

**Make Bright the Arrows: Edna St. Vincent Millay
and the New Lyric**

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Abstract

Edna St. Vincent Millay's politically-charged compilation of poems, Make Bright the Arrows, does not enjoy a privileged place, if any, amongst either the literary canons of modernist verse or war poetry. Millay's tactic of embracing the ability of lyric poems to do the hard work of political discourse on the home front has gone unrecognized by scholars and critics alike; it is an important gateway into the discussion of such later lyric poets as Muriel Ruckeyser, Adrienne Rich, Denise Levertov and Carolyn Forché. Millay's conception of poetry as social discourse, able and willing to employ the tactics of propaganda, caused an uncomfortable shift for emerging New Critics who were quick to objectify the poet's political work as meaningless, and the poet irrelevant America's literary future. Millay's lyric poems in Make Bright the

Arrows embody several modes of writing historically deployed during war time. These modes were re-invented by Millay to serve the difficult purpose of raising the national morale and furthering a political cause. The goal of this study is to illuminate why Make Bright the Arrows has been misinterpreted as unsuccessful but should be re-examined as the gateway to a broader conversation about women's war-time experience and political participation through writing. Edna St. Vincent Millay's Make Bright the Arrows challenges the dominant habits of modernist evaluative structures as an evidentiary text addressing rapid social change due to the significant restructuring of literary and social order between the World Wars.

The research and writing of this thesis
is dedicated to my mother, Ludmila Tsyganova Gorski,
who helped me during every step of my graduate education.

With love,
Olga Tsyganova Brichto

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Introduction

*I have gone to war, I am at war, I am at grips
With that which threatens more than a cold summer;
I am at war with the shadow, at war with the sun's eclipse,
Total, and not for a minute, but for all my days.*
Edna St. Vincent Millay

Known best for her lyric eroticism and unabashed display of sexual freedom as a public figure, Edna St. Vincent Millay is rarely remembered for her poems of "moral seriousness"¹. Her lyric forms, still held to be exemplars of the long-standing tradition of the sonnet dating back to the Victorian era and the English Renaissance, are "an alternative to the high modernist impersonality" because of their uncomplicated structure and language (Baer 121, Ramazani 509, Wiltenburg 287). However, Millay's politically-charged compilation of poems written in the years preceding America's entry into World War II, Make Bright the Arrows, does not enjoy a privileged place, if any, amongst either the current literary canons of modernist verse or war poetry. Furthermore, the publication history of her political work and near-complete exclusion

¹ Millay referred to her work of political nature as "works of moral seriousness", according to biographer Nancy Milford (450).

from anthologies until the 1970's, stands at odds with the widespread popularity Millay's poetry, political and otherwise, enjoyed during her lifetime. In this study, I will review the contemporary critical appraisal of Millay's political writing as well as the fluctuating scholastic climate that influenced the reception of Make Bright the Arrows. By engaging with the sphere of politics in an unprecedented and unorthodox way, Millay's Make Bright the Arrows shakes the very structures of the critical framework that rejected it.

Dorothy Goldman writes that "the war must be seen in all its ramifications, all its implications, if we are to be able to judge its impact - whether historical social, or literary - properly" (27). Women's poetry between and during the wars of the early 20th century is oftentimes dismissed because it is not the poetry of hand-to-hand military battle or aerial combat. Millay's patriotic "outspokenness" about the civilian attitudes towards America's entry into World War II in Make Bright the Arrows suggests that there is a necessity to explore political poems, even those that flirt with propaganda, as a

legitimate category of war poetry, no less important than the poems inspired by combat experience at the front. As Goldman suggests in her discussion of women's poetry during the Great War, "it is important to emphasize the fact that the war deeply affected both men and women. Women's experiences during the war were significant and long lasting, and their realization in writing constitutes an important conical of change, self-realization, and literary experiment" (28). If the divided experience of the men and women continues to be contrasted, rather than compared, and prioritized based on "authenticity" or "immediacy", the view of history becomes clouded by value judgments that in the long run cannot be substantiated by textual evidence (Goldman 28). By expanding the category of war poetry to include the political writing of civilian men and women, those for and against the war, the canon may be opened up to voices that were previously sidelined due to their inability to participate more directly in either of those spheres. The result of doing so will be a more complete, thorough and accurate representation of a historical and literary moment.

Edna St. Vincent Millay's tactic of embracing the ability of lyric poems to do the hard work of political discourse on the home front has gone unrecognized by scholars and critics alike, but is an important gateway into the discussion of such later lyric poets as Muriel Ruckeyser, Adrienne Rich, Denise Levertov and Carolyn Forché. Millay's conception of poetry as social discourse, able and willing to employ the tactics of propaganda², caused an uncomfortable shift for emerging critics. These critics were quick to objectify the poet's political work as meaningless, and the poet irrelevant American literary future.

This thesis will closely examine several poems in Make Bright the Arrows as examples of evolution in lyric forms during the 1930s. Millay's adaptation of the traditional lyric to the changing political and social needs of a post

²Propaganda is a term of the mass media; it was developed around World War I, but has existed since Aristotle and Plato as "the art of persuasion". In the most neutral sense, it means "to disseminate or promote particular ideas". More concretely, propaganda is defined as "a form of communication that is different from persuasion because it attempts to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist" (Jowett 13). While "usage has rendered the word "propaganda" pejorative, Millay does not necessarily see it as such.

World War I, economically and morally depressed America was an effort to provide literary stability and continuity which for Millay represented an alternative to the chaos and fragmentation of the war-torn world around her.

Millay's poems in Make Bright the Arrows will be shown to embody several modes of poetry historically deployed during war time but re-invented by Millay to serve the difficult purpose of raising the national morale and furthering a political cause. This discussion will illuminate why the work as a whole has been misinterpreted as unsuccessful but should be re-examined as the gateway to a broader conversation about women's war-time experience and political participation through writing. Thus, Edna St. Vincent Millay's Make Bright the Arrows challenges the dominant habits of modernist evaluative structures as an evidentiary text addressing rapid social change due to the significant restructuring of literary and social order between the World Wars.

Context, Politicization and Critical Appraisal

*O Earth, unhappy planet born to die,
Might I your scribe and your confessor be,
What wonders must you not relate to me
Of Man, who when his destiny was high
Strode like the sun into the middle sky
And shone an hour, and who so bright as he,
And like the sun went down into the sea,
Leaving no spark to be remembered by.*

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Millay burst onto the scene in 1912 at "the dawn of the poetic renaissance" with the publication of her coming-of-age poem "Renascence" in a compilation titled The Lyric Year (1912). Editor Ferdinand Earle placed Edna St. Vincent Millay among the company of such other lyricists as William Rose Benét, Witter Bynner, Nicholas Vachel Lindsay, Sara Teasdale, Louis Untermeyer, and John Hall Wheelock (Beach 49). At the same time, the relevance of lyric poetry overall was called into question by the multiple factions of the modernist movement represented by T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Gertrude Stein, H.D. and William Carlos Williams among others (Beach 49). In general, it was thought that lyric forms of the 19th century relied too heavily on

melodious language and formal constraints. Rather than approaching their subject directly and focusing on representing the complexity of thought, lyric poems were thought to be borne of raw sentiment dressed in formality which had no place in American literature in the aftermath of the death and destruction of the Great War and the decline of Victorian idealism and gentility (Beach 49).

According to Paul Fussell, World War I was the ultimate origin of irony and absurdity. It fragmented history and language until traditional literary conventions would no longer support every-day experience (21). Jeffrey Pearle furthers Fussell's claim that "high diction" was the ultimate casualty of the Great War by arguing that the effects of WWI, the Depression and WWII were so profound that the modernists viewed them as evidence of "a worldwide nervous breakdown", thus establishing themselves as "therapists to the world" (Fussell 22, Pearle 8). In this literary climate, objectivity, learnedness, and theoretical implications of experiential language play were beginning to be valued over mastery of form and clarity of content. Nonetheless, Edna St. Vincent Millay saw the fractured

modernism of Eliot and Pound as a fashion to wave aside; she made close friends of Arthur David Ficke and Witter Bynner - two older poets that authored a verse collection spoofing imagism and other schools of modernism entitled "Spectra" (1916). As such, Edna St. Vincent Millay is often identified as a poet of the lyric past, rather than a modernist. However, her politically charged poems leading into the Second World War suggest otherwise.

