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An American Troubadour:
The Career and Life of Alfred Kreymborg as a Modernist and Beyond

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in English from
The College of William and Mary

by

Benjamin Dwight Norris

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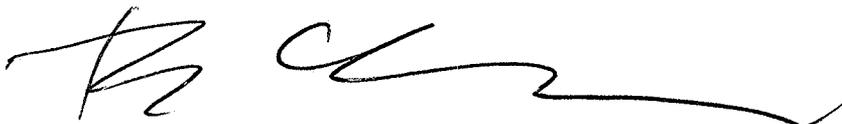
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An American Troubadour:
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In his Prologue to *Kora in Hell* in 1920, William Carlos Williams positions Alfred Kreymborg as a central figure in the development of experimental American poetry, asserting, “The best thing that could happen for the good of poetry in the United States today would be for someone to give Alfred Kreymborg a hundred thousand dollars. In his mind there is the determination for freedom brought into relief by a crabbedness of temper that makes him peculiarly able to value what is being done here” (Williams, *Kora in Hell* 23). Over twenty years later, in an unpublished letter to Kreymborg, Archibald MacLeish writes, “Indeed, you are becoming a sort of mythical figure – the great granddaddy of American literature. I am proud to have known you” (Kreymborg Papers, UVA). In another twenty years, toward the end of Kreymborg’s life, Richard M. Elman interviewed him for a radio documentary on Sherwood Anderson. Despite Kreymborg’s extensive literary career, which had spanned nearly half a century, he was unknown to Elman, who only interviewed him because Kreymborg had responded to a query in the *New York Times Book Review*. Though Kreymborg told Elman that he knew “all of the greats at one time or another,” Elman describes him as a desperate, deteriorating figure. He writes, “[Kreymborg] looked unhealthy, precisely in the way some alcoholics appear to be when they are off the stuff... he smelled of lack of sleep, that sour odor, and stale sweat, perhaps fecal matter” (Elman 117-118). Though Kreymborg claimed to have gotten drinks with Wallace Stevens forty years earlier on the same street in which he and Elman sat, Elman suggests, “He seemed to have no need to impress me as anything very much except a survivor of his own talents. He was old and had hit bottom” (Elman 118).

From endorsements by Pulitzer Prize winning poets to an odorous “has been” in a Greenwich Village café, the shift in Kreymborg’s position illustrates the extent to which his reputation had diminished by the end of his life.

Born in 1883 and living until 1966, Kreymborg had an expansive career that included the roles of poet, novelist, dramatist, editor, anthologist, music critic, literary historian, and literary critic. Between 1908 and 1950, Kreymborg published over 40 books, appeared regularly in prestigious poetry journals, and was considered for a Pulitzer Prize. Aside from his writing, he began working with the Provincetown Players in 1916 and founded the Other Players in 1918; he discovered and promoted new writers as an editor of three avant-garde ‘little magazines’ between 1913 and 1921; he co-edited a series of anthologies that ran from 1927 to 1936 called *The American Caravan*, which launched and promoted the careers of a number of important writers; and he served as the director of the Manhattan and Bronx companies of the Federal Theatre Project beginning in 1936. With a formidable list of accomplishments behind him, Kreymborg became central in the New York literary establishment in the 1940s and 50s. He was the recipient of two Carnegie Grants, the first in 1940 to complete his anthology, *Poetic Drama: an Anthology of Plays in Verse*, and the second in 1942 to work on *The New Troubadour*, which would never be published, but was meant to serve as a sequel to his 1925 autobiography, *Troubadour*. While his poetry continued to appear in various literary journals, Kreymborg served as the President of the Poetry Society of America in the mid-1940s; he was inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1949; and he served as a judge on the committee for the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry from 1947-1961.

Despite Kreymborg's central roles to both the avant-garde and the literary establishment throughout the first half of the century, many aspects of his life and work have been overlooked. His contributions as an editor of little magazines have been recognized by many scholars, and there are numerous critical assessments that involve, or at least mention, *The Glebe* and *Others*. Yet there is no biography of Kreymborg; very little critical work that discusses his poetry, drama, or prose; and even less scholarship that involves the contributions of his later career as an editor, anthologist, and promoter. The qualities comprising the figures that endure literary history as canonized "authors" are, as Michel Foucault writes, "only a projection, in more or less psychologizing terms, of the operations we force texts to undergo, the connections we make, the traits we establish as pertinent, the continuities we recognize, or the exclusions we practice" (Foucault, "What is an Author?" 895). According to Foucault's ideas on authorship, the author-ities within literary narratives are contingent, a constantly constructed product that reflects contemporary psychology as much as it does the original relationship between author and text. The privileged position of the author in these narratives effaces the secondary labor that helped construct the text—namely, the work of the editor, publisher, or promoter. Some anecdotes exist that do affirm the role of the editor; surviving manuscripts may provide tangible evidence of the editor's role in the creative process (one needs only think of Ezra Pound's influence on T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, made evident in the scrawled notes and crossed out passages). But contributions like anthologizing, providing grant recommendations, compiling magazine issues, and awarding literary accolades do not leave as apparent of a connection to their original source. Many of Kreymborg's roles have served the reputations of other writers rather

than his own; but through his writing, as well as his other overlooked roles, Kreymborg was an important figure in American modernism.

After attending 291, Alfred Stieglitz's avant-garde gallery in New York City, Kreymborg was convinced, as he writes in *Troubadour*, that "if the young literary men of the town had a haunt like this one, something in the nature of a concerted movement might at last be born among them" (*Troubadour* 128). Serving as a place in which he felt that he could "study...the birth, development, and tendencies of modern art," 291 provided Kreymborg with an introduction to modernism, as well as access to a number of literary and artistic figures with whom he would collaborate later in his career (*Troubadour* 127-128). 291 was the first to introduce many individuals from the European avant-garde to American audiences—Stieglitz's gallery introduced Auguste Rodin and Henri Matisse in 1908, Paul Cézanne in 1910, and Pablo Picasso in 1911, while also presenting exhibitions of young American artists like Marsden Hartley, John Marin, and Arthur Dove (Hartley, *My Dear Stieglitz* 2). Becoming a regular visitor to 291 after his first exposure to it in 1910, Kreymborg probably felt, as he describes in *Troubadour*, that a "concerted movement" had already begun to form in the visual arts. The impression upon Kreymborg was so strong that he wrote in a 1914 article for *The Morning Telegraph*, "If there were just one Stieglitz, say in the literary field, American literature would see a revolution similar to that [which] American art is enjoying" (Kreymborg, "Stieglitz and 291" 1). Though Kreymborg's article suggests that Stieglitz's impact was felt only within the visual arts, the experimental artists of the Stieglitz group would help develop the principles of the revolution in American literature

that Kreymborg desired. The New York avant-garde would foster a close relationship between visual artists and writers, and Benita Eisler positions Kreymborg as one of the earliest figures to participate in the interdisciplinary exchange, claiming that he was “the first literary recruit to 291” (Eisler 104). In the initial years of his acquaintance with the people and artwork within 291, Kreymborg had begun working as an editor of *Musical Advance*—a publication started by Franklin Hopkins, who Kreymborg remembers as “a fanatic on every conceivable type of reform, not alone in the musical world” (*Troubadour* 131). During his time at *Musical Advance*, Kreymborg attempted to shift the focus of the publication from the classical ‘masters’ to contemporary, emerging musical figures, and he also added literature, art, and drama departments to the periodical. But even before his activities with 291 and *Musical Advance*, he had articulated the need for a publication that would feature writers who were unable to publish in the larger, more conventional literary magazines. He recognized a stifling literary environment in the United States in which experimental work was virtually unpublishable. His assessment was correct—though Kreymborg was not yet aware of it, even Robert Frost had to go to England to publish his first two books, *A Boy’s Will* in 1913 and *North of Boston* in 1914.

Four years before the founding of Harriet Monroe’s *Poetry*, Kreymborg had begun in 1908 to collect manuscripts and subscriptions for a publication that he intended to title *The American Quarterly*. After developing a friendship with the poet Alanson Hartpence, who recommended that Kreymborg move into an apartment on Fourteenth Street in order to be in closer proximity with other artists, Kreymborg began to meet other writers who, like himself, needed an outlet for publication. It was through these contacts that Kreymborg collected the initial manuscripts for the publication. Though he

was eventually able to publish his first book, *Love and Life and Other Studies*, with the Grafton Press in 1908—the same company that would publish Gertrude Stein’s *Three Lives* a year later—Kreymborg and his friends’ writing was consistently rejected, which influenced his decision to begin his own publication. After two rejections from *Harper’s* and *The Dial*, which he remembers as being particularly distressing, Kreymborg explains in *Troubadour* that the atmosphere among his peers was one of “companionship in misery,” and he saw *The American Quarterly* as a remedy that would help to expose young writers, as well as himself (*Troubadour* 97).

In a statement that would come to dictate virtually all of his aims as an editor of little magazines, Kreymborg claimed that *The American Quarterly* was to have “no concern with the public taste...and no thought in the direction of the advertisers” (*Troubadour* 97). However, Kreymborg’s disregard for the financial concerns of publishing would ultimately end the venture before its first issue appeared. Though he had collected submissions from Charles Demuth, Joyce Kilmer, John Cournos, Gutzon Borglum (the sculptor who created Mount Rushmore), and Jo Davidson (a sculptor of portrait busts), among others, he had found only one benefactor and had not sold enough subscriptions to run the first issue. Charles Allen suggests that Kreymborg was forced to give up the project because “he worked himself into nervous prostration” (Allen 419). While Kreymborg did indeed suffer a nervous breakdown after the failed venture, Allen’s account mixes up the chronology that Kreymborg provides in *Troubadour*, and suggests that the publication ended because of personal reasons, rather than economic ones. It was only after the publication had already failed that Kreymborg records he was thrown “into a temporary nervous collapse” (*Troubadour* 105). Despite his inability to raise money —

a recurring theme, along with his inability to find commercial success, that plagued his career as an editor—Kreymborg’s venture represents an early attempt to establish an experimental publication devoted to printing young and emerging artists. Four years before *Poetry* would begin what many consider the renaissance of American poetry, Kreymborg had envisioned the need for a publication that would bring together the creative expressions of a new generation.

Five years later, after having developed friendships with Man Ray and Samuel Halpert at 291 and the avant-garde Daniel Gallery, Kreymborg returned to the idea of starting an experimental magazine. During the summer of 1913, Kreymborg moved to an artists’ colony in Grantwood, New Jersey, and began *The Glebe* with Man Ray, a publication whose editorial policy was one of “absolute freedom of expression” (*The Glebe* 1:5). The title—a synonym for “soil” that holds religious connotations—embodies the American nativist position which held that American poetry needs to metaphorically arise from American soil. As an outlet for avant-garde American writers, *The Glebe* was to act as a nurturing space for emerging expressions; or, as Susan Churchill extends the “soil” metaphor, the publication was to focus on “harvesting the fruit of American labors” (Churchill 30).

Deeming Kreymborg one of the “patron saints of the modern little magazine movement,” Frederick J. Hoffman argues that *The Glebe* was “one of the first periodicals to sponsor experimental writing” (Hoffman 46). Unlike Harriet Monroe’s *Poetry*, which had begun a year earlier in 1912, all but one issue of *The Glebe* featured a long piece by a single, relatively unknown writer. Describing the reason for this editorial decision, Kreymborg writes in an early number of *The Glebe*, ““Each issue will be devoted

exclusively to one individual, thereby giving him an opportunity to present his work in sufficient bulk to make it possible for the reader to obtain a much more comprehensive grasp of his personality than is afforded him in the restricted space allotted by the other magazines” (Churchill 32). This distinction from “the other magazines” represents a significant attempt to separate *The Glebe* from contemporary literary publications like *Poetry*, as well as *The Little Review* and *The Egoist*, which both began in 1914. Whereas a poet could be buried between the pages of other writers in a magazine like *Poetry*, Kreymborg and Ray suggested that bringing attention to individual writers was a more effective means of promoting emerging figures whose work would be unfamiliar to the majority of readers. Kreymborg’s concern for promoting writers would lead Gorham Munson to patronizingly recall in *The Awakening Twenties*, posthumously published in 1985, that Kreymborg was “more promoter than editor in the various publishing ventures” (Munson, *Awakening Twenties* 34). Yet while Kreymborg’s efforts at literary promotion would indeed continue throughout his career, his editorial decisions while working on *Others*, a little magazine following *The Glebe*, would do more toward organizing and asserting the existence of a concerted movement. By featuring only a single artist in each of its publications, *The Glebe* served as an important early expression of experimental writing, but it was unable to provide an inclusive portrait of the beginning stages of Modernism; and because the publication’s chapbooks ran in such small editions (300), *The Glebe* was unable to exert the influence of the more widely circulated *Poetry*, and did not have the international presence of publications like *The Egoist* or *The Little Review*.

An exception to the publication's single-author chapbooks was the fifth issue, comprised of a collection of manuscripts that arrived in Grantwood, as Kreymborg recalls, in "a bizarre, special-delivery package, post-marked London" (*Troubadour* 156). In what has become a well-known story, the package, sent in 1914, was a collection of manuscripts titled *Des Imagistes*, which Ezra Pound had sent to Kreymborg along with a letter that read, "unless you're another American ass, you'll set this up just as it stands!" (*Troubadour* 157). Because the poems were unconventional in their typography, Pound may have included such explicit instructions in order to avoid any editorial adjustments of the poems—an issue that poets faced when submitting to Harriet Monroe, who would occasionally alter punctuation and capitalization as she saw fit, as well as omit or rearrange stanzas. Robert Crunden interprets Pound's advice as an indication that he was "clearly fearful that he might have a male Harriet Monroe on his hands," and *Des Imagistes* would be altered from its original contents (Crunden 415). Kreymborg's willingness to publish the manuscript "just as it stands," however, demonstrates that as an editor, he was more sensitive—or perhaps sympathetic—to the experimentation of modern verse. While Kreymborg and Man Ray immediately recognized the significance of *Des Imagistes* and hoped to publish it as the first issue of *The Glebe*, a broken printing press prohibited them from doing so. After overcoming the minor publishing setbacks, however, the editors arranged for Albert and Charles Boni—New York avant-garde publishers who owned the Washington Square bookshop—to finance the publication, and *Des Imagistes* appeared in 1914 without any changes as the fifth issue of *The Glebe*. In the strict adherence to Pound's instructions, Kreymborg published a number of poems that had previously appeared in *Poetry*, and was accused of copyright infringement by

Harriet Monroe. In an unpublished letter to Monroe in March of 1916, Kreymborg claimed that he was unaware of the offense, writing, “I, for one, did not know of their publication in “Poetry,” all of whose numbers I am not familiar with.” Kreymborg’s feigned ignorance is unlikely; his own work appeared regularly in *Poetry*, he corresponded with Monroe and many of the publication’s contributors; and as a competing editor of a poetry publication, he was aware of who was publishing in *Poetry*. Monroe did not demand payment for the poems, but requested instead that a notice of their previous publication in *Poetry* appear in future copies of the text and accompany all existing copies (*Poetry* Archive). This early confrontation between Monroe and Kreymborg would prefigure the competition between the two editors in the years to follow.

