

The Leaf and the Tree

by Edna St Vincent Millay

(February 22, 1892 – October 19, 1950) was an American poet and playwright. She received the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry in 1923, the third woman to win the award for poetry, and was also known for her feminist activism.

Directions: (Note: Poem has two stanzas.) Full name top left corner. As practiced in class, fully analyze the poem using the 10 steps. Scoring based on the completeness of your work as related to the Poetry Analysis handout. If needed, include analysis notes on the back of the paper.

When will you learn, myself, to be

a dying leaf on a living tree?

Budding, swelling, growing strong,

Wearing green, but not for long,

Drawing sustenance from air,

That other leaves, and you not there,

May bud, and at the autumn's call

Wearing russet, ready to fall?

Has not this trunk a deed to do

Ungessed by small and tremulous you?

Shall not these branches in the end

To wisdom and the truth ascend?

And the great lightning plunging by

Look sidewise with a golden eye

To glimpse a tree so tall and proud

It sheds its leaves upon a cloud?

Here, I think, is the heart's grief:

The tree, no mightier than the leaf,

Makes firm its root and spreads its crown

And stands; but in the end comes down.

That airy top no boy could climb

Is trodden in a little time

By cattle on their way to drink.

The fluttering thoughts a leaf can think,

That hears the wind and waits its turn,

Have taught it all a tree can learn.

Time can make soft that iron wood.

The tallest trunk that ever stood,

In time, without a dream to keep,

Crawls in beside the root to sleep.