

*Edward J. O'Brien*

# OTHERS

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## *Others for June 1917*

*Sherwood Anderson*

*Mary Aldis*

*Mitchell Dawson*

*Alfred MacArthur*

*Max Michelson*

*Carl Sandburg*

*William Saphier*

*Marjorie Allen Seiffert*

*Eunice Tietjens*

*Mark Turbyfill*

*Alfred Kreymborg\**

\*An immigrant from the East River, New York.

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## SONG OF THE SOUL OF CHICAGO

On the bridges, on the bridges, swooping and rising, whirling and circling. Back to the bridges, always the bridges.

\* \* \*

I'll talk forever. I'm damned if I'll sing. Don't you see that mine is not a singing people. We're just a lot of muddy things caught up by the stream. You can't fool us. Don't we know ourselves?

Here we are, out here in Chicago. You think we're not humble? You're a liar. We are like the sewage of our town, swept up stream by a kind of mechanical triumph—that's what we are.

\* \* \*

On the bridges. On the bridges. Wagons and motors, horses and men—not flying—just tearing along and swearing.

\* \* \*

By God we'll love each other or die trying. We'll get to understanding, too. In some grim way our own song shall work through.

\* \* \*

We'll stay down in the muddy depths of our stream. We will. There can't any poet come out here and sit on the shaky rail of our ugly bridges and sing us into paradise.

We're finding out. That's what I want to say. We'll get at our own thing out here or die for it. We're going down, numberless thousands of us, into ugly oblivion. We know that.

\* \* \*

But say, bards, you keep off our bridges. Keep out of our dreams, dreamers. We want to give this democracy thing they talk so big about a whirl. We want to see if we are any good out here—we Americans from all over hell. That's what we want.

### SANG LONG AFTER

Was that all you could do, Mary?  
Loving and giving—that's all right.

\* \* \*

You went pretty far. I admire you for that. Do you remember the night in the upper room when I cried. I wanted you then. God knows I wanted you then.

Down below the others  
were waiting, Judas and Peter and John—old  
men, pretty wise. I was crucified for them.

At night when the stars came I went out alone—  
long after that.

\* \* \*

How did you know what you did know, Mary?  
That puzzled me. How could you go that far  
and stop?

---

Was that all you could do, Mary?  
Loving and giving—that's all right.

### THE CORNFIELDS

I am pregnant with song. My body aches, but do not betray me. I will sing songs and hide them away. I will tear them into bits and throw them in the street. The streets of my city are full of dark holes. I will hide my songs in the holes of the streets.

\* \* \*

In the darkness of the night I awoke and the bands that held me were broken. I was determined to bring old things into the land of the new. A sacred vessel I found and ran with it into the cornfields, into the long fields where the corn rustles.

\* \* \*

All of the people of my time were bound with chains. They had forgotten the long fields and the standing corn. They had forgotten the west winds.

\* \* \*

Into the cities my people had gathered. They had become dizzy with words. Words had choked them. They could not breathe.

On my knees I crawled before my people. I debased myself. The excretions of their bodies I took for my food. Into the ground I went and my body died. I emerged in the corn, in the long cornfields. My head arose and was touched by the west wind. The light of old things, of beautiful old things, awoke in me. In the cornfields the sacred vessel is set up.

I will renew in my people the worship of Gods. I will set up for a king before them. A king shall arise before my people. The sacred vessel shall be filled with the sweet oil of the corn.

The flesh of my body is become good. With your white teeth you may bite me. My arm that was withered has become strong. In the quiet night streets of my city old things are awake.

\* \* \*

I awoke and the bands that held me were broken. I was determined to bring love into the hearts of my people. The sacred vessel was put into my hands and I ran with it into the fields. In the long cornfields the sacred vessel is set up.

## C. S.

I cry out I am one of the people,  
I belong to the masses,  
I live with them, sweat with them,  
Eat their bread and share their hunger,  
Bear on my back their burdens  
And in my soul their grief:

Then—  
I write  
And write and write and write  
For you to listen,  
Listen and falter:

I sing of their quick-snatched joys  
Of the abundant life,—  
Living and loving, giving birth and dying,  
That goes on in the east side,  
And you in your swivel chair  
You turn sick with envy!