The connection between Pound and Kreymborg came through John Cournos—a mutual American friend who had moved to London—and though Kreymborg was aware of and admired Pound, Pound was probably unaware of Kreymborg’s literary activities before *The Glebe*. Theirs was a relationship that was neither intimate nor enduring, and in an unpublished letter to Kreymborg from the early 1920s, an irritated Pound writes, “Isn’t it just a little slack of you to seek the quiet life, I mean by saving yourself the inconvenience of having any opinion about the relative qualities of everything done since 1900” (William Bird Ezra Pound Papers, Yale). As was largely the case with Harriet Monroe of *Poetry*, Dora Marsden of *The Egoist*, and Jane Heap and Margaret Anderson of *The Little Review*, Pound did indeed “wake up” Kreymborg with *Des Imagistes*. In comparison to the other issues of *The Glebe*, which most notably included publications of Charles Demuth, Adolph Wolff, and Kreymborg, *Des Imagistes* represents the

periodical's most innovative and enduring material—it included work from Pound, Williams, James Joyce, H.D., Amy Lowell, and others. In recalling his initial response to reading through *Des Imagistes*, Kreymborg declares that the poems were “an exotic manifestation of something alive and beautiful...nearly all of the pieces moved without rhyme or a traditional metre” (*Troubadour* 157). This reaction, as described in *Troubadour*, suggests that he did not entirely understand the poems within the package, but as an astute editor, he understood their significance. Kreymborg was intent to support innovative and unique forms of expression, so despite a puzzled appreciation of Pound's manuscripts, he did not want *The Glebe* to degenerate “into some Puritanical policy” whereby the publication would only feature the more accessible poems. Despite Pound's authoritative role as educator—or “fearless propagandist,” as Kreymborg remembers him—Pound evidently respected Kreymborg (or at least Cournos' opinion of him) as one of the few American editors willing to publish experimental work (*Troubadour* 156).

In a 1913 letter to William Carlos Williams, Pound suggests that Williams contact Kreymborg, writing, “I suppose you've seen Demuth about *The Glebe*—if not take my introduction to Alfred Kreymborg...They ought to do yr. book” (Pound, *Selected Letters* 27). Following the introduction, Kreymborg and Williams would influence each other and become close friends until the early 1920s. In his *Autobiography*, Williams recalls, “I had up to that time produced...*Al Que Quiere*...Alfred Kreymborg noticed that the cacophony was a re-echoing of his name and felt complimented. We were very close friends then and I think his surmise was a proper one” (Williams, *Autobiography* 157). Following a mishap over a lost manuscript, the friendship soured, and Williams' 1921 volume *Sour Grapes* is probably ironic in its dedication to Kreymborg. Though the

relationship between Pound and Kreymborg would also sour—Pound claiming that Kreymborg suffered from “anemia of education”—Pound recognized the importance of Kreymborg’s early publishing ventures and considered him as an American editor sympathetic to experimental art (Pound, *Selected Letters* 128).

Because Albert and Charles Boni were financially responsible for publishing *The Glebe*, they began demanding greater editorial control with the ninth and tenth issues, ultimately causing Kreymborg to resign from the publication in 1914. Kreymborg’s self-proclaimed reason for leaving *The Glebe* is nearly identical to his reason for leaving Harold Loeb and *Broom* in 1922, and is usefully seen in relation to the entirety of his career as an editor. Discussing why he relinquished his role in *The Glebe*, Kreymborg claims (in the third person): “notwithstanding his love for the expressions of modern Europe, he felt that his job as an editor, actual or potential, consisted in pursuing...the continued discovery and advancement of the unknowns on this side of the Atlantic” (*Troubadour* 162). Though Kreymborg had happily published *Des Imagistes*, which featured some non-American writers, the Boni Brothers had insisted that Kreymborg publish translations of European works, and the final two issues of *The Glebe* were translations of the German playwright Frank Wedekind. Describing his resignation from *Broom* eight years later, Kreymborg formulates his explanation in almost identical terms, writing, “Harold [Loeb] inclined more and more toward Europe and established reputations and Krimmie toward America and the future” (*Troubadour* 301). Though Loeb’s 1959 autobiography, *The Way It Was*, suggests that *Troubadour* misleadingly presents Kreymborg’s commitment to American poetry, the narrative of Kreymborg’s career—including ventures like his history of American poetry, *Our Singing Strength*

(1929), and his anthology of American poetry, *Lyric America* (1930)—suggests his dedication to promoting American poetry. For Kreymborg, *The Glebe* served as his first step toward occupying a central position in the development of a distinctly American avant-garde.

In the earliest stages of Kreymborg's own writing career, he focused almost entirely on prose. His first book, *Love and Life and Other Studies*, was published in 1908 and was a series of prose poems that he conceptualized as "moods and studies" (*Troubadour* 89). The "studies" are mainly monologues to, dialogues between, or descriptions of abstract concepts. For example, "The Nude" begins by defining an abstraction in concrete terms: "The nude is the form in which Nature creates. Trees are nude forms; butterflies are nude forms; snow is a nude form" (Kreymborg, *Love and Life* 34). In "To My Habits," the passage addresses the constancy of habits through a monologue addressed to the speaker's own habits: "You are more faithful to me than friends, more persistent in loving one than woman; I cannot part with you" (*Love and Life* 47). And in the title passage, "Love and Life," love and life are personified and discuss impending death.

Kreymborg would soon become embarrassed by the youthful efforts of his first book; in a letter to her brother in December of 1915, Marianne Moore describes her initial meeting with Kreymborg, writing, "He nearly sank down in a fit, when I spoke of *Studies of Love and Life!* He said, I feel as if I ought to go home. Those are worthless things I did them when I was 18" (Moore 104). Though Kreymborg offered only deprecating words about his earliest work when meeting Moore, he recalls in *Troubadour*

the significant impact of having a first book published. To see his book upon a shelf and his name in a New York daily signaled to Kreymborg his ‘arrival’ as a writer, and provided him with much-needed confidence after having experienced numerous rejections (*Troubadour* 90). Two years later, the Grafton Press would publish Kreymborg’s *Apostrophes: A Book of Tributes to Masters of Music*, a series of twenty-five poetic tributes to composers ranging from Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina to Richard Strauss. Though his first two books did little toward establishing Kreymborg’s reputation in New York, they are an early manifestation of his interest in unconventional writing forms, and they prefigure the more influential poetic drama and dialogic poetry that he would write in the ensuing years.

In 1914, Kreymborg’s novelette, *Erna Vitek*, ran as the sixth issue of *The Glebe*. The text follows three men—an artist, a writer, and a composer—as they attempt to seduce a Norwegian waitress in a diner that they frequent. Kreymborg describes his text in conventional terms, claiming that it is “a realistic novelette, in which three artists, true to tradition, tried to ‘seduce’ [Erna Vitek]” (*Troubadour* 85). Yet despite its short, declarative sentences and traditional narrative structure, Kreymborg’s novelette features the type of deceptively simple prose that figures like Sherwood Anderson and Ernest Hemingway would soon develop into a more complex form. Throughout *Erna Vitek*, Kreymborg uses the minor details of a character’s action or setting to imply an impression or underlying meaning, and the occasional free indirect discourse obscures the distance between the third person narrator and the thoughts of the character that he is describing. In one such instance, the waitress watches the composer, who has fallen in love with her, play a piece that he wrote for her as a symbol of his affection. The

narrative voice describes her as she watches him: “A greedy little smile played about the corners of her mouth and her nose twitched slightly. But the corners straightened and her nose stopped twitching. No, he was too soft. His shoulders were so weak and his hands so small...” (Kreymborg, *Erna Vitek* 48). From the external physical movements of her mouth and nose, the reader understands that she is enjoying the performance and entertaining the idea of romance with the composer. With the change in her physical features, the narrative shifts to her interior thoughts and the narrator’s voice merely becomes a vehicle through which her thought processes are verbalized while she considers the flaws in the composer. Along with the technical aspects of the text, another Modernist feature of *Erna Vitek* is its explicit treatment of sexuality and gender roles.

Although there is no evidence that the themes within this novelette caused controversy, Kreymborg would soon find his work the target of a national censorship case after adopting similar themes in his 1915 short story, “Edna: The Girl of the Street.” Originally published by Guido Bruno as a chapbook in 1915, “Edna: The Girl of the Street” was deemed “indecent literature” by the Secretary of the New York Society for the Prevention of Vice, John S. Sumner, who subsequently arrested Bruno in 1916 for selling Kreymborg’s text. It would be another four years until the more infamous case in which the same organization banned the serialized prose section of James Joyce’s *Ulysses* that appeared in a 1920 issue of *The Little Review*. Though Kreymborg himself was not taken to court (Bruno was sent to trial instead), he recalls that in the headlines of New York newspapers he was deemed a “horrible example to the young and an injurious immoralist generally” (*Troubadour* 79).

The story, which narrates a young man's nonsexual experience with a prostitute, ultimately conveys the narrator's disgust at the dehumanizing effects of prostitution. Recognizing that the story was not salacious, both Frank Harris and George Bernard Shaw came to the defense of Bruno and Kreymborg when the case was taken to court. As Ross Wetzsteon writes, Bruno "vigorously defended [Kreymborg's] story...even eliciting a letter of support from George Bernard Shaw, which he flourished before the astonished judge" (Wetzsteon 306). In the letter, which Bruno included with the 1919 reprint of "Edna," Shaw argues that despite the superficially 'lewd' elements of the story, it is actually moralizing, writing, "if your societies for the suppression of vice had any sense they would make a tract of ["Edna"] and distribute it broadcast among young men" (Kreymborg, "Edna" 3). Frank Harris published a similar interpretation and defense of the story in *Pearson's*, and also testified in court on behalf of "Edna," claiming, "Is it any wonder that art and literature find difficulty in coming to flower when such brainless persecution is possible?" (*Troubadour* 80). Once the charges were dismissed, Bruno printed a second edition of the story and exploited the notoriety surrounding "Edna" by increasing its cost. Kreymborg recalls that the price went from a dime to a dollar, while Wetzsteon claims that Bruno only tripled the cost—at any rate, Kreymborg did not financially benefit from his minor infamy, as Bruno kept all of the profits from the second edition (*Troubadour* 81, Wetzsteon 306). The case filed against "Edna" was a victory for Bruno and small publishing, as well as the Bohemian literary community in Greenwich Village more generally.

Kreymborg would appear in the press again in 1916 after publishing his first full-length book of poems, *Mushrooms*. Published by John Marshall's new company—which

would eventually pass the rights to Alfred Knopf—the text was an expansion of *Mushrooms: Sixteen Rhythms*, which Kreymborg had published in 1915 as the third issue in Bruno’s chapbook series. Kreymborg became aware of John Marshall through the Canadian publisher’s partnership in the progressive bookstore and minor publishing imprint, *The Little Bookshop Around the Corner* (“September’s Harvest of Important Books”). Marshall was beginning a new publishing venture under his own name and requested that Kreymborg’s *Mushrooms* appear as the first book under the new imprint (*Troubadour* 208).

Following his resistance to genre classifications in *Love, Life, and Other Studies* and *Apostrophes*, Kreymborg uses the terms ‘mushrooms’ and ‘free forms’ rather than ‘poems’ to describe his early free verse. He conceptualizes the mushrooms as an organic extension of the poet’s interiority; he suggests, “Mushrooms spring up over night in my heart...I carry them up to my hothouse attic, up to my gardener for cultivation” (*Mushrooms* 1). The ‘mushrooms’ serve as a metaphoric embodiment of the organic growth between subjective experience and poetic content, and in his emphasis on the poet’s interiority, Kreymborg offers a Modernist revision to Wordsworth’s Romantic dictum, “poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” (Wordsworth 265). But unlike the professed spontaneity of Wordsworth’s poetry, Kreymborg’s ‘mushrooms’ ‘cultivate’ the subjective experience by expressing it within a consciously experimental form. Regardless of any Romantic heritage, Kreymborg’s poems represented to many a radical, if not iconoclastic, break from convention. Kreymborg recalls that his ‘mushrooms’ were met with “instantaneous disapprobation,” while literary historian David Perkins more reservedly suggests, “*Mushrooms* was read with at least enough

interest to excite parody” (*Troubadour* 163, Perkins 529). Though Kreymborg may overemphasize the public’s reaction to his text, the reviews of *Mushrooms* suggest its polarized reception and visibility.

Reviewing *Mushrooms* in 1916 in *Poetry*, Harriet Monroe defends the unconventional form and content of the poetry while patronizingly suggesting that Kreymborg is, “as becomes the harlequin-philosopher, entertaining” (Monroe, “A Staccato Poet” 52). Her review implies that “some critics” claimed that *Mushrooms* was such a break from conventional poetry as to no longer be poetry at all. In attempting to counter such claims, she legitimizes Kreymborg’s work by comparing him to Homer (and later to Pope), writing, “Are these poetry? Why not? Did not Horace write satires long ago, and successfully ‘put them over’ with the Romans” (“A Staccato Poet” 52). Monroe uses *Mushrooms* as a way of addressing the free verse controversy more generally, positioning Kreymborg in significant company as one of the ‘new’ poets that conservative critics both misunderstood and unfairly attacked; she claims, “I own it doth amaze me to hear some critics solemnly reading the law against Messrs. Kreymborg, Eliot, Pound, and others” (“A Staccato Poet” 53).

Another positive 1916 review of *Mushrooms* was by Robert Alden Sandborn—who appeared a year earlier in the fifth number of *Others*. Reviewing the book in *The Poetry Journal*, a Boston publication sympathetic to experimental writers, he argues, “[Kreymborg] is brave enough to let you see him tremble, to lay bare his nerves, his wistfulness, his weakness. None but the brave are crucified on high hills. And the hill upon which Alfred Kreymborg is crucified will be remembered long” (Sandborn 80). Sandborn suggests that it is the experimental and intimate nature of Kreymborg’s poetry

that will have him “crucified,” and like Monroe, he attempts to support Kreymborg’s verse not by discussing it, but by equating it with both an older poetic figure and the new poetic movement. Sandborn writes, “He is one of this age who stands for freedom in form...Kreymborg is a true disciple of Whitman in his freedom from imitation” (Sandborn 80).

