

# Collected Lyrics

of

Edna St. Vincent Millay



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From *RENAISSANCE*

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### *Renascence*

All I could see from where I stood  
Was three long mountains and a wood;  
I turned and looked another way,  
And saw three islands in a bay.  
So with my eyes I traced the line  
Of the horizon, thin and fine,  
Straight around till I was come  
Back to where I'd started from;  
And all I saw from where I stood  
Was three long mountains and a wood.

Over these things I could not see:  
These were the things that bounded me.  
And I could touch them with my hand,  
Almost, I thought, from where I stand!  
And all at once things seemed so small  
My breath came short, and scarce at all.

But, sure, the sky is big, I said:  
Miles and miles above my head.  
So here upon my back I'll lie  
And look my fill into the sky.  
And so I looked, and after all,  
The sky was not so very tall.  
The sky, I said, must somewhere stop . . .  
And—sure enough!—I see the top!  
The sky, I thought, is not so grand;  
I 'most could touch it with my hand!  
And reaching up my hand to try,  
I screamed, to feel it touch the sky.

I screamed, and—lo!—Infinity  
Came down and settled over me;  
Forced back my scream into my chest;  
Bent back my arm upon my breast;  
And, pressing of the Undefined  
The definition on my mind,  
Held up before my eyes a glass  
Through which my shrinking sight did pass

Until it seemed I must behold  
Immensity made manifold;  
Whispered to me a word whose sound  
Deafened the air for worlds around,  
And brought unmuffled to my ears  
The gossiping of friendly spheres,  
The creaking of the tented sky,  
The ticking of Eternity.

I saw and heard, and knew at last  
The How and Why of all things, past,  
And present, and forevermore.  
The Universe, cleft to the core,  
Lay open to my probing sense,  
That, sickening, I would fain pluck thence  
But could not,—nay! but needs must suck  
At the great wound, and could not pluck  
My lips away till I had drawn  
All venom out.—Ah, fearful pawn:  
For my omniscience paid I toll  
In infinite remorse of soul.

All sin was of my sinning, all  
Atoning mine, and mine the gall  
Of all regret. Mine was the weight  
Of every brooded wrong, the hate  
That stood behind each envious thrust,  
Mine every greed, mine every lust.

And all the while, for every grief,  
Each suffering, I craved relief  
With individual desire;  
Craved all in vain! And felt fierce fire  
About a thousand people crawl;  
Perished with each,—then mourned for all!

A man was starving in Capri;  
He moved his eyes and looked at me;  
I felt his gaze, I heard his moan,  
And knew his hunger as my own.

I saw at sea a great fog bank  
Between two ships that struck and sank;  
A thousand screams the heavens smote;  
And every scream tore through my throat.

No hurt I did not feel, no death  
That was not mine; mine each last breath  
That, crying, met an answering cry  
From the compassion that was I.  
All suffering mine, and mine its rod;  
Mine, pity like the pity of God.

Ah, awful weight! Infinity  
Pressed down upon the finite Me!  
My anguished spirit, like a bird,  
Beating against my lips I heard;  
Yet lay the weight so close about  
There was no room for it without.  
And so beneath the weight lay I  
And suffered death, but could not die.



Long had I lain thus, craving death,  
When quietly the earth beneath  
Gave way, and inch by inch, so great  
At last had grown the crushing weight,  
Into the earth I sank till I  
Full six feet under ground did lie,  
And sank no more,—there is no weight  
Can follow here, however great.  
From off my breast I felt it roll,  
And as it went my tortured soul  
Burst forth and fled in such a gust  
That all about me swirled the dust.

Deep in the earth I rested now.  
Cool is its hand upon the brow  
And soft its breast beneath the head  
Of one who is so gladly dead.  
And all at once, and over all  
The pitying rain began to fall;  
I lay and heard each pattering hoof  
Upon my lowly, thatched roof,