

*Edward J. O'Brien*

# OTHERS

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*Edited by Alfred Kreymborg*

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# OTHERS For September, 1916

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*Retort — “Why a ‘Woman’s Number’ ” asked someone. “Art is surely sexless. There isn’t man’s poetry and woman’s poetry. A poem must satisfy the same canons whether it happens to have been written by a man or by a woman.” These contentions are true, but everyone grants the convenience and justice of such categories as French Poetry, Spanish Poetry—Greek, German, Hindu Poetry—and is there not as great difference, in physical make-up, in psychology, custom and history, between the people called Men and the people called Women? Yes, alas.*

*At present most of what we know, or think we know, of women has been found out by men. We have yet to hear what woman will tell of herself, and where can she tell more intimately, more immediately, than in poetry? If only she is able to be sincere enough; and rather brave!*

H. H.

*In other words, it is time woman played troubadour!*

A. K.

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ALFRED KREYMBORG



## AT NOON

(The World's Columbian Exposition—1893)

Oh, the Midway! the long bright flaunting Midway!  
the nations thronging in the sun!

Like a dancer it spins and reels! like a dark-eyed  
dancer it bows to the flute, it sparkles in scarlet  
and golden chains.

The straw-fringed African stares wide and leaps for  
joy. The Hindoo smiles out of his shadowed  
past; winding his yellow turban, flashing his  
shell-white teeth.

The soft little daughter of Java flaps her green  
ribbon and flutters her flower-sweet fingers.

The camel stalks out from his sleep-bound sands,  
and dips his bedizened head. The steed of the  
Bedouin streaks over the black earth like the  
copper flash of a flaming fuse.

Oh, the crowd! ever moving and moving! back and  
forth, east and west, with chatter and laughter  
and giddy joy! looping over the great wheel that  
slowly circles, its glassy cars saluting the high-  
throned sun as they silently rise and fall!



Hark to the drums and the bells! Hark to the  
tuneless monotonous music, the babel of beckon-  
ing voices, ever calling and calling from shores  
and isles of the big round world!

Where shall I go? I know not. What shall I do?  
Nay, ye bearers of strange banners, let me sit  
on a bench and dream in the sun!



---

PEAR TREE

Silver dust  
lifted from the earth,  
higher than my arms reach,  
you have mounted,  
O silver,  
higher than my arms reach  
you front us with great mass;

no flower ever opened  
so staunch a white leaf,  
no flower ever parted silver  
from such rare silver;

O white pear,  
your flower-tufts  
thick on the branch  
bring summer and ripe fruits  
in their purple hearts.



## EVENING

The light passes  
from ridge to ridge,  
from flower to flower—  
the hypaticas, wide-spread  
under the light  
grow faint—  
the petals reach inward,  
the blue tips bend  
toward the bluer heart  
and the flowers are lost.

The cornel-buds are still white,  
but shadows dart  
from the cornel-roots—  
black creeps from root to root,  
each leaf  
cuts another leaf on the grass,  
shadow seeks shadow,  
then both leaf  
and leaf-shadow are lost.



## SONG OF BASKET-WEAVING

Kulsagh, Kulsagh, my Mother,  
I sit at thy knee  
Weaving my basket of grasses,  
Weaving for my harvest of berries when the Ripe  
Days come.

Thy fingers gently touch my hair with fragrance,  
Thy mouth drips a song, for the wind has kissed it—  
(Love sings in thy mouth!)

The soil listens and answers;  
I feel a stirring beneath me and hear buds opening,  
The river chants thy song, and the clouds dance to  
it,

To-night the stars will float upon thy singing  
breath,

Gleaming like slanting flocks above the sea. . . . .

All the Earth sings: and its voices are one song!

I alone am silent: I alone, a maid waiting him, the  
Fate,

The Stirring One, The Planter of the Harvest,  
The Basket-Filler.

Kulsagh, Kulsagh, Mother!

See how beautiful, how liberal, is my basket,  
How tightly woven for the waters of love,  
How soft for the treading of children's feet,



How strong to bear them up!  
Kulsagh, Kulsagh, Mother, remember me—  
Ere the Sunset and the Dropping Leaf!

*Kulsagh; Cedar-Tree. Considered the source of Life as it supplies all the necessities of life, even food in fish famine. British Columbia Coast Indians.*



## HINDU LOVE CHANTS

There is a silver web called silence;  
It hangs between us, soft and blinding;  
Break it, my love, and let me hear your voice;  
But break it only with a sound as beautiful.

I feel your breath upon my heart;  
I know, through seven lakes and mountains, that you  
    smile:  
I need no words to say you love me;  
If your love went from me, the truth would fall upon  
    my heart and crush it.



## AN INCANTATION

O great sun of Heaven, harm not my love,  
Sear him not with your heat, nor blind him with  
    your beauty,  
Shine for his pleasure!

O grey rains of Heaven, harm not my love,  
Drown not in your torrent the song of his heart,  
Lave and caress him!

