

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 Imagists

H. D.

Hymen. HOLT.

One of the six poets who formed the nucleus of the imagist group, and were included in the three Imagist Anthologies, "H. D." is an almost perfect example of the writer of cadenced verse. Her passionate fondness for classical mood and form has led her into a clear, almost brittle style that for some people seems cold. Yet in these delicately intimated lyrics of hers, there is a fire, a worship of beauty, strong, determined, whole souled, though subtle. Her rhythms are varied and graceful. These poems have often been likened to delicate yet strong Greek vases. She is pagan, yet she gives to old-world culture the freshness and vitality of the new world. Hers is a

special and a rare gift, and one which it is important to appreciate and to understand if we would know the new school of poetry.

Hilda (Doolittle) Aldington is tall, dark, fragile, exceedingly shy. "Unworldly" is a proper adjective to use in describing her. She is as remote as her verses, yet withal kindly and interested. She was born in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, was educated in private schools, and, for a time, at Bryn Mawr College. Her father was Professor Charles L. Doolittle, for some years director of the Flower Astronomical Observatory of the University of Pennsylvania. Her literary career started while she was in Europe. Contact with Ezra Pound and other members of the English and American group of literary experimentalists then living in London stimulated her. In America, her first work appeared in the January, 1913, num-

four of "Poetry". She is married to the English poet and critic, Richard Aldington, also a member of the imagist school. "H. D." has spent much time of late years in Greece and on the continent. She has visited America seldom. She lives quietly, and writes constantly, though her output is small. Hers has been a quiet but a forceful influence in the development of American poetry.

"Her poems are native, personal, to a marked degree. They show no slightest trace of those influences which until recently ruled American art. Deeply affected by classic literature, still it is only as a blush of colour that we perceive it in her work. The tricks of her manner occasionally recall the Greek, but her thoughts are perfectly her own. Here is a fresh flower, sprung out of a new graft upon an old stock. Here is the frank, unartificial paganism of a new world. Neither in point of view, nor in technique, does this art resemble any preceding English art, yet it is cosmopolitan in that it is a fusion of much knowledge, all melted and absorbed in the blood of a young and growing race. She takes her good where she finds it, and the perfect singleness of her aim has resulted in releasing all her forces to concentrate them upon the simple fact of beauty. There is no clipping her pattern to a traditional mode; there is no staining it for ulterior ends. It is completely personal, completely sincere. Meticulous, at times, undoubtedly, 'H. D.'s faults are obvious enough, because they are also her greatest virtues; but, in the narrow compass in which she works, she has achieved a rare and finely-wrought beauty."—*Amy Lowell in "Tendencies in Modern American Poetry"*.

"'H. D.' is the most nearly perfect of the Imagists; she is, in fact, the only true Imagist. . . . In the narrow borders of her style she has achieved a concentration so great that it has an intensity of its own. . . . In 'Sea Garden' one notices at once how many and sensitive are 'H. D.'s perceptions of nature and how diverse are the rhythms she uses to express this keenness. Often her love for the beauty of an orchard, a pear-tree, a sea-rose is so great that it hurts her, and yet, with the artist's self-inflicted blows that wring ecstasy out of torture, she opens and reopens her wounds. . . . In all of these poems one receives the impression of something thin and fine struggling out of a narrow, compressed mold, of a gift used with a knowledge of its limitations, but with almost too sharp a precision and always with a quiet distinction of utterance."—*Louis Untermeyer in "The New Era in American Poetry"*.

"This ['Hymen'] is the first collection of H. D.'s verse to appear since the slender volume, 'Sea Garden', which was published

four or five years ago. She has been called a 'Greek' in mood and temper because she has taken her symbols, to a very large extent, from the Hellenic world. The other portion of her themes are evoked as symbols from the natural objects and elements."—*The Boston "Transcript"*.

REFERENCES:

Tendencies in Modern American Poetry.

Amy Lowell. HOUGHTON MIFFLIN.

The New Era in American Poetry. Louis Untermeyer. HOLT.

A Critical Fable. Anonymous. HOUGHTON MIFFLIN.

Poems of H. D. May Sinclair. DIAL, February, 1922.