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Edna St. Vincent Millay (Every Woman, August 1971)

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Every Woman

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the Chinese apparently believed that girls have tiny feet and boys don't. Footbinding, besides differentiating men from wo-
men, was also said to be socially benefi-
cial because it confined women to the
home where they belonged. A happy side
effect of these social benefits, at least
for the men, was that bound feet made
women walk with a captivating swaying
damd enlarged their buttocks and, so the lec-
tores whispered, made their thighs tighter.
In bed Chinese men got an additional sex-
ual thrill from bound feet. They liked to
home where they belonged. A happy side
foot, which had obviously become a sub-
the tiny foot nevertheless flourished. In
the eighth century the Byzantine empress,
to the extreme of footbinding, the cult of
foot had become a substitute for the woman?
Irene, when she was looking for a wife for
her son, the future Constantine VI, demanded
her son, the future Constantine VI, demanded
the world that of Cinderella, who married
that the prospective bride be able to wear
shoes of a small size. That true story
reminds us of the best-known folk-tale in
the world—that of Cinderella, who married
a prince because she had feet small enough
to fit into the tiny glass slipper. As she was
slipped over her wicked ugly sisters who
could not get their gross feet into the shoe
emptied of its content. One of these ugly
other the back of her heel. The prince,
like his Chinese brothers, valued a woman
ness and pointed toes so their feet would look
achieve the ideal eighteen-inch waist.
Tight corseting dislocated one's kidneys
and crushed one's liver; tight shoes, be-
side making it difficult to walk, caused
painfully swollen calves and could have un-
pleasant immediate effects, humorously de-
described in a popular limerick;
There was a young lady of Twickenham,
who wore shoes so narrow and so tight
they hardly thought about them, as
men do.
life, and nothing short of ridiculous in light of (her) astonishing intellectual achievement..."

Millay is best known for her passionate love poems, marking her as the voice of the wild twenties, but she wrote on a number of different subjects, and in a number of styles. She experienced the tragedy of many close deaths, and she wrote often on the theme of death, its sorrow, and its inevitability. She wrote political poems, including one on the execution of Sacco and Vanzemti (she had been one of the writers arrested for marching in protest against the execution). She wrote a long sonnet sequence, "Sight for the Race of Men," tracing the history of the human race from its creation to its inevitable self-destruction. She also wrote another sonnet sequence, one of her less popular, but perhaps most interesting, works. Called "Sonnets from Ungrafted Tree," it tells the story of a woman, long estranged from her husband, who returns to care for him as he dies. It begins:

So she came back into his house again
And watched beside his bed until he died,
Loving him not at all.

The tone of these seventeen sonnets is remarkable: leaving her usual lush imagery, she captured the grizz, ascetic dignity of the woman and her situation.

In 1919, Eugen Boissivan died suddenly. Vincent lived only another year. Her health had been declining for years, and nearly everyone she loved had died. She had lived much, and had known much sorrow and much happiness. On October 15, 1920, at the age of 58, Edna St. Vincent Millay died.


(continued from page 12)

To Citizen de Gouge, General Officer in the Army of the Rhine:
I die, my dear son, a victim of my idolatry of justice and of the people...The indictment was delivered to me three days before my trial. The law entitled me to counsel. All the persons of my acquaintance have been intercepted. I was, as it were, in solitary confinement, not being even able to speak to the concierge. The law also entitled me to select my juror. The list of names was announced to me at midnight, and next morning at seven o'clock I was taken to the tribunal, ill and weak, and without having the art of speaking in public. Remembering Jean Jocopie (Boussseau) in his virtues, I felt all my insufficiency. I asked for the counsel whom I had chosen. I was told he was not present, or had refused to undertake my cause. Failing him, I asked for another. I was told I was quite able to defend myself. Without doubt I have strength enough to defend my innocence, which is self-evident to all spectators. It was impossible to dispute all the services and benefits which I have rendered to the people. Twenty times I made my executioners turn pale, not knowing how to answer me. At every sentence which showed my innocence and their bad faith... They pronounced my doom for fear of exposure of the iniquity of which the world has not had sufficient examples. Alien, my son, I shall be no more when thou receivest this letter...I die, my son, my executors, I die innocence. All the laws have been violated against the most virtuous woman of her age.

Olympe Delouge

Olympe was guillotined on the 3rd of November, 1793, by the Revolutionary Tribunal, le 12 Brumaire, an 11, during a period which had become a Reign of Terror. The Parisian newspaper, "Journal of Public Safety" remarked: "Olympe de Gouges, born with an impassioned imagination, took her delirium for an inspiration of nature. She began by talking nonsense and finished by adopting the treacherous plan which willed a divided France; she wanted to be man of the State, and it seems that the law has punished this conspirator for having forgotten the virtues becoming to her sex."

---S.S.