



# The Selected Poetry

*Edna St. Vincent Millay , Nancy Milford (Editor)*

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One of America's most celebrated poets—and winner of the Pulitzer Prize in 1923—Edna St. Vincent Millay defined a generation with her passionate lyrics and intoxicating voice of liberation. Edited by Millay biographer Nancy Milford, this Modern Library Paperback Classics collection captures the poet's unique spirit in works like *Renascence and Other Poems*, *A Few Figs from This-tles*, and *Second April*, as well as in “The Ballad of the Harp-Weaver” and eight sonnets from the early twenties. As Milford writes in her Introduction, “These are the poems that made Edna St. Vincent Millay's reputation when she was young. Saucy, insolent, flip, and defiant, her little verses sting the page.”

## The Selected Poetry Details

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# From Reader Review The Selected Poetry for online ebook

## Jennifer says

I love Millay's poetry. Her engagement with the natural world, her rather cynical view of romance, her moments of grace and grief, all speak to me.

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## Jillian says

I picked this up because I came across a snippet of one of Millay's poems somewhere (can't remember now of course):

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!

When I read this, I swamped with work, correcting papers, and choreographing/directing a musical. And those four little lines managed to make me nod my head, smile to myself, and think, "Oh yes. I know exactly what she means." So of course, I scurried over to my library and picked up a selection of Millay's poems.

Of course, not all of the poems spoke to me, but many of them did. I don't usually read a book of poetry from cover to cover, but I had no problem with this little volume. In fact, I forced myself to read it slowly so that I'd have time to savor and reflect on each poem.

For fans of poetry, I'd recommend this--there are definitely some gems in here.

---

## Sarah Koppelkam says

At first I was like "nah, Edna, you use way too many exclamation points and you're way too reverent" but then I got sucked in by the biting, fiercely independent voice lurking beneath the first few poems of this collection. Then Edna reveals herself with poems like "Thursday":

"And if I loved you Wednesday,  
Well, what is that to you?  
I do not love you Thursday -  
So much is true.

And why you come complaining  
Is more than I can see.  
I loved you Wednesday, - Yes - but what is that to me?"

Edna St. Vincent Millay: the original Millennial, 100 years too soon.

My favorite in the collection is "Witch-Wife"

---

## **mwpm says**

From *Renascence*...

I will be the gladdest thing  
Under the sun!  
I will touch a hundred flowers  
And not pick one.

I will look at cliffs and clouds  
With quiet eyes,  
Watch the wind bow down the grass,  
And the grass rise.

And when lights begin to show  
Up from the town,  
I will mark which must be mine,  
And then start down!

- **Afternoon on a Hill**, pg. 23  
\* \* \*

Love, if I weep it will not matter,  
And if you laugh I shall not care;  
Foolish am I to think about it,  
But it is good to feel you there.

Love, in my sleep I dreamed of waking, -  
White and awful the moonlight reached  
Over the floor, and somewhere, somewhere,  
There was a shutter loose, - it screeched!

Swung in the wind, - and no wind blowing! -  
I was afraid, and turned to you,  
Put out my hand to you for comfort, -  
And you were gone! Cold, cold as dew,

Under my hand the moonlight lay!  
Love, if you laugh I shall not care,  
But if I weep it will not matter, -  
Ah, it is good to feel you there!

- The Dream</b>, pg. 33</blockquote>

\* \* \*

Thou art not lovelier than lilacs, - no,  
Nor honeysuckle; thou art not more fair  
Than small white single poppies, - I can bear  
Their beauty; though I bend before thee,  
though  
From left to right, not knowing where to go,  
I turn my troubled eyes, not knowing where to  
go,  
I turn my troubled eyes, nor here nor there  
Find any refuge from thee, yet I swear  
So has it been with mist, - with moonlight  
so.  
Like him who day by day unto his draught  
Of delicate poison adds him one drop more  
Till he may drink unharmed the death of ten,  
Even so, inured to beauty, who have quaffed  
Each hour more deeply than the hour before,  
I drink - and live - what has destroyed some  
men.

- Sonnets I</b>, pg.

40</blockquote></blockquote>

*From A Few Figs from Thistles</i>...*

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!

- First Fig</b>,

pg.

49</blockquote>

\* \* \*

Why do you follow  
me? -  
Any moment I can  
be  
Nothing but a  
laurel-tree.

Any moment of the  
chase

I can leave you in  
my place  
A pink bough for  
your embrace.

Yet if over hill  
and hollow  
Still it is your  
will to follow,  
I am off; - to  
heel, Apollo!

-

Daphne</b  
>, pg.  
62</block  
quote></b  
lockquote  
>

From  
*Second*  
*April*</i>  
...

