Federal Theatre Project (1935-1939)

contexte & enjeux / context & issues

Émeline Jouve & Géraldine Prévot (dir.)

II. Alfred Kreymborg Federal Troubadour: Singing the Unsung Masses · Drew Eisenhauer
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Le *Federal Theatre Project* (*FTP*) constitue une aventure singulière dans l'histoire du théâtre américain, inédite à l'époque et jamais réitérée sous cette forme. Dirigé pendant ses quatre années d'existence, de 1935 à 1939, par l'autrice, dramaturge et metteure en scène Hallie Flanagan, il s'inscrit dans l'ensemble des mesures mises en place par l'administration Roosevelt dans le cadre du programme du *New Deal*, au sein de la *Work Progress Administration* (*WPA*) dirigée par Harry Hopkins. Federal Theatre Project *(1935-1939) : contexte et enjeux* constitue la première étude française d'envergure sur cette période essentielle de l'histoire du théâtre américain. En mêlant approches transversales et études de cas, ce volume rassemblant les contributions de chercheuses, chercheurs et artistes se propose de mettre en lumière les angles morts et les figures oubliées de cette période de l'histoire théâtrale américaine, faisant le pari que ces oublis eux-mêmes racontent quelque chose de l'historiographie de cette période et, en retour, des regards contemporains que nous pouvons porter sur elle. L'ouvrage s'inscrit dans une perspective résolument transdisciplinaire, à l'image de ce que fut le *FTP*, en proposant des articles sur le théâtre à proprement parler mais aussi la musique et le cinéma.

The Federal Theatre Project (FTP) is a singular adventure in the history of American theater, unprecedented at the time and never repeated at such. Headed during its four years of existence, from 1935 to 1939, by the author, playwright and director Hallie Flanagan, it is part of the program set by the Roosevelt administration as part of the New Deal, within the Work Progress Administration (WPA) directed by Harry Hopkins. Federal Theatre Project *(1935-1939): Context and Issues* is the first French volume on this essential period in the history of American theater. By combining cross-disciplinary approaches and case studies, this volume, which brings together contributions from researchers and artists, aims to shed light on the blind spots and forgotten figures of this period of American theatrical history, considering that these omissions themselves tell us something about the historiography of this period and, in turn, about the contemporary views we can take on it. The book is resolutely transdisciplinary, as was the FTP, with articles on theater itself, but also on music and film.

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DEUXIÈME PARTIE

Le théâtre de la crise : croiser les échelles et les esthétiques

ALFRED KREYMBORG FEDERAL TROUBADOUR: SINGING THE UNSUNG MASSES

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Despite his enormous output of free verse, his ground-breaking avant-garde theatre produced in affiliation with the legendary Provincetown Players, an induction into the American Academy of Arts and Letters (1949), and consideration by the Pulitzer Prize committee, Alfred Kreymborg (1883-1966) is best remembered not for his writing but as editor of several modernist "little magazines." Kreymborg's editorial achievements are indeed remarkable: in the fourth issue of his first review, *Glebe* (1913), he and his co-editor, Man Ray, published the entirety of Ezra Pound's first collection of Imagist poems—*Des Imagistes*. As editor of the legendary *Others* (1915-1921), Kreymborg helped launch the careers of fellow modernists William Carlos Williams, Marianne Moore, Djuna Barnes, Lola Ridge, and Mina Loy among others. *Broom* (1921), which he co-founded with Harold Loeb, became one of the most important expatriate voices of the early twenties. Kreymborg then edited *The American Caravan* series of poetry annuals from 1927 to 1936 with Paul Rosenfeld, Lewis Mumford, and Van Wyck Brooks. Yet, criticism of Kreymborg's extensive oeuvre of poetry and plays is scarce and biographical scholarship is limited to his early Greenwich Village years.[1] A complete study of Kreymborg's life and work is long overdue.

Moreover, there has been virtually no examination of Kreymborg's important work in mid-career with the Federal Theatre Project from 1934-1938.[2] The present paper

1 The only scholarly book treating Kreymborg as a central figure—and that in his role as editor—is Suzanne Churchill's *The Little Magazine Others and The Renovation of Modern American Poetry* (Burlington (VT), Ashgate, 2006). While recent scholarship of the Provincetown Players has recognized the importance of Kreymborg's poetic modernist plays such as *Lima Beans* (1916), a dearth of criticism pervades the rest of his oeuvre. For a perspective on Kreymborg's artistic and political formation, see Louis Andrew Eisenhauer, "*Something Sweetly Personal And Sweetly Social:" Modernism, Metadrama, And The Avant Garde In The Plays Of The Provincetown Players* (PhD Dissertation under the direction of Jackson R. Bryer, University of Maryland, 2009).