The two decades preceding World War II were decades of preparation, rather than peace, for European nations and the world; Japan's incursions into China in 1931, Germany's experimentation with *Blitzkrieg* during the Spanish Civil War, the Nazi rise to power, and the arming of Rhineland in 1936 were all developments pointing towards the unraveling of the Treaty of Versailles³ and the probability of another period of violence (Forché 177). In an introduction to the poems produced during this period, Carolyn Forché, poet and

³ The Treaty of Versailles was signed by Germany and the Allies on June 28, 1919. This treaty, among others, marked the end of World War I. Under it, Germany was asked to pay reparations to certain countries, make territorial concessions, and disarm. The arming of Rhineland around 1936 was a clear violation of the Treaty, signaling the inevitability of further conflict.

editor of the anthology Against Forgetting Twentieth-Century Poetry of Witness, notes that the French and English finally gave up their policy of appeasement when "the Nazis took Poland on September 1, 1939...France was overrun in spring 1940...the United States, although more than willing to lend material aid, was unwilling to commit to a war" (177). The rise of the German Nazi party and its continued aggressive militarism towards its European neighbors left the United States in a dangerous position; to ignore Europe's cry for help meant leaving England, a long-time ally, alone to fight an ever-growing Nazi force. Edna St. Vincent Millay's growing concern for America and its European neighbors is evident throughout the body of work she published during the years preceding America's entry into World War II. Not all of Millay's political poems center on the war itself prior to the late 1930's. However, the development in her early political writing points to the formation of an integrated social consciousness which to this day remains, in large part, unrecognized or refuted. This chapter will discuss Millay's

political writings leading up to Make Bright the Arrows and the contemporary critical appraisal of her early work.

The politicization of Edna St. Vincent Millay's poetry can be traced through several works produced during her early years during and in the aftermath of WWI. In her youth, the poet had known associations with anti-war activists and communist sympathizers such as Floyd Dell, John Sloan and Peter Blume (Milford 153). One can easily read the influence of communist rhetoric and pacifist agenda into poems such as: "Epitaph for the Race of Man" (1928, 1934), "Justice Denied in Massachusetts" (1927), "Conscientious Objector" (1931), "Two Sonnets in Memory" (1934), as well as her full-length works Conversation at Midnight (1937), and Huntsman, What Quarry? (1939). However, upon a closer examination of these poems, several critics and scholars have argued that Millay's early political writing represents a broader commitment to the poetics of social commentary.

"Justice Denied in Massachusetts" is accepted as Millay's seminal piece of political writing. The poem was written as an appeal for the lives of Nicola Sacco and

Bartolomeo Vanzetti, two anarchists sentenced to death for a murder they did not commit because of their political beliefs. It is widely held that the verdict was passed because of the men's personal convictions and affiliations, and not because there was any conclusive evidence against the two men (Milford 297-300). "Justice Denied in Massachusetts" was one of Millay's first poems that purposely attacked the gap between political and literary agency. Through this poem, Millay suggests that poems are able to do the work of protest and can be influential in the political sphere, condemning the removed anti-sentimental modernism of Eliot and rethinking the direction of lyric poetry.

During the heated protests over the execution order for Sacco and Vanzetti, Millay proposed the following: "some of us have been thinking and talking too long without doing anything. Poems are perfect; picketing, sometimes, is better" (New York Times, 1950). In August of 1927, on the steps of the State House in Boston, Millay turned to picketing along with Katherine Anne Porter, John Dos Passos, and Dorothy Parker to publicly protest the

execution of Sacco and Vanzetti only to be arrested for "sauntering and loitering" (Milford 298).

When picketing failed, Millay returned to writing as her dominant form of protest. "Justice Denied in Massachusetts" was published on August 22, 1927 in the afternoon edition of New York World, only one day before the two prisoners were scheduled to be electrocuted. It ended with the following lines:

Let us sit here, sit still,
Here in the sitting-room until we die;
At the step of Death on the walk, rise and go;
Leaving to our children's children the beautiful
 doorway,
And this elm,
And a blighted earth to till
With a broken hoe.

The use of pastoral allusion throughout "Justice Denied in Massachusetts" emphasizes Millay's political argument by the implicit description through antithesis. The poem objectifies helplessness and imminent defeat by invoking nineteenth century pastoral imagery. Pastoral references

such as the "broken hoe", "larkspur blossom", "corn", and "fruitful seed" are re-configured by Millay to emphasize the loss of democratic values of the past that had led to the unjust verdict. Paul Fussell comments on such uses of the pastoral in the literature of the Great War (235):

The recourse to the pastoral is an English mode of both fully gauging the calamities of the Great War and imaginatively protecting oneself against them. Pastoral reference, whether to literature or to actual rural localities and objects, is a way of invoking a code to hint by antithesis at the indescribable.

Therefore, for Millay the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti was an extension of the War; the breakdown of the American democratic system is the equivalent of the "indescribable" for her. Just as Governor of Massachusetts, Alvan T. Fuller, saw the two immigrants as a threat to the American democratic system, Millay saw their death as the failure of that same system. As such, Millay uses her lyric

poetic persona to write as a witness to an event that is about to change the future or "our children's children" during the days that preceded the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti.

Furthermore, the "us" in "Justice Denied in Massachusetts" is not an identifying "us"; Millay's poem is not simply referential. "Us" appears to be a narrative persona that Millay conjures to invoke a political conscience which she herself had failed to influence in her picketing attempt. This "us" is a construction; it is an invented version of a communal self that aims to reconsider Millay's own political motives in poetic terms. This usage of the narrative voice marks a break from the personal, expressive lyric. What some have found to be sentimental in Millay's political poems is therefore more challenging. The poet's allusions are those of a constructed conscience that she will impress again and again on her readers in order to prescribe a poetic solution for political problems that she was not, as an individual, able to resolve.

Edna St. Vincent Millay's literary reputation permitted her to meet with Governor Alvan T. Fuller on the

same afternoon as "Justice Denied in Massachusetts" was published in an attempt to remedy what she and the rest of the world perceived as a terrible injustice. Millay pleaded with Fuller to "exert the clemency" which his office afforded him (Milford 297). She also condemned Judge Webster Thayer's final decision to employ the death sentence (Milford 297). "There is need in Massachusetts of a great man tonight", Millay wrote the governor after their meeting, "it is not yet too late for you to be that man" (Milford 298). Unfortunately, her appeal was unsuccessful and the men were executed at midnight the following day. In essence, Edna St. Vincent Millay's political poems, starting with "Justice Denied in Massachusetts" and culminating with the more formal contents of Make Bright the Arrows, deny the central self of the poet to narrate and reconsider in the lyric forms, thus muddying her critical "categorization" as a sentimentalist and widening the implications of her work.

"Justice Denied in Massachusetts" also points to Millay's disappointment in the modernist modes of impersonality. The opening lines of Millay's poem allude to

Eliot's "Lovesong of J. Alfred Prufrock", resembling parts of the poem in meter and diction. Consider the following excerpt from Eliot's poem:

Let us go then, you and I,
When the evening is spread out against the sky
Like a patient etherized upon a table;
Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets,
The muttering retreats
Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels
And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells:
Streets that follow like a tedious argument
Of insidious intent
To lead you to an overwhelming question ...
Oh, do not ask, "What is it?"
Let us go and make our visit.

In the room the women come and go
Talking of Michelangelo.

T.S. Eliot's learned complex poem with its heavily researched allusions is at odds with Millay's stylistically

simple, clean and direct verse. Consider the following lines from "Justice Denied in Massachusetts":

Let us abandon then our gardens and go home
And sit in the sitting-room.
Shall the larkspur blossom or the corn grow under
the cloud?
...
Let us go home, and sit in the sitting-room.
Not in our day
Shall the cloud go over and the sun rise as
before,
Beneficent upon us
Out of the glittering bay,
And the warm winds be blown inward from the sea
Moving the blades of corn
With a peaceful sound.

The modernism of Eliot has been termed "paleomodernism" due to the complexity of its allusions and the complexity of its syntax; it has been suggested that for paleomodernist poets like Eliot, Pound, and Yeats meaning is a matter of context (Pearle 4-8). It is more important to note that

this modernism differs drastically from that of William Carlos Williams, Gertrude Stein and many of the surrealists, but has been the dominant force in canonical portrayal of modernist texts. It can therefore be suggested that there are many "modernisms" at work during the early part of the century that reflect the many aspects of modernity, which reject one another and yet rely on another as well. Millay was not discreet about her opinions of T.S. Eliot and his school of poetry and criticism. In a letter to Cass Canfield, Millay alluded to writing a collection of "merely murderous" twenty poems against Eliot, who she considered a man of "no humor", and instructed her friend to "not speak of these poems to anybody at Harpers" (MacDougall 353). Unfortunately, these poems were never published. Mimicking Eliot's style to reclaim a local, American political experience for her readers was a gesture meant to disenfranchise Eliot's paleomodern experiment. "Justice Denied in Massachusetts" is therefore an important starting point in discussing Millay's complex series of political works that aim to bring continuity to the

experience of political violence in its relationship to the wars.