To what  
purpose,  
April, do  
you come  
again?  
Beauty is  
not  
enough.  
You can  
no longer  
quiet me  
with the  
redness  
Of little  
leaves  
opening  
stickily.  
I know  
what I  
know.  
The sun  
is hot on  
my neck  
as I

observe  
The  
spikes of  
the  
crocus.  
The smell  
of the  
earth is  
good.  
It is  
apparent  
that  
there is  
no death.  
But what  
does that  
signify?  
Not only  
under  
ground  
are the  
brains of  
men  
Eaten by  
maggots.  
Life in  
itself  
Is  
nothing,  
An empty  
cup, a  
flight of  
uncarpete  
d stairs.  
It is not  
enough  
that  
yearly,  
down this  
hill,  
April  
Comes  
like an  
idiot,  
babbling  
and  
strewing  
flowers.

-  
Spring</b  
>, pg.  
75</block  
quote>  
\* \* \*

No matter  
what I  
say,  
All that  
I really  
love  
Is the  
rain that  
flattens  
on the  
bay,  
And the  
eel-grass  
in the  
cove;  
The  
jingle-sh  
ells that  
lie and  
bleach  
At the  
tide-  
line, and  
the trace  
Of higher  
tides  
along the  
beach:  
Nothing  
in this  
place.

- Eel-  
Grass</b  
>, pg.  
86</bloc  
kquote>  
\* \* \*

April  
this  
year,



not  
otherwis  
e  
Than  
April of  
a year  
ago,  
Is full  
of  
whispers  
, full  
of  
sighs,  
Of  
dazzling  
mud and  
dingy  
snow;  
Hepatica  
s that  
pleased  
you so  
Are here  
again,  
and  
butterfl  
ies.

There  
rings a  
hammerin  
g all  
day,  
And  
shingles  
lie  
about  
the  
doors;  
In  
orchards  
near and  
far away  
The grey  
wood-  
pecker  
taps and  
bores;  
The men

are  
merry at  
their  
chores,  
And  
children  
earnest  
at their  
play.

The  
larger  
streams  
run  
still  
and  
deep,  
Noisy  
and  
swift  
the  
small  
brooks  
run  
Among  
the  
mullein  
stalks  
the  
sheep  
Go up  
the  
hillside  
in the  
sun,  
Pensive  
Y, -  
only you  
are  
gone,  
You that  
alone I  
cared to  
keep.

- Song  
of a  
Second  
April</b

>, pg.  
96</blockquote></blockquote>

From  
*Sonnets*  
*and*  
*Ballad*  
*Harp-*  
*Weaver*  
*i>...*

When  
you,  
that at  
this  
moment  
are to  
me  
Dearer  
than  
words on  
paper,  
shall  
depart,  
And no  
more the  
warder  
of my  
heart,  
Whereof  
again  
myself  
shall  
hold the  
key;  
And be  
no more  
- what  
now you  
seem to  
be -  
The sun,  
from  
which  
all

excellen  
ces  
start  
In a  
round  
nimbus,  
nor a  
broken  
dart  
Of  
moonligh  
t, even,  
splinter  
ed on  
the sea;  
I shall  
remember  
only of  
this  
hour -  
And weep  
somewhat  
, as now  
you see  
me weep  
-  
The  
pathos  
of your  
love,  
that,  
like  
flower,  
Fearful  
of death  
yet  
amorous  
of  
sleep,  
Droops  
for a  
moment  
and  
beholds,  
dismayed  
,  
The wind  
whereon  
its

petals  
shell be  
laid.

-

Sonnet</  
b>, pg.  
149</blo  
ckquote>  
\* \* \*

"Son,"  
said my  
mother,  
When I  
was  
knee-hig  
h,  
"You've  
need of  
clothes  
to cover  
you,  
And not  
a rag  
have I.

"There's  
nothing  
in the  
house  
To make  
a boy  
breeches  
,  
Nor  
shears  
to cut a  
cloth  
with  
Nor  
thread  
to take  
stitches  
.

"There's  
nothing  
in the

house  
But a  
loaf-end  
of rye,  
And a  
harp  
with a  
woman's  
head  
Nobody  
will  
buy,"?  
And she  
began to  
cry.

That was  
in the  
early  
fall.  
When  
came the  
late  
fall,?  
"Son,"  
she  
said,  
"the  
sight of  
you?  
Makes  
your  
mother's  
blood  
crawl,-

"Little  
skinny  
shoulder  
-blades  
Sticking  
through  
your  
clothes!  
And  
where  
you'll  
get a  
jacket

from  
God  
above  
knows.

"It's  
lucky  
for me,  
lad,  
Your  
daddy's  
in the  
ground,  
And  
can't  
see the  
way I  
let  
His son  
go  
around!"  
And she  
made a  
queer  
sound.

That was  
in the  
late  
fall.  
When the  
winter  
came,  
I'd not  
a pair  
of  
breeches  
Nor a  
shirt to  
my name.

I  
couldn't  
go to  
school,  
Or out  
of doors  
to play.  
And all

the  
other  
little  
boys  
Passed  
our way.

"Son,"  
said my  
mother,  
"Come,  
climb  
into my  
lap,  
And I'll  
chafe  
your  
little  
bones  
While  
you take  
a nap."