Among the negative responses to *Mushrooms*, a number of reviews satirized the book while also neglecting to seriously discuss its poetics. In *The Independent*—a conservative New York weekly originally founded as a Congregationalist journal—Clement Wood writes in a 1918 article titled “The Charlie Chaplins of Poetry” that Kreymborg’s *Mushrooms*, “should not be chronicled among the atrocities of war; but it marked, perhaps, the birth of a new movement” (Wood 64). Again, Kreymborg is figured as a representative example of the ‘new’ verse, and Wood uses him (as well as Chaplin) as a means of attacking free verse more generally. Implying that the ‘new movement’ is an atrocity to poetic tradition, Wood challenges the seriousness of the experimental artists by suggesting a triviality to their work. Though Wood’s claims are misinformed—for example, the “birth” of the poetic renaissance began well before the 1916 publication of *Mushrooms*—his comments reveal that Kreymborg was seen as synonymous with the poetic iconoclasm of the New York avant-garde. Like Wood’s article, other satirical reviews of *Mushrooms* dealt more with the relation between tradition and experimentation than with Kreymborg’s poetry itself. In a similarly patronizing article that appeared in a 1916 edition of *The American Review of Reviews*, the writer claims, “Like a *Pied Piper*, Alfred Kreymborg’s ‘Mushrooms’ enters the Hamelin Town of poetry and presently all our traditions yield to the spell of his pipe and

go scurrying like the rodents of that famous city” (“The New Poetry” 233). Again, the review describes Kreymborg’s break from poetic convention while positioning him as central to the emerging experimental poets. The reviewer treats Kreymborg as a definitive example of the avant-garde, suggesting, “In "Mushrooms," the reader will find the very essence of the new school of ultra poetic expression” (“The New Poetry” 233).

Apart from the justifications and condemnations of *Mushrooms*, there were a number of more moderate responses that actually discuss Kreymborg’s poetics rather than the literary context in which the book was published. In a reserved but approving review in 1916 in *The Boston Evening Transcript*, William Stanley Braithwaite, the conservative editor of the publication, writes, “I have delighted in this book, and wherever I have not been able to accept the poet’s philosophy I have at least recognized the fresh and inquiring impulse which prompted the utterance” (Braithwaite, “Review” 8). Braithwaite’s acceptance of *Mushrooms* is surprising given his disapproving position on many of Kreymborg’s contemporaries.¹ In an extended essay in 1916, however, Braithwaite expands upon his admiration for Kreymborg’s work while also maintaining his conservative position in relation to the avant-garde. He argues that although Kreymborg has been “associated with a movement that has produced a great deal that is mere rubbish,” his poetry is genuine, and he is “the most potent singer of his [*Others*] school” (Braithwaite, *The Poetic Year* 170). Braithwaite makes clear that he tolerates the experimental nature of Kreymborg’s work because it often retains within its form a sentimental, if not conventional content. Though *Mushrooms* reflected the interests of

¹T.S. Eliot was so opposed to the publication’s conservative stance that he wrote a satirical poem in 1917 titled “The Boston Evening Transcript,” in which he says, “The readers of the Boston Evening Transcript/Sway in the wind like a field of ripe corn” (Eliot 20).

the early American avant-garde, the tension between its form and content, as well as its support from conservative critics, foreshadows Kreymborg's adoption of a conservative poetics that would begin with his 1923 book, *Less Lonely*. While *Mushrooms* appealed to the radical group centered around *Others*, it also found admiration with a number of critics opposed to the New York avant-garde.

Conrad Aiken and Louis Untermeyer, two conservative critics who would later become prominent members of the New York literary establishment and close friends with Kreymborg, both treated *Mushrooms* with qualified support. In Aiken's *Skepticisms: Notes on Contemporary Poetry* (1919), a book that seeks to "deal only with the most interesting aspects of contemporary poetry," he begins a whole chapter on Kreymborg by arguing that the majority of early readers of *Mushrooms* were not so much polemicized as they were confused, claiming that many were unsure of whether or not to take the publication seriously (Aiken, *Skepticisms* 240). He explains that the reading public "twinkled for a moment between indifference and derision," with many believing that Kreymborg was merely attempting to obtain "any sort of publicity" (*Skepticisms* 240). Yet Aiken argues that Kreymborg is "in reality a melodist," and has similarities to Wallace Stevens and Maxwell Bodenheim—two experimental poets that Aiken supported, as opposed to his derision for *Others* contributors like Mina Loy, Walter Arensberg, and Marianne Moore (*Skepticisms* 242). Like Braithwaite, Aiken frames his discussion of Kreymborg's poetics by arguing that *Mushrooms* retains conventional elements and, in its musical propensities, is somehow distinct from free verse. In providing an extended discussion of *Mushrooms*, Aiken was among the first to give serious critical treatment to Kreymborg's poetics.

In two very different responses by Louis Untermeyer—the first in 1919 and the second in 1921—the critic’s opinion of Kreymborg’s work diminishes in 1921, possibly because he no longer perceives the “freshness” of Kreymborg’s verse that he cites in his earlier article. In *The New Era in American Poetry* (1919), Untermeyer praises *Mushrooms* because its “delicate etchings and concise ironies are seen with few detractions; there is a neat disposal if not a solution of intricacies” (Untermeyer, *New Era* 313). Speaking of the conciseness of Kreymborg’s poetry in terms similar to those of Imagist verse, Untermeyer’s 1919 assessment points toward the innovative nature of Kreymborg’s work as constituting one of the principle values of *Mushrooms*. He qualifies his approval by claiming, “frequently his imagination overleaps itself and lands him in dullness,” but Untermeyer also claims that at Kreymborg’s best, the poet is “little short of exquisite” (*New Era* 313).

Two years later, however, Untermeyer approaches Kreymborg’s poetics in an entirely different, deprecating way. In the revised edition of his *Modern American Poetry* in 1921—an anthology that would later become a competitor of Kreymborg’s *Lyric America*—he writes, “Often [Kreymborg] overdid his effects, attaining nothing more than a false ingenuousness, a sophisticated simplicity. One sees him frequently trying to strike curious attitudes, tripping over several of his buffooneries and sprawling ingloriously” (Untermeyer, *Modern American Poetry* 269). The “neat disposal” that Untermeyer described in 1919 becomes “sophisticated simplicity” and “harlequin gestures” in 1921 (*Modern American Poetry* 269-270). The substantial difference in critical assessments may suggest a personal controversy with Kreymborg; yet in the same year that Untermeyer wrote his condemnatory assessment of Kreymborg’s *Mushrooms*,

he wrote generous words to Kreymborg praising *Broom*, claiming, “it is so far ahead of any other monthly—physically, intellectually, typographically, aesthetically” (Kreymborg Papers, UVA). If Untermeyer considered the poetic value of *Mushrooms* to lie primarily in its “freshness” or novelty, it is possible that his 1921 assessment is different because the temporal distance between himself and the publication of *Mushrooms* neutralized his perception of Kreymborg’s ‘newness.’ Untermeyer’s conflicting opinions further illustrate that Kreymborg’s early poetry occupied a precarious position between the conservative critics and the supporters and participants of the avant-garde.

In the cadences and rhythms of the poems’ musical qualities and the simple, distinctly American diction, *Mushrooms* influenced William Carlos Williams’ early work. In a ‘Letter to the Editor’ printed in *The Egoist* in 1915, Williams writes of *Mushrooms*, “[it] consists in the skillful use of small words, the artistic effect depending on the musical design and not on the values noted and connoted by the words themselves. One turns at last to one’s desk drawer and thumbs over one’s own verses with something of the feelings of a miser. America has triumphed!” (Williams, *Selected Letters* 33). For Williams, whose early poetry was often derivative of Pound—or featured antiquated lines like, “I will sing a joyous song/To you, my Lady!/On a hill the wind is blowing”—Kreymborg’s verse presented a means of incorporating imagist aesthetics into poetic expression (Williams, *CP I* 24). As Bram Dijkstra argues, “[Kreymborg] undoubtedly helped Williams to get rid of the ‘classic’ poetic diction which afflicted his earliest poems. The series of ‘my townspeople’ poems which Williams wrote around 1914-1915 combine the colloquial exuberance derived from Pound with the colloquial homeliness of

Kreymborg” (Dijkstra 56-57). Experimenting with rhythmic patterns through repetition of such ‘homely’ words, Kreymborg writes in “Vista,” “The sea/ah yes, ah yes indeed/is green and alluring, green and alluring/verily alluring—/from the shore” (Kreymborg, *Mushrooms* 5). The effect of the poem, as Williams suggested, is not necessarily in the meaning of the words, but rather in the auditory effect that the relationship between the words creates. The repetition of unstressed followed by stressed syllables creates an “alluring” effect that imitates the content within the poem. When the line beginning with “verily” interrupts the pattern, it is a gesture that affirms the effect of the previous lines—the stressed syllable at the beginning of the line breaks the rhythm to make the reader conscious of how alluring the lines preceding it were.

In “Summer Sunday,” another poem that probably would have appealed to Williams, Kreymborg describes a horse walking down a road; to defy the seeming simplicity of such a subject, he experiments with language and images to complicate the scene. By waiting to reveal the noun to which the poem’s initial descriptions refer, the poem begins by describing what seems to be a human. He writes, “There came along/down the lane/waddling genially/nodding amiably/like a girl/with her prayer book/on her way to Sunday school...” (Kreymborg, “Summer Sunday,” 1-7). In the first seven lines of the poem, the poetic subject is absent—instead, in its place are a simile and the subject’s actions. In the next lines, a gendered pronoun emerges but the noun that it refers to is still absent: “save/that he led a small cart/quite as inoffensive as himself...and wore a pyramidal straw hat/on his rhomboid head” (8-10, 13-14). As the reader still assumes that the subject is a man, the angular shapes that describe him imitate the lines of a cubist painting. In the sixteenth line of the poem, the speaker reveals that he is

describing an “old thin horse,” yet continues to assign it anthropomorphic qualities when he complains that the horse was “so absent-minded/he didn’t return my bow” (18-19). Through an unconventional means of narrativizing the description, Kreymborg creates a complex scene out of simple material. Like the avant-garde visual artists that challenged the viewer’s perception of an object, Kreymborg’s poem forces the readers to readjust to preconceptions of poetic narrative. As in “Vista,” the artistry of “Summer Sunday” is not necessarily in the connotative meanings of the poetic content; instead, the poem is significant in its experimentation with form and image.

During the time that he was writing his ‘mushrooms,’ Kreymborg began another venture that made a large impact on the American free verse movement. In his discussion of the emergence of the little magazines *Rogue* and *The Soil*, Jay Bochner claims, “in New York a newer cultural rebellion was already stirring, with, for example, Kreymborg’s earlier series of chapbooks, *The Glebe*” (Bochner 50). With the initial publication of *Rogue* in March 1915, Kreymborg became aware of a number of poets with whom he would soon collaborate or publish, including Donald Evans, Mina Loy, Walter Conrad Arensberg, and Wallace Stevens, among others. Though Kreymborg was unfamiliar with many of the contributors, as well as with Allan and Louise Norton, the founders of *Rogue*, his ‘mushrooms’ and his role with *The Glebe* had made his reputation known among the writers associated with the new publication. Seeing Kreymborg as a central figure to the developing free verse experimentation, Allan Norton wrote to him, asking for Kreymborg to submit poetry and to meet with the contributors of the magazine. Though Kreymborg felt at odds with the “languorous speech” of the Harvard alumni within the group, he became friends with Walter Conrad Arensberg, the patron of

Rogue, who in a few months would fund Kreymborg's newest venture, a little magazine called *Others*.

The relationship between Arensberg and Kreymborg is one of opposites drawn together by a mutual appreciation of experimental poetry. Arensberg, a wealthy, Harvard educated art collector with a large studio on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, provided very different circumstances for the initiation of a publication than did Kreymborg's partners in setting up *The Glebe*. Recalling the differences between Arensberg and himself, Kreymborg remembers himself as "reckless and impressible," while Arensberg was "reserved and critical" (*Troubadour* 220). Though they agreed on a motto for the publication, the collaboration would not accomplish much more—from selecting contributions to designing the physical makeup of the magazine, the two editors' disagreements severed the relationship before the first issue ran. Relinquishing any editorial role, Arensberg instead acted as a patron, agreeing to finance the publication for its first year. With financial independence and a "reckless" enthusiasm for his work, Kreymborg created a publishing venue that brought together some of the most innovative work of the period.

The publication's motto—"The old expressions are with us always and there are always others"—indicated an awareness of the conventions from which the publication was to break, while it also asserted the legitimacy of poetry that had been 'othered' by either poetic or historical convention. Though privileged males had generally controlled the production of poetry, *Others* opened a space for experimental women poets to publish; as Churchill points out, "Nearly half the poets it published were women" (Churchill 7). In her biography of Mina Loy, Caroline Burke suggests a connection

between the freedom of poetic expression and women's emancipation from repressive gender conventions; *Others* provided a synthesis between these political and aesthetic implications of free verse. The act of extensively representing women is political in itself—along with an issue devoted to women poets that was guest-edited by Helen Hoyt, the publication featured Marianne Moore, Mina Loy, Djuna Barnes, H.D., Harriet Monroe, Mary Carolyn Davies, Amy Lowell, Kathleen Cannell, and Lola Ridge, among many others. Though *Others* did not transcend racial boundaries, it provided a means for publication that complicated political, class, and gender boundaries.

From the anarchist Adolf Wolff to the impoverished Italian immigrant Emmanuel Carnevali, the contributors to *Others* were as diverse as the poetic expressions contained within the publication. Churchill argues, “Little magazines like *Others* provide a record of the undecided, heterodox character of the avant-garde before it was simultaneously reduced to and aggrandized as ‘Modernism’” (Churchill 8). Though *Others* is, as Churchill suggests, a testament to the avant-garde's heterodoxy, its heterodox character does not need to be seen in opposition to the conceptual formation of Modernism as a concerted movement. Any term that proposes to define a movement will necessarily be a ‘reduction,’ insufficient in articulating the diversity that the word proposes to represent. But rather than valuing *Others* for providing documentation of the avant-garde before the concept of ‘Modernism,’ the publication may be more usefully considered in its influence over the definition of the aggrandized term in question. In providing a space for ‘other-ed’ people to publish, the magazine incorporated figures into a literary narrative that would have otherwise excluded them.