Edna St. Vincent Millay's poetics as well as her politics evolved dramatically between the publications of "Justice Denied in Massachusetts" and Make Bright the Arrows. Millay began to test her personal experiences with love, death, violence and politics against a larger, sometimes Whitmanesque, world view. "Epitaph for the Race of Man" is indicative of this change; Consider the broad language and contemplative tone of the first sonnet of the sequence:

Before this cooling planet shall be cold,
Long, long before the music of the Lyre,
Like the faint roar of distant breakers rolled
On reefs unseen, when wind and flood conspire
To drive the ship inshore-long, long, I say,
Before this ominous humming hits the ear,
Earth will have come upon a stiller day,
Man and his engines be no longer here.
High on his naked rock the mountain sheep
Will stand alone against the final sky,

Drinking a wind of danger new and deep,
Staring on Vega with a piercing eye,
And gather up his slender hooves and leap
From crag to crag down Chaos, and so go by.

Elizabeth Atkins, Millay's contemporary, read "Epitaph for the Race of Man" as the poet's wide analysis of "all human history" expressing concern for the "impending desolation of a lost civilization" as a result of war and industrialization (28). Ten of the poems were originally published in the St. Louis Dispatch, and the rest sequenced in later by Millay for the publication of Wine from these Grapes (1934). Rather than implicating Millay's sequence in engaging with bipartisan politics and degenerating poetic forms to promote a political agenda, Elizabeth Atkins suggests that "there was no taking sides possible for her... [she] was aware of herself not as an American but as "child of all mothers, native of the earth" (29). Instead, Atkins suggests that the poem expressed a philosophical concern about the war similar to that raised by T.S. Eliot's Waste Land; For Atkins, Millay's "Epitaph for the Race of Man" represents the following:

It is a philosophy of man as a pure miracle in a universe of nightmare unconsciousness, of man as an earth child bringing earth to true sentience, of man marvelously capable of seeing and feeling, capable of conceiving beauty and grandeur, capable even, were it not for some nightmare trick of unconscious fate, of actually achieving grandeur, but doomed, through the fear and greed that accompany his sentience, to destroy himself, and so blot out all intellectual meaning from the cosmos (249).

In other words, instead of employing the use of implicit description through antithesis and ironic tone as she had done in "Justice Denied in Massachusetts", Millay revisits the possibility of Man's demise by employing a communal memory of human history, revisiting individual historic events and foreshadowing a troubling future. The sensory details that Millay perceives throughout the poem are there forgiven "purely for their own sake", in the words of Paul Fussell, and these images remain in our memory with "a special kind of vividness". By uniting her readers as

witnesses and implicating them into her apocalyptic vision, Millay engenders a communal memory:

So Man, by all the wheels of heaven unscored,
Man, the stout ego, the exuberant mind
No edge could cleave, no acid could consume,
Being split along the vein by his own kind,
Gives over, rolls upon the palm abhorred,
Is set in brass on the swart thumb of Doom.

Overall, "Epitaph for the Race of Man" was praised in critical reviews from 1934 to 1937. Critics recognized Millay's politically charged subject matter and dubbed it her "unerring sense of what lies within the poetic domain how it must be governed and mastered" (Nierman 67).

Millay's careful union of political, personal and communal was recognized as "growth toward intellectual maturity", "poetic integrity" and dubbed "technically very skillful" (Nierman 69. 71). Contemporary Louise Bogan, a frequent critic of Millay for her immaturity alongside Cleanth Brooks, praised Millay for recognizing "and being prepared to meet the task of becoming a mature and self-sufficing

woman and artist" in writing "Epitaph for the Race of Man" (Nierman 70, 71).

By the end of the 1930's, Millay's broad examination of man's mortality in her political poems was supplemented by specificity, direct naming, and testimony of witness triggered by the violence in Europe. Millay's publication of her antiwar play, Conversation at Midnight (1937), and her collection of poems, Huntsman, What Quarry? made evident the forceful political undertones that marked her later works. In the wake of the Great Depression, and still today, Conversation at Midnight has been recognized as an "audacious piece of work, intellectually provocative, colloquial, funny..." (Milford 404). Millay's election to write a play with an entirely masculine cast suggests an even more interesting development in Millay's authorial voice. When speaking about the political, she submerges into a male persona and satirizes it. Perhaps John Timberman Newcomb best described the poet's changed trajectory when commenting on Conversation at Midnight (269):

In representing the rhythms of prolonged conversation as a disjoined collage of subject matter and shifting emotional nuance, she demonstrated how some central formal attributes of high modernism could be appropriated for a poetry based not on alienated individualism but on social dialogue.

It is after the publication of Conversation at Midnight that Millay outwardly stated her changed poetics in an interview with Michael Mok (Milford 406):

The poet can be concerned with what goes on outside, but the moment the outside comes in, dictates to him what pen, what ink, what paper he shall use, what thoughts he shall think, he declines and dies. I think there might be a great Communist poet, a great Fascist poet. Communism and Fascism are subjects for poetry, but Communism and Fascism will never permit the poems to be written. I can't imagine myself living,

working, in such a world. I should either
have to stultify myself or be shot.

According to Mok, Conversation at Midnight was evidence that Millay had finally decided to face "the rise of the Fascist fury" and "decided that the only way to fight evil is to come to grips with it" (Milford 405). The passion and haste with which the poet undertook the writing of Make Bright the Arrows after Conversation at Midnight marked a change in Millay's politics as well as her poetics.

Millay's 1939 book, Huntsman, What Quarry? further reflects the poet's growing concern for Europe, and the annihilation of Spain. Millay was among several women writers, including Martha Gellhorn, Florence Farmborough, Helen Nicholson, and Sylvia Warner who struggled to understand and expose the dangers of Red Spain and spur their countries into action (Hartmann 2). Among poets, Millay is one of the few women who is noted for her evidentiary writing on the conflict in Spain; More commonly, English poet W.H. Auden's poems "Spain 1937", "September 1, 1939, and "Epitaph on a Tyrant" are seen as representative of Anglo-American reaction to the War.

Millay's poems "Say That We Saw Spain Die", "Czeko-Slovakia", and the sequence of five sonnets presented under the heading of "From a Town in a State of Siege" were Millay's reactionary socio-political pieces that warned against the appeasement of German expansionism throughout the 30's and paid tribute to democratic Spain (Brittin 149). It is important to note that these poems continue Millay's practice of directly identifying the specific places and events to which her political poems refer; she first employed this practice in "Justice Denied in Massachusetts". This practice of direct "naming" will continue in Make Bright the Arrows.

The aforementioned poems present the problem of blending "personal" and "political" more directly than any of Millay's other poems that preceded them. "Say that we Saw Spain Die" is especially indicative of this; It best represents the evolution of Millay's poetics during this period. Edna St. Vincent Millay was never in Spain during the Spanish Civil War. She did not experience the violence of Spain's decline first-hand. However, "Say That We Saw

"Spain Die" is undeniably an example of evidentiary writing at its finest. Consider the concluding stanza of the poem:

Say that we saw Spain die from loss of blood, a rustic
Reason, in a reinforced
And proud punctilious land, no *espada* -
A hundred men unhorsed,
A hundred horses gored, and the afternoon aging,
And the crowd growing restless (all, all so much
later than planned),
And the big head heavy, sliding forward in the sand,
And the tongue dry with sand, -- no *espada*
Toward that hot neck, for the delicate and final
thrust, having dared trust forth his hand.

The narrative persona in Millay's poem focuses on the recording and reporting on an event symbolic of "endured conditions of historical and social extremity", in the words of Carolyn Forché (29). If we are to trust that "a poem is itself an event, a trauma that changes both common language and an individual psyche", then Millay is successful at producing a true "plea against despair" (Forché 32, 33). Thus, Huntsman What Quarry is indicative

of Millay's attempt to carve out a new space for evidentiary poems of political importance.