2 Kreymborg's work with the FTP has had brief mentions, for example, in the context of Yiddish theatre in Joel Schechter's *Messiahs of 1933*, Philadelphia, Temple UP, 2008, and in Benjamin Dwight Norris's remarkable undergraduate thesis (*An American Troubadour: The Career and Life of Alfred Kreymborg The Career and Life of Alfred*

recovers this period, relying on an exploration of the primary materials available in the National Archives and Records Administration and the Library of Congress in Washington, DC, conducted in 2019. The present study examines Kreymborg's work primarily as an artist but also as an administrator for the FTP from 1935-1937 at a critical juncture in his writing when he turned towards the far left. It includes the first critical analyses of his ardently anti-capitalist ensemble verse-play *America, America!: a Mass Recital* (1934), which laments the hardships of poverty and lambasts America's "sale" of "human flesh and misery,"[3] as well as two related trenchant anti-capitalist satires *Frank and Mr. Frankenstein* (1934), and *Privilege and Privation* (1937). The study also examines Kreymborg's application of both his theatrical and political theories in a major production of W.H. Auden's *The Dance of Death* (1936), a synthesis of drama, dance, verse, Marxism, and modernist experimentation. The production was Kreymborg's major, and as it happened only achievement as head of the Poetic Drama Unit which he had proposed to Hallie Flannigan and which she encouraged him to found in 1936.[4]

Recovering Kreymborg's work for the FTP will not only fill an obvious gap in the work of one of American modernism's most overlooked figures but add a chapter to the history of the FTP, exploring the breadth of the project's work for theatre and the masses. Kreymborg's dramaturgy of the thirties was sufficiently far left enough to earn him friends in the communist party, and, subsequently, a blacklisting by the House Un-American Activities Committee. The study will ultimately expose those ideas of Kreymborg's that most probably resulted in his exclusion from the canon of American modernism in the second half of the twentieth century.

TROUBADOUR OF THE COMMON MAN

Alfred Kreymborg is circumspect about his politics in his autobiography, *Troubadour* (1925), an odd work in which he speaks of himself throughout in the

Kreymborg as a Modernist and Beyond, under the direction of Christopher MacGowan, College of William and Mary [VA, 2011], pp.67-68).

3 Alfred Kreymborg, *America, America!: a Mass Recital*, in *How do You do, Sir? and Other Short Plays*, New York, Samuel French, 1934, p.47. In 1935, the play also appeared in *Proletarian Literature in the United States*, edited by Joseph Freeman and Granville Hicks. Hicks was the first biographer of John Reed and America's pre-eminent Marxist literary critic until his resignation from the Communist party in 1939.

4 Hallie Flannigan to Alfred Kreymborg, 14 December, 1935 (Correspondence, Works Projects Administration, Federal Theatre Project Records, National Archives and Records Administration [NARA], College Park, Maryland).

third person, usually under the nickname "Krimmie." He does not describe himself as having party affiliations in the early part of his career. However, beginning with his earliest verse and journalism, Kreymborg expressed concern with the common citizen and the downtrodden and an anarchist's distrust of capitalism. While interviewing Horace Traubel, a socialist and the first biographer of Walt Whitman, for example, Kreymborg praised him as "a man of the streets more than any man of the streets, who writes exclusively about the man of the streets to the man of the streets," [5] and contrasts Traubel's writing with the right-wing Nietzsche:

> Nietzsche sings the aristocrat, the individual; Traubel sings the crowd, the crowd as a unit, democracy, the crowd as individuals, liberty. Nietzsche sings in aristocratic meter; Traubel in the meter of the streets. [6]

Kreymborg was particularly concerned that although Traubel wrote "in the meter of the streets," he was only read by "high-brows." Avoiding this contradiction became for Kreymborg a central preoccupation of his career—he sought methods to produce challenging work, often derived from the formal experiments of European modernism that could nonetheless simultaneously reach the man in the street. In his dramaturgy, Kreymborg often employed absurd and ambiguous verse and stagings difficult even for the intelligentsia to comprehend, while yet expressing familiar themes and minimalist plots and situations reminiscent of children's puppet theatre. In the stage directions for his first and best-remembered verse play, *Lima Beans* (1916), he famously referred to the piece as a "fantastic treatment of a *commonplace* theme set to a stylized rhythm" (emphasis added). [7] This balance of the fantastic and the commonplace, and an attempt to make them accessible to the common spectator can be seen throughout his career as a rejection of the Nietzschean and aristocratic and an explicit embrace of the crowd.