And, oh,  
but we  
were  
silly  
For half  
an hour  
or more,  
Me with  
my long  
legs  
Dragging  
on the  
floor,

A-rock-  
rock-  
rocking  
To a  
mother-g  
oose  
rhyme!  
Oh, but  
we were  
happy  
For half  
an



hour's  
time!

But  
there  
was I, a  
great  
boy,  
And what  
would  
folks  
say  
To hear  
my  
mother  
singing  
me  
To sleep  
all day,  
In such  
a daft  
way?

Men say  
the  
winter  
Was bad  
that  
year;  
Fuel was  
scarce,  
And food  
was  
dear.

A wind  
with a  
wolf's  
head  
Howled  
about  
our  
door,  
And we  
burned  
up the  
chairs  
And sat  
on the

floor.

All that  
was left  
us  
Was a  
chair we  
couldn't  
break,  
And the  
harp  
with a  
woman's  
head  
Nobody  
would  
take,  
For song  
or  
pity's  
sake.

The  
night  
before  
Christma  
s  
I cried  
with the  
cold,  
I cried  
myself  
to sleep  
Like a  
two-  
year-old  
.

And in  
the deep  
night  
I felt  
my  
mother  
rise,  
And  
stare  
down  
upon me

With  
love in  
her  
eyes.

I saw my  
mother  
sitting  
On the  
one good  
chair,  
A light  
falling  
on her  
From I  
couldn't  
tell  
where,

Looking  
nineteen  
,  
And not  
a day  
older,  
And the  
harp  
with a  
woman's  
head  
Leaned  
against  
her  
shoulder  
.

Her thin  
fingers,  
moving  
In the  
thin,  
tall  
strings,  
Were  
weav-wea  
v-  
weaving  
Wonderfu  
l

things.

Many  
bright  
threads,  
From  
where I  
couldn't  
see,  
Were  
running  
through  
the  
harp-str  
ings  
Rapidly,

And gold  
threads  
whistlin  
g  
Through  
my  
mother's  
hand.  
I saw  
the web  
grow,  
And the  
pattern  
expand.

She wove  
a  
child's  
jacket,  
And when  
it was  
done  
She laid  
it on  
the  
floor  
And wove  
another  
one.

She wove  
a red

cloak  
So regal  
to see,  
"She's  
made it  
for a  
king's  
son,"  
I said,  
"and not  
for me."  
But I  
knew it  
was for  
me.

She wove  
a pair  
of  
breeches  
Quicker  
than  
that!  
She wove  
a pair  
of boots  
And a  
little  
cocked  
hat.

She wove  
a pair  
of  
mittens,  
She wove  
a little  
blouse,  
She wove  
all  
night  
In the  
still,  
cold  
house.

She sang  
as she  
worked,

And the  
harp-  
strings  
spoke;  
Her  
voice  
never  
faltered  
,  
And the  
thread  
never  
broke.  
And when  
I  
awoke,—

There  
sat my  
mother  
With the  
harp  
against  
her  
shoulder  
Looking  
nineteen  
And not  
a day  
older,

A smile  
about  
her  
lips,  
And a  
light  
about  
her  
head,  
And her  
hands in  
the  
harp-str  
ings  
Frozen  
dead.

And

piled up  
beside  
her  
And  
toppling  
to the  
skies,  
Were the  
clothes  
of a  
king's  
son,  
Just my  
size.

- The  
Ballad  
of the  
Harp-  
Weaver</  
b>, pg.  
156-  
160</blo  
ckquote>  
</blockq  
uote>

---

**Adam  
Ferrel  
l says**

The best  
sonnet  
writer  
since  
Shakespe  
are.

Many of  
the  
poems in  
this  
book  
have  
changed

my  
vocabula  
ry, my  
way of  
thinking  
, and my  
definiti  
on of  
literary  
beauty.

---

**Kelly**  
**says**

I have  
great  
difficul  
ties  
with  
poetry.  
At  
first,  
it was  
because  
I was a  
member  
of the  
"roll  
your  
eyes and  
hold  
your  
nose"  
continge  
nt as  
regarded  
pretty  
much the  
entire  
art  
form.  
Except  
Shakespe  
are,  
don't  
you  
know,



because  
I was a  
*cultured*  
little  
thing,  
and  
well-  
how  
couldn't  
I? That  
reason  
changed  
when all  
of a  
sudden,  
I  
encounte  
red a  
poet I  
loved.  
And  
irony of  
ironies,  
he was  
one of  
the  
major  
roll  
your  
eyes  
poets  
even for  
people  
who  
could  
enjoy  
poetry-  
Byron. I  
just  
loved  
it- but  
it  
didn't  
have  
anything  
to do  
with  
apprecia  
tion for

craft. I  
connecte  
d to it  
on a  
deeply  
selfish,  
personal  
level-  
so much  
of his  
writing  
is so  
appropri  
ate for  
teenager  
s. I  
could  
just  
live in  
his  
ridiculo  
us  
yearning  
s and  
affectat  
ions,  
because  
they  
were  
mine as  
well-  
even if  
I was  
embarras  
sed for  
him, I  
recogniz  
ed so  
much of  
it in  
myself.  
From  
there I  
loved  
Shelley,  
I loved  
Tennyson  
, I  
loved