Critics noted the shift in Millay's verse and her attempt to incorporate the political into the personal, but their reaction was not what Millay expected. Louise Bogan once again began to criticize her for a lack of maturity, citing that "the present book, although it bears marks of the poet's magnanimity of nature and her basic poetic gifts, is a strange mixture of maturity and unresolved youth"; According to Bogan, Millay still hadn't demonstrated the ability to withdraw personality from her work (Nierman 98). Henry Lappin wrote that Millay was suffering from "hardening of the poetical arties" and Huntsman, What Quarry? was lacking in substance (Nierman 102). Gilbert Maxwell stated that the book was "a disappointing performance", while Paul Rosenfield of Poetry, finding no degradation of Millay's "poetic powers", still criticized all political poems (Nierman 102, 104). Theodore Spencer of Atlantic Monthly found that the poems did not stand up to intellectual probing. Roberta Teale Schwarz of Kenyon Review wrote that the lyric, rather than

metaphysical or political pieces, were Millay's strong suit (Nierman, 103, 104, 105). Though most critics continued to praise Millay's artistry and technique, they tended not to appreciate her transition to politically charged verse that indicated the poet's public partisanship. Huntsman, What Quarry? is an important predecessor to Make Bright the Arrows, as it foreshadows the critique and obstacles Millay would face after the publication of Make Bright the Arrows.

Contemporary Critical Appraisal

Several contemporary scholars have touched upon a need to re-evaluate the importance of Edna St. Vincent Millay's political work in the context of later 20th century political writing. Artemis Michailidou identifies Edna St. Vincent Millay as playing "an instrumental role" in the formation of Muriel Rukeyser and Adrienne Rich's social consciousness, pointing to the centrality of performance in communication and political poetry (7). She briefly touches upon the bitterly divided opinions of the media and academics citing that "while academics were repeatedly rejecting her [Millay's] work as either 'epigrammatic journalism' or 'sputtering verses', newspapers were

hailing Millay for having written 'the first poem of the second world war'" (10). However, Artemis Michailidou seems to agree with the opinion that Millay lacked an "integrated philosophy of social organization and personal principle", suggesting that Millay's role as predecessor to Adrienne Rich to be symbolic and the literary merit of her political work "questionable" (8,22). Also notable is that Make Bright the Arrows is entirely omitted from Michailidou's discussion of Millay's political writing, explained only by the scholar's citation of only discussing those works that were pertinent to the discussion of Muriel Rukeyser and Adrienne Rich.

It is difficult to imagine that Make Bright the Arrows, Millay's most outwardly political text, did not resonate with Adrienne Rich's use of memory and her choice to "report out", as Stanley Kunitz put it, and to reach out to a collective "we" (Orr, 273). The difference is in how the two chose to report. For example, Adrienne Rich's poem "Eastern Wartime: 10" practices a kind of reporting that ends with the collective and inclusive "I": "I'm a canal in Europe where bodies are floating...I'm a mass grave ...I am

standing here in your poem ..." (Rich 158). Using this technique allows Adrienne to grant the experience of war time to those that do not have access to it; she uses her poetic persona to understand that which is not accessible to her as an individual. Millay also practices a kind of reporting in her work, but hers is less direct than that of Adrienne Rich. Consider the following excerpt from "There Are No Islands Any More":

With sobbing breath, with blistered hands,
Men fight the forest fire in bands;
With kitchen broom, with branch of pine
Beat at the blackened, treacherous line;
Before the veering wind fall back,
With eyebrows burnt and faces black;
While breasted in blackened streams perspire,
Watch how the wind runs with the fire
Like a broad banner up the hill -
And can no more...yet more must still
New life! - to hear across the field
Voices of neighbors, forms concealed
By smoke, but loud the nearing shout:

"Hold on! We're coming! Here it's out!"

(The tidal wave devours the shore:
There are no islands any more)

This little life, from here to there -
Who lives it safely anywhere?
Not you, my insulated friend:
What calm composure will defend
Your rock, when tides you've never seen
Assault the sands of What-has-been,
And from your island's tallest tree,
You watch advance What-is-to-be?

Millay's method of reporting focuses on narrating a large-scale allegorical likeness to a battle, focusing on sensory details and concluding with direct address to her audience, pulling them into the scene with the direct address. Millay and Rich write themselves into an experience of war that they did not necessarily experience themselves, and assert that though a civilian experience of war time is not the

same as participating as a combatant, it too is implicated in the historical moment of wartime.

Edna St. Vincent Millay's Make Bright the Arrows introduced the use of memory to mix the personal and political for the first time in women's poetry, and though her work overall is more allegorical and traditional in form than that of Adrienne Rich, Make Bright the Arrows represents Millay's attempt to look through herself, rather than into herself, to see a bigger social and political disjunction and report it by re-integrating a community into her own experience of the war. Compared to her celebrated love sonnets, the poems included in Make Bright the Arrows may seem more overtly emotional and rhetorical and at the time of publication were consistently accused of being "mostly poetic rather than political" (Republican, 7E) and classified as "stock sentiment" by fellow poets like Louise Bogan (62). Artemis Michailidou's dismissal of Make Bright the Arrows is evidence of a not-uncommon oversight of this work's importance to the formation of later poets' social and political consciousness and poetic practice of reporting.

John Timberman Newcomb takes a broader approach to Millay's political works arguing that an evaluative shift in the critical canons of modernist poetry during the mid-century period marginalized populist poets and female lyricists - two categorical groups to which Millay belonged (261). He places Millay in the company of Vachel Lindsay, Carl Sandburg, Archibald MacLeish, and Stephen Vincent Benet, citing that "the disjunction between popular and critical evaluations of Millay mirrored a broader evaluative shift in the critical canons of modernist poetry...away from communicative immediacy and social commentary, towards such qualities as complexity, originality, and impersonality" (261). Newcomb traces the politicization of Millay's early work by highlighting her personal involvement in the famous Sacco-Vanzetti case and christens Millay's "Justice Denied in Massachusetts", the poem prompted by the tragic resolution of this case, as the catalyst towards "an aesthetic of "mature bitterness" which supersedes one of "immature beauty" (1). Newcomb then evaluates the changing attitudes towards Millay through the reaction of several of her early enthusiasts who later

turned into critics: John Ransom Crowe, Cleanth Brooks, Allen Tate, and John Ciardi. Newcomb carefully evaluates the critical reception of "Justice Denied", "The Anguish", Hangman's Oak, and "Wine from these grapes", concluding with an evaluation of Millay's ultimate abandonment(276):

It appears that to Ciardi, women poets were not individuals but merely distillations of female consciousness, interchangeable member of a frivolous stereotype (call them Ednas), ultimately to be outgrown. Millay's feminist frankness regarding her own sexuality, and the exemplary position she occupied were thus objectified and trivialized into a source of emotional titillation for the adolescent male mind, eventually to be discarded in the embarrassment in one's more "mature" years.

Newcomb suggests that it was not only Millay's "forceful coupling of progressive political dissidence with her longstanding feminism" that led to her critical marginalization and ultimately her canonical exile, but the

forging of the tenets for New Criticism⁴. The allegorical method itself, according to Newcomb, was under siege: "[Tate was] making Millay's allegory seem absurd by taking it overly literally, and concluding (without justification) that "if you do not share those feelings" about social justice which the poet felt when she wrote the poem, "the lines and even the entire poem are impenetrable obscure" ... [Tate] objected to the allegorical system of Millay's poem as "mass language designed for (fallacious) communication" (264). Millay's writing did not fit the tenets of New Criticism, and was thus left on the sidelines of what would emerge as the twentieth-century canon.

Newcomb also points that Millay was seen as "the first prototype of the "modern woman"...critical discussion of Millay, favorable and unfavorable alike, tended to treat her not merely as an individual writer but as an exemplary instance of "the woman as poet" (262). The implication, according to Newcomb, was that Millay's use of language in poetry as "an expression and potentially a form of

⁴ Allen Tate's 1938 collection of essays entitled "Tension in Poetry" were nascent to the later tenets of New Criticism.

political commitment was not merely an individual choice, but implied the potential for a broader scope for female poets at large" (262). Coupled with her progressive lifestyle, Newcomb implies that the male canon "frowned" upon the "ultrapersonal obscurity and meretricious communicability" of Millay's political writing, citing Allen Tate's analysis of Millay's early poem "Justice Denied in Massachusetts" as his example of "the fallacy of communication in poetry" which, according to Tate's later writing, should never be overtaken by political zeal of any kind, patriotic or dissident. Millay, having published works that seemed to exemplify for Tate and others the very weaknesses that modernism took charge to get rid of.

Like many of the critics before him, John Timberland Newcomb also takes the attitude that Millay "was never able to muster much confidence in any specific political or social program", a statement that seems contradictory to her history of political activism during the Sacco and Vanzetti trials of the 1920's, her outward commitment to women's participation in anti-war efforts during World War I, and her later dedication to the Writers War Board during

the rise of fascism in the years preceding America's involvement in World War II. Millay was a woman of strong personal and political conviction; she clearly understood that the implications of World War I and World War II were distinctly different - the threat of globalized fascism seemed to her a bigger evil than the taking up of arms.