Moreover, Kreymborg seems to have had a distinct political awakening in the spring of 1920 when he wrote his election satire *Vote the New Moon*, the last in the series of scripts produced in affiliation with the Provincetown Players. The playlet is set in a Toyland village where candidates favoring either a blue moon or a red one are "chosen" in a rigged election by the "burgher" and the "burgess," who hit each other over the head with hammers to count votes, like in a Punch and Judy show. [8] In this surrealistic,

5 Alfred Kreymborg, "Traubel American: A Notable Figure," *The Morning Telegraph,* New York, May 31, 1914, Section 2, p.7.

6 *Ibid.*

7 Alfred Kreymborg, *Troubadour* (1925), New York, Sagamore, 1957, p.242.

8 *Id., Vote the New Moon,* in *Plays for Merry Andrews,* New York, Sunwise Turn, 1920, p.7-28.

mad Toyland former candidates are fed to a terrible monster—a giant purple catfish (catfish = cap-i-talism, perhaps?). The tension in the piece occurs when the citizens question the voting process—pointing out that there is no real difference between the blue and the red parties—and become tired of the pointless, mechanical spectacle. In the end, the catfish, merging the blue and the red into "royal purple," stages a *coup d'état* and dominates the village.[9] As strange as the playlet is, a recent (and perhaps the only) revival on its centenary by the Metropolitan Playhouse of New York proves its relevance to the current American electoral circus and was well-reviewed. The revival revealed Kreymborg as anarchistic in his politics as any of the era's Greenwich Village "reds." Moreover, *Vote the New Moon* was dedicated to Kreymborg's colleagues at the Provincetown Players, John Reed and Louise Bryant, who were at the time illegally in Russia reporting on, or in Reed's case actively supporting the revolution.

In the early 1920s, Kreymborg and his wife Dorothy toured his verse dramas in the Midwest using a puppet play kit that had been given him by the legendary New York puppeteer Remo Bufano,[10] and which later collected in a book called *Plays for Merry Andrews*. The object was to bring modernist experimentation to Main Street. Kreymborg sought the meter of the streets, to sing of and to "the crowd...as democracy, the crowd as individuals"[11] as he had praised in Traubel, vowing to bring culture directly to them and not leaving it exclusively for high brows.

One essential aspect of Kreymborg's aesthetics developed in these early years will also prove instrumental in his work with Federal Theatre Project—and this is his work with movement. The Provincetown Players allowed Kreymborg to perform his experimental works at their theatre under the provision that he would produce and cast his plays himself. Kreymborg, then editor of the avant-garde magazine *Others*, therefore founded the *Others* Players, a sub-group within the Provincetown Players, with post-impressionist artist William Zorach, fellow experimental modernist poets Mina Loy, William Carlos Williams, Edna St. Vincent Millay, and her sister Norma Millay.[12] While Edna Millay and other poets such as Floyd Dell produced along with Kreymborg some of the first modern verse drama in America at this time, Kreymborg pioneered experiments with movement and stage direction timed to poetic meter. In the *Others* Players, Kreymborg had notoriously directed the actors to move after the

9 *Ibid*, p.28.

10 Bufano had also acted a minor role in *Vote the New Moon.*

11 A. Kreymborg, "Traubel American: A Notable Figure," art.cit.

12 For accounts of the *Others* Players, see Brenda Murphy, *The Provincetown Players and the Culture of Modernity,* New York, Cambridge UP, 2005 (Chapter 3); and Jeffrey Kennedy, *Staging America*, Tuscaloosa, U of Alabama P, 2023 (Chapter 18).

movement of the Greek chorus, in strophe and anti-strophe movements across the stage syncopated to the meter of the dialogue. In his autobiography, he relates the tale of the initial resistance his actors (including Williams and Loy) exhibited to his "beating out the rhythm with a baton."[13] A photograph of the Others Players posing, several in a turning or kicking movement as they would cross the stage is preserved at the library of congress.[14] It is this feature of rhythmic movement which Kreymborg will employ in his later FTP work and may have been an influence on the choreographed movement of American workers' theatre productions.

