimes heartbreakingly poignant." Edna reciting was always beautiful. Describing Rita Cavanagh, a fictional poet whom he modelled after the real Edna, Wilson noted the transfiguration that took place when she read her own work:

Her cheeks were fiery now—all her face was suffused with fierce pink, and I saw that there was red in her hair. I saw now for the first time that she was beautiful. Her brow was very high and wide, and the resonant voice with which she recited—so different from her quick dry speech, a mere pizzicato of those strings—seemed the full toned and proper music of what I saw now also for the first time was a long and lovely throat of a solidity and complexity of symmetry, like some harmoniously swollen musical instrument, almost incongruous with her tiny body . . . .14

10 The Shores of Light, 749.
12 The Shores of Light, 749.
13 Homecoming, 301.
14 I Thought of Daisy (New York, 1929), 38.
Dell speaks of this same quality of hers in his 1933 reminiscence, recording a reaction that would later be echoed by several of those who published memoirs of her: “she seemed, as a poet, no mere mortal, but a goddess; and though one could not but love her, one loved her hopelessly, as a goddess must be loved.” Representing an unattainable ideal and yet fallible enough at times to provoke his pity or correction, she obviously exasperated and frustrated all attempts by Dell and other admirers to categorize her. She seemed to contain many contraries within her personality.

The lonely, unreachable, tragically beautiful, inhuman, remote and divine quality in one who was, at moments, a scared little girl from Maine, and at other moments an austere immortal, was something which drove everybody who knew her to writing poetry in the attempt to express that recognition of her lovely strangeness.

In one of his poetic efforts to capture the ineffable quality that made Miss Millay so fascinating and elusive, Dell addressed her as “Child of the lightning, alien to our dust,” and pictured her as “fleeing/The too-close human handclasp.”

In that phrase describing her flight from too-close human relationships, Dell indicates the price Edna Millay had to pay, or thought she had to pay, for her freedom. Inclined to commit herself wholly to whatever or whoever interested her, she nevertheless shrank from following up the original commitment. Throughout her life she clung tenaciously to her independence, to her right to be her own person and not merely a feminine satellite to some male star. Thus a frequent theme of her poetry is her demand that she be as free as men traditionally have been to take a lover and, when the affair has run its course—which she asserts it inevitably will—to forget him. An excellent example is Sonnet XI, one of several that coolly examine love and pronounce it little more than a biological reflex, although an urgent and even ecstatic one for its duration.

I shall forget you presently, my dear
So make the most of this, your little day,

15 *Homecoming*, 301-302. It is interesting to note that while the protagonist in Edmund Wilson’s *Daisy* thinks of Daisy, it is Rita [Edna] he loves. His choice of Daisy as a fitter companion lacks emotional conviction.

16 Ibid., 302.

17 Ibid., 302-303.
Your little month, your little half a year,
Ere I forget you, or die, or move away,
And we are done forever; by and by
I shall forget you, as I said, but now,
If you entreat me with your loveliest lie
I will protest you with my favourite vow.
I would indeed that love were longer-lived,
And oaths were not so brittle as they are,
But so it is, and nature has contrived
To struggle on without a break thus far,—
Whether or not we find what we are seeking
Is idle, biologically speaking.

Similarly, in Sonnet XLI, she adopts a patiently reasoned tone and admits that “being born a woman and distressed/By all the needs and notions of my kind,” and “urged by your pro-pinquity,” she feels a “certain zest” in the act of love. But she hastens to “make it plain” that for the moment her blood has overruled her brain and therefore she does not find this “frenzy” sufficient reason “for conversation when we meet again.”

On the other hand, there are a few poems which, if read as reflections of Edna’s real feelings, suggest that she may have written of love’s transience partly to convince herself that love always fades, and thereby to prepare herself for the dreaded moment when the beloved departs, whether by his own wish, circumstances, or death. “And you as well must die, beloved dust,” she allegedly addressed Arthur Ficke in a sonnet, “And all your beauty stand you in no stead.” This will be true “in spite of all my love.” And despite her sometimes flippant assertions that she cannot remember all whom she has loved, or where, or when, she occasionally writes of the difficulty of forgetting a loved one. Thus, with as much conviction in the tone as in any of those telling lovers to be on their way, she protests in the opening lines of one sonnet: “Time does not bring relief; you all have lied/Who told me time would ease me of my pain!” She takes inventory of the times and seasons in which she misses her departed lover, and concludes with an ironic paradox:

19 Collected Poems, 601.
20 Sonnet XIX. Ibid., 579.
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. 21

The poems in which she is abandoned are not, however, nearly so numerous as those in which she is fleeing some over­ possessive admirer or those in which she is cautioning a lover not to magnify the permanence and significance of a passionate physical attachment. Insofar as body and mind can be considered separately, she seems to value the mind more and to insist on its freedom. Marriage, as viewed by most men, was anathema to her for it shackled the mind. She knew too well her companions' real scale of priorities; she knew the feminine mystique of her day and she knew that most of her men friends only pretended to reject it. And so she chastizes one of them in a sonnet for intimating that big books are not for little girls' heads. With immense scorn, she agrees to act the conventional role: "Come, I will show you now my newest hat,/ And you may watch me purse my mouth and prink!" She will even remain his beloved, but only so long as it pleases her to.