I proclaim  
I am one with the people—  
And all the while I know  
I am a thousand million miles  
Beyond you and the people.

## WHERE IS GOD?

I went into the forest seeking God.  
I looked up at the trees,  
Tall, straight, aspiring,  
Not needing God.

I went down to the sea  
And watched the waves  
Rolling relentlessly,  
Indifferent to God.

I saw two wrens love-making,  
Twittering and chirping shrilly in the sun,  
Not bothering about God.

A woman's arms were around me,  
Upon her breast I slept  
And forgot I wanted God:  
She gave me—a little,  
But—where is God?



---

NORMA LEE: A LUSTRUM

Dark eyes of Father Joseph,  
You taught her  
The luminous escape  
From the intricacies  
Which Sister Laurenta  
Had looped about her. . . .

Would she with the midges  
Hover out of copses  
Through the lanes and gardens?  
Would she with the midges  
Flitter moons and midnights  
In profligate succession? . . .

The panels drawn by her  
Had but revealed  
The dearth of what she sought:  
There was darkness and no glow.  
And as she turned within her thoughts  
She saw the gropings of her year  
Like green mice  
Hopping trepidant  
On crimson rugs. . . .

Somewhere in the cellar of the night  
She had left  
The burnt-out perfumed tapers  
She had lit for him,  
And the songs that danced about them

Had perished  
With their spent fragrance.  
Groaning  
She stumbled  
With heavy feet  
Up the huge steps of morning. . . .

He was forever—this other—  
He was forever taking fishes  
On air adventures;  
He was forever wondering  
At their gaspings.  
But now  
The meshed rings of her laughter  
Caught him  
Dangling  
Quivering to her pleasure,  
And his strength  
Could not cut  
The silver of it.  
—How happiness stroked her!

### PEBBLE

Like a frog on a lily pad  
Was his love,  
Puffing and popping its eyes;  
The deadly pebble of her laugh  
Ended its green antics.  
Droll are the quivering muscles  
Of a stricken love.

## AT CETARA

One April morning  
On the beach at Cetara  
He read:  
"I am waiting at Salerno,  
Come——"  
And his love rose like a slender cone  
Piercing into heaven  
(Far above the brown-legged men and women  
Dragging at long nets  
Of writhing silver fishes)  
So that he spun  
Like a dizzy top  
On the apex of his love.

## SMOKE

The last touch of your hand  
Creeping into my hand  
Was like the blue savor of burning leaves,  
Whispering of bare branches  
And moon-cold nights.

## NOCTURN

(Adaptation from inscription on a Hiroshige print)

In the days of the gods men walked on air.

And now this bridge is as beautiful as though its  
piers were clouds.

## MY CITY

## An Autumn Memory

The full moon glides in its own smouldering wings  
of light  
Or cuts through or under mouse-colored clouds.  
Your face is an upright lily in the night's concave.  
Your lips taste cold at first. In you  
Your heart is restive  
With gentle resentment at itself.  
Your body and your clothes melt and you become .  
A faintly-luminous goddess—moved and compelled  
By yourself and by other gods.  
And overhead—is it the footstep of your mother  
In her four yards of space? No,—  
It is a heart  
Trembling in rhythm with ours.

## PORTRAIT OF MY FATHER

An oak tree with a somewhat short trunk  
But whose branches reach up high  
Is moving. It is moving slowly and rhythmically  
Under the sky which always closes it in anew,  
And feeling this sky as a gently moved log feels  
perhaps  
The water and the wind which carry it.  
Night and day which it encounters are  
Like rain and the dust; and the sky  
Soothes the worm-wounds,  
And they slowly draw up.

## “PRETTY BABY”

Like the trembling luminous edge of a thick humid  
cloud  
Is the curve of your face near the chin;

When you smile, light and shadow flit around  
Bewildered and happy.  
Your thoughts are like a wreath  
Of city smoke at sunset:  
Delicate, air-bright, yet also a little blackish and  
    murky.  
The flesh and bones of your body  
Are tender, giving  
Like the flesh and bones of a young chicken;  
And you hold it out like a glass of wine:  
Feeling it trickle down the throat, and the little  
    gurgles  
With the pleasure of pure charity.