If Kreymborg had shown a concern for the common person, the meter of the streets, and incredulity at the American political system in his early career, by the 1930s, his thinking developed into a fully proletarian politics when he joined the Communist Party USA and developed a friendship with its chief cultural commissar, V.J. Jerome. A sharper orientation towards capitalism and the plight of the working classes then emerges in his poetry and plays of the 1930s, including, and especially in his work with the Federal Theatre Project. Throughout the decade, Kreymborg's *America, America!: a Mass Recital*, a call to working-class action, was used as a curtain-raiser by both FTP and non-FTP productions. An advertisement in October 1934 for the magazine *The New Masses*—the communist successor to *The Masses* of pre-war Greenwich Village days—boasts the publication of Kreymborg's playlet noting that it "has been produced all over the country."[15] One production this writer has verified is that at the Repertory Playhouse Associates on May 20, 1934, at the Civic Repertory Theatre. This bill was intended as a showcase of plays from the best worker-theatres in New York.[16]

On August 29, 1935, the FTP was officially established. An examination of personnel records at the Library of Congress/George Mason Collection and NARA for the NY units of the FTP was inconclusive as to Kreymborg's starting date with the organization. However, sometime before the fall of 1935, Kreymborg was made head of the Manhattan/Bronx Unit, where he remained throughout at least the first half of 1937. In addition to overseeing the weekly production conferences which provided updates for all performances currently being undertaken, Kreymborg sought to produce a bill of three of his plays for an evening of the FTP, repeating the pattern of three one-act plays which had been a staple of the Provincetown Players

13 A. Kreymborg, *Troubadour*, *op. cit.*, p.309.

14 Thank you to Jeffrey Kennedy for referring us to this photograph.

15 *New Theatre*, October 1934, p.2. *New Theatre* magazine also sponsored the Civic Repertory evening two Sunday nights a month "to show the best productions of the workers' theatres" (*ibid.*).

16 "This Side of the Footlights," *The Brooklyn Citizen*, May 12, 1934, p.8.

and other little theatre companies. The bill was to have included the Kreymborg sketches, *America, America!: a Mass Recital*, *Frank & Mrs. Frankenstein* and *Privilege and Privation*. The Weekly Production Conference reports from the fall of 1936 through early 1937 show *America, America!* was scheduled and then finally in rehearsal in the spring, while the second two pieces were "awaiting approval for contract" week after week.[17] Emile Beliveau, who would work with Kreymborg in a separate verse drama unit of the FTP, was selected to direct the last piece. However, the entry for March 23, 1937, reads "run thru 3/17—canceled without authority probably being withdrawn by Author."[18] It is not clear from these notes if the show opened in early March but was then closed on the 17th or if only *America, America!* was performed. No newspaper notices have been found to confirm this run, so it may have been that Kreymborg canceled the bill when it was in rehearsal. Kreymborg possibly encountered problems with his publisher Samuel French in regards to payment from the FTP, since all three sketches had been previously published and this was not the norm for theatre productions at the time. On the other hand, given the significant pressure of the DIES committee in Washington that would eventually kill the FTP out of fear of communist infiltration, one must also ask why was it that the sole bill which hung in limbo during the spring of 1937 was one comprised of playlets of the most ardent anti-capitalist sentiment. Indeed, as we will detail below, *America, America!* closes with the crowd chanting in unison "in a threatening tone"[19] as if warning of revolution. Further research is warranted here to determine the cause of the project's delay and subsequent abandonment.

In any case, *America, America!* would see at least one production on stage associated with the FTP. The play, received a reading in New York on March 20, 1936, apparently in English, with actors who were from the Yiddish Intimate Theatre,[20] and *America, America!* would see success translated into Yiddish and incorporated with 10 short Yiddish skits in the very successful FTP produced review: *We Live We Laugh* by the Yiddish Intimate Theatre (opened May 8, 1936, at the Public Theatre, with a new review presented the following year). The program, a series of photographs, and posters, and costume designs for the Yiddish skits survive from this marvelous production and have been digitized by the Library of Congress. However, no images of Kreymborg's

17 Weekly Production Conference Reports, Federal Theatre Project, Manhattan Bronx Units, 1936-1937, Works Projects Administration, Federal Theatre Project Records, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), College Park, Maryland.