I never again shall tell you what I think.
I shall be sweet and crafty, soft and sly;
You will not catch me reading any more:
I shall be called a wife to pattern by;
And some day when you knock and push the door,
Some sane day, not too bright and not too stormy,
I shall be gone, and you may whistle for me. 22

Conventional matrimony threatened her chosen career as a poet. She considered poetry more lasting than any human relationship.

III

This pattern of flight from the too-human handclasp is evident from the outset of her life in Greenwich Village. At the time she met Floyd Dell, her first suitor there, he was nearly 30 years old; two years earlier, according to his autobiography,

21 Sonnet II, Ibid., 562.
22 Sonnet XXXI, Ibid., 591.
he had determined that he was finally ready to assume the responsibility of a wife and family. He had tried the companionate marriage of equals with Margery Currey in 1909, and it had not worked out. Though they granted each other a large measure of personal freedom and tried earnestly to avoid such common obstacles to marital happiness as jealousy, Dell discovered that it was difficult to live up to his liberal ideas of marriage. He didn’t always feel as his reason and promises directed. In fact, he painfully acknowledged that he often felt like the old-fashioned head of the household whose ways he theoretically rejected. He missed the sense of security the old system fostered by its clear designation of male and female roles, he was unreasonably jealous at times, and perhaps his ego suffered a bit too. At any rate, by 1915 he was certain that he didn’t want to marry a girl artist the second time around; “I wanted to be married to a girl who would not put her career before children—or even before me, hideously reactionary as that thought would have seemed a few years ago.”

That resolution was forgotten—at least temporarily—when he met Edna. Sharing a love of poetry and good conversation, the two young people took turns reading and criticizing poetry and just talking about the multitude of ideas that excited Villagers in those days: socialism, feminism, psychology, the experimental life most Bohemians felt they were living. And then the quarrels began, and breakups and makeups alternated with the good times. A major source of friction between them was Floyd’s possessiveness, for that is how Dell’s incessant questioning appeared to Edna. Though they both championed freedom—as did most Villagers, often refugees from middle-class homes and mores—their ideas of freedom conflicted at important points. Dell’s concept apparently assumed complete openness and honesty between them, but his persistent questioning seemed to Edna a form of tyranny, an invasion of her precious privacy. Dell’s intensely analytical mind and predilection for tracing the whys and wherefores that motivate the smaller acts (as evidenced by his early interest and participation in psychoanalysis) naturally made him especially interested in understanding—as it seemed to him—his newest friend.

But Edna would not have it. She distrusted the minute examination of one’s mental and psychological makeup; she

23 Homecoming, 283.
feared it might dry up the inspiration on which she depended for her writing. Contradictions and apparent irrationalities of behavior did not unduly bother her; she did not want to probe into every corner of her psyche. Still less did she want someone else to know her so thoroughly. In an early sonnet, entitled “Bluebeard,” she examines the intrusion of one person upon another’s privacy. Bluebeard, in the poem, is confronting a lady who has just entered the one room whose door he had forbidden her to open. The room is empty—there are no exotic, precious or horrendous treasures stored there. But Bluebeard, his privacy invaded and personality thereby violated, banishes the trespasser.

Yet this alone out of my life I kept
Unto myself, lest any know me quite;
And you did so profane me when you crept
Unto this threshold of this room tonight
That I must never more behold your face.
This now is yours. I seek another place."

This was Dell’s sin, as Edna saw it. Later she admitted as much to Arthur Ficke, and he put her confession into a sonnet he called “Questioning a Lady.” In this poem the lady, whom Ficke has identified as Edna, says of her first lover that “His infinite curiosity too much pried/ Into that darkness which was mine alone.” In the next lines the lady defies anyone to make her “his own,” and protests, “I am nobody’s own; I am a being/ Simple, perplexed, unhappy like the rest:/ Toward beauty turning and from boredom fleeing./ No special secret hides in this my breast.” And in the final lines, Ficke has her warning him against the same prying: “Or are you not my friend,—only my lover?”

A curious order is evident in those closing lines; but for Edna Millay, it is a characteristic one. For all their talk, she felt the men in her life did not value her mind much—at least not so much as she did. Many of them genuinely liked her poetry, were astonished at her knowledge of literary traditions, and confessed to receiving new insights into the beauty and meaning of certain lines of poetry under her guidance. But their offers of marriage, she felt, were based on the assumption that her duties as wife and mother would receive top priority.