O swift winds of Heaven, harm not my love,  
Bruise not, nor buffet him in your rough humor,  
Sing you his prowess!

O mighty triad, strong ones of Heaven,  
Sun, rain, and wind, be gentle I charge you,  
Or send on me the storm of your anger,  
But spare him, my love, most proud and most dear,  
O sun, rain, and wind, strong ones of Heaven!



## MATRIX

I stretch my hands out toward you;  
And by all the ways that are surer than seeing  
I see that they are filled with gifts of your giving;  
A coronet tipped with leaves and star dust,  
And little slippers of gold with wings upon them,  
And a glowing girdle of crimson,  
And coin of royal mintage.

I hold my hands up to you;  
And by all the ways that one knows without knowing  
I know that you know I have filled them with gifts  
    for your taking;  
A cloak of eider as softly warm as satisfied desire,  
And a clasp of living emerald to hold it,  
And tingling wine in a jeweled goblet,  
And a rare red rose to grace it.

But the cruel resolvent of actuality  
Is fallen upon them:  
And I stand and gaze at my upturned hands;  
And they are only full  
Of wistfulness.



## I

You love  
As the wind loves a bed of blue larkspur,  
But I  
As a yellow poppy  
Loves starlight in the pool.

## II

Since I smile when you offer me  
    Pearls and roses  
You never guess my hunger for  
    Circlets of moonstone,  
    Jade anklets,  
    Chrysoprase, jacinth, and amaranth,  
    Flag-flowers,  
    Saffron,  
    And the bitter brown blossoms  
    Of the calycanthus.

## III

My life is a smooth green vase  
To hold the purple thistles  
Of your passion.



## IV

You who hear only the words  
That say I love you  
Know of my love  
What a tree dashed with white foam  
Knows of salt bitterness of the sea.

## V

No, I do not love you.  
A hundred times I have choked my love of you,  
And left it dead a hundred times.



## VISITATION

You came to me again last night,  
And today you are as a mood upon me.  
You! You! You! I can think of nothing else but  
your meaning,  
And the darkness of your eyes, and the way your hair  
grows away from your forehead,  
And what you have said to me and what you would  
say and the touch of your hands upon my body,  
And all that was unresolved and did not quite come  
to an issue between us.  
Yet they buried you in the ground ten years ago—  
and now I am most happily married;  
And it isn't quite fair of you, is it, to come to me, so,  
in the darkness!



## THE INTRUDER

Not flesh I fear,  
But spirit.  
Spirit that comes in the midst of joys,  
Comes even into the marriage bed  
And lies down between husband and wife  
Saying  
“Lo, I am here—look upon Me.”

And one hears,  
One sees,  
One obeys. . . . .

It is not flesh I fear.



## THE CHAMELEON

What happened yesterday?  
What terror drove me here to hide away  
    Grey  
Under a stone?  
My lizard soul needs warmth,  
    Light, color.  
It brightens into beauty in the sun.  
I will go out again to the dappled earth,  
    To the gold, to the blue, to the green—  
Never mind tomorrow's  
Or yesterday's dim sorrow  
That drove me here to hide alone  
    Grey under a stone.



---

SPECTRUM

There was a glory of heaven,  
    Forgotten,  
And a glory of earth,  
    Forgotten,  
And a glory of myself,  
    Forgotten, too.

You who have not found  
Heaven, or earth, or self  
    Glorious,  
Am I at last  
    Like you?



## RETRIBUTION

I want to *hurt* you!

For once—not long ago—someone hurt me.

I know the way to madden you

And gladden you

And leave you with smirched pride,

Trembling between love and hate,

Yes, I know that hell!

For not so long ago I felt my heart twist

With hard pain,

And tried to smile,

But something moved again, so that I only wept,

And all my sweetness slipped into the dark. . . . .

That is why I want to hurt you.



## TEA ROOM

Old women  
Nod *bien coiffé* heads  
Over Orange Pekoe  
And the bitter green  
Of English breakfast brew ;  
Young girls come in  
To gaze at men  
And bewilder them with their bodies.  
It is not tea they drink ;  
Tea is a sophisticated taste—  
Only old women know this.

## CURVES

I do not hurry after  
my friend  
and my friend returns  
to say  
Is it me you love  
or yourself,  
and I answer  
neither yea nor nay.



## ARABELLE

I dislike men.  
Dislike them for the strain  
They put on women.  
If I didn't have to earn a living  
I'd snap my fingers at this fading hair of mine  
And let the colour in my cheeks  
Begin to go.  
I'd sit down to it  
And rock my age in comfort by the fire.  
Forty-four and poor—  
If you're single—  
Is the devil of a combination for a woman.  
Every time a married one  
Comes in to buy a box of rouge  
I'd like to tell her she's a fool to do it  
When she's not obliged to look young.  
Once I said as much  
And the woman answered  
I guess you're not married  
Or you'd know the reason . . . . .  
I dislike men  
For the strain they put on women.