pieces  
of  
Dickinson  
n here  
and  
there.  
But I  
was very  
very  
picky,  
very  
dependen  
t on  
transien  
t moods,  
and a  
very  
very  
unsophis  
ticated  
reader  
of  
poetry-  
and  
that's  
the  
stage  
that I  
remain  
at  
today.  
I'm very  
capable  
of  
scornful  
ly  
laughing  
somethin  
g out  
the door  
without  
a second  
thought  
that I  
would  
have  
loved  
yesterda  
y, and I

even do  
this to  
my  
favorite  
s. I am  
cruel to  
poets-  
for some  
reason,  
I'm  
willing  
to give  
novelist  
s and  
playwrig  
hts a  
lot more  
leeway.

Which is  
probably  
why I'm  
somewhat  
conflict  
ed about  
my  
feelings  
on Edna  
St.  
Vincent  
Millay.  
This  
particul  
ar  
edition  
chronicl  
es her  
juvenali  
a into  
the  
writings  
of  
approach  
ing  
(what  
was for  
the  
time)  
middle

age. I  
had  
expected  
to grow  
with her  
and like  
her  
writings  
progress  
ively  
more as  
she went  
along-  
but I  
did not  
find  
that to  
be the  
case. I  
loved  
her  
first  
collecti  
on of  
works,  
*Resananc  
e and  
Other  
Poems*, ,  
some of  
them  
written  
in her  
teens,  
and  
publishe  
d before  
she was  
in her  
mid-  
twenties  
.  
"Resanan  
ce,"  
exactly  
suited  
my mood-  
the  
story of

a  
troubled  
girl on  
a  
seemingly  
perfectly  
innocuous  
day  
who  
imagines  
herself  
dead to  
escape  
the  
world...  
but  
cannot  
ultimately  
face  
the  
prospect  
. It was  
perfect  
for what  
I  
needed-  
an  
expression  
of  
incredible  
love  
for  
life,  
someone  
depressed  
enough  
to want  
to die,  
but too  
enthralled  
with  
life to  
be able  
to. Like  
in that  
Fellini  
film-

with the  
girl at  
the end  
who has  
just  
been  
fucked  
over by  
life and  
men  
again  
and you  
think  
she's  
going to  
do  
somethin  
g awful  
to  
herself.  
.. but  
then  
there  
are  
these  
kids  
playing,  
and  
she's  
smiling.  
Corny,  
but I  
love it,  
and I  
needed  
that. I  
also  
loved  
"Interim  
," the  
story of  
the  
survivor  
s of  
death  
and  
clash of  
the Big  
Ideas

and  
Facts of  
Life  
with the  
everyday  
mundane  
and how  
ridiculo  
us it  
seems to  
do  
/anythin  
g/ that  
isn't  
epic  
when  
such  
things  
have  
happened  
to you.  
She has  
many  
other  
poems  
along  
these  
lines,  
and I  
adored  
all of  
them,  
even if  
they  
were  
just  
smaller  
echoes  
of  
things  
that had  
been  
expresse  
d  
before.

By  
contrast  
, I



really  
did not  
like the  
majority  
of  
*Second*  
*April*.  
Millay  
definite  
ly  
always  
had a  
flower  
child  
sensibil  
ity  
about  
her  
(despite  
being  
raised  
in the  
'teens,  
not the  
sixties)  
. And I  
mean  
this  
very  
literall  
y as at  
least  
half her  
poems  
mention  
flowers  
in some  
way, and  
if its  
not  
flowers,  
she's  
marvelin  
g about  
some  
other  
wonder  
of  
nature.

Now, I  
have no  
problem  
with  
this  
generall  
y, and  
sometime  
s I find  
it very  
sweet.  
There's  
a poem  
called  
Exile  
that is  
really  
about  
nothing  
else but  
the  
yearning  
for  
home-  
all she  
wants is  
to smell  
the  
water  
again. I  
can  
apprecia  
te that.

However-  
*Second*  
*April*  
feels  
like a  
girl who  
got too  
high on  
herself  
and went  
to  
Greenwic  
h  
Village,  
and

wrote  
poems to  
impress  
the  
people  
there  
with how  
rebellio  
us and  
idealist  
ic and  
well  
educated  
(waaaay  
up with  
the  
classica  
l  
referenc  
es in  
this  
one) she  
was. It  
did not  
feel  
geniune  
in the  
least.  
Even her  
nature  
poems  
often  
felt  
twee-  
like she  
was  
looking  
for the  
wonder  
she was  
once  
able to  
write  
with,  
and not  
able to  
find it.  
I can  
understa

nd this  
to a  
certain  
degree,  
and I'm  
certainl  
y at an  
age  
where I  
can  
still  
remember  
that-  
but I  
don't  
admire  
it, I  
shudder  
to think  
of it,  
and  
being  
embarras  
sed for  
it isn't  
helping  
me  
apprecia  
te it  
more. I  
can  
understa  
nd it in  
a  
distant,  
historic  
al  
context  
way- WWI  
had just  
ended,  
the  
atmosphe  
re was  
thick  
with  
politica  
l  
statemen

ts and  
heady  
with the  
sorrow  
that  
lead to  
jazz age  
ridiculo  
usness.  
It just  
feels  
like a  
pose of  
a girl-  
or a  
girl too  
stereoty  
pical  
for me  
to even  
want to  
know.