18 *Ibid.*

19 A. Kreymborg, *America, America!*, *op. cit.*, p.55.

20 "Stage News," *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Brooklyn, New York, March 20, 1936, p.25.

curtain-raiser appear online nor could any be found in the LOC archives. Typescripts of both the English and Yiddish versions of *America, America! a Mass Recital* can be found in the LOC collection.[21]

AGITPROP FOR MERRY ANDREWS

In many ways, the three playlets Kreymborg intended for his FTP evening in 1936-37 continue his experiments from the nineteen-tens and twenties which aimed to concentrate meter and movement in performance. Kreymborg was influenced as well by worker's theatre agitprop, particularly the use of satiric cartoons of boss-worker relations, symbolically representative characters, and the episodic style, as Marc Blitzstein would famously employ in *The Cradle Will Rock* (1937). However, much of this was already Kreymborg territory: he regularly used symbolic types in the traditions of both the morality play and expressionist theatre in his early sketches—often choosing names from nursery rhymes or other common sources. We can see such characters sketched in *Frank and Mr. Frankenstein*,[22] the slightest of the FTP playlets, which for reasons of both theme and length, was probably intended as the first play.

Kreymborg sets the scene in the corporate office to expose the exploitation and mendacity of the boss, who ruthlessly cuts his staff, playing one off against the other, while mouthing the platitudes of business America. He often doesn't have to repeat these platitudes himself, though, because his employees, having heard them so often, anticipate and quote them verbatim. Kreymborg names his capitalist banker Mr. Frankenstein, a satirical jibe at the mad science of capitalism only a few years after the release of the mythic Hollywood film. His humble worker is Frank. Both are clear representatives of their socio-economic classes and not intended as realistic characters. They receive minimalist and symbolic descriptions: the boss is a "stout man [...] who looks like a generous dollar sign," his "thin" assistant looks like a "question mark."[23] These descriptions suggest modernist costuming and stage design and one easily imagines scenery something like Elmer Rice's *The Adding Machine* or Chaplain's contemporary *Modern Times*. Mr. Frankenstein views the universe and the nation as part of a giant machine, the workers as "cogs," the quintessential modernist trope about

21 The English typescript of Kreymborg's sketch is identical to the published text.
22 Alfred Kreymborg, *Frank & Mrs. Frankenstein*, in *How do You do, Sir?...*, *op. cit.*, pp.69-73.
23 *Ibid.*, p.69.

modernization, explaining away the current economic problems by saying that just "some of the cogs need tightening."[24]

Kreymborg's worker pleads for the families who find their only breadwinner with reduced wages or out of work, treated like parts easily replaced, as they are handed clichés about company loyalty. Frank is in Frankenstein's office hoping to forestall another cut to his wages, which seem to come as often as Frankenstein receives a call from his broker about the value of the dollar declining. Frank doesn't know how he can break the news about another pay cut done to "save the bank"[25] to his wife at home. It's clear the conversation is one Frank and his boss have had before, and Kreymborg emphasizes the absurdity of this repetition in verse, using a simple ABAB rhyme scheme and regular (for Kreymborg) meter—iambic pentameter (with frequent inversions), and stanzas commencing regularly with an 11-syllable variation.[26] Mr. Frankenstein begins what the stage directions note ironically as the "pleasant conversation:"

> I'm sorry we can't pay you what we paid you
> In days before the dollar fell apart.
> I know you're loyal, Frank, but I'm afraid you
> Have let the great depression break your heart[27]

Frankenstein needs to say hardly anything else himself, however, as Frank can repeat back the excuses that he has heard so often before:

> The firm's a friend to every employee—
> I know that Mr. Frankenstein, I know
> And when a man's been here eternally
> We'd rather cut our throats than let him go—[28]

As Frank worries about his wife at home, Mr. Frankenstein, blind to the pain of the workers and their families, relies on patriotic cant about saving the bank and prattles on about his responsibility to his "fraternities"[29] of other bankers and capitalists. He concludes the negotiations by telling Frank:

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24 *Ibid.*, p.70.