### THE JOURNEY

Dog-like you accepted caresses  
But your body and your soul lay curled  
Waiting . . .

Then with your frail torso,  
With your soft flesh,  
With your feet less strong than iron  
You set out on your journeys—  
Your eyes of gleaming gold  
And the smile about your mouth  
Like white foam.

I admired you.

But when I caught a glimpse  
Of the hand behind you—  
The big ruthless hand,  
I did not know whether to admire  
Or to pity you.  
I almost blamed you  
Like other folk.

## EXPECTATION

Some morning on opening the door of my office  
I shall find a baby in old green onyx:  
Its torso will be heavy about the lower part  
    And somewhat contorted;  
The feet in a whimsical strained position  
But with no arms—just rounded off at the  
    shoulders;  
Its lips and eyes will be frozen in a tantalizing and  
    almost obscene grin.  
On its back will be painted in beautiful colors but  
In a hieroglyphics which no one ever saw  
A message which will be quite plain to me.

## KATE, SIXTEEN, READS POLLYANNA

Pollyanna, that's I, though I  
Am a little different.  
I live behind the rainbow  
On the air—for I am light.  
My cheeks are made of gold,  
And my nose is a lily with its stem  
Split lengthways.  
My mouth is made of four roses—  
Two up and two down.  
It's my chin that laughs—my little chin  
Is still of flesh and my eyes are the same.  
Some distance away but not too far  
Is HE dressed in a summer suit.  
(I know it's snowing elsewhere.)  
His face is of flesh but his body and head  
Are airier.  
He looks at me but can not come.  
Perhaps some day there will be  
A cloud-storm, and—.

INTERCESSIONS OF CERTAIN FAT MEN  
AT THE BLACKSTONE

God of the Swag Belly:  
Listen to the prayer of the fat, fierce men who are  
hungry.  
Women we buy kick high heels and sing for us and  
sleep with us  
And always our muscles ask for new women and  
younger flesh to hold  
And the call is for redder lips than we sucked last  
night.

Come across,  
O God of the Swag Belly,  
And give us lobsters and sea food we never tasted  
before,  
New stuff with strange names picked up in far off  
places,  
Let us hear a coon song that will tickle us into  
wanting a dance,  
Ragtime out of the slums and the underworld reck-  
less with kisses,  
Let us have a softer plush to sit on  
And bring fresh peaches and wild chicken be-  
fore us.

JINX

I am the jinx of love, an old iron billiken  
Close by all kissers in the dark and huggers.  
I remember Sappho. She broke her little fists  
Beating my head when a man who had a date with  
her never came  
And she wrote songs looking at my iron grin.



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Thousands know me every night.  
There was a laundry girl—maybe you read a piece  
in the paper about her this morning—  
She turned on the gas and left a note nobody loved  
her.  
I was in the room when she fixed the jet and lay  
down murmuring, "Good-by everybody."  
They sing for me and die. I am the jinx of love,  
an old iron billiken.

### COOL TOMBS

When Abraham Lincoln was shovelled into the  
tombs, he forgot the copperheads and the  
assassin . . . in the dust, in the cool tombs.

And Ulysses Grant lost all thought of con men and  
Wall Street, cash and collateral turned ashes  
. . . In the dust, in the cool tombs.

Pocahontas' body, lovely as a poplar, sweet as a  
red haw in November or a paw-paw in May, did  
she wonder? does she remember? . . . in the  
dust, in the cool tombs?

Take any streetful of people buying clothes and  
groceries, cheering a hero or throwing confetti  
and blowing tin horns . . . tell me if the  
lovers are losers . . . tell me if any get more  
than the lovers . . . in the dust . . . in  
the cool tombs.

(Machine Shop Notes)

### THE GEAR CUTTER

This master is a slave  
to three greedy gear cutters.  
They shape arms and legs  
on solid bronze disks  
and blow stray chips  
on his garment, beard and face,  
the face of the Man  
who was born on the road to Egypt.  
He heeds not the winged chips  
nor the dirt laden drops of oil.  
He walks on brown velvet clouds,  
anoints the machines with oil  
and the disks are faces of children.