*A Few  
Figs* was  
better,  
quieter,  
more  
consiste  
nt. Less  
with the  
referenc  
es to  
being  
out all  
night,  
more of  
a return  
to the  
subjects  
that  
first  
fascinat  
ed her.  
Still a  
bit more  
pretenti  
ous, but  
I'll let

that  
pass.  
After  
all, I  
do like  
Byron,  
and she  
does  
harken  
back to  
19th  
century  
styles  
to a  
certain  
degree.

Actually  
, I  
think  
that's  
my  
favorite  
part  
about  
Edna St.  
Vincent  
Millay.  
Perhaps  
this is  
to do  
with one  
of my  
historical  
fascinations  
(the  
echoes  
of the  
Old  
World  
that  
always  
linger),  
but I  
love how  
she's  
one of

the  
writers  
straddli  
ng the  
old  
world  
and the  
new- the  
techniqu  
es of  
the  
Victoria  
n era  
were  
still  
being  
taught,  
still  
being  
revered,  
and yet,  
entirely  
modern  
sentimen  
ts were  
being  
expresse  
d in  
"thees"  
and  
"thous,"  
that  
clank up  
against  
your ear  
in a  
startlin  
g and  
charming  
way,  
being  
used to  
say  
things  
that one  
has  
trouble  
believin  
g they

would  
ever  
intend  
to  
express.  
I just  
loved  
the  
sound of  
it, the  
spirit  
of it,  
and that  
gave me  
another  
way into  
understa  
nding  
it.

I will  
revisit  
several  
of these  
poems  
again-  
they are  
inspirin  
g, with  
beautifu  
l images  
to hold  
onto and  
remember  
when  
they are  
needed.  
Thank  
you to  
everyone  
who  
recommen  
ded this  
collecti  
on to  
me.

---



**Alliso  
n Long  
says**

I don't  
know too  
much  
about  
Edna St.  
Vincent  
Millay,  
but the  
more I  
read  
about  
her, the  
more I'm  
intrigue  
d.

I have  
always  
adored  
her poem  
'First  
Fig', so  
I set  
out to  
read  
more of  
her  
poetry.  
'Selecte  
d  
Poetry'  
consists  
of both  
flippant  
verses  
and  
those  
obsessed  
with  
death  
(no  
really,  
there is  
some

morbid  
stuff  
there).  
The  
language  
is  
beautiful  
and  
sad  
because  
so much  
of it  
has  
fallen  
out of  
favor  
with  
more  
contempo  
rary  
styles.

'Selecte  
d  
Poetry'  
makes  
you  
wonder  
when  
reading  
poetry  
fell out  
of favor  
and want  
to start  
a  
movement  
to bring  
it back  
again.

---

**Noah  
Goats  
says**

From the  
precocio

us power  
of  
Renascen  
ce to  
the  
sentimen  
tal but  
surprisi  
ngly  
effectiv  
e Ballad  
of the  
Harp  
Weaver,  
this  
collecti  
on  
contains  
one  
great  
poem  
after  
another.  
As far  
as I'm  
concerne  
d,  
Millay  
is one  
of  
American  
literatu  
re's  
greatest  
poets,  
and  
these  
lovely  
and  
witty  
poems  
show  
why.

---

**David  
says**

Everythi  
ng in  
life  
seems to  
me to be  
ephemera  
l,  
always  
passing,  
changing  
,  
transfor  
ming.  
Nothing  
stays  
the  
same,  
nothing  
lasts.  
We live  
in a  
very  
narrow  
slice of  
infinity  
, and in  
our mind  
we  
explode  
every  
moment  
of that  
slice to  
somethin  
g  
enormous  
,  
somethin  
g of  
incompre  
hensible  
signific  
ance. We  
analyze  
every  
glance  
and turn  
of  
phrase,

we plan  
our days  
and  
weeks  
and  
months  
and  
five-yea  
r plans,  
and our  
retireme  
nts  
which we  
may  
never  
reach.  
We are  
always  
sad to  
let  
things  
go, it  
does not  
come  
naturall  
y to us.  
We cling  
and hold  
fast to  
the  
things  
we love,  
even  
cling to  
pains  
that  
have  
become  
dull,  
for fear  
of new,  
harsher  
hands  
which  
may play  
upon us.  
And yet  
we  
paradoxi

cally  
love the  
idea of  
new  
things.  
New  
cars,  
and the  
excitement  
of  
new  
romances  
and new  
cities,  
travels  
to new  
places,  
discovering new  
books.  
"Death  
is the  
mother  
of  
beauty"  
said  
Wallace  
Stevens,  
which is  
to say  
that  
nothing  
beautiful  
is  
eternal,  
that we  
are only  
moved by  
the  
knowledge  
that  
what is  
will  
never be  
the same  
again.  
Like a  
photograph

caging a  
moment  
of  
beauty  
into  
somethin  
g of  
forever,  
so to  
does a  
poem  
capture  
that  
slice of  
dying  
Time  
forever.