Along with the serialized issues, Kreymborg published *Others* anthologies each year from 1916-1919. As Christopher MacGowan argues, “the act of anthologizing contemporary poetry...[makes] the implicit or explicit claim that this is the major poetry of the moment and for the future, and that these are the poets who will write it” (MacGowan 296). By including poetry of “heterodox character” into his anthologies, Kreymborg was implicitly arguing that the movement should be defined by its catholicity of experimental expression. Along with presenting the work of politically and socially marginalized poets, *Others* published many emerging poets that had difficulty publishing elsewhere for aesthetic reasons. With poems from Williams, Pound, Eliot, Stevens, Moore, Sandburg, and H.D., the issues and anthologies of *Others* resemble contemporary anthologies that have the advantage of appraising the movement from nearly a century’s distance. Kreymborg’s significant impact as an editor, and his role in little magazines, is still generally his most recognized achievement.

Along with his interest in experimental poetry, Kreymborg discovered experimental theater around 1915 and would maintain an interest in drama for the remainder of his life. The visual artist William Zorach told Kreymborg about the Provincetown Players, a group of writers and artists that had initially performed experimental work in Provincetown, Massachusetts, but then relocated to Greenwich Village. After attending a rehearsal of a Eugene O’Neill play (probably *Bound East for Cardiff*—on the second bill of plays in 1916), Kreymborg, as he remembers in *Troubadour*, was “thrilled to the hypothesis that at last something was happening in the theatre...Here was what he had been hoping for in the theatre: a creative group, putting

on its own plays and learning the entire profession of stagecraft” (*Troubadour* 306-307). Yet while he admired the work of the Players, Kreymborg felt that they were focused too narrowly on naturalism and would not encourage the sort of plays that he was writing. On the advice of Zorach, Kreymborg submitted *Lima Beans* in 1916, only to have it almost unanimously rejected. However, Jack Reed, a member of the Players, threatened to resign if *Lima Beans* was not accepted, so the group allowed Kreymborg to produce it as long as he provided his own cast. To fill the three parts, he recruited Mina Loy and William Carlos Williams for the lead roles, and Zorach—who designed the set—to play the third. Performed on the same bill as O’Neill’s *Before Breakfast* and Neith Boyce’s *Two Sons* in December of 1916, Kreymborg recalls that *Lima Beans* was an overwhelming success, prompting sixteen curtain calls and an “unheard of pandemonium” (*Troubadour* 311). Yet despite the initial success of *Lima Beans*, Kreymborg’s work highlighted a paradox in the attitude of the Players: though they were encouraging toward new playwrights, they were only amenable to certain forms of experimentation. Drawing on this distinction between experimentalism and realism within the early work of the Provincetown Players, Mardi Valgemaie argues, “the original Provincetown Players tended to lean toward realism,” and her discussion suggests that O’Neill was more successful within the group because, “Unlike Kreymborg’s experimental early work, O’Neill’s first plays tend to be realistic” (Valgemaie 20, 23). Though O’Neill’s early work had experimental elements, its realistic qualities may explain his eventual crossover success to Broadway—a success that Kreymborg’s plays would never find.

Like Kreymborg's *Lima Beans*, O'Neill's *Before Breakfast* is centered around a domestic marital dispute. Yet in O'Neill's play, the dispute is not so much dialogic as it is a wife's tirade against her husband. Edna Kenton, a member of the Executive Committee of the Players, recalls that O'Neill conceived of the play as a challenge to audience expectations; he remarked to her about *Before Breakfast*, "I wonder how long an audience will stand for monologue" (Kenton 44). Innovative in its extended use of such monologue as well as its simplistic staging, *Before Breakfast* features solely the wife on stage, excepting an instance when the husband's hand is seen to receive a cup of water. The sparseness of the set is similar to that of *Lima Beans*, but as Arthur Feinsod suggests, O'Neill's work is not as aesthetically concentrated as Kreymborg's. Feinsod reports, "*Before Breakfast* did not simplify all aspects of the *mise-en-scene*...the stage directions for *Before Breakfast* ask for all the paraphernalia of a realistic kitchen setting" (Feinsod 119). Conversely, Kreymborg's play does simplify these aspects by calling for imaginative rather than realistic props; the stage directions read, "This question of concrete paraphernalia, and the action consequent thereupon, might of course be left entirely to the imagination of the beholder" (*Lima Beans* 43). In retaining conventional elements of the stage, O'Neill's work remains consistent with the Provincetown aesthetic. For Kreymborg and other writers focused on non-realistic forms of expression—including pantomime and puppetry—opportunities within the Provincetown Players were limited.

As a pantomime play, *Lima Beans* features staccato dialogue that imitates the musical form indicated by the play's subtitle, "A Scherzo-Play." Attempting to apply principles of verse to the stage, Kreymborg writes repetitious, lyrical lines that propel the

dialogue in a musical manner and contrast the short, declarative sentences that imitate musical counterpoint. Lines like, “I got cauliflower/I got red beets/I got onions/I got lima beans” provide lyrical contrast to quick, fragmented exchanges such as:

She—’Twas a day?
 He—For a hot sweating donkey
 She—A donkey?
 He—A mule!
 She—My poor, dear, poor spouse
 He—No, no, my good mouse. (*Lima Beans* 46)

Through acting in the play, Williams became interested in Kreymborg’s application of modernist poetics to traditional verse drama. As Williams recalls in his *Autobiography*, “I too wanted to have a play on that stage...I wrote my first small playlet in verse called *The Old Apple Tree*” (*Autobiography* 139-140). It is impossible to compare *The Old Apple Tree* with Kreymborg’s work, however, because Kreymborg lost the only copy of the play; an offense for which, as Williams claims, “from that time on Kreymborg and I didn’t get on so well” (*Autobiography* 140).

The theme of marriage in *Lima Beans* is treated far more whimsically and comically than in O’Neill’s *Before Breakfast*, which ends with the husband’s offstage suicide. While O’Neill’s play deals with the confining nature of a marriage that is forced due to pregnancy, Kreymborg’s play provides, as his stage directions suggest, “an inoffensive parody” on the monotonous conventions of marriage and domestic life (*Lima Beans* 43). When the nameless wife in *Lima Beans* chooses to make string beans rather than lima beans for her husband (also nameless), the rupture of a simple marital routine thrusts the couple into a ridiculous argument that satirizes typical marital disputes. The wife points out, “We had [lima beans] all the way since we were married,” telling her husband that she changed beans because, “I thought you’d have to have a change” (*Lima*

Beans 49). Underlying the explicit content about the rituals of marriage and domesticity is a sexual tension between the two characters made evident as the string bean is masculinized and the lima bean is feminized. In a passage that contrasts the two beans in terms of gender polarities, the husband describes the lima bean as “that soft, soothing/succulent, caressing/creamy, persuasively serene/my buttery entity,” whereas he calls the string bean an “elongated, cadaverous/throat-scratching, greenish/caterpillar...a parochial/menial pleb” (*Lima Beans* 49-50). The husband rejects the string beans on one level because it breaks the couple’s sexual ritual by presenting an aberration from the intercourse that they have had thus far. On a more psychological level, the husband seems to reject the phallic appearance of the string beans because they challenge his heterosexuality, and in order to assure and assert his masculinity, he exclaims, “this domicile [is] dedicated, consecrated, immortalized in the name of Hymen!” (*Lima Beans* 51). The husband’s appeal to Hymen is an attempt to protect the ritual of marriage by elevating the conventional sexual routine to a sacred status by which their home is “immortalized.” The wife’s disruption of the routine—whether seen in terms of perversion, homosexuality, or infidelity—leads the husband to repeatedly call her a “traitress!” (*Lima Beans* 52).

In the concluding scenes the husband is willing to accept the change of menu but does not articulate the symbolic significance of the beans, saying to his wife, “Will you—I want to—won’t you...” (*Lima Beans* 55). As the husband points toward the audience and breaks the fourth wall, he indicates that he is aware of public intrusion into the private domestic space in which he can comfortably discuss sex. Instead, the couple is forced to whisper and the implied sexual content remains ambiguous. With the

suggestion of intercourse at the end of the play—represented by the “mock solemnity” with which the wife hands her husband the bowl of lima beans—the curtain on the stage quivers and “comes capering down” upon the couple (*Lima Beans* 58). Despite the couple’s desire to finish the play, the conscious curtain, which “cannot see—or understand,” forces the couple’s romantic advances into privacy. Their sexual tensions may also serve as an allegory about the resistance to embracing change—an important motif throughout much Modernist work. Though the husband initially rejects the proposed change, he forgives his wife and opens himself to the possibilities of the new experience, an appropriate parallel for an avant-garde play that forces audiences to confront the distinction between convention and experimentation.

The Provincetown Players’ reluctance to accept the formal and thematic elements of *Lima Beans* confirmed Kreymborg’s view that they were limited in their acceptance of certain dramatic forms. In his critical study of Jig Cook, one of the co-founders of the Players, Robert Károly Sarlós agrees with Kreymborg’s conclusion and argues, “The Provincetowners did not prove equally hospitable to all recruits; their laboratory emphasized content over form too strongly” (Sarlós 88). With Kreymborg’s focus on music and poetry as the organizing principle of the dialogue in his plays, his work stood at odds with the Players’ typical productions, and the second manuscript he submitted, *Manikin and Minikin*, was also initially rejected. He recalls in *Troubadour* that he felt like an outsider in the group, writing that although he “was elected a member of the Provincetown group...he did not feel at home in this new environment...and his own love of experiment, seeking more room for poetry in the theatre, was not seriously encouraged” (*Troubadour* 312). Because Kreymborg felt that the Provincetown Players

were not “sufficiently daring and elastic,” he approached George Cram Cook—one of the founders of the group—about creating a bill of poetic plays that Kreymborg would fund himself as an impresario. During the same period, Kreymborg had been editing *Others* with Williams and wrote to him proposing a plan to work alongside the Provincetown Players while also suggesting that those figures associated with *Others* create a separate means of producing their plays. In an unpublished letter to Williams in 1916, Kreymborg suggests, “We must collect all our plays—independently of Provincetowns—Stevens, you, Cannell, Johns, Bogie, etc.—submit them, and at the same time plan among ourselves, as well as with them as to ways and means of production, publication, etc.” (Williams Papers, Buffalo). Though Kreymborg hoped to have the *Others* plays performed with the Provincetown Players, he anticipated that they would be rejected, and suspected that the *Others* contributors would have to find their own means of production and publication. The result was the Other Players Bill in 1918, which served as a compromise between the two options, and which was a result, as Sarlós argues, “of the paradoxical attitude that reigned at The Playwright’s Theatre” (Sarlós 88). The bill consisted of Kreymborg’s *Manikin and Minikin* and *Jack’s House*, Rihani’s *Static Dances*, and Edna St. Vincent Millay’s *Two Slatterns and a King*.

In *Manikin and Minikin*, Kreymborg uses inanimate marionettes to explore the limitations of poetic language in expressing human emotions. The play features two dolls that a maid has placed facing away from one another. The female doll (Minikin), questions the certainty of the male’s (Manikin) love for her, speculating that he loves the maid because of her animate qualities. Between the dolls, love is treated as a logical emotion, a mere product of “contrast and deduction” (*Manikin and Minikin* 99). The

tension between the affection of inanimate objects and the emotion of animate life becomes apparent when Manikin says, “Words were never given to man/to phrase such a one as you are/inanimate symbols/can never embrace, embody, hold/the animate dream that you are” (*Manikin and Minikin* 96). As proof that Manikin does not love the maid, he argues that he prefers the dolls’ immutable circumstances to the change that humans endure; he says, “The life of an animate/is a procession of deaths...the life of an inanimate/is as serenely enduring/as all still things are” (*Manikin and Minikin* 98). Yet although Manikin suggests that human emotions are subject to constant change and marionettes’ emotions are consistent, the play ends ironically with Manikin refusing to reassure Minikin of his love, suggesting the fluidity of his own emotions. In Manikin’s inability to affirm the value of a fixed, stagnant existence, the play ultimately argues—like “Lima Beans”—for the importance of resisting convention and embracing change. The unconventional form of the play also suggests this. The rapid, staccato dialogue matches the metronome of the clock that sits between the two dolls, and the repetition of phrases between the characters functions as musical counterpoint. At a moment when Manikin attempts to persuade Minikin of his love for her, the dialogue shifts to a form in which Minikin’s single syllable responses act like a bass note that ends the musical phrase:

He—Will you listen to me?

She—No!

He—Will you listen to me?

She—No.

He—Will you listen to me?

She—Yes.

He—I love you—

She—No!

He—I’ve always loved you

She—No. (92)

Though little is conveyed in the exchange, the poetic qualities propel the dialogue and draw attention to the rhythms and cadences of language.

The four-day bill featuring *Manikin and Minikin* ran with success at the Provincetown Players' theater on MacDougal Street in Greenwich Village, and Kreymborg recalls his surprise at the financial success of the show, saying that the company was "torn with delirious joys" because they had "earned several hundred dollars above the outlay" (*Troubadour* 251). Rather than splitting the money between the members of the company, however, the Other Players decided to take the bill to The Bramhall Playhouse, a more conservative theater uptown. The show was so poorly attended that in the course of a week, the company had lost all of the profits it had made in the Village. The move uptown ended the Other Players, as it would the Provincetown Players three years later (Sarlós 89). Though Kreymborg's failed attempt to provide a larger audience for the Other Players mirrors his lack of commercial success throughout his life, his efforts with the company are important because they challenged the Provincetown Players to become more inclusive in the experimental work that they accepted and produced. It also furthered the potential of the experimental stage; as Brenda Murphy argues, "the Other Players were an important artistic force. The group served as a focal point for other artists who were interested in creating experimental theatre, both inside and outside the Provincetown Players" (Murphy 115).

Despite failing to achieve success in the commercial New York theatre scene, the importance of Kreymborg's activity within smaller theaters was recognized by many critics and contemporary artists and literary figures. Pointing toward this recognition, Valgemaë concludes, "One does not, of course, have to agree with Waldo Frank that

Kreymborg has more claim to be called a founder of the modern American theatre than Eugene O'Neill. Nevertheless, Kreymborg deserves to be recognized as an imaginative formal innovator" (Valgema 23). With his growing reputation as a dramatist, Kreymborg formed his own troupe in 1917 called The Poem-Mimes, which traveled and performed his work across the United States. A program announcing the first Poem-Mimes tour reads, "Engagements have been scheduled for little theaters, colleges, clubs, and private houses. Soon an intimate acquaintance will be formed with Kreymborgian balloons and ragpickers...and the rest of the dramatic-poetic figures of which this young American is so rich a possessor and so luscious a spend-thrift" (*Poetry Archives*). In a 1918 article in *Poetry* discussing poetic drama and the 'little theater movement' in the United States, Harriet Monroe begins by describing one of the Poem-Mimes' performances in St. Louis, asserting that Kreymborg is "a poetic and interpretive playwright of original and authentic power, a claimant for wide recognition on the American stage" (Monroe, "Little Theatres" 201).