---

TO A PREGNANT WOMAN

This is possession!  
To own so surely, so completely;  
So absolutely to command,  
To serve, to keep.  
Knowing you hold the beating life of the beloved  
In the depths of your life;  
Breathing through your breath,  
Enfolded in your strength for its sustainment.

“I am my beloved’s  
And he is mine”  
You cried once to your lover:  
But who is able to own another,  
Or be owned by another?  
Only now may love truly possess:  
The beloved is yours.



## THE PASSING

Red drop by drop with breath devouring pain  
I give to death what but till now in me  
Was love alive. Oh those cruel unknown powers  
That take from my body what was wrought  
In threads of gold, out of the stars.

It is a soul that flows from me  
Through the dark channel of my pain  
Into the depthless ocean wastes of death.

He was to me as one already living;  
When love sought love and struck to life a flame,  
I knew his presence, and full of joy I sang  
Loud to the skies a new magnificat,  
And day by day held sweet communion.

More than when fruit trees stretch their brawny  
arms

Into the summer air and pray for sun  
And rain to give rich abundant yield  
My body yearned over this seed, this bud  
To nourish it into the perfect flower and growth. . . .

Slowly now the tide of drops that would have  
been

Baby eyes and lips and hands and feet. . . . .

The half-formed petals drop upon the night  
And I, the stem, stand empty of all bloom,  
Life's beauty and its perfume fled from me.  
My soul which was a garden is a tomb.



## OUR CAMILLA

Today we had a funeral for Camilla,  
All along Spring Street past the candy-store.  
The street looks different when you're in a carriage,  
You notice things you never saw before,  
And feel so strange—  
And all the other children stop and stare.  
I used to stare, too, once, and want to ride—  
I wore my new black coat, and mama cried.  
The day it snowed Camilla had no carfare,  
We never had a horse until today:  
We had two for Camilla, trimmed with jet;  
We left her out in Brooklyn—  
She ain't home yet.



## THE PENNY

A penny, a penny smooth, a penny round!  
Why do you bend your eyes upon the ground?

Magical things that leap and frisk  
Are conjured up by that copper disk.

Toss it into the green lagoon—  
It rises in the round yellow moon.

Fling it into the cleft yew-tree—  
The woodcutter finds a treasury.

Spin it on an oak table top—  
Gray waving lines of rabbits hop.

Roll it under the coach of the bride—  
Luck goes over the countryside.

Ring it that children's hearts may sing  
Round barrel organs capering.

Cheaper than silver, dearer than gold,  
Thistledown light, yet hard to hold!

A penny, a penny round, a penny gay—  
*Why* do you turn your dancing eyes away?



## WHITE TREMOR

Tiny ghost-tree, flickering in the rain,  
Pale, pale,  
Why do you tremble there at the turning,  
High at the rim of the road  
Against the parapet of dark trees,  
And they against nothing but rain,—  
You, so wan, so shaken?

Why are you quivering in my heart like a secret,  
Like a sick tale that cannot be told,  
Or a spring anemone too frail to be plucked?

It is many years since I saw you—  
I have forgotten how many—  
The spring was still so close to winter that you  
shivered and blanched ;  
I was on my way upward from the valleys—  
I know not whither,  
Nor who were my companions ;  
Only there was the driver, thin, young, swaying beside  
me,  
Within a lurching shelter from the weather,  
Pulled up the steep road,  
And there at the acrid-sweet turning  
Suddenly you,  
And a tremor of white joy shook through me.  
“What is that?” I cried.



“Oh that? That’s a beech sapling with the old leaves  
still clinging in the spring,  
Just a beech sapling.”

That spring, what was shooting through my veins in  
the dawn and back to my heart in the twilight?

I was young!

Did not that pilgrimage bring me some new portion  
of life

Which is a part of me now,

Fused with me in a moment

That melted my soul

And set my young blood seething?

Gone, gone, utterly vanished—I remember nothing—  
Only I see you, ghost-tree, in your timid beauty,  
Little beech sapling.



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**BEANS**

Today I saw a lunatic sorting beans.  
Long, loose, unkempt, with toes turned in,  
He sat upon a bench by a brick wall  
And worked, and worked.

His shifting eyes  
Concealed his mighty plan;  
His lips murmured ahead;  
His white and narrow hand  
Seized prettily each separate bean  
From off the pile  
And hurried it to place.

I watched him for an hour,  
Maybe two.  
Finally, the last bean on,  
He set his pattern in the sun;  
And with a little touch now here, now there,  
He stole away and hid.

Soon other lunatics came wandering by,  
Jostling to look.  
One stared, one laughed,  
One peered again;  
One said that he could do  
A darned sight better out of smoke;



One thrust a kick  
And all the beans went scattering about.

But one came back  
And looked down gravely  
On the worker picking up his beans.  
"Brother!" he said,  
And fell to helping him.