For Edna  
St.  
Vincent  
Millay,  
there is  
perhaps  
no god  
in her  
poetry  
if not  
the  
omnipote  
nce and  
unconque  
rable  
god of  
Time.  
She is  
acutely  
aware of  
the  
passing  
of time,  
of the  
passing  
of  
loves,  
the  
passing  
of  
moments,

like  
ships at  
sea. As  
soon as  
a moment  
buds, it  
has  
stepped  
closer  
to  
decay.  
As soon  
as a  
love is  
forged,  
it is  
one day  
closer  
to rust.  
This  
seems to  
be a  
very  
cynical  
view of  
the  
world,  
that all  
is  
always  
dying,  
that  
nothing  
lasts,  
and  
nothing  
is  
certain  
but  
death  
and  
ruin.  
But  
aren't  
we moved  
by  
ruins?  
We are  
not



moved by  
cities,  
not by  
skyscrap  
ers nor  
apartmen  
t  
building  
s which  
climb  
high  
into the  
sky and  
bustle  
with  
inmates  
and  
house-ca  
ts going  
about  
their  
dailies.  
What  
moves us  
are the  
ruins  
past,  
where no  
one  
lives,  
the  
Pompeiis  
of the  
world  
which  
echo  
with  
ghosts,  
of  
unsolved  
mysterie  
s and  
goings-o  
n which  
have  
long  
been  
dulled  
by the

crawl  
and  
recessio  
n of  
time.  
Like  
sand on  
the  
beach  
always  
being  
drawn  
away,  
inch by  
inch, so  
too does  
time  
pull  
back on  
the  
present,  
transfor  
ming it  
into the  
past.  
What  
once was  
ugly to  
us  
becomes  
beautifu  
l in the  
nostalgi  
c  
distance  
s of the  
past -  
for it  
was  
always  
beautifu  
l, but  
beauty  
requires  
distance  
. If the  
only  
paradise  
s are

paradise  
s lost,  
then too  
are the  
only  
beauties  
lost  
beauties  
. Millay  
is hyper  
aware of  
the  
beauty  
in  
passing  
things,  
in  
transien  
t  
things,  
in dying  
things.

*THE  
FIRST  
rose on  
my rose-  
tree  
Budded,  
bloomed,  
and  
shattere  
d,  
During  
sad days  
when to  
me  
Nothing  
mattered  
.*

*Grief of  
grief  
has  
drained  
me  
clean;  
Still it  
seems a*

*pity*  
*No one*  
*saw,—it*  
*must*  
*have*  
*been*  
*Very*  
*pretty.*

We hear  
recurren  
t in Ms.  
Millay's  
poetry  
this  
seeming  
ambivale  
nce  
towards  
loss and  
grief,  
this  
acceptan  
ce that  
the best  
things  
of  
yesterda  
y have  
already  
deprecia  
ted  
immeasur  
ably in  
time.  
She  
knows  
that we  
don't  
apprecia  
te  
beauty  
when it  
is  
present,  
beauty  
"buds,  
blooms"  
when

"nothing  
matters"  
- when  
we can't  
apprecia  
te it,  
when it  
is too  
close,  
when we  
take it  
for  
granted,  
when we  
are  
still  
aspiring  
for  
better.  
And it  
shatters  
before  
we even  
see that  
we were  
happy.  
We are  
much  
better  
at grief  
than  
gratitud  
e. So  
much  
beauty  
goes  
unseen  
by us  
because  
we do  
not give  
it  
attentio  
n, we do  
not  
think of  
our  
happines  
s; but

we are  
wallower  
s in  
grief.  
Grief  
seems to  
us an  
ocean;  
happines  
s,  
beauty,  
a  
lightnin  
g-flash.  
We are  
comforte  
d by the  
endless  
vastness  
of the  
oceans  
of  
grief,  
their  
expected  
tempos  
and  
waves of  
emotion,  
which  
threaten  
imminent  
ly to  
topple  
us over,  
to wreck  
us. We  
see the  
flashes  
of  
beauty  
only  
peripher  
ally, we  
never  
seem to  
catch  
them  
head-on,

we are  
never  
ready  
with our  
cameras,  
and even  
when we  
do they  
never  
seem  
quite  
right  
captured  
. We  
look  
back on  
moments  
of great  
beauty,  
and  
think  
they  
"must  
have  
been  
very  
pretty"  
- but we  
did not  
think so  
when we  
had  
them,  
when our  
rose  
bushes  
were  
blooming  
just  
outside  
our  
windows,  
on days  
we kept  
the  
windows  
shut so  
that  
bees

wouldn't  
come in,  
or the  
wind  
wouldn't  
disrupt  
the  
pages on  
our  
desks.  
Yes,  
they  
must've  
been  
very  
pretty.