A closer reading of Make Bright the Arrows reveals that Millay's language was struggling to graduate from alienated neomodernist poetics to practical political poetics because of the author's engagement with World War II. Millay had many friends and relatives (through her husband) in Europe, and felt that fascism would end the world as she knew it. Her involvement in the Writers War Board is evidence of a kind of "crossing over" into a different era of writing, one that the poet was not familiar with. Make Bright the Arrows reflected Millay's sudden and passionate engagement with the war, her participation in it and her contribution to it. Participation does not implicitly equate to combat, but nonetheless is an important element of the historical moment during which Millay was working. In fact, Millay's

personal commitment to politics and social causes was unquestionably strong and the problem was one of categorization and labeling, rather than of Millay's resolve or commitment.

It is no doubt that Millay struggled with the politicization of her work; as Newcomb points out, "the Anguish", an earlier poem, is exemplary of her longing for the beauty she had "nourished" her early poems, but she could now never go back to it because "the anguish of the world is on [her] tongue" (266). Like many poets affected by war before her, Millay's poetics were influenced by the violence and threat of wartime, and she understood that her outspokenness on the matter could lead to a downturn in her popularity in literary and public circles alike. In a letter to Arthur Ficke, Millay expressed her understanding that her political work cannot and will not be as desirable as her earlier volumes. In a discussion of the unfairness that surrounds Elinor Wylie's not getting the Pulitzer Prize, Millay discusses her own understanding of the critical reception her political work was receiving (Macdougall 295-6):

I wondered why I, having been once awarded this prize in 1923, never received it afterwards, although Robert Frost and E.A. Robinson seemed to be taking turns at receiving it year after year. I remembered that not so very long after "The Harp-Weaver" was published I went to Boston and walked up and down before the State House and carried a placard protesting against the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti, suggesting that President Lowell of Harvard was withholding evidence which might have freed these men; that I was arrested and taken to jail for this and that the whole country knew it. With how much affection following this action of mine would an aged professor of Harvard look upon my subsequently published volumes? With how much affection would any aged and conservative governor of a New England state look thence forward upon the published works of a person who had agitated as I had done against the governor of a neighboring New

England state? That became at once pretty plane...If their [Frost and Robinson] private lives, both sexual and political, were not thoroughly blameless, I have never heard about this. The judges [of the prize] must have felt entirely happy and at ease in their minds the moment either Robinson or Frost published a new collection of poems.

Judging by her letter, Millay clearly understood the precarious trajectory of her career in the years preceding America's involvement in World War II. Considering this, it is puzzling that John Timberland Newcomb, having written one of the more extensive reviews of Millay's political work, ultimately excludes Make Bright the Arrows or the individual poems contained therein from his argument as it is this work that more overtly than any other merges Millay's political polemic with the language of poetry, and shows evidence of the influence of the war on the civilian war poet apparent in the utilization of genre and form. Unfortunately, this exclusion is symptomatic of the

multiple appraisals and reappraisals of Millay's political work.

Diane Freedman writes that "Millay, America's foremost sonneteer and important verse dramatist, was beloved in the popular imagination for the personal and poetic performative emotion for which some critics soon condemned her" (xi). During a conference held in honor of her 100th birthday, Edna St. Vincent Millay received a reappraisal from interested scholars from many disciplines. In "Uncanny Millay", the opening essay to the volume that was published as a result of the aforementioned conference, Suzanne Clark writes at length about the problematic notions of modernism, its critics as well as the type of criticism prevalent during and after Millay's life and death, citing the cultural work that Millay's joining of poetry and life accomplishes, though sometimes less overtly, for today's poet:

What we can clearly see, in retrospect, is how Millay was able to seize the day for a brief while in the 1920s, in a time of historical crisis, and how much of the

ground she took was soon retaken by the counter-revolutionary New Critics. We can see that the question of the imaginary identity is a matter for public and political struggle. The double sense of strangeness and familiarity that marks the uncanny should alert us to the struggle over terrain of the subject taking place in Millay's poetry (24).

Suzanne Clark's particularly interesting discussion relates to "poetic politics", and though she seems to be more interested in the politics of gender and gender distinctions in writing, her argument is important to note as it is representative of a larger body of work in feminist reappraisals of the poet. However, in the fashion of Michailidou and Newcomb, Clark finds that Millay's political writing is "not typical of her work" and yet, it is in part due to this fraction of her work that she is lost during the decades following her death (4).

Jo Ellen Green Kaiser, another contributor to Millay at 100, suggests that the poet's refusal to participate in

the modernism of Eliot and Pound reflects an attempt to renegotiate "a modernist as well as a sentimental aesthetic" by engaging in the political realm (38). She discusses the trajectory of sentimental discourse in Millay's more political works, such as Aria da Capo and Second April, but yet again overlooks, or ignores, Make Bright the Arrows (34-38). Towards the end of her career, Millay rejected the charting of imaginary boundaries between practical and poetic and employed common "sentimental speech" in an attempt to bridge the gap so aptly created by Eliot and Pound. She rejected the "crisis of modernity", as Kaiser terms it, in an attempt to rebuild the community, or as I claim the civil morale that optimistically drove her earlier work to reinvigorate the possibility of a continuous social progress.

In her other work, "Millay and the Triumph of Sentimentality", Kaiser seconds Newcomb's assessment that Millay was caught in a cultural shift from sentimentality to modernist ideology - which in the 1920s represented a sort of nihilism for Millay, too rational and disconnected to represent the true experience of the time as the poet

saw it. Kaiser goes on to link modernism to masculinity and sentimentality to feminity, citing Millay's performance of a later radio play, The Murder of Lidice , as an "attempt to write from a sentimental position in order to influence a larger public" (40). Overall, Kaiser engages in a larger attempt to regain the sentimental as a form of modernism but yet again, Make Bright the Arrows is never mentioned in this discussion, though it would have easily lent itself as an example of a practical appeal through the sentimental.

The major critical works that center on Millay's political writing have thus omitted Make Bright the Arrows from their discussion, obscuring the volume and making it virtually unavailable in print. Labeling Millay's volume "unrepresentative" and "minor" has successfully obscured the importance of this notebook. The omission of this text from the canon and contemporary critical discussion has led to an incomplete and inaccurate understanding of Millay's political and social consciousness, and of the precedent her political works as a whole set for future poets. The remedy for this is to reopen the notebook that was so harmful, in Millay's opinion, to her career and to

work through the poems in order to form a deeper understanding of her writing in the context of the mid-century historical climate. The publication of Make Bright the Arrows marked a permanent political and poetic shift for Edna St. Vincent Millay. The poet's personal lyric turned outwards toward social and political issues that marked the foreboding entrance into the civilian trauma of World War II.

Martyrdom, Propaganda and the Lyric

*But men asleep can stumble out of bed
And pull their trousers on and find their guns,
And fight, to save from rape the human soul.*

Over ten years after the publication of her first politically motivated poem, "Justice denied in Massachusetts", in a letter to George Dillon, Edna St. Vincent Millay dubbed her new notebook, Make Bright the Arrows, a "book of impassioned propaganda, into which a few good poems got bound up because they happened to be propaganda, too"; in Millay's estimation, Make Bright the Arrows was a book of "—not poems, posters" (MacDougall 309). Millay's association of poetry and political

participation has either been dismissed as irrelevant or hasn't been considered in the context of WWI and WWII poetry but it raises some interesting questions: how do we read civilian political poems in the context of war-time writing? In the context of women's political writing during the wars, are certain kinds of political activism privileged over others? Is political dissent more readily re-appropriated into modernism's canon than patriotism? If Make Bright the Arrows is a work of propaganda as Millay herself claimed, is its exclusion from the canons of war-time writing justified? Leaving the tenets of New Criticism behind, it is time to begin considering the social and linguistic context in which Millay crafted Make Bright the Arrows and how she used the category of "propaganda" to find a bridge between the traditional lyric forms and political witness.

By stepping into the political arena, Millay knew that she would forever change her reputation as a poet. Nonetheless, she felt compelled to move to New York and write for what she felt was "propaganda for democracy" (Milford 452):

If I can write just one poem that will turn
the minds of a few to a more decent
outlook...what does it matter if I compose a
bad line or lose my reputation as a
craftsman?...I used to think it very
important to write only good poetry. Over
and over I worked it to make it as flawless
as I could. What does it matter now, when
men are dying for their hopes and their
ideals? If I live or dies as a poet it won't
matter, but anyone who believes in democracy
and freedom and love and culture and peace
ought to be busy now. He cannot wait for the
tomorrows.