### THE PLANER

Grey iron casting is rocked on a planer  
like a baby in a cradle  
and a sharp edge removes layers,  
like time, days,  
from this sleeping weight.  
The bent machinist is also rocked  
on the bed of the planer.  
It adds days to his life.

### AT THE ANVIL

Dan never spoke a word in his life.  
His eyes are blooming, black roses.  
His arms are oak trees in winter.  
He shapes a woman's dream  
with a sledge  
out of a bar of red-hot steel  
on his anvil.

---

## A DREAM

(Near the tempering furnace)

The intense little furnace  
is his life.  
the cold-rolled steel tool in it  
his heart,  
the chunk of cyanide in his hand  
the world  
and he is God.  
A gay move brings the cyanide  
to his open mouth,  
he bites and the world is dead.

## AT THE LATHE

The lathe twirls a steel shaft  
that will roll out gold.  
The boulder-shouldered man over it  
shoves the tiny hard tool deeper  
into the heart of the steel  
and smiles at the moaning shaft.  
There is a new baby in his home.

## THE OLD OILER

The swift shafting chants  
of the hardships of a hot road.  
The old oiler shakes a can  
over the thirsty bearing,  
with the same gesture  
as his daughter shakes a toy  
before her crying first babe.  
His own road is hard and hot  
but the smiles of his hard muscles  
keeps it clear.

## AT THE BENCH

He rides on a chisel  
through sheet tool-steel,  
his hammer is the whip  
and he swings it  
to the beat of his heart.  
He loves his chisel, hammer  
and sheet tool-steel,  
this Hun with a harem woman's eyes.  
And every fresh gash  
is an added charm  
to the ones he loves.

## AT THE VICE

A bastard file cuts his days  
while he is held tight  
like the piece of copper  
in his vice.  
And he is swayed over it  
with a file in his two hands  
to shape it for another life.  
He has long ago passed the scratch  
that means stop  
and he moves on as if blind.  
There is a silk gowned worm  
gnawing at his heart.

---

FROM THE MADISON STREET POLICE  
STATION

I, John Shepherd, vagrant,  
Petition the Park Commissioners  
For wider benches.

My soul  
Has long been reconciled  
To the prick of gunny-sack,  
(Oh well remembered fleeces!)  
And to rustling vests  
Of newspaper,  
And to the chill of rubbers on unshod feet,—  
But to the wasteful burning of dry leaves,  
God's shepherd's mattress,  
Never!

Descendant of ancient ones  
Who tended flocks and watched the midnight sky,  
My forebears saw the Eastern Star appear  
Over Judaeon hills.

Where do your flocks graze, gentlemen?  
Are there no sheep or shepherds any more?  
All day long I sought the flocks,  
And came by night to a wide grassy place,  
And in the morning someone brought me here.

THE PEDDLER

Hark, people, to the cry  
Of this curious young magician-peddler  
Seeking a golden bowl.  
He wanders through the city  
And offers useful tin-ware

For all the ancient metal  
You have left to rust  
In the dim, dusty attic  
Or mouldy cellar  
Of your soul.

He refuses nothing—  
Rusty nails,  
Which may have played their part  
In a crucifixion—  
For ten of these he will give  
A new tin spoon.

The andirons  
Once guarding hearth-fires of content,  
Now dusty and forgotten  
In an obscure corner—  
He will give for these  
A new tin tea-kettle  
With a wooden handle.

And for this antique bowl  
Fashioned to hold  
Roses or wine?

The eyes of the peddler glisten.  
Oh woman,  
If acid reveal  
Gold beneath the tarnished surface  
He will gladly give you  
His hands, his eyes, his soul,  
His young, white body—  
If not,  
A mocking laugh  
And a bright tin sieve  
To hold your wine  
And roses.

---

PORTRAIT OF A GENTLEMAN

Tower of stone  
Rugged and lonely——

My thoughts, like ivy  
Embrace my memory of you,  
Climbing riotously, wantonly,  
Till the harsh walls  
Are clothed in tender green.