Though poetic drama would fail to catch on with commercial audiences in these years, Kreymborg became a central figure within the 'little theater movement' between 1916 and 1920, and his plays were seen as innovative in their attempt to apply the principles of free verse to the stage. As Heywood Brown observed in the *New York Tribune* in 1918, "The Other Players is the latest and most ultramodern of the little theatres...it aims at the synthesis of the arts" (Murphy 114). In writing for the stage, Kreymborg was attempting to apply the principles of free verse in order to release poetic drama from what he saw as its antiquated position. He writes in an unpublished letter to William Carlos Williams from the early 1920s, "Carrying poetry onto the stage is a huge

undertaking, and one that has been mislaid ever since the Elizabethan period” (Dawson Papers, Newberry). Calling upon contemporary poets like Barnes, Stevens, Bodenheim, and Frost to write for the stage, Kreymborg envisioned the free verse movement as a means of reviving poetic drama (Dawson Papers, Newberry). Like *Mushrooms*, which drew from and revised Romantic ideology, Kreymborg’s plays offer a Modernist revision of a conventional form dating back to Greek tragedy.

After six of Kreymborg’s plays were collected into the 1918 volume *Plays for Poem Mimes*, they received positive reception from various critics, and both Lola Ridge and Orrick Johns predicted that Kreymborg would become a major figure in American theater with its publication. In a review from *The Drama* in 1918, Orrick Johns writes, “if I were a Broadway manager the next thing I should do would be to give an adequate season of all of the Kreymborg plays written to date—not because I feel absolutely certain that it would pay (though doubtless it would), but because, by so doing, I should instantly become something more than a Broadway manager” (Johns 416). Though Johns comments upon the artistic merit rather than the commercial possibilities of the plays, he suggests that Kreymborg’s work could bridge the gap between the little theater and commercial theater. Writing in *The Dial* in 1919, Lola Ridge similarly predicts that Kreymborg will become a central figure in American theater, claiming, “Deftly, surely, with his sensitive musician’s fingers, Kreymborg touches those tenuous quivering threads that radiate beneath the compact surface of life... Whether we like him or not, it will soon be obligatory to recognize Kreymborg as an impelling force in the new American drama” (Ridge 29-30). As members of the American avant-garde themselves, Johns and Ridge offer prophecies that are more hopeful than realistic. In a 1921 review in *Poetry*, Laura

Sherry provides a more reserved judgment; describing the division between “Little Theatre” and “Big Theatre,” she claims, “The two theatres cannot be paralleled—they are two different mediums” (Sherry 221). Sherry aligns Kreymborg with the “Little Theatre” and implies that despite his talents as a playwright, crossover success between experimental and commercial stages is unlikely. Despite the hopes of Johns and Ridge, as well as the commercial success of fellow Provincetown writer Eugene O’Neill, Kreymborg never would achieve Broadway success. While he remained skeptical of commercial theater for his entire life, he sought commercial success that would not jeopardize his artistic integrity. His failed efforts at the Bramhall Playhouse placed him, as he recalls in *Troubadour*, in a “state bordering on despair,” and attempting to ease Kreymborg’s disappointment following the dismantling of the Other Players, both Alfred Stieglitz and Albert Gleizes suggested to Kreymborg that his work would be met with more widespread success in Europe (*Troubadour* 252-253). In part driven by such hopes, Kreymborg sailed to Europe in 1921 to visit the expatriate scene in Paris and then move to Rome to edit *Broom* with Harold Loeb.

As he discusses in his autobiography, *The Way it Was*, Loeb had wanted to begin a literary publication but his reputation was as yet “unknown” among the necessary artistic circles. Though he would soon become active in the expatriate scene in Paris (and would later serve as the basis for the character Robert Cohn in Ernest Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises* in 1926), Loeb claims that he needed “an established literary reputation...[to] help the new magazine off the ground” (Loeb 6). After meeting at the Sunwise Turn Bookshop in New York City, an independent bookseller that also hosted

readings, Loeb and Kreymborg became friends based not on likeness of character, Loeb recalls, but instead on a “congruity of taste” (Loeb 7). Due to the inexpensive printing costs in Italy—as well as the more receptive audience abroad—the editors moved to Rome and published the first issue of *Broom* in November 1921. The “congruity of taste” that Loeb perceived in New York, however, was short-lived in Europe: after the fourth issue ran in February 1922, the editing partnership ended, and Loeb continued the publication on his own.

In a way, the opportunity to edit *Broom* with a wealthy patron was for Kreymborg a realization of Williams’ earlier claim that “the best thing that could happen for the good of American poetry in the United States” would be for Kreymborg to receive financial support so he could edit a publication without worrying about its commercial reception. While working on *The Glebe* and *Others*, Kreymborg did not receive a regular paycheck for his editing efforts. Yet with *Broom*, as Kreymborg recalls in *Troubadour*, Loeb promised, “a fairly free hand in editing it at a salary to be determined later,” which ultimately convinced him to join the venture (*Troubadour* 360). Regardless of whether or not Loeb actually promised him final editorial control, Kreymborg seems to have considered Loeb as more of a wealthy patron than a co-editor. In *Troubadour*, he calls Loeb a “young Princetonian,” using Loeb’s Ivy League education—as does Hemingway in *The Sun Also Rises*—for what he sees as a symbol of Loeb’s unearned privilege.

After reading a letter to Kreymborg from Gordon Craig, Loeb discovered that his co-editor thought of him as merely a wealthy patron—an offense that would lead to Kreymborg’s ‘resignation’ soon after. Loeb writes in his autobiography, “In the second letter Craig gave Alfred explicit directions on how to manipulate his wealthy backer...I

was angry because Craig and presumably Kreymborg considered me a ‘wealthy backer.’ But mainly I was hurt that my partner had presented me to a fellow artist as a dullard who had to be wheeled into accepting good material” (Loeb 94). Kreymborg saw *Broom* as an opportunity to “introduce lesser known Americans to European circles,” and it is likely that he did think of Loeb as someone who needed to be manipulated; as he claims in *Troubadour*, “Harold inclined more and more toward Europe and established reputations and Krimmie toward America and the future” (*Troubadour* 286, 301).

Despite assuming editorial control during his time at *Broom*, Kreymborg’s assertion that in the material accepted he was looking “toward...the future” is unsubstantiated by the writing contained within the first four issues that he co-edited. Aside from featuring a number of visual artists, the initial volumes of *Broom* resemble a reiteration of *Others*, comprised by poets like Wallace Stevens, Marianne Moore, John Gould Fletcher, Amy Lowell, Conrad Aiken, and Louis Untermeyer. Though such poets were not commercial or canonical figures by 1921, they also were not examples of the “unknown, path-breaking artist” that Kreymborg’s manifesto for *Broom* declared that the publication would present (Kreymborg, *Broom* 1.1). Loeb evidently felt that *Broom*, while under Kreymborg’s co-editorship, was not fulfilling its potential to publish new writers, and as he claims in *The Way it Was*, “The truth was that little distinguished *Broom* from other experimental magazines” (Loeb 76).

While Loeb would soon cast the magazine, as Jack Selzer writes, “in a more Dadaist light,” the period of *Broom* under Kreymborg’s editorship presents a failed opportunity to take advantage of both his and the publication’s economic freedom (Selzer 126). Unlike the previous little magazines that Kreymborg edited, *Broom* was financially

stable, and the editors could have taken larger risks when choosing its content. His correspondence shows that in the initial stages of planning, Kreymborg had already decided to present what Hans Bak calls a “slightly older generation” of Modernists, such as Sherwood Anderson and Gertrude Stein (Bak 188). When soliciting for submissions in 1921, he wrote in an unpublished letter to Sherwood Anderson, “I want as much as you can spare without committing financial suicide. And we want especially to us something of yours in the maiden issue” (Anderson Papers, Newberry). Following the success of *Winesburg, Ohio* in 1919 and *Poor White* in 1920, Anderson was hardly a “lesser known American” at the time of his publication in *Broom* in 1921. At age forty-five, he received the first *Dial* Award in 1921, which granted its recipient two thousand dollars. The work that Kreymborg was publishing was still important, as it presented the work of well-known experimental artists who still had difficulty getting published (Gertrude Stein, for example); but his time at *Broom* marks the beginning of his transition toward becoming a more conservative literary figure—a writer and editor who belonged with the “slightly older generation.”

Due to Kreymborg and Loeb’s differing opinions on the direction of the magazine, Kreymborg accepted five hundred dollars from Loeb to buy out of his contract and resign from *Broom*. Upon his resignation, a number of writers indicated that they felt Kreymborg was the more competent of the two editors. In an unpublished letter to Kreymborg in 1921, Stieglitz writes, “That you are no longer associated with Harold L. does not surprise me—as a matter of fact I felt when you left that you could not work together long. You are creative...I feel you’re better off ‘free’” (Kreymborg Papers, UVA). Though Pound’s feelings toward Kreymborg wavered throughout their careers, a

similarly encouraging letter from Pound in 1922 reads, “Never said you were to blame for *Broom*. I think you meant to make a damn good thing of it, and wd. have done so had you been free. Low-ebb too gt. a handicap” (Kreymborg Papers, UVA). And in a letter from Malcolm Cowley to Kenneth Burke on January 23, 1922, Cowley writes, “Just as I always blamed the *Dial*’s shortcomings on Thayer, so I have been blaming those of *Broom* on the richer Jew. I should regret Kreymborg’s demise” (Cowley 110). Despite the skepticism related to Loeb’s capacities as an editor, however, *Broom* would continue to run until 1924. Loeb’s reticent explanation in *Broom* of the editors’ separation suggests that he did not want it to appear that he was breaking with Kreymborg editorially—after all, the publication had only run four issues and still needed Kreymborg’s reputation to attract submissions and subscriptions. Thus, a closing comment by Loeb in the final issue that featured Kreymborg as an editor reads, “We have been forced to accept the resignation of Alfred Kreymborg from BROOM. Ill health and the demands of his own work have necessitated this separation” (*Broom* 1.4). Relinquishing his position at *Broom*—in full health and with five hundred dollars to spend—Kreymborg moved to Rapallo, Italy, to continue his expatriate experience.

The brief period in which Kreymborg lived in Europe provided a substantial amount of the material for his 1925 autobiography, *Troubadour*, which Craig Monk argues took the “first, tentative steps toward defining modernism as a movement; and asserting for this fledgling movement a privileged position within American culture” (Monk 21). As a visitor rather than member of the groups of convening artists in Paris in the 1920s, Kreymborg’s interpretation and recollection of the expatriate experience is

necessarily different from other Modernist figures who inhabited the artistic circles of the Left Bank. Though he was introduced to the literary circles during his visit to Paris in 1921, he never became an active member of “the Crowd,” as Robert McAlmon called it. Passages in *Troubadour* show that Kreymborg was never entirely comfortable during his time in Paris—as he says, “Krimmie’s French was a severe handicap. He must have seemed queer to these Parisians. Every foreigner spoke French of a sort and few Frenchmen ever descended to another language” (*Troubadour* 288). Aside from a language barrier, Kreymborg apparently did not enjoy the company of the congregations of artists—a contrast to the importance that he places upon his time among artists in Grantwood and New York. In an unpublished letter sent to Gertrude Stein from Italy in August of 1921, he wrote, “In Paris we saw too much of Americans and of artists. We don’t know a single high-brow here, and god, the blessing of it” (Kreymborg Papers, UVA). His remarks to Stein—and his time in Paris more generally—represent a tension throughout *Troubadour*, as well as throughout his life: he acknowledges the benefits and support that come from working in a community of artists, yet he also believes, as he suggests in *Troubadour*, that “when [the artist] turns sociable it is usually at the expense of some compromise with his inner being” (*Troubadour* 159).

Though Kreymborg was in close contact with a large number of artists—as Loeb remembers, “his list of acquaintances must have included half the poets of America”—Kreymborg probably uses the term ‘sociable’ to refer to the daylong drinking and late night gatherings from which he generally abstained (Loeb 10). Because Kreymborg was not as ‘sociable’ in this sense as other literary figures who later wrote memoirs and literary histories of the ‘20s, he focuses more on promoting authors in his autobiography

than engaging in gossip or criticism. Craig Monk suggests that Kreymborg's generous treatment of writers in *Troubadour* is an indication that his "modernism was already distinguishing itself by its Catholicism, its heterogeneity" (Monk 39). Rather than merely a catholicity of judgment, however, this consistently generous treatment of modernist figures, and the reluctance to engage in the gossip of their personal lives, may have been an attempt to both sanitize the narrative of Modernism and legitimize the movement to a larger commercial audience. Calling Kreymborg's autobiography a "chaste account," Susan Churchill argues that it "implicitly defends the free verse movement against charges of decadence and perversity" (Churchill 26). While many of the modernists were notorious for their eccentricities, drinking habits, and/or sexual liberties, Kreymborg's account remains consistent with conventional ideas of respectability.

Reading this heterogeneity as a lack of distinctions instead, Waldo Frank writes in a 1925 review in *The Dial*, "Mr. Kreymborg names many names, recounts many events. But of the analyses that establish, of the distinctions that create...this book has few" (Frank 72-73). Frank argues that Kreymborg documents rather than analyzes, which he argues is a weakness because, "A strong world creates: a weak one records" (Frank 74). In his capacity to record, however, Kreymborg was *creating* a reliable narrative history of the movement to which he and Frank belonged. In Marsden Hartley's posthumously published autobiography, *Somehow a Past*, the painter cites *Troubadour* as an authority for the period's history, so reliable that he questions if Kreymborg remembered Hartley more accurately than Hartley can remember himself: "he says I wore gardenias—but I am still doubting it for I was never courageous nor am now, enough to wear flowers in my buttonhole" (Hartley, *Somehow a Past* 72).

Told in the third person, *Troubadour* follows the trajectory of the Horatio Alger myth as applied to the artist: through perseverance and dedication to his craft, “Krimmie,” the son of an immigrant cigar-store owner, rises to international success despite having dropped out of high school and having never held a steady job. With the autobiographical subject effaced, the characters within the text may act as fictional articulations of historical events, in effect, as Jean Starobinski suggests, “glorifying the hero who refuses to speak his own name” (Starobinski 77). By distancing himself from the narrator, Kreymborg is able to write his personal history as belonging to—and being representative of—a larger narrative within American culture. In his discussion of *The Education of Henry Adams*, Thomas R. Smith argues that the use of autobiographical third person “renders [Adams’] life suitable as evidence in the historical argument he wants to make” (Smith 154). Similarly, though Kreymborg would live for another forty-one years after the publication of *Troubadour*, he historicizes himself within a particular cultural moment and uses his own identity as evidence that a concerted movement had taken shape. In effect, the autobiographical content within *Troubadour* solidifies Kreymborg’s position within the modernist movement while at the same time constructing the narrative of that very movement. By narrativizing his experience, Kreymborg seeks to, in Michel Foucault’s terms, “designate and name it, to judge it, and, finally, to know it in the form of truth” (Foucault, “Discourse on the West” 418). This process of objectivizing his experience allows for readers to assess Kreymborg’s central role in modernism as being an historical truth rather than a self-proclaimed one. As the first autobiography to incorporate a narrative of modernism, *Troubadour* anticipated many later accounts that obscured the distinction between literary and personal history.