24 Sonnet VI, Collected Poems, 566.
She, however, had no intention of scribbling poems in odd moments after domestic chores were completed. Only Eugen Boissevain was willing to grant her gift the recognition she felt it deserved and to subordinate his own career to hers, as he did for the 26 years of their marriage. And though Edna’s former admirers sometimes paid him tribute, it is clear that none of them envied him his position as guardian of the muse. It may have been ideal for her, but few men could have accepted their part of the unconventional arrangement. Max Eastman thought her spoiled, and even the sympathetic Edmund Wilson wonders whether Eugen’s protective babying of her did not encourage a neurotic dependence on Edna’s part. Dell’s astonishment at Eugen’s willingness to play the subordinate role assigned him is evident in his comment on Eugen’s relationship with his first wife, Inez Milholland, and his suitability for marriage with Edna:

Moreover, he had really enjoyed being the husband of a gallant Feminist leader; his pride hadn’t been hurt by her dedication to a cause, and her not remembering to darn his socks. A divinely ordained husband, it would seem, for a girl poet, who would certainly not remember to darn his socks, either!28

Mixed with his surprise is perhaps admiration (for Eugen’s strong ego) but also skepticism (about anybody being able to live successfully with Edna). Clearly he did not envy Eugen the position; by this time Dell knew that he liked having his socks darned.

Had it been offered him, Edmund Wilson would, like Dell, have rejected marriage on these terms. As Sherman Paul notes in his study of Wilson, Edna’s extreme independence undermined his masculine self-assurance. He was never, Paul thinks, “comfortable with the new woman, accommodating her where he can to his own domestic ideal.” Through the character of Rita in I Thought of Daisy, Wilson shows that her devotion to art made people secondary to her, a bit like tools of the trade.27 Though he seems to have gravitated toward the type—he once wed Mary McCarthy—in his fiction he frequently castigates the new woman, as in this passage from The Little Blue Light, quoted by Paul to make the same point: “that’s what’s

26 Homecoming, 309.
short-circuiting the world: the woman that won't be a woman; the woman man can't depend on! . . . what good is a woman, for pity's sake, if she doesn't want to make men?" 28 With Boissevain Edna could continue doing as she pleased when she pleased, says Miriam Gurko, who goes on to quote Edna's candid explanation: “‘That's the only way in which I can live and be what I am.’” 29 Miss Millay waited a long time before she found a man who was willing for her to produce poems instead of babies. Neurotic she may have been; but forgettable she certainly was not.

IV

Edna St. Vincent Millay was by all accounts a complex personality. Knowing her was a bittersweet experience, but one which few men would have chosen to omit. To speak of her with detachment was nearly impossible. “And how shall I speak calmly of her/ whose mind was like a bow pulled taut? And a burning arrow drawn to the ear?” wrote John Peale Bishop a year after meeting her. 30 Although she would give her “hoyden heart” to no man exclusively, Bishop recalls that he had “heard no man name her/ But at once he was breathless.” 31 Arthur Ficke describes her in “Portrait of a Charming Friend” as “a minx, a marten and a mouse.” 32 And elsewhere he adds that she was like a “reckless, wild . . . unstable . . . faery child,” “false and fickie and possessed by demons.” 33 That so many of her contemporaries tried to capture her personality on paper and that the results of their efforts are so varied attests to her undeniable versatility and originality.

Although her own writing utilized traditional forms, eschewing the numerous experimental forms and techniques flourishing at the time, her personal creed—reflected in her poetry—is radical. It is true, as one critic noted in 1936, that she was fortunate in her time of emergence—or perhaps the time was fortunate in her, for the spirit of her work is symptomatic of the moment.

She gave voice to a new freedom, a new equality, the right of the woman to be as inconstant in love as the man and as demanding of

28 Ibid., 198.
29 Restless Spirit, 167.
31 Ibid., 263-264.
32 Out of Silence, 86.
variety. To what extent it was actually applied as a new ethic by Miss Millay's very numerous admirers one hesitates to say. It was, however, a timely statement of intellectual and biological equality, an aspect of feminism for the first time put into poetry of audacity, lyrical quality and vogue. 84

Of greater importance than any particular ethic of Edna Millay's—e.g., a woman's right to be as inconstant in love as a man—is the larger concept of freedom implicit in her work. Meaningful freedom was for her the liberty to express her individuality on many levels, not in one or two carefully delineated areas. This insistence on being what she was is evident throughout her life and her work and it is what qualifies her for the title of New Woman.

Her ability to enhance and ennoble life, alluded to by Dell and said by Wilson to have been recognized by all who knew her, depended on her strong individuality. Yet because such strength of character can demand as well as supply, it is not easily compatible with an ideal of femininity closely allied with feminine subordination. The ambivalent attitude expressed by many men, by no means provincial, towards Miss Millay is evident in their memoirs of her. In the same piece in which he disparages the division of labor in the Millay-Boissevain household, Edmund Wilson also remarks that it was the combination of tough intellectuality and feminine attractiveness that made Edna "such a satisfactory companion, and that persuaded so many men that they had found their ideal mate." 85 And yet it was because she insisted on the importance of her intellectuality that Edna Millay's husband took over so many of the domestic chores. It would seem that even the men who admired the New Woman so vividly represented by Edna Millay could only conceive of her as a single woman. The individuality that was so crucial a part of what defined her as "new" had to be drastically curtailed in marriage unless the man was to forego some of his precious freedom. This sacrifice proved too much for most of her admirers. Though they might stretch their imaginations sufficiently to encompass a new kind of sweetheart (especially when it eased their own responsibility), they were not ready for a new kind of wife, especially one who insisted that she was "nobody's own."

85 The Shores of Light, 768.