According to Nancy Milford, Make Bright the Arrows was
rushed and unpolished, heavily influenced by Millay's
painful illness and morphine addiction, and less
meticulously crafted than any of Millay's previous works
(452, 453). Make Bright the Arrows received several
lukewarm reviews from Peter Monroe Jack at the *New York
Times Book Review*, but mostly evoked outraged criticism

from even her closest friends. George Dillon, to whom Millay had sent a copy of the book just after publication, wrote that "it was a book containing several poems I had advised her not to publish. After trying it on two well known critics, who annihilated it, and on two others who refused it, I printed what seemed to me at the time a just and respectful review...My punishment was that she never sent me her poetry again" (Milford. 452, 453, 455). As mentioned earlier, Louise Bogan and John Peale Bishop strongly criticized Make Bright the Arrows calling into question its "poetic statement" and dismissing it as a "regression to the stock sentiments of the post World War I era" (Nierman 107). More harsh words followed from the *New Republic's* Babette Deutsch who claimed the book represented hysteria, not poetry, and Eugene Jolas of the *Living Age* who found *Make Bright the Arrows* "the expression of a poet whose conviction and sincerity are obvious, but whose creative spirit has burned out" (Nierman 109). Only later, in 1941, was Millay's ingenuity in placing revolutionary content in traditional forms mentioned by Maurice Swan at the *New York Times Book Review*, but the notion did not

catch on. Millay's Make Bright the Arrows has been treated as Millay's compromise of her art and poetic persona to an uncritical public and marked the beginning of her critical decline. By 1941, Rolfe Humphries of *The Nation* was reassessing Millay's importance as a modern poet, writing what reads a lot like a posthumous review (Milford 464):

Miss Millay's public has grown,
unfortunately... to include collectors as well
as readers... This encourages skeptical
criticism, and the fact that the direction of
her progress has been from legend to success
somewhat confuses discussion of her merit as
an artist. If she is not taken quite
seriously in this role today, it may be that
she was taken too seriously twenty years
ago...placing her out of her class, over her
head, instead of keeping her where she really
belonged, with Meredith, say, or as Elizabeth
Barrett Browning's naughty younger sister in
the parlor, the last of the female

Victorians, and in that sense only, the
herald of the Coming Woman.

It is interesting to note that in the last ten years, Millay's early political writing has roused new interest from critics, biographers and enthusiasts from related fields; Artemis Michailadou cites Sayre P. Seldon's inclusion of Millay's "Apostrophe to Mankind" and "Say that We Saw Spain Die" in his 1999 anthology Her War Story: Twentieth Century Women Write about War and the re-appropriation of Millay's "Conscientious Objector" for the textbook Approaches to Peace: A Reader in Peace Studies as evidence that Millay's political writing is advancing to the "future-classic status" (8,9). The inclusion of these early writings and the omission of the later poems in Make Bright the Arrows seem to un-complicate Millay's political writing; if Millay can be the poster girl for the "non-violence chapter" of an anthology, her fate is once again sealed - she will be classified based on the content of a few poems and the truly original, complicated poetic persona and the possibilities she created for it will be lost. In reality, poems in Make Bright the Arrows are

evidence of a far more complex and interesting poetic persona who grappled with her political, personal, communal and poetic identity, complicated by war.

The writing in Make Bright the Arrows shows evidence that Millay began to test her poetics in her poems. This process rendered it impossible for her to write in the same way as she had before; Make Bright the Arrows is indicative of Millay's so-called poetic "rapture" with the past - the rapture that made Eliot's Waste Land possible, and encouraged Stein's experimentation with language poetry. Millay was demoralized by her realization that it was necessary to fight a war against the same enemy within twenty years of what was pronounced to be the "war to end all wars", which she openly opposed. Once she realized that fascism was unstoppable without the United States, she was not only forced to break with her earlier ideals but with the language she used to express them. It is her prescription for this rapture which isolates her from her contemporaries; instead of stepping further towards experimental verse, Millay reverted to the traditional forms of poetry - the lyric. However, Millay quickly

realized that the new lyric must address a communal reality, rather than a personal one. To do that, Millay decided to martyr the poetic persona of her youth, in Make Bright the Arrows in order to address the social demoralization that stood in the way of a prevailing democracy.

Millay begins Part I of Make Bright the Arrows with an apostrophe to a martyr, Joan of Arc. The subject of the poem is the nature of martyrdom; the price of "sainthood" is not a singular act but recurring sacrifice, Millay tells her reader. The poem commences with a metrical emphasis on the name "Joan" through repetition (Millay 3):

Joan, Joan, can you be
Tending sheep in Domremy?
Have no voices spoken plain:
France has need of you again?

In 1939, France was taking in refugees from Nazi-occupied Poland and was forming a Polish army in France, led by General Sikorski. Millay, aware of the imminent invasion of France by the Germans, thus summons the historical heroine

of Joan to rally the Ally forces. The same repetition appears again in the fourth stanza of the poem (4):

Joan, Joan, hearken still,
Hearken, child, against your will:
Saint thou art, but at a price
of recurring sacrifice.

Millay chooses to use the word "thou", a seemingly antiquated and elevated word to reinforce the formal tone of the poem. This circularity coupled with the formal aspects of the poem enables Millay to give the reader a sense of connectedness to history and inevitability of the need for martyrdom. Emphasis through repetition coupled with strict use of form is a technique Millay uses to rein in the presentation of feeling in this poem, and to prepare the reader for the delivery of a poignant final stanza:

"Martyred many times must be/ Who would keep this country free" (3). By directly addressing a historically and religiously symbolic heroine in a strict poetic form, Millay is able to unite the past and the present and deliver a philosophic statement without falling into the trap of overt sentimentality. At the same time she

encourages the civil morale of her own country. This is perhaps one of the reasons Make Bright the Arrows has been admonished as propaganda. In his treatise on propaganda, Alfred McLung Lee suggests that "in moments given to decision, vividness and emotion quite often override commonsense demands for accurate facts and for an opportunity to question and to discuss" (2). Lyric poetry easily provides the means for vividness and emotion; Millay's choice of the lyric medium to deploy propaganda was well thought-out. Millay's cool, thoughtful approach to the subject of martyrdom in simple, direct, traditional verse is symptomatic of the 30s generation that included W.H. Auden, George Orwell and Cecil Day Lewis, all neomodernists who turned away from Eliot's complicated allusions and forms, and worked toward simplicity that could appeal to the working class America. Millay manages the difficult distinction between the expression of sentiment and overt sentimentality in this poem by providing a cooler commentary on the current political situation in Europe and bringing a historic reference familiar to her readers. When cold, hard facts failed to

motivate her countrymen to action, Millay decided to engage with civil morale by martyring the poetic persona of her earlier work to become a poet and a propagandist, thus opening the realm of poetry for politics.

A less overt allusion, but still an important one, that Millay draws in the title of her poem is her reference to Voltaire. Edna St. Vincent Millay worked on translations of various French poems and works, including Beaudelaire's Les Fleurs du Mal and was most likely aware of Voltaire's satirical poem "La Pucelle d'Orléans", or "The Maid of Orleans", which was not published in its original form until 1899 - only 40 years prior to Millay's poem. Voltaire's satire on the life of Saint Joan had been widely criticized vulgar. In his poem, Voltaire probes the life of Joan prior to her canonization employing the use of the sexual undertones and explicitly putting down the previously published account of her life by Jean Champlain. Millay acknowledges Voltaire's work and the criticism it brought to its author, and paints Joan as a saint who may not be willing to hear the "sound of voice come through/ Saying France has need of you" because of the "faggot,

stake and touch" that in Joan's memory "roar and scorch". Millay also employs satire in her work as well by annoyingly admitting "we know" Joan is "maiden without spot or taint" who has been "Welcomed into Heaven", literary and otherwise. However, sainthood must be earned, again and again, Millay stresses - France is in need of "a" Joan again. Millay implies that Joan could be a literary martyr this time around. Interestingly enough, "To the Maid of Orleans" is the only poem in Section I that does not employ the narrative "I". By not employing the narrative "I" of her past, Edna St. Vincent Millay contends that there is a type of literary martyrdom that Make Bright the Arrows reflects as a volume and that she must make a sacrifice of her own to be one of those "who would keep his country free". It can then be said that it is this poem, and none other, that signals, in John Timberland Newcomb's terms, a reconstruction of Millay's poetic persona into something politically "more forceful". The lyric bluntness, formal style and open employment of propaganda of her directive was unexpected in the context of Ezra Pound's "Pisan Canto LXXIV" with its flashing images and broad range of

intellectual references or Gertrude Stein's "Scenes from the Door", engaging in playful language with the shrapnel of various voices; In their context, such Millay poems as "To the Maid of Orleans", "There are No Islands Anymore", "Memory of England" and "And Then There were None" appear too uncomplicated, too direct for the fragmented thirties consciousness and modernism's demands.