Reprinted in 1957 by Sagamore Press, *Troubadour* was able to find new audiences alongside the later expatriate autobiographies more than thirty years after its original publication.

With the contentious debates among figures and groups within Modernism, writers like Gertrude Stein, Robert McAlmon, and Ernest Hemingway use their autobiographies largely as legitimizations of their own writing and censure of others'. McAlmon's *Being Geniuses Together*, published in 1938, provides a more intimate and severely critical depiction of the expatriate figures than *Troubadour* does, but the social interactions that provided him with the intimate material for his memoirs may have come at the cost of what Kreymborg feared: as Sylvia Beach claims in her memoir, "Bob was so busy sharing his interesting ideas with his friends or listening attentively and with sympathy to their stories of frustration that he neglected his craft, which was supposed to be writing" (Beach 25). While Beach's comments are useful in recognizing a Left Bank atmosphere that could be distracting to one's profession, she neglects to mention McAlmon's contributions as the founder and editor of *Contact Editions*, which published H.D., Hemingway, Loy, Stein, Ford Madox Ford, and Williams, among others, and which probably helped McAlmon develop the opinionated and discerning editorial judgments that are reflected in his literary history. Though in *Our Singing Strength* (1929) Kreymborg would eventually become more critical of some of his contemporaries, the more neutral position of *Troubadour* demonstrates an inclusiveness and catholicity of judgment. Indeed, heterogeneity was necessary for Kreymborg's role in promoting figures who remained marginalized at the time of *Troubadour*'s publication in 1925. Writing thirteen years later, however, McAlmon was evaluating—and in many cases,

attempting to downplay—reputations that had already begun to establish. Throughout the text, McAlmon does not so much defend his own work and reputation as challenge those of others. In writing about Stein, he attempts to reveal an insecurity in her self-professed authoritative position, saying, “I left thinking that one could become fond of Gertrude Stein if she would quit being the oracle and pontificating, and if she would descend from the throne chair and not grow panicky any time someone doubted her statements” (McAlmon 205-206). Similarly, he seeks to undermine Hemingway’s reputation as a hardened, bullfight aficionado by claiming, “I suspect that [Hemingway’s] need to love the art of bullfighting came from Gertrude Stein’s praise of it, as well as from his belief in the value of ‘self-hardening’” (McAlmon 161). Whereas Kreymborg seeks to construct a narrative of Modernism grounded in camaraderie and complicity among the movement’s practitioners, McAlmon attempts to challenge the emerging perceptions of other writers, in effect suggesting that despite the gestures of sociability, modernists must ultimately distinguish themselves through critical estimations of their peers. In an explicit example that illustrates this distinction, McAlmon deprecatingly describes Kreymborg and the “*Broom* outfit” by seizing their collectivity as a point of criticism; he writes, “How that little group of pilgrim expatriates loved each other!” (McAlmon 167).

Like McAlmon, Hemingway provides a number of anecdotes in *A Moveable Feast* that serve to challenge the popular conception of expatriate writers—from describing the petty nature of Stein’s quarrels, to presenting a portrait of a desperate Scott Fitzgerald (a portrait similar to Fitzgerald’s own candid autobiographical story, *The Crackup*). Posthumously published in 1964, Hemingway’s autobiography features romanticizing gestures that play up his ‘hardened’ persona, describing hunger as a useful

trait for writers and creating an idealized vision of Parisian cafes and social life. A major difference between Hemingway and McAlmon's accounts, however, is the attention to the craft of writing in *A Moveable Feast*. Whereas McAlmon judges the works of his contemporaries throughout his autobiography, he rarely discusses his own writing. Hemingway describes theories and methods related to his writing, and provides the reader with insight into the craft involved in his work. Similarly, Kreymborg attempts throughout *Troubadour* to illuminate theories regarding both his writing and modernist art more generally. In doing so, Hemingway and Kreymborg resist the Romantic notion of the divinely endowed 'poet prophet' by providing a humanizing perspective and interiority into the mechanics of their craft. As the work of many avant-garde modern writers was discredited as being nonsensical, the discussion of the principles underlying the texts is an important attempt to legitimize and provide insight into experimental forms of expression. For Kreymborg, writing in 1925, this discussion was significant because it argued that an interdisciplinary exchange of ideas existed between modern visual arts, writing, and music—because the theories underlying the various works were connected, it allowed for Kreymborg and his readers to conceptualize the different mediums as belonging to a unified movement. As Hemingway's autobiography came much later, the need to declare and legitimize modernism as a concerted movement was less of an issue.

Another gesture of Modernist autobiography that Monk points out is the tendency toward self-aggrandizement. Monk notes that *Troubadour* is an exception to this tendency; while Kreymborg discusses his various contributions to Modernism and describes some of his writing, he does not indulge in the sort of self-promotion that arguably some Modernist autobiographers do. In Gertrude Stein's *The Autobiography of*

Alice B. Toklas, Stein positions herself as the authoritative figure of Modernism—both in the genius of her own writing, and her influence on other artists and writers. While Kreymborg’s discussion of his important, influential ventures—such as *Glebe* and *Others*—revolves around all of the figures involved, Stein tends to reconstruct events only as they relate to her. As is evident from the autobiography, disapproval of Stein’s work would sever a relationship with her, and she tended to befriend and appreciate only those artists who either appreciated her or recognized her as the authority of Modernism. As Hemingway claims in *A Moveable Feast*, “I cannot remember Gertrude Stein ever speaking well of any writer who had not written favorably about her work or done anything to advance her career” (Hemingway 27). As an editor and reviewer, Kreymborg had helped “advance her career,” which may explain the benign treatment he receives in her autobiography. Aside from publishing Stein in both *Broom* and the later *American Caravan* series, Kreymborg reviewed *Tender Buttons* in *The Morning Telegraph* in 1914. Though it was an unfavorable review that called Stein a “hoax and hoaxtress,” it drew attention to the text and was, as Michael Hoffman notes, one of “only two reviews that have been discovered” of *Tender Buttons* upon its publication (Hoffman 5). In her brief discussion of Kreymborg, Stein remarks that the two had a “bond of union” based on “mutual liking” and a publishing experience with the Grafton Press (Stein 216). Her respect for Kreymborg reveals itself as respect for his appreciation of her work as she writes, “Kreymborg and his wife came to the house frequently...[he] used to read out the sentences...with great gusto” from one of Stein’s unpublished manuscripts that he admired (Stein 216).

In contrast to Stein, Kreymborg's more accommodating position toward the personalities of other writers provides the foundation for the catholicity of his judgments, and shapes the way he describes other writers in *Troubadour*. In a striking example, Kreymborg claims that in his youth, he "had his ribs beaten in by the lusty rataplan of the Menckenesque drum-stick;" though upon meeting Mencken in Europe, he says that "as long as they avoided poetry...[they] moved along as smoothly as a pair of student *Gesellen*" (*Troubadour* 311). Similarly, Conrad Aiken's initial appearance in *Troubadour* is as a "confounded conservative," a free verse opponent who had ridiculed *Others* and Kreymborg's early poetry. Yet by the end of the book, Aiken and Kreymborg develop a close relationship and a mutual respect for each other's work. Though Aiken had initially called Kreymborg's poetry "the poetic paraphrase of the lisp and coo," he would include Kreymborg as one of the thirteen poets in his 1922 anthology, *Modern American Poets* (Lorenz 9). Describing this catholic tendency of Kreymborg's, Loeb writes, "even those whose forms he disapproved of...he had but to meet in order to appreciate" (Loeb 8). The effect was seemingly mutual. In an article from *The Little Review* in 1916, Margaret Anderson writes, "I know another who said to me, when I remarked that I didn't like Alfred Kreymborg's verse, 'Oh, but you would if you knew him'" (Anderson 11).

This ability to appreciate other writers and be appreciated by them probably explains the ease with which Kreymborg was able to transcend the boundary between the avant-garde and the literary establishment. While in most cases Kreymborg was able to maintain his relationships with both conservative and radical figures alike, his shift toward the literary establishment in the mid 1920s inevitably signaled the end of some

relationships. One particularly important relationship that dissolved after the *Others* period was that between Kreymborg and Williams. Describing Kreymborg during the *Others* years, Williams writes in his 1951 *Autobiography*, “the focus of my own enthusiasm was the house occupied by Alfred and Gertrude Kreymborg to which, on every possible occasion, I went madly in my flivver to help with the magazine which had saved my life as a writer” (*Autobiography* 135). Williams has little to say of Kreymborg’s later career in the *Autobiography*, however, and in a chapter that lists the death or decline of the majority of Modernist figures, Williams uses Kreymborg’s election to the “Institute of Arts and Letters” in 1949 to represent the death of Kreymborg’s creativity—an ironic gesture, since Williams himself was elected to the Academy of Arts and Letters a year later (*Autobiography* 319).

An early member of the Academy (elected in 1925) and one of the preeminent literary critics in the United States, Van Wyck Brooks befriended Kreymborg in the early 1920s and, along with Louis Untermeyer and William Rose Benet, successfully proposed Kreymborg’s election to the Institute in 1949. In his 1957 autobiography, *Days of the Phoenix: The Nineteen Twenties I Remember*, Brooks argues that the consciousness of a ‘movement’ in the twenties would become solidified when, “thirty years later, in literary circles, the decade of the twenties was to look rather like an epoch in the mind of the young” (Brooks 5). Brooks situates the emerging “consciousness” of modernism in the 1950s, as he was writing his own history of the period, and overlooks that Kreymborg had attempted to do the same thing over twenty-five years earlier. Writing amid a stifling literary atmosphere in which Americans were neglected for conventional European artists, Kreymborg demonstrates the value of American work by showing its approval in

European circles; as Monk claims, “Kreymborg’s narrative makes the argument that Americans are blossoming amid a receptive audience abroad” (Monk 30). Like Kreymborg, Brooks cites the emergence of little magazines and little theaters as the principle means by which “good writers” could find publishing venues—unlike Kreymborg, however, Brooks does not conceptualize how these individual movements were formative ventures that helped constitute the larger, encompassing movement of modernism.

In Brooks’ autobiography, Paul Rosenfeld is the figure who plays the critical role that Kreymborg also served—Brooks says of Rosenfeld, “[he] saw in his own time what others were to see twenty years later” (Brooks 9). Despite Kreymborg’s affinities with Rosenfeld, Brooks only briefly mentions Kreymborg—not in helping to promote figures in his early ventures, but instead in relation to *The American Caravan* anthologies. Brooks praises Rosenfeld’s critical judgments, saying, “Paul found these talents at home, and few of his swans turned out to be geese” (Brooks 9). Brooks’ comments indirectly relate to Kreymborg because Rosenfeld found such a ‘swan’ in Kreymborg in the 1920s: although he did not include Kreymborg in his 1924 *Port of New York*, he did dedicate a chapter to him in his next book, *Men Seen*, in 1925, along with figures like James Joyce, Marcel Proust, E.E. Cummings, and F. Scott Fitzgerald.

In *Men Seen*, Rosenfeld describes Kreymborg as a poet extending the romantic tradition to meet experimental new forms. Though in the 1920s Kreymborg had not yet voiced his admiration for poets like Shelley and Swinburne, Rosenfeld astutely recognizes, “there never was...any sentiment of conflict between the moderns and the classics in the mind of [Kreymborg]” (Rosenfeld 139). He finds value in the

universal experience that Kreymborg expresses through common objects and minor occurrences. While some critics dismissed Kreymborg's poetry as being trivial, Rosenfeld sees within it a concerted artistry; he claims that Kreymborg's poetry, "constantly refers one to the human immensities against which the feelings, experiences, are thrown" (Rosenfeld 144).

With mutual respect for each other's work, during the same year that Rosenfeld published *Men Seen* and Kreymborg published *Troubadour*, they decided to begin a project that eventually resulted in *The American Caravan* in 1927. Though they had been associated with the same groups in New York before Kreymborg left the United States in 1921, they did not solidify their relationship until Kreymborg's return from Italy in 1924. Writing about Rosenfeld and Brooks in *Troubadour*, Kreymborg says, "they were the two profoundest critical influences in Krimmie's life, giving him many an unconscious hand of guidance" (*Troubadour* 285). Kreymborg was also an important influence on Rosenfeld though; Kreymborg and Rosenfeld's correspondence shows that Rosenfeld looked to Kreymborg for advice on young, emerging poets.

From 1927 to 1936, Kreymborg, Rosenfeld, Brooks (for one anthology) and Lewis Mumford would publish five influential *American Caravan* anthologies: as Mumford foresaw in a 1927 letter to Brooks, "we have planted something that may well grow, and become, like the Russian yearbooks, a definite influence" (Mumford 44). The five *Caravan* volumes, appearing in 1927, 1928, 1929, 1931, and 1936 were recognized, as Mumford wrote in a 1928 letter to Brooks, as an "institution" that moved "along on its own momentum" (Mumford 52). Though the existing correspondence does not reveal

the specific duties of each of the editors, Mumford indicates that Kreymborg played an essential role in the operation, writing to Brooks in 1927, “Alfred and Paul and I have been busy, like the seven maids with seven mops...One of us, probably Kreymborg, is going to have the devilment of tending to the more grubby details” (Mumford 43, 49). Aside from publishing well-known experimental artists like Stein, Hemingway, and O’Neill, the volumes also promoted the work of emerging artists—as Mumford wrote to Brooks, the editors of the *Caravan* “turned up a lot of young people...and have given them heart” (Mumford 43). One such figure, who would go on to a very successful writing career, was Robert Penn Warren. Discussing Warren in *Our Singing Strength* in 1934, Alfred Kreymborg writes, “So far as I know, Robert Penn Warren has not yet published a book...Though he is still another metaphysician in a land now dense with such thinkers, Warren has a grip on the soil and sounds less bookish than his fellows” (566). Appearing in the first (1927), second (1928), and fourth (1931) *American Caravan* anthologies, Warren would not publish his first book of poems, *Thirty-Six Poems*, until 1935, and his first book of fiction, *Night Rider*, until 1939.