Perhaps  
the  
cruellest  
truth in  
love, in  
beauty,  
is that  
we  
withhold  
it from  
ourselves.  
We  
are  
citadels  
of  
grief,  
keeping  
out  
happiness,  
and  
hemming  
ourselves  
in  
with our  
evasions  
and  
defenses  
. We do  
not want  
to risk  
being  
struck



by  
lightnin  
g. We do  
not take  
chances,  
we  
vouchsaf  
e our  
lives to  
the  
wavering  
seas of  
time,  
bobbing  
up and  
down  
like  
corks on  
the  
waves,  
never  
secured  
in our  
happines  
s, but  
never,  
too,  
sunk  
complete  
ly,  
always  
in flux.  
We hurt  
ourselfe  
s with  
our own  
pride,  
we  
refuse  
to be  
subservi  
ent to  
the idea  
of love,  
we  
champion  
ourselfe  
s as  
worthy

of love,  
but hold  
ourselves  
too  
highly.  
We never  
give up  
our  
whole  
hearts,  
and so  
instead  
we lose  
them  
piece by  
piece.

*Thus  
when I  
swear,  
"I love  
with all  
my  
heart,"  
'Tis  
with the  
heart of  
Lilith  
that I  
swear,  
'Tis  
with the  
love of  
Lesbia  
and  
Lucrece;  
And thus  
as well  
my love  
must  
lose  
some  
part  
Of what  
it is,  
had  
Helen  
been  
less*

*fair,  
Or  
perished  
young,  
or  
stayed  
at home  
in  
Greece.*

While  
this is  
a lovely  
collecti  
on, to  
anyone  
interest  
ed in  
Millay's  
poetry,  
I would  
rather  
recommen  
d her  
Collecte  
d Poems,  
as they  
include  
a  
broader  
selectio  
n of her  
poetry,  
and more  
specific  
ally  
consolid  
ate all  
(or at  
least  
most of)  
Millay's  
sonnets,  
which  
are her  
stronges  
t and  
most  
poignant

.

---

**Kaion**  
**says**

I am a  
little  
irate  
that  
this  
volume  
turned  
out not  
to be  
the  
promised  
*Selected*  
*Poetry*  
*of Edna*  
*St.*  
*Vincent*  
*Millay,*  
but  
instead  
should  
be  
titled  
"Poetry  
by Edna  
St.  
Vincent  
Millay  
That  
Happens  
to be in  
the  
Public  
Domain".  
Namely,  
this  
consists  
of the  
entirety  
of her  
first  
three  
collecti

ons  
*Renascen*  
*ce and*  
*Other*  
*Poems, A*  
*Few Figs*  
*From*  
*Thistles*  
*, and*  
*Second*  
*April;*  
as well  
as "The  
Ballad  
of the  
Harp  
Weaver"  
and  
addition  
al  
sonnets  
from  
*American*  
*Poetry,*  
*1922: A*  
*Miscella*  
*ny.*

There is  
somethin  
g I find  
perpetua  
lly  
girlish  
about  
these  
poems,  
for all  
their  
claims  
of  
deathly  
romance  
and  
pretensi  
ons of  
classica  
l  
timeless

ness.  
Millay  
is best  
as a  
poet of  
summer,  
effusive  
and  
energetic  
(and  
fond of  
those  
exclamation  
points).  
I think  
I like  
her best  
when she  
embraces  
the  
playfulness  
of  
language  
, of  
rhythm  
and  
rhyme,  
over her  
proclamations  
of  
loss and  
love.

Rating:  
2 stars  
(  
*Renascence*  
and  
*A Few*  
*Figs* are  
particularly  
sparse  
in  
interest  
, and I  
admit a  
disinter

est in  
the  
sonnets  
altogeth  
er.  
*Second*  
*April* is  
the  
early  
collecti  
on to  
pursue  
here.)

My  
picks:  
**"The  
Singing-  
Woman  
from the  
Wood's  
Edge",  
"Journey  
,  
"Inland"**  
.

---

**Rowena  
says**

These  
were  
lovely  
poems,  
pleasant  
to read  
and with  
easy  
interpre  
tations.  
Some of  
her  
poems  
about

death  
had a  
very  
Sylvia  
Plath  
feel to  
them.  
Most of  
the  
poems  
had  
nature  
elements  
. She  
describe  
d her  
love for  
the  
great  
outdoors  
in great  
detail.  
I want  
to go  
run  
around  
in a  
meadow  
now :)

---

**El**  
**says**

I'm  
really  
not all  
that  
great  
with  
poetry  
yet. I  
think  
that if  
I know  
enough  
about a  
poet's



personal  
life  
that I  
will  
have a  
better  
apprecia  
tion for  
their  
poetry.  
This may  
or may  
not be  
true,  
but this  
is sort  
of my  
first  
experien  
ce of  
trying  
that  
out,  
reading  
two  
biograph  
ies  
about  
Millay  
while  
reading  
this  
selectio  
n of  
poetry  
on the  
side.