Chapter IV: Poems of Peace, Acts of War

*The house has a roof; but the boards of its floor are rotting,
and hall upon hall
The moles have built their palace beneath us: we have
not far to fall.*

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Millay's drawing together of political subject matter and lyric form, though not always a smooth pairing in Make Bright the Arrows, allowed the poet to incorporate and rethink several modes and forms of "war poetry" employed throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century. Nearly all poems within Make Bright the Arrows champion the cause of the war, but in calling the readers to arms, Millay suggests that combat is not necessarily the outcome she wishes for; In "The Blizzard" Millay asks the reader (33):

Are we not wise who wear in winter warmer clothing
Than when the summer days are hot?

Do you not utter folly who insist in winter when the
days

is cold, that it is not?

According to Millay, preparation does not indicate the need for action - it is a preventative measure. "The dearest thing in life I possess which might possibly be of help to my country" wrote Millay after having received an angry letter from Charlotte Sills, a childhood friend from Vassar who had three young sons, "has already gone over the top, in the hope that your sons need never go to war" (Milford 453). Likewise, in Sonnet I of Section V, Millay restates that her intention, though conflicted, is to restore peace:

Peace was my earliest love, and I presume
Will be my latest; but today, adult,
Arguing not to prove but for result
Opposing concepts in this thoughtful room,
I wonder at whose prompting, schooled by whom
I urged that Peace the Slogan, Peace the Cult,
Could turn the edge of sledge and catapult

And leave us calm to cull the grafted bloom.

Peace, like love, is more than an expression of emotion for Millay's poetic persona - it is a linguistic act. The poem, therefore, can incite an act rather than simply commenting on it. This is the change in Millay's poetics; if before poems of protest and remembrance were the tactical choices of Millay's political poems, the possibility of World War II called her language to become an act in itself. Notice that in the final lines of the sonnet, Millay addresses a community of readers directly (57):

Longing to wed with Peace, what did we do?
Sketched her a fortress on a paper pad;
Under the casement twanged a lovesick string;
Left wide the gate that let her foemen through.

"Peace the Slogan" and "Peace the Cult" were ideals the young Millay championed in her poems; the "adult" Millay sees peace as the "act", incited by the language poem and evidenced in that language. Derek Furr, referring to John Stuart Mill, writes that "Millay's whispered verse was a lyrical act...she self-consciously performed the role of the poet, who speaks beautiful words", suggesting it was the

act of "speaking" or "performing" her poetry that somehow made the publication of "herself" real; the above sonnet suggests otherwise - the "self" portrayed in Millay's poem is a poetic persona and its existence is an act, and an evidence of that act (Furr 98). This is why Millay termed her writing in Make Bright the Arrows "-not poems, posters" - both act and evidence of a political struggle. The poem itself, in Millay's formula, then becomes the activist, employing propaganda, forging traditional forms with contemporary content and evolving to bridge the gap between literary and political.

Edna St. Vincent Millay also reinvents poems that regard war as a religious crusade, with all that it implies. She chooses to begin Make Bright the Arrows with a biblical epigraph, referencing the moral arguments made for isolationism: "Make bright the arrows; gather the shields: the Lord hath raised up the spirit of the kings of the Medes". This epigraph is taken from Jeremiah LI-ii but regardless of the punctuation chosen by Millay, the passage is not cited in its entirety; the remainder of the verse continues - "...for his device is against Babylon, to destroy

it; because it is the vengeance of the Lord, the vengeance of his temple". The exact wording matches that in the King James version of the Bible, and references the destruction of Babylon. The invocation of Darius, or Cyaxares, the king of the Medes, suggests a powerful threat, since Darius was known to have greater strength than that of the Persians. The quote suggests that "the Lord" gathers the most severe of power to wage vengeance on those who offend him with their sinful ways. The epigraph sets the tone for the book suggesting that it is an initiation of a conversation about the renegotiation of modern morality, a call to action, and a reunification of a people in the face of a grave threat - a kind of rebuilding.

The exclusion of the second part of the biblical quote warrants further investigation and is a far more interesting argument for reconsidering Millay's work. Millay's poem "There Are No Islands Anymore", included in Make Bright the Arrows, was published within months of Anne Morrow Lindbergh's⁵ isolationist text The Wave of the Future.

⁵ Anne Lindbergh was the wife of Charles Lindbergh, an American aviator, inventor, explorer and author, who on November 15, 1940 made his famous speech "Our Drift Toward

Millay was "distressed" by the book because "it supported the fascist point of view" (Milford 457). Though she made several attempts to respond with an essay, she could not. Milford suggests that it was due to Millay's battle with addiction to morphine and alcohol that prevented the completion of her response, but considering her continued efforts to write and publish afterwards, it is possible that Millay felt she could not address Lindbergh on the grounds of "disingenuous sentimentality" as well as she could by publishing Make Bright the Arrows (457). In her draft responses, she questioned why we should resign to Lindbergh's approaching "wave" (Milford 457):

If this wave, whatever it may be, is
scheduled to engulf us soon, no matter what
we may do, it would seem to me more
admirable, more valiant (old-fashioned
words, but still with a strong and pleasant

War". He had resigned from the Army Air Corps in 1939, and had moved to Europe after his son's tragic kidnapping. His strong isolationist ideals led to accusations of pro-Nazi sentiments. Anne Lindbergh wrote her book in part because she was "impelled to write it, because of my personal loyalty and desperate feeling of injustice to C. [Charles]" (Milford 451).

herb-like savour about them) to say to the Wave, "Here is my Honour and here is my Individuality: if you want them, come and take them; I give nothing to you." Instead, Mrs. Lidnbergh has counseled us, since we cannot avert death, not to conspire against illness.

Perhaps Millay's omission of the remaining segment of the original biblical quote reflects her covert admiration for the "New Babylon" blooming in New York in the wake of modernity - her invocation inverts the assumption that America is, in fact, on the side of "the Lord" and not of Babylon - "here is my Honor and my Individuality; If you want them, come and take them; I give nothing to you" - the right to immorality, in Millay's equation, should be defended with "arrows" and "shields" because it is the essence of democracy - it is freedom (Milford 457). Taken further, the allusion can be read that the liberal social freedoms of the US must fight against conservative, repressive ideals of fascism. Millay thus reinvents the

religious crusade in her book, and through omission champions the freedom of America from Fascism.

In the first stanza of second epigraph which also references the same biblical passage from Jeremiah, Millay introduces a conceptually new element to the previously discussed biblical verse - instead of citing "vengeance" as the reason for battle, which appears in the omitted part of the Jeremiah passage, she cites "conquest" as the disturbance that "narrows the peaceful field". Though Millay could have easily used "vengeance" without hindering the rhythm or rhyme of the poem, she selects "conquest" instead to alter the original intention of the reference; Vengeance has a denotation of a response to a wrongdoing whereas conquest suggests aggression for personal gain. Converting the original epigraph into a poem, Millay colors her call to action as a preventative measure to respond to fascist aggression in the last two stanzas:

Stock well the quiver
With arrows bright:
The bowman feared
Need never fight.

Make bright the arrows

O peaceful and wise!

Gather the shields

Against surprise.

Millay makes a verbal play with the word quiver - the sack in which the arrows are carried also alludes to an action - quivering, or shaking. Millay suggests that preparedness, moral and physical, is the only cure for fear. Arm yourselves "peaceful and wise" instead of giving into fear, Millay suggests, and we may not have to fight; the threat of a response may be enough.

Finally, the phrase "make bright the arrows" can have two different denotations: readying and purifying. In one sense, Millay is calling her country to prepare itself for the worst, but in another asking her fellow countrymen to make sure that their intentions are pure - in defense for freedom. As such, Millay's poetic persona is not inciting aggression, but encouraging a rise of civil morale to support the cause of democracy as freedom is being challenged. The second epigraph serves as a transitional

element to invert a moral crusade set forth in biblical terms in order to appeal to a rational, historic experience challenged by Millay's present condition, and at the same time take on the difficult contradictory identity that the United States still struggles with to this day: staying "a bowman feared" who "need never fight"⁶. In a single opening epigraph Millay has begun to do what her work is best known for: renegotiating traditional forms and modes to distill the boundless confidence that "the new" can forget that which came before it, can break with the past and proclaim novelty without sufficient reflection; Make Bright the Arrows begins by reminding us that while we were inherently changed by the First World War, the past hangs heavy across the present, as Tony Judt recently suggested in his article "What Have We Learned, If Anything" (New York Review of Books, 2008).