In a 1979 interview with William Ferris, Warren indicates that the *American Caravan* was his original inspiration to write prose. He recalls, “My last year at Oxford...I got a cable from Paul Rosenfeld...asking me to do a novelette for the *Caravan*. I had never thought of doing such a thing. And I said, ‘Well, why not? Try’... I sent it in, and it got good press. It was the first fiction I ever wrote. I was hooked” (Ferris 169). Though Warren had published poetry in the first and second *Caravan* anthologies,

he was hesitant to submit prose, as he was still insecure in his ability to write fiction.²

The positive reception of his novelette, *Prime Leaf*, which appeared first in the *American Caravan IV*, was the impetus for what would later lead to twelve books of fiction, the Pulitzer Prize for the Novel in 1947, and the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry first in 1958 and then again in 1979.

Publishing two sections of Hart Crane's *The Bridge*, the *American Caravan* also helped initiate Crane's short, but influential career. In his biography of Hart Crane, Paul Mariani indicates that the *American Caravan* was one of the first publications to accept a section of Crane's *The Bridge* (Mariani 260). "Ave Maria," the first section of *The Bridge*, was published in the first *Caravan*, and "The River," a section of "Powhatan's Daughter" (which is the second section of *The Bridge*), appeared in the second *Caravan*. Though Crane was particularly pleased that a section of his poem was appearing in Eliot's *Criterion*, the acceptance of his work to the *Caravan* placed him in contact with the New York literary establishment and allowed for his work to circulate more widely within America than did Eliot's magazine. In a letter that Crane wrote to his family, he describes his introduction to the literary establishment in the form of a party thrown for the contributors of the *American Caravan*; he explains, "When I was last in NY the owners of the Macaulay Co gave a large party to all the contributors up in a huge but unbelievably vulgarly furnished and expensive apartment on West End Avenue. There seemed to be everybody there I'd every heard of. Enormous quantities of wine, cocktails, and highballs were served...It would take me ages to tell all the amusing things that

² A letter in 1930 to Allen Tate reveals this insecurity: Warren writes, "The story for the *Caravan* is still unfinished...I haven't the least idea whether it is any good or not...I haven't much faith, anyway, in my ability as a writer of fiction" (Warren 185).

happen at such parties” (Crane 533). Kreymborg’s career had taken him from a shack in Grantwood to highballs on West End Avenue. Always remaining a proponent of experimental arts, however, Kreymborg would only experience the glamour of the literary institution in glimpses through his contacts; he would never become a commercially successful writer, and he would remain plagued by economic concerns for the remainder of his life.

Much earlier than the *Caravan* project, Kreymborg had shown an interest in Crane’s work and had encouraged the young poet. Crane biographer John Unterecker writes, “though Crane was never to become close to Alfred Kreymborg, Kreymborg did look at Crane’s work with a view toward publishing some of it in *Others*...At the end of [Crane’s] first week in New York he reported to his grandmother that William Carlos Williams and Kreymborg had accepted for publication one of his lyrics” (Unterecker 60, 72). Due to the difficult financial situation of *Others*, Crane’s work was never to actually appear in the magazine. Yet Kreymborg and Williams’ admiration of Crane’s earliest work helped him maintain confidence in a literary career; as Unterecker argues, Crane’s father changed his attitude toward his son’s occupation as a writer, “as a consequence of the success Harold seemed to be having. Though he was never to be published in *Others*, for months Crane was convinced he would be” (Unterecker 72). His first publication, a poem titled “C 33,” would instead appear in 1916 in *Bruno’s Weekly* (Spears 10).

Aside from Warren and Crane, Kreymborg and the *Caravan* project helped a number of other artists in various capacities. The publication of Yvor Winters’ work in the first, second, and third *Caravan* anthologies provided him with early recognition, and helped begin his career as a literary critic. Though Winters had published books of

poems in 1921, 1922, and 1927, he had not published book-length criticism, and had not yet shifted to the more conservative poetics for which he is best known. Thomas Parkinson argues that the *American Caravan* helped launch Winters' career as an influential critic, writing, "[Winters] began writing his first extended critical prose since his master's thesis at Colorado in 1925...The essay was published in *American Caravan* for 1929 under the title 'The Extension and Reintegration of the Human Spirit, Through the Poetry Mainly French and American Since Poe and Baudelaire'" (Parkinson 132). During a time when lengthy criticism was difficult to publish in literary journals, the essay published by the *Caravan* eventually led to the first of many of Winters' books of criticism, *Primitivism and Decadence: A Study of Experimental Poetry* (1937). Similarly, though Kay Boyle's work had appeared in various magazines—including *Broom*, *Poetry*, *This Quarter*, and *Forum*—her work would not appear in book-length form until 1929, a year after her publication in the second *American Caravan*. As a well-known and prestigious place to publish (Richard Elman would remember it forty years later as a "famous annual"), the *Caravan* was a significant step for writers who had not yet gotten publishing contracts for their first book. Though many of the figures within the *Caravan* had access to publish in little magazines, being published in the annual gave them much more publicity. Articulating this point, Moron Zabel describes the advantages of the widely-circulated *Caravan* for a poet like William Carlos Williams, writing in a 1931 review in *Poetry*, "A fairly patriarchal figure like Williams is still inaccessible and, outside the circulation of the unbought quarterlies, read" (Zabel 157). The *American Caravan* series was extensively reviewed and, as it was supported by the Literary Guild of America, it was widely distributed across the United States.

In the attempt to bring attention to, as Mumford says, “some good solitaires stranded in Virginia or New Mexico or Iowa,” the *Caravan* also launched the career of Stanley Burnshaw, the poet, publisher, friend and later biographer of Robert Frost (Mumford 43). Before his poems appeared in the first *Caravan*, Burnshaw’s work had only been published in minor magazines like *The Midland* and *Palms*. In Burnshaw’s obituary in the *New York Times*, Douglas Martin describes the poet’s expansive career by marking its beginnings with publication in the *Caravan*, writing, “His own creative career spanned more than 70 years: five of his poems were published in 1927 in *The American Caravan: A Yearbook of American Literature*...and he published his final book, a poetry anthology, in 2002” (Martin, “Stanley Burnshaw”). A 1927 review by Gorham Munson in the *Saturday Review of Literature* accurately summarizes the venture: “The happy idea of the Editors of ‘The American Caravan’ was to work out on a large scale this quest for worthy but rejected authors... So the first question that naturally occurs is, have the Editors found new writers of interest? The answer is, yes” (Munson, “On the March” 337). And aside from drawing writers from obscurity, the annuals served as a venue for an assortment of important established writers—among its pages are Jean Toomer, William Faulkner, Allen Tate, Robert McAlmon, E.E. Cummings, Malcolm Cowley, Archibald MacLeish, Robert Frost, Sherwood Anderson, H.D., and William Carlos Williams.

During his time editing the *Caravan* anthologies, Kreymborg also began his own anthology project, *Lyric America*. In his 1990 discussion on the various intentions and functions of poetry anthologies, Robert McDowell argues that Kreymborg’s *An*

Anthology of American Poetry: Lyric America, 1630-1930 (1930) served similar ends as *Troubadour*:

Alfred Kreymborg's *Anthology of American Poetry* (and before that his *Others* anthologies...) first brought together the work of Wallace Stevens, William Carlos Williams, T.S. Eliot, and other leading Modernist poets. Kreymborg intended to establish the credibility and authority of a new generation and represent the open-minded, dynamic energy of American verse. (McDowell 594)

Though McDowell's article focuses mainly on contemporary poetry anthologies, he approvingly cites Kreymborg's claim that the confident critic needs an "essential detachment" when acting as anthologist (McDowell 596). And while McDowell does not explicitly claim that Kreymborg was the ideal anthologist, he ends his article with a description of the necessary qualifications of an anthologist that could be easily applied to Kreymborg; he suggests that anthologists "must buck the current habit of elevating personalities above the work itself...[and] if they are also to be poets, it would be better if they had already established a legitimate track record in editing" (McDowell 608).

Having worked as an editor on *Musical Advance*, *The Glebe*, *Others*, and *Broom*, Kreymborg had the necessary "track record in editing"; the "essential detachment" that he attributed to his catholicity of judgment may not have been as genuine as he asserted, but his willingness to publish radical and conservative poets side by side ensured that he 'elevated' the work above the personalities.

In claiming that Kreymborg's anthology was the first to bring together the work of Stevens, Williams, and Eliot, McDowell overlooks two anthologies that include the three poets' work and predate Kreymborg's *Lyric America*: Harriet Monroe's *The New*

Poetry: An Anthology of Twentieth-Century Verse in English—which was published first in 1917, then revised in 1923 and expanded in 1932—and Louis Untermeyer’s *Modern American Poetry: A Critical Anthology*, which went through five editions from 1919-1932. In 1915, Pound published five hundred copies under the Chiswick Press of *The Catholic Anthology, 1914-1915*, which brought together work from W.B. Yeats, T.S. Eliot, Kreymborg, Edgar Lee Masters, Monroe, Maxwell Bodenheim, Carl Sandburg, and Williams. Yet Kreymborg’s *Others, an Anthology of the New Verse* (1916) was the first anthology to represent a number of important figures, including Stevens, Marianne Moore, and Mina Loy.

The experimental nature of Pound, Kreymborg, and Monroe’s anthologies elicited varying responses. In the October 1916 edition of *The Quarterly Review*, Arthur Waugh reviews the *Catholic Anthology* in order to level an attack on the ‘new’ poetry, rather than the anthology itself: “If the fruits of emancipation are to be recognised in the un-metrical, incoherent banalities of these literary 'Cubists,' the state of Poetry is indeed threatened with anarchy” (Harwood 88). Similarly, a reviewer of Kreymborg’s *Others Anthology* in *The Springfield Republican* in June of 1916 comments on the ‘new verse’ rather than the anthology, claiming, “at present much of the new verse presents unrhythmic jangle to the ear of the untrained reader and kaleidoscopic convulsions of nothingness to his mind” (Newcomb 35). Like Kreymborg’s *Mushrooms*, the experimental anthologies were used as central texts in the debate about free verse. The *Others Anthology* did, however, meet with some positive reception. In a review in *The Nation* in January of 1917, O.W. Firkins writes, “A book the purchase of which I should unhesitatingly recommend to every librarian who includes among his purposes the enlivenment or the enlightenment of

posterity” (Firkins 43). Firkins’ enthusiasm for the *Others Anthology* is usefully compared his review of Monroe’s *The New Poetry: An Anthology of Twentieth Century Verse in English*. Craig Abbott explains, “O.W. Firkins noted a discrepancy between Monroe’s definition of the new poetry in her introduction and the inclusion of poets ‘like Percy MacKaye and Sara Teasdale and Alice Meynell, whose affiliations with the new poetry are either dubious or indistinct.’” A comparison between the two anthologies—as well as the reviews of both—shows that Kreymborg’s *Others Anthology* was committed to specifically representing experimental ‘new’ verse, whereas Monroe’s was more inclusive, and thus less coherent. Aside from the editors’ own editorial decisions, the demands of their publishers probably played a significant role. Kreymborg’s anthology was published by Alfred A. Knopf, a young company founded a year earlier (1915) that was probably more willing to take risks than Monroe’s more commercial publisher, MacMillan. As Abbott recognizes, “Monroe had said that she wanted the anthology to be representative of the new poetry, meaning new in kind. But [Edward] Marsh [of MacMillan] had been thinking about new in time, saying that the anthology should contain ‘the best of all schools so that it fairly represents every poetic effort of the day’” (Abbott 92).

Kreymborg’s *An Anthology of American Poetry: Lyric America* (1930) is among the first of anthologies to place emphasis on experimental Modernist poets within a narrative of American poetry extending back to the colonial era. Conceived as a supplement to his *Our Singing Strength: A History of American Poetry* (1929, 1934), Kreymborg’s anthology is meant to be, as he claims in his Preface, “an effort to view American poetry en masse and to bring enough of that view into a gamut embryonic of

the whole movement” (Kreymborg, *Anthology* xxxviii). Despite Kreymborg’s inclusion of significant early American poets like Anne Bradstreet, William Cullen Bryant, and Edward Taylor, his anthology also presents important emerging writers whose reputations had not yet been established and who had not appeared in either Monroe or Untermeyer’s anthologies. Among the significant differences between Monroe and Kreymborg’s anthologies is Monroe’s omission of the Harlem Renaissance poets. As Conrad Aiken points out in a review of Monroe’s anthology in *The Dial* in 1917, her anthology is “neither old nor new, good nor bad, selective nor comprehensive” (Aiken, “The Monroe Doctrine,” 390). Aiken’s principle criticism is that although the anthology proposes to be comprehensive, as it “aims to embrace all that is typical of the period chosen,” it omits many important English poets. Though Aiken’s review predates the Harlem Renaissance poets, his argument against the claims to her anthology’s comprehensiveness may be applied to Monroe’s later, revised editions, which into the 1930s still omitted the work of the Harlem Renaissance poets. Whereas Langston Hughes, Jean Toomer, Claude McKay, and Countee Cullen all appear in *Lyric America*, none of them appear in Monroe’s *The New Poetry* (1932).

Furthermore, although Monroe’s text proposes an inclusiveness of twentieth century poets, some reviews interpreted the attempt at comprehensiveness as being merely incoherent. In a review of her anthology in *Poetry* in 1918, Kreymborg points out that despite her attempts at inclusivity, Monroe leaves out Moore, Loy, and Donald Evans at the expense of including a number of “mouthing poetasters and rhetoricians of the stamp of Hamlin Garland, William Ellery Leonard, Percy Mackaye, James Oppenheim, Charles Hanson Towne and Louis Untermeyer” (“As Others See Us” 215). At the end of

his review, however, Kreymborg claims that *The New Poetry* is an important volume, suggesting, “even the most derogatory critic has had to admit that *The New Poetry* affords an adequate retrospect of the renaissance of American verse” (“As Others See Us” 222). Like her earlier volumes, in the revised 1932 edition of *The New Poetry*, Monroe includes many important experimental poets whose reputations were now beginning to establish, but she neglects the younger, emerging generation of Modernists. A brief list of the poets excluded from *The New Poetry* that Kreymborg anthologizes in *Lyric America* shows that Kreymborg was early to recognize (and anthologize) the talent of a number of figures who would later have more prominent literary careers: Archibald MacLeish, Malcolm Cowley, Babette Deutsch, Hart Crane, Stanley Kunitz, Dorothy Parker, and Evelyn Scott.

Similarly, a comparison between Kreymborg and Untermeyer’s anthologies reveals a number of important Modernist poets that appear only in *Lyric America*. In a 1932 review in *American Literature* that compares Kreymborg’s anthology to one of Untermeyer’s, Robert E. Spiller grants Untermeyer two pages and Kreymborg two paragraphs, ultimately saying of Kreymborg’s anthology, “The chief value of the collection lies in its representation of the left wing of Modernism” (Spiller 220). In the revised edition of *Modern American Poetry* that appeared in 1932, however, Untermeyer also anthologizes the “left wing of Modernism,” including Archibald MacLeish, Malcolm Cowley, and Langston Hughes for the first time, as well as three poets to whom Kreymborg had paid early critical attention and had himself anthologized a year earlier: Allen Tate, Robert Penn Warren, and Phelps Putnam.

