

Millay, Edna St. Vincent (1892-1950)

Encyclopedia Article

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The quintessential romantic American poetess of the 1910s and 1920s, Edna St. Vincent Millay became a popular heroine to an entire generation of girls who grew up dreaming of becoming modern women writers. Millay's family was an unconventional one. After Millay's parents separated, Millay's mother, a nurse, reared her children alone, making sure to encourage their creativity. A published poet at 20, Millay became a popular literary figure while still in college at Vassar. There she developed a reputation as free spirit, whose romantic and sexual liaisons with women were recorded in her lyric verse. After graduating and moving to avant-garde Greenwich Village, Millay came to epitomize the modern bohemian lifestyle. A woman who "burned the candle at both ends," Millay took many lovers of both sexes, even as she continued to write popular and award-winning poetry and plays. After marrying feminist Eugen Boissevain in 1923, Millay's poetry and personal life gradually became more conservative. But she continued to write and to tour the country reading her poetry. Wearing only scarlet, Millay continued to attract overflow audiences of women who looked to the poetess as a heroine whose life exemplified the myriad hopeful possibilities for women in the twentieth century.

Further Reading:

Brittin, Norman A. *Edna St. Vincent Millay*. Boston, Twayne Publishers, 1982.

Cheney, Anne. *Millay in Greenwich Village*. Montgomery, University of Alabama Press, 1975.

Gould, Jean. *The Poet and Her Book: A Biography of Edna St. Vincent Millay*. New York, Dodd, Mead and Company, 1969.