Knowing  
more  
about  
the  
author  
helps in  
one way  
- I know  
what was  
going on  
when she

wrote  
certain  
poems,  
how old  
she was,  
possibly  
what was  
going on  
in the  
world  
(though  
most of  
her  
poems  
had more  
to do  
with  
herself  
than  
anything  
else,  
until  
later in  
her  
years).  
On the  
flip-  
side of  
the same  
coin,  
knowing  
more  
about  
the  
author  
hurt in  
some  
ways - I  
knew  
what she  
was  
writing  
as she  
got on  
in  
years,  
what she  
was  
doing to

herself  
and her  
body,  
her  
obsessio  
ns with  
certain  
people -  
all of  
which  
likely  
took its  
toll on  
her  
writing.

When you  
look at  
the  
first  
poem in  
this  
selectio  
n,  
"Renasce  
nce"  
[sic],  
and you  
read it  
with the  
knowledg  
e that  
she was  
19 when  
she  
wrote  
it, you  
have a  
greater  
apprecia  
tion for  
the  
skill  
and  
genius  
of  
Millay.  
I'd give  
five

stars to  
that  
poem  
alone.  
But as  
she got  
older,  
that  
genius  
just  
wasn't  
there in  
the same  
way. I  
attribut  
e that  
mainly  
to her  
addictio  
n -  
there's  
no way  
that  
being on  
as much  
morphine  
as she  
was in  
her  
later  
years  
(compoun  
ded by  
the  
excess  
of  
alcohol  
she  
drank  
and the  
slew of  
other  
medicati  
ons she  
put in  
her  
body)  
didn't  
affect

her  
mind.  
This is  
evidence  
d in  
Nancy  
Milford'  
s Savage  
Beauty:  
The Life  
of Edna  
St.  
Vincent  
Millay  
where  
her time  
spent  
detoxing  
in  
hospital  
s were  
written  
in great  
detail.

Her  
poetry  
in later  
in years  
was hit-  
or-miss  
for me.  
Some of  
them are  
lovely,  
but  
others  
tend to  
ramble  
and be  
vague  
and  
essentia  
lly  
unintere  
sting.

However,  
she led

a  
difficul  
t and  
often  
sad  
life,  
and that  
does  
come  
across  
in her  
writing,  
for  
better  
or for  
worse.  
At times  
in a  
selectio  
n like  
this it  
starts  
to drag  
a bit,  
and  
that's  
even  
when I  
would  
read  
only one  
or two  
poems an  
evening  
before  
picking  
up where  
I left  
off in  
one or  
both of  
the  
biograph  
ies.  
Some of  
her  
poems  
are so  
short

that  
it's  
easy to  
read a  
couple  
of pages  
and wind  
up  
having  
read  
four  
poems.

Not the  
worst  
poetry  
I've  
read,  
and  
there  
are one  
or two  
of pure  
genius  
("Renas-  
cence"  
being  
probably  
one of  
my all-  
time new  
favorite  
poems  
EVAH),  
but the  
rest  
left me  
feeling  
probably  
as cold  
as her  
insides  
felt on  
all that  
freaking  
morphine  
.

---

**Samant  
ha  
(Sundr  
essSec  
rets)  
says**

Head on  
over to  
my  
Instagra  
m at  
instagra  
m.com/sa  
manthaiv  
yyyy for  
reviews

---

**Richar  
d  
Smith  
says**

I've  
been  
tidying  
up the  
list of  
50 or so  
books  
that I'm  
supposed  
ly  
"current  
ly  
reading,  
" and  
the  
terrible  
thing is  
that I  
am  
"current  
ly  
reading"



most of  
them,  
although  
so  
intermit  
tently  
that I'm  
stretchi  
ng the  
definiti  
on of  
"current  
ly  
reading"  
beyond  
usefulne  
ss. But  
this  
book of  
poems by  
Edna St  
Vincent  
Millay I  
certainl  
y did  
finish,  
seven  
years  
ago. She  
was once  
the most  
famous  
poet in  
America,  
giving  
readings  
to 20  
000  
people  
with her  
distinct  
ive  
voice.  
Now  
she's  
out of  
fashion.  
She's  
unashame

dly  
romantic  
, a  
follower  
of  
Shelley.  
Love and  
death,  
the  
great  
themes,  
are her  
themes,  
and I  
like her  
poetry  
very  
much. I  
return  
to it  
often.

---

## **Gen says**

I find  
I'm  
mostly  
alone on  
this but  
I feel a  
distance  
between  
me and  
poetry  
like  
it's too  
personal  
for me  
to view  
no  
matter  
where  
I'm  
seeing  
it or  
how much

I enjoy  
it.  
Millay's  
words  
complete  
ly  
betray  
this  
feeling,  
I  
understo  
od and  
gushed  
over the  
poems. I  
borrowed  
a copy  
of this  
from the  
library  
but it  
looks  
like I'm  
definite  
ly  
buying I  
need  
this on  
my shelf  
<3.

---