In *Troubadour*, Kreymborg explains that because of Untermeyer's early years as a very conservative critic, he was Kreymborg's "arch antagonist" (*Troubadour* 322). Expanding on why his relationship with Untermeyer was so tense, he writes in *Our Singing Strength* in 1934 that Untermeyer had "dashed off an article on the return of the 'Vers Libertine' and picked on the present author as the most flagrant of reactionaries" (*Our Singing Strength* 487). Kreymborg's comments reflect Untermeyer's distance from the 'left wing' of Modernism, and the inclusion of figures like MacLeish and Cowley in the fifth edition of *Modern American Poetry* suggests that Untermeyer may have included them as a reaction to their increasingly positive critical reception (for example, MacLeish won a Pulitzer Prize in poetry the next year). As Abbott argues, Untermeyer's revisions between editions, "with his gift for phrasing and his *ability to alter his taste to reflect trends*, probably accounted in large part for his anthology's success" (italics mine, Abbott 98).

Untermeyer's anthologies, published by Harcourt, Brace, and Howe, were more commercially successful than *Lyric America* and *The New Poetry*, and as Abbott argues, "*Modern American Poetry*...came to dominate the textbook market" (Abbott 97). It is likely that the commercial concerns of Untermeyer's anthology are in large part the reason for its success. In *Bygones*, his 1965 autobiography, Untermeyer explains that his publisher instructed him to balance "the strange new poets I selected with a representation of the approved 'standards,'" in effect creating a more marketable anthology for both schools and the general reader (*Bygones* 60).

Though *Lyric America* was not as commercially successful as Untermeyer's anthology, it received mostly favorable reviews. An unfavorable review in the *New York*

Times, however, attacked the anthology as being undiscerning; E.L. Walton writes, “Save for offering a rather larger prospectus than usual, more documentary evidence of an early Colonial poetry, a very inclusive list of those writing poetry in America today, this anthology has little reason for existence” (Walton 63). Yet other reviews praised Kreymborg’s discerning editorial ability despite the immense task of creating such a widely encompassing anthology. In the *Saturday Review of Literature*, William Rose Benet writes, “Mr. Kreymborg is to be congratulated on having strictly exercised a balanced personal judgment,” and Horace Gregory of the *New York Evening Post* claims, “his anthology is superior to any recent attempt to gather the entire range of American poetry into a single volume” (Benet 8, Gregory 4).

Following his limited success as an anthologist—a venture that he would continue in ensuing years—Kreymborg returned to his interest in drama and wrote a commercially successful radio play, *The Planets*, which aired in 1938 just months before the premier broadcast of Orson Welles’ *War of the Worlds*. As an anti-war allegory inspired by the events of WWI, *The Planets* features an astrologer who has “lost the world” along with his faith in humanity. Alternating between blank verse, free verse, and balladry, the astronomer meets each of the planets and ultimately confronts the interconnectedness of all things in a universe that is eternal. With immanent wars and chaos, the play ends with the future undecided and the astrologer questioning if he will ever regain humanity. He seeks peace within a chaotic world, and wonders if the “soul has still another soul” (*The Planets* 49). Ironically, one of Kreymborg’s only large commercial successes received almost unanimously negative critical reception. In a 1938 review in *The Saturday Review of Literature*, Louis Untereymer writes, “Perhaps Kreymborg has chosen a subject

beyond his powers...the large concept degenerates into trivialities, and the humor too often runs into the grooves of musical comedy” (“Review of *The Planets*” 16). In an equally negative review in *Poetry*, John Wheelwright writes, “Kreymborg's taste is not so right... music [should] be used to enrich familiar poems which are already rich in trope rather than to conceal thin verse” (Wheelwright 165).

Aside from the explicit political content of the play, the act of writing for the radio has social and political implications in itself. As John Wheelwright claims, “The social implications of broadcasting are as wide and subtle as the waves of the air. To leave a large part of citizens deaf to poetry is politically dangerous” (Wheelwright 164). Radio broadcasting was a way to present poetic works to an audience who ordinarily would not have access to it. Still somewhat associated with avant-garde, and holding leftist political views, Kreymborg probably saw radio broadcasting as a suitable medium through which his experimental work could appeal to a larger commercial audience. At the time of *The Planets* broadcast, Kreymborg had published a number of poems dealing with class and racial inequalities, and he envisioned the need for poetry to appeal to the masses—an anti-modernist position in tension with his experimental aesthetics. This ideology of inclusivity explicitly manifested itself in his earlier 1934 play, *America, America: a mass recital*, which was performed under the auspices of the Federal Theatre Project and documented the hardships of American poverty while arguing that the nation sold “human flesh and misery” so the affluent could maintain its riches (Schechter 91). Avoiding such an explicit political message in order to ensure wider popularity, Kreymborg casts his ideology in *The Planets* in allegorical terms that are easily apparent, but not as antagonistic.

Kreymborg's correspondence following the initial broadcast shows the extent to which *The Planets* was commercially successful. After the play aired on June 6, Kreymborg received a letter from a representative of the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) on August 23 confirming a repeat broadcast of the play to occur on September 12 (Kreymborg Papers, UVA). A July 19, 1938 letter from Herbert Rosen of the Broadcasting Programme Service suggests that the positive reception of *The Planets* in the United States could be globally marketable; he writes, "With great interest we have read the account of the broadcast of your radio-play "The Planets," which was so successful in the United States, and we are sure that this play would be of equal interest to European stations...we should be glad to know if we could be your representatives for the distribution of this, as we specialize in this field, and are in close touch with the broadcasting stations in Europe, Africa, and Asia" (Kreymborg Papers, UVA). Though evidence is unavailable as to whether or not Kreymborg's radio play was broadcast abroad, *The Planets* represents Kreymborg's attempt to transcend the boundary between popular culture and literary culture.

With wide recognition in the United States for his various roles, Kreymborg continued publishing poetry for at least twenty more years—his last published poem is "Warm Sun," appearing in *Poetry* in 1958—and he became an influential and active figure within multiple literary institutions. As President of the Poetry Society for America in the mid-1940s, Kreymborg judged annual contests, aided in grant and fellowship distribution, and helped coordinate membership and recruitment. In 1949, he was inducted into the American Institute of Arts and Letters, where he would apply his

editorial instinct by finding young, emerging artists and providing grant recommendations for them. During his active years in the American Institute of Arts and Letters, Kreymborg continuously submitted recommendations for the Academy's annual prize, as well as for various fellowships. Though many of the figures are now little-recognized or unknown—Alan Kapelner, Charles Salerno, Ben Appel, Lou Adelman—he repeatedly wrote on behalf of May Swenson, and he nominated Gwendolyn Brooks for the Academy's 1955 annual award. Writing to Van Wyck Brooks in 1951, Kreymborg says of Swenson, "I consider her to be one of the outstanding 'finds' in my entire career as a poet and editor" (Kreymborg Papers, American Academy Archives). Though Swenson had appeared in one of the *New Directions* anthologies, she did not publish her first full-length book until 1958. Seeking to help Swenson achieve some degree of financial independence so that she could concentrate on writing, Kreymborg wrote to Elizabeth Ames, the director of Yaddo, as early as 1950. Calling Swenson's poetry "bold and healthy," Kreymborg—who had previously stayed at Yaddo himself—successfully secured a position for Swenson at the artists' colony (Kreymborg Papers, UVA, Yaddo Records, NYPL). Kreymborg's recommendation with Ames surely carried a lot of weight—years earlier, Kreymborg had introduced and recommended Aaron Copland, who would become one of Yaddo's most famous alumni. Kreymborg's consistent efforts to recommend Swenson for grants and fellowships between 1949 and 1954 were prophetic. Swenson's work has recently, for example, been considered alongside major figures like Marianne Moore and Elizabeth Bishop in Kirstin Zona's 2002 *Marianne Moore, Elizabeth Bishop, and May Swenson: the Feminist Poetics of Self-Restraint*, as

well as the 2006 collection of essays edited by Paul Crumbley, *Body My House: May Swenson's Work and Life*.

During his years as a member of the American Institute of Arts and Letters, Kreymborg also became a longstanding judge on the Pulitzer Prize committee. Though his earlier anthologies placed them in competition, Kreymborg would serve next to his once-competitor turned friend, Louis Untermeyer, from 1948-1961. While Kreymborg never won a Pulitzer himself, his first experience with the Pulitzer Prize came years earlier as a writer—in 1938, Farrar & Rinehart Publishers submitted *The Planets* to the committee for consideration. Throughout his years as a juror on the committee, Kreymborg sought to balance the recognition between established poets (many of whose careers he helped to begin), as well as less established poets. This is evident in the 1950 decision, in which the judges claimed, “The finest book of poetry this year is very naturally the *Complete Poems of Robert Frost*...[but] a fifth award to Mr. Frost would actually be a double or triple or quadruple award for a body of poems already so distinguished” (Kreymborg Papers, UVA). Instead of bestowing another award upon Frost, the judges elected to give the award to Gwendolyn Brooks for *Annie Allen*, making her the first African American to receive the Pulitzer Prize. Though some questioned the decision, the judges claimed, “We have seldom been more satisfied than with our choice of Annie Allen” (Fischer xxxix). Believing that Brooks’ award was based on political rather than poetic reasons, Kreymborg’s old friend John Ciardi wrote to him saying, “I hear you were one of the judges: what the Hell were they thinking of when they made that award? Well, it’s a decent sort of award. I think I prefer merit to decency, however. The merit in *Annie Allen* escapes me” (Kreymborg Papers, UVA). Though Ciardi’s

comment makes an explicit reference to Brooks' race, Kreymborg's decision to award Brooks was not one of mere "decency"—Kreymborg was, and would continue to be, an admirer of her poetry. Along with Brooks, other younger poets to receive the award under Kreymborg's tenure as a judge on the commission were Theodore Roethke (1954), Elizabeth Bishop (1956), and Richard Wilbur (1957).

In the years that Kreymborg did not advocate for younger poets in the competition, he sought recognition for figures with whom he had been closely associated in his early career. 1951 marks the first year in which the Pulitzer Prize committee only consisted of two members, Kreymborg and Untermeyer, and the award went to Carl Sandburg, a poet who Kreymborg corresponded with and appreciated throughout his life. In 1952, the decision came down to Marianne Moore and William Carlos Williams, two poets originally associated with *Others*. With the deciding third person on the committee absent, Kreymborg and Untermeyer could not reach a final decision and wrote, "It is in the opinion of the advisory committee that this might be a good year to do an unprecedented thing: to split the award between these two poets" (Kreymborg Papers, UVA). Ultimately, they would conclude, "Miss Moore is not only the finer artisan, but the truer artist," and Williams would not receive the Pulitzer Prize until eleven years later in 1963, a month after his death (Kreymborg Papers, UVA). Another poet originally associated with *Others*, Wallace Stevens was awarded the Pulitzer in 1955. As a testament to the enduring legacy of the poets whose careers began to a large extent with Kreymborg's little magazines, the awards solidify the accomplishments of the early avant-garde. From public ridicule to Pulitzer Prizes, the trajectory of the Modernists' careers demonstrates a long-awaited acceptance and recognition within American literary

culture. In the final notable achievement of his life, Kreymborg was inducted into the American Society of Composers, Artists, and Publishers in 1961, four days after his seventy-eighth birthday—the necessary recommendation for his application was provided by Langston Hughes (Academy of Arts and Letters Archives).

Upon his death in 1966—which an unpublished letter from Louis Untermeyer to Louise Sillcox in 1962 reveals was due to “an aggravated form of Parkinson’s disease”—Kreymborg was financially destitute, having lived off of his wife’s pension and contributions from friends and literary societies for the last few years of his life (Kreymborg Papers, American Academy Archives). Having never achieved substantial commercial success, Kreymborg died in economic conditions that were worse than those in which his career as a struggling writer began. Despite being overlooked at the end of his life, Kreymborg recognized the impact of his career. In a conversation toward the end of his life, Kreymborg resignedly said to Untermeyer, “I’ve come a long way since those days in my father’s poor little cigar store...I’ve been kicked around from one publishing house to another...but I can point to forty different books on the shelves, and some of them are still read” (Untermeyer, “Alfred Kreymborg” 83). In a speech to the American Academy of Arts and Letters commemorating Kreymborg in 1967, Untermeyer claimed that Kreymborg’s neglect was not due to any insufficiency in his writing, but was rather due to his refusal to adjust to commercial tastes. Untermeyer said, “In the nineteen fifties, author of a dozen volumes of poetry, nine books of intimate plays, a couple of novels, and a scattering of anthologies, he was all but forgotten. The public could forget about Alfred because he forgot to fit himself to the public’s changing fashions” (“Alfred Kreymborg” 82). Though critically neglected, Kreymborg was not entirely forgotten: he

received a page-long obituary in the *New York Times* which remembered him as a “prolific writer” who played a significant role in his “early editorial ventures,” as well as with the *American Caravan*, “an influential anthology of experimental writing” (“Alfred Kreymborg is Dead”). In the back matter of the November 1966 issue of *Poetry*, the penultimate page of the magazine is an inscription with Kreymborg’s name and the years of his birth and death, along with an excerpt from “Vista,” one of his early poems: “Love?—/ah yes, ah yes indeed/verily yes, ah yes indeed!” (“Back matter”). And in 1977, eleven years after Kreymborg’s death, *Poetry* awarded a one hundred dollar ‘Alfred Kreymborg Memorial Award’ to Geraldine C. Little (“News Notes” 174).

Though all of Kreymborg’s books were out of print at the time of his death, reprint companies like Kessinger Publishing and Nabu Press have recently made his early work available. Among the reprinted texts are *Love and Life and Other Studies*, *Erna Vitek*, *Mushrooms*, *Blood of Things*, *Plays for Merry Andrews*, *Plays for Poem Mimes*, and *Others for 1919; an Anthology of the New Verse*. Along with the critical acknowledgment of the importance of his early work as an editor, the reprinting of Kreymborg’s work represents an important step toward including him as an “author” of the movement as well. From mushrooms to pantomime plays and anthologies to prize committees, Kreymborg’s literary contributions make a strong case for a more prominent position within the narratives of Modernist literary history. Given the influence that Kreymborg had through the vast scope of literary activities in which he participated, a carefully researched biography is clearly needed in order to adequately recognize his significant contributions to the development of American Modernism.

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