

CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN POETRY

Committee: Amy Lowell, chairman; Grace Hazard Conkling, Edwin Arlington Robinson, Carl Sandburg, Sara Teasdale, Louis Untermeyer.

EDITOR'S NOTE: *The appreciation of poetry is a most personal matter. The following program represents the painstaking effort of the above group of distinguished poets and critics. It includes only names of living Americans, and most of the younger poets were omitted as not having yet won their spurs. When this program was submitted for approval to the executive committee, suggestions and emendations were many. In few cases did the comments of any one member of the executive committee agree with those of another. For this reason, we have decided to publish the program as originally outlined by the poetry committee, without change. The biographies and quotations from critical material have been added by the editors of THE BOOKMAN, and for these the poetry committee is not responsible.*

The Experimentalists

ALFRED KREYMBORG

Mushrooms. KNOFF.

Of late, Alfred Kreymborg has taken to writing sonnets. That is a new departure, however, and this form is certainly not typical of his work. His curious, jerky rhythms, his abrupt manner of presenting an idea, his verse plays, his grotesque imagery, all prove him the experimentalist. He loves a good poetical joke. He likes to play with irony and to smile like an elf at cosmic problems. With all these brave showings of strangeness, he is yet extraordinarily gentle and gay in his work.

Kreymborg was born in New York City and educated in the schools there. He has passed his life in various pursuits akin to literature and involved with books. He is a lecturer, and his puppet plays have been well received both here and abroad.

"There is lustiness in Kreymborg too. He can be downright brutal without losing himself in brutality. And in 'Etching' and 'America' his sense of brusqueness intensifies ideas that are far from unusual. It is, in fact, from an intellectual standpoint that this group is weakest. Their revolt is so specious, their dissatisfaction so superficial. The chief defect of much of this

poetry is not that it questions, but that it accepts evasive, half-formulated or factitious answers. Frequently its very questioning is a sham, being little more than a quibble about the externals of form. It often deceives itself by the mere technical twisting of a platitude; the breaking-up of a hackneyed thought into spasmodic lines; by a few erratic capitals and an inverted image. This impulse is dying rapidly; the war, with its tremendous responsibilities, its devastating vitality, has made these thin emotional substitutes seem doubly artificial. It is becoming increasingly difficult to shock one's readers with an intellectual concept that was stale in 1885, even though one dislocates prosody and punctuation in the attempt."—*Louis Untermeyer in "The New Era in American Poetry"*.

"The poetry of 'Mushrooms' will be strong meat to admirers of Keats and Shelley. It is daring, heavy with its own conceit, eccentric, definitely blasphemous against older ideas of the substance of poetry, but withal a delight to truth lovers."—"The Review of Reviews", *August, 1916*.

REFERENCES:

- The New Era in American Poetry*. Louis Untermeyer. HOLT.
A Critical Fable. Anonymous. HOUGHTON MIFFLIN.