Tower of stone—  
Stark walls and a narrow door  
Which speak:

“You who are not for me  
Are against me—  
If you are mine,  
Enter!” . . . .

But who would be prisoned  
In unknown darkness!

Tower of stone  
Rugged and lonely,  
I dared not enter and I would not go  
Till clasping you  
My arms were bruised and torn.

## THE CITY WALL

About the city where I dwell, guarding it close,  
runs an embattled wall.

It was not new I think when Arthur was a king, and  
plumed knights before a British wall made  
brave clangor of trumpets, that Launcelot  
came forth.

It was not new I think,—and now not it but chivalry  
is old.

Without, the wall is brick, with slots for firing, and  
it drops straightway into the evil moat,  
where offal floats and nameless things are  
thrown.

Within, the wall is earth; it slants more gently  
down, covered with grass and stubbly with  
cut weeds. Below it in straw lairs the  
beggars herd, patiently whining, stretching  
out their sores.

And on the top a path runs.

As I walk, lifted above the squalor and the dirt, the  
timeless miracle of sunset mantles in the  
west,

Dusk spreads her purple wings

And beauty moves immortal through the land.

And I walk quickly, praying in my heart that beauty  
will defend me, will heal up the too great  
wounds of China.

I will not look—to-night I will not look—where at  
my feet the little coffins are,

The boxes where the beggar children lie, unburied  
and unwatched.



---

I will not look again, for once I saw how one was  
broken, torn by the sharp teeth of dogs.  
A little tattered dress was there, and some  
crunched bones . . .

I need not look. What can it help to look?

Ah, I am past!

And still the sunset glows.

The tall pagoda, like a velvet flower, blossoms  
against the sky; the Sacred Mountain fades,  
and in the town a child laughs suddenly.

I will hold fast to beauty! Who am I, that I should  
die for these?

I will go down. I am too sorely hurt, here on the  
city wall.

### MY SERVANT

The feet of my servant thump on the floor. THUMP  
they go, and THUMP—dully, deformedly.

My servant has shown me her feet.

The instep has been broken upward into a bony  
cushion. The big toe is pointed as an awl.  
The small toes are folded under the cushioned  
instep. Only the heel is untouched.

The thing is white and bloodless with the pallor of  
dead flesh.

But my servant is quite contented.

She smiles toothlessly and shows me how small are  
her feet, her "golden lilies."

THUMP, they go, and THUMP!

## THE DANDY

He swaggers in green silk and his two coats are lined with fur. Above his velvet shoes his trim, bound ankles twinkle pleasantly.

His nails are of the longest.

Quite the glass of fashion is Mr. Chu!

In one slim hand—the ultimate punctilio—dangles a bamboo cage, wherein a small brown bird sits with a face of perpetual surprise.

Mr. Chu smiles the benevolent smile of one who satisfies both fashion and a tender heart.

Does not a bird need an airing?

## CHINESE NEW YEAR

Mrs. Sung has a new kitchen-god.

The old one—he who has presided over the household this twelvemonth—has returned to the Celestial Regions to make his report.

Before she burned him Mrs. Sung smeared his mouth with sugar; so that doubtless the report will be favorable.

Now she has a new god.

As she paid ten coppers for him he is handsomely painted and should be highly efficacious.

So there is rejoicing in the house of Mrs. Sung.

---

THE LADY OF EASY VIRTUE: AN  
AMERICAN

LOTUS,

So they called your name.

Yet the green swelling pod, the fruit-like seeds and  
heavy flower, are nothing like to you.

Rather, like a pitcher plant you are, for hope and  
all young wings are drowned in you.

Your slim body, here in the cafe, moves brightly  
in and out. Green satin, and a dance, white  
wine and gleaming laughter, with two nod-  
ding earrings—these are Lotus.

And in the painted eyes cold steel, and on the lips  
a vulgar jest;

Hands that fly ever to the coat lapels, familiar to  
the wrists and to the hair of men. These  
too are Lotus.

And what more—God knows!