During October of 1940, the Luftwaffe air-raided England, though unsuccessfully. Millay's poem, "The Memory

⁶ Jo Ellen Kaiser suggests that "politics of sentimentality" are at play here: Millay would appear to be replicating a moral crusade and appealing through sentimentality as the "caretaker" of a nation. However, I argue that in the opening of this book, Millay appeals to historical elements, rewriting the terms of crusade itself.

of England" is a civilian commentary on this attack which uses another prevalent mode of war poetry in which a speaker revisits a place associated with a loved one, either living or dead (Forché). The poem reclaims that which is now destroyed by unraveling a linguistic genealogy of a particular pre-war memory. Millay begins by stating the event triggering the writing of the poem: "I am glad, I think, my happy mother died/ Before the German airplanes over the English countryside/ Dropped bombs into the peaceful hamlets that we used to know -- " (Millay 4). The reference to the attack leads to a recounting of concrete names, places and activities in the poet's memory: a clearly peaceful scene with cows, meadows and elm trees emerges as an antithesis, in Paul Fussell's terms, to the bombing the poem began with. Fussell would call this a technique of combining the opposites - an idyllic scene is presented the opposite to that of war (Fussell 235). Millay uses her civilian experience of war and through her poetic persona defines that experience through the use of opposites; the poet shows us her and her mother wandering through the pastoral English countryside amidst "the shaggy

burrs on the cold autumn ground" and "trees and ferns and
bracken and, directly in our way/ Or grazing near at hand,
From time to time a herd of small wild ponies" (Millay 5).
The scene culminates in a symbolic sunset, appropriated
from Romantic poetry, to present a hallmark that signals a
kind of reaching out toward traditional significance of
high diction from before the Great War (Fussell 51-57).

Millay moves beyond Fussell's symbolic postulates and
speaks about the use of language directly: "All this was
good,/ And all had speech, and spoke,/ And all the magic
unfamiliar land/ Was ours by distant heritage and ours by
deep love close at hand" (Millay 5). The rural tradition
is part of the English psyche, and Millay "inherits" it by
"distant heritage" and "deep love". Her memory is
fashioned as a "sentimental journey" and "quaint
pilgrimage" through the concrete artifacts of memory.
Throughout "Memory of England", Edna St. Vincent Millay is
using writing as an evidentiary record of a place and time
which may no longer exist due to the war. The poet
consistently notes words, speech, and writing throughout
the poem: "The German airplanes...Dropped bombs on Ramsey

Abbey, where the aging rec-/ords show (or did a while ago)
in faded ink and elegant fine hand/ The name of a boy baby
christened there in 15 - (I forget the year)..." (Millay 4).
The written elements that show up throughout the poem are
evidentiary artifact that Millay takes great care to
preserve in her own poem as evidence. Millay is recreating
that which may no longer exist in language so as to make a
"record" of it and claim ownership "All this was good,/ and
all had speech, and spoke"/ And all the magic unfamiliar
land/ Was ours by distant heritage, and ours by deep love
close at hand" (5). Through writing, the poet is able to
re-conjure that which has been lost and recreate it for the
reader. In the final four lines of the poem, Millay
establishes the distance between the desirable and the
actual by recreating her mother's trip and describing what
had been there before "the airplanes dropped bombs"; this
implicit description of the "now" through its antithesis is
a mark of ironic perception, something that marked the
writing during and following World War I. In the space
between the past and present is a call to action,
suggesting an ability to change the future. However, it is

Millay's understanding of language as record that propels this particular poem to a different level of linguistic understanding: "My ancestor -", Millay writes "I can see the page,/ Our sentimental journey, our quaint pilgrimage!" (4). It is through language that Millay is able to find her readership's communal and linguistic past and through it, engage with the political present. By creating such a linguistic genealogy, Millay is able to actively engage her poetic persona and her community of readers with the threat and implications of war, and a joint political present.

Conclusion

*Blue, bright September day, with here and there
On the green hills a maple turning red,
And white clouds racing in the windy air! -
If I would help the weak, I must be fed
In wit and purpose, pour away despair
And rinse the cup, eat happiness like bread.*

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Regardless of her obvious use of modes and forms in which "war poetry" is written, Edna St. Vincent Millay, like many of her female contemporaries, is rarely read as a "war poet". "War poetry" as a genre has primarily been reserved for male perspectives on combat experiences on the

front. Only recently have critics begun to cast a wider net for a variety of war-time experiences of violence, trauma, and recovery in order to achieve a more accurate and inclusive account of a historical moment (Khan 70). Women's account of war efforts at home, poetic and otherwise, is one category of neglect that has been getting more attention since the eighties. A few notable anthologies that include, or are committed solely to women's war poetry are Catherine Reilly's Scars upon My Heart: Women's Poetry and Verse of the First World War (1981) and Chaos of the Night: Women's Poetry and Verse of World War Two (1984), Nosheen Khan's Women's Poetry of the First World War (1988), and Lorrie Goldensohn's American War Poetry (2006). Only Lorrie Goldensohn's anthology presents Millay includes Millay's "Say That We Saw Spain Die"; none include any poems from Make Bright the Arrows. It seems that Millay's rejection of pacifism in the face of fascism has been met with a sort of animosity from the New Critics - the poster child of pacifism had thematically transgressed the limits set by the forms she employed - lyric forms should apparently direct an appropriate lyric subject; blending of

the personal and political is a sentimental flaw, according to some. However, Millay did not feel that the opinions of those contemporaries that were opposed to her lyric patriotism were long-lasting; in the concluding stanza of the last sonnet in Make Bright the Arrows, Millay writes (65):

The gods are patient: they are slaves of Time
No less than we, and longer, at whose call
Must Phoebus rise and mount his dewy car,
And lift the reins and start the ancient climb;
Could we learn patience, though day-creatures
all,
Our day should see us godlier than we are.

Millay writes of patience for two reasons here: firstly, she acknowledges that her work will be criticized because it is rushed and of-the-moment; but secondly, she expresses that with time, her work can be better appraised. "With patient brightness", she pledges to continue to pursue her cause in the concluding poem of Make Bright the Arrows (65).

The category of women's political writing, especially propaganda, related to the two world wars to this day, has not been acknowledged as a significant category of war poetry. This problem of exclusivity is symptomatic of a more severe dilemma related to the epistemological systems that determine the "authenticity" and relevance of any voice from the fringe. Millay, never having experienced first-hand combat and previously protesting the war, has never been read as a war poet. However, she should be; consider the following excerpts from the poem "There Are No Islands Anymore" (Millay 13):

Dear Isolationist, you are
So very, very insular!

...

No man, no nation, is made free
By stating it intends to be.

...

(Meantime the tide devours the shore:
There are no islands any more.)

...

Oh, build, assemble, transport, give

That England, France and we may live

...

Let French and British fighters, deep
In battle, needing guns and sleep,
For lack of aid be overthrown,
And we be left to fight alone.

The poem was said to be "a landmark of literary history" and "the first important poem of the great war" and was published in The New York Times, the Herald Tribune, and the Daily News the same morning (Milford 447). Millay immediately authorized the poem to be printed and distributed "free of royalty, all proceeds of sale being turned over to the Red Cross or some similar war relief agency", once again suggesting that poems are a form of action (Milford 448). It was claimed to be the first time in years that "a poet sought so directly the ear of so wide a public...In an era in which poets have been accused of having too little to say to the many, Miss Millay suddenly launched her ringing call to arms under the impact of the tragic drama in France" (Ibid 447).

It seems that when it comes to anthologies, Millay's early pacifist works, less committed to specifically "indicating public partisanship" in relation to specific events have been more readily accepted into the canon whereas the poems in Make Bright the Arrows, are deemed somehow different and excluded based on assessed literary merit and soci-historic relevance. Nonetheless, poems like "To the Maid of Orleans", "Memory of England", "There Are No Islands Anymore", Sonnet I, and Sonnet IX of Make Bright the Arrows introduce a new kind of lyric. It is the lyric of political action and poetic self-realization, itself an action, that allows poets like Adrienne Rich, Denise Levertov and Carolyn Forché to later forge the language and challenge the formal boundaries of lyric verse.

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