You too perhaps were stranded here, like these poor  
homesick boys, in this great catch-all where  
the white race ends, this grim Shanghai that  
like a sieve hangs over filth and loneliness.

You were caught here like these, and who could  
live, young and so slender—in Shanghai?

Green satin, and a gleaming throat, and painted eyes  
of steel,

Hunter or hunted,

Peace be with you,

LOTUS!

---

 LAST SEASON

We two  
 Storm-sheathed buds  
 Slept  
 Upon the wild plum bough.

Oh, once in April, late,  
 When the slow bee pushed  
 Through the sweet, thick air,  
 And the oval slug  
 Lurked at the roots of grass—  
 Oh, once in April, late,  
 We sprang—white—  
 Into bloom and light:  
 You loved the yellow of my throat,  
 And I went mad with the honey of your lips!

Now  
 Keen days  
 Have flung our slightness  
 To the ground;  
 No brown bee swings by,  
 And bare the bough  
 Where our swift life  
 Once clung.

## SLOTH

In the sun  
 A date-palm sways,  
 And one brown girl  
 Struts copiously.

O days!  
 Pass thus over me.

## REALITY

Low-burnt light  
 In the waning night  
 In the brown, broken station:  
 These

The present things,  
                                     Far off  
 And little felt.  
 But pressing close  
 The too uncertain thought of you,  
 O Greatly Wished,  
 And the feel of dear love upon my throat.

Clattering into the brown, broken station,  
 In the waning night  
 In the low-burnt light;  
 Falling across my thighs,  
 And cursing me  
 With liquor-stinking breath—  
                                     These were the ways  
 Of three tired whores.

                                    One shivered  
 Beneath a draggled coat;  
                                     One leered  
 From under a broad-brimmed hat;  
                                     One had grey eyes,  
 And a tinge of light about her hair.

At last the train,  
 And we went creaking on a while,  
 Until the door opened like a mouth  
 Vexed and sick  
 And belched them out,  
 A vomit on the night.

                                    One had grey eyes,  
 And a tinge of light about her hair.

                                    These  
 The present things,  
                                     Far off,  
 And little felt.  
 But pressing close  
 The too uncertain thought of you,  
 O Greatly Wished,  
 And the memory of dear love upon my throat!

## HEN BEING

Being cooped in a crate,  
cooped in a crate,  
as one is cooped in crates  
on West South Water Street  
of the filthy, stinking Chicago River—  
being cooped in a crate  
with more hens than a crate can hold,  
is not an existence,  
even for hens,  
but it gives one a sense of safety,  
monotony, warmth and interest  
I don't deplore.  
What I deplore  
is this being yanked by the neck,  
yanked by the neck,  
yanked by the neck,  
and being flung,  
crammed and damned  
by a common, filthy, stinking  
West South Water Street poultryman  
of the filthy, stinking Chicago River,  
from one crate to another,  
one crate to another,  
one crate to another.  
It's enough to make  
an old hen squawk,  
and I'm an old hen, if you please,  
a roosterless, eggless, chickenless hen!  
There is ever the hope  
in a hen like me  
that the next crate  
will be one's last

---

so this being slammed  
from one crate to another,  
one crate to another,  
one crate to another,  
will reach a cadence.  
I'm an old hen, if you please,  
a roosterless, eggless, chickenless,  
and I can endure  
filthy, stinking West South Water Street  
of the filthy, stinking Chicago River  
of the filthy, stinking Loop of Chicago, Illinois,  
but wring my neck ere my time  
if I don't squawk truth for all hens  
when I affirm this  
one crate to another,  
one crate to another,  
one crate to another,  
is no hop forward  
but a hop backward from  
being cooped in a crate,  
cooped in a crate.  
Being cooped in a crate,  
a hen might find something to scratch,  
though it's only one's neighbor,  
and one is sans claws,  
sans even a feather,  
to scratch her with!  
Oh Poultry Man:  
You are truly  
the God of hens!

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The Congressional Library, in order to complete its files of "Others," needs Numbers 3 and 4, Volume 2 (March and April, 1916). If you can spare those numbers, please send them to the Librarian of Congress, Washington, D. C.

Chicago

200 West South Water St.

OTHERS