25 *Ibid.*, p.69.

26 Hendecasyllable. Kreymborg probably used this to enhance "feminine" rhymes of two syllables at the end of the lines, e.g. "paid you"/"afraid you." The poem also features occasional couplets used as asides marking the characters' thoughts as a form of chorus.

27 A. Kreymborg, *Frank & Mrs. Frankenstein, op. cit.*, p.69.

28 *Ibid.*, p.70.

29 *Ibid.*

And now we understand each other so
You mustn't mind a little cut, my boy.
Millions of men are on the street and oh,
Only a few are still in our employ.[30]

Frankenstein turns to answer a call and learns the dollar's "dropped another point." Poor Frank, presumably recognizing this means another cut in wages and another difficult announcement at home, faints. While he is unconscious, the boss promises Frank's desk and job to one of the employees who comes in to help. There is a chorus of "But Frank's a married man," but the boss shushes them with the question "You think a clerk who faints can start a riot?" Frankenstein is sure he can control the workers he terms "sheep."[31] In the end, a fellow employee happy to keep his own job escorts Frank home, who will likely have no job to return to the next day. Kreymborg's derisive satire condemns not only the capitalist but the other employees for not organizing to effectively "start the riot."

Kreymborg returns to the ideas of the worker's loyalty to the firm in the face of job losses, the insensitivity to workers supporting families, and particularly the bosses' self-absorption in the preoccupations of their class in the other two pieces designated for the FTP bill. Perhaps *America America!* would have been saved to conclude the evening and thus *Privilege and Privation* presented second.[32] In this piece, Kreymborg takes us outside the office to the streets—specifically to the park where jobless workers live as tramps. Again, we find the use of symbolic characters in the expressionist and morality play tradition in the central part of the play as a prose dialogue (although with repetitions and some rhetorical effects) between a Mr. Privation and a Mr. Privilege. Two versions of the script exist in the FTP papers. The longer version includes a revised ending and a new opening scene Kreymborg defines as an *aubade*—a song

30 *Ibid.*, p.71.

31 *Ibid.*, p.72.

32 Alfred Kreymborg, *Privilege and Privation* (ca. 1936, ms.), Federal Theatre Project Collection, The Library of Congress Collection of U.S. Works Progress Administration Records; Special Collections Music Division, Washington, DC. All citations are from the longer of the two variant typescripts in the collection. Kreymborg apparently published a pamphlet version of the play in 1937, perhaps with a publisher called Pageant. It was then included in the *Annual Anthology of the One Act Play Magazine / 1937-1938*, New York, Contemporary Play Publications, 1938. In 1939, American composer John Joseph Becker published his musical score for "2 soloists, male chorus and small orchestra" of the play. It's not known if the score was composed by the time of the aborted FTP production.

celebrating the dawn from French art music. Kreymborg was a self-trained musician who often used musical terminology for his plays. For example, he called his best-known modernist work of the Others Players *Lima Beans* (1916) both a *scherzo* (a light song) and a *rondo* (a three-part-themed composition) in his stage directions. Here in *Privilege and Privation*, the "aubade" features the "bums" in the park as they rise for the morning; the "lead bum," Mr. Privation, is found ironically sleeping curled around the feet of the park's statue of Cornucopia—the goddess of plenty.[33] There is no indication in the script that the song should be sung rather than read, but the play was adapted as a musical by the American composer John Joseph Becker in 1939.

"It's a lovely spring morning in one of the little city parks in this, our country" the stage directions read. Signs of American slogans such as "in god, we trust" and "gone with the wind," are viewable as well as surrounding skyscrapers; "An aura of goodwill touches the sleeping forms of five or six bums."[34] They awake, slowly throw off the newspapers they are using as blankets, and, along with a few passing cops and the birds in the trees raise their voices in joy, while the lyrics belie the sunny mood:

Glory, glory
Hunky-dory
See the pretty sun
Follow fellow
Fellow follow
Everyman's a bum.
Naught to do the livelong day
And naught when that is done.
Hear the pretty birdies singing:
All of us are one![35]

Three of the tramps then take solos to tell us why their new lives in the park are better than their former world.

Solo:
I was once
A busted fellow
When the rent came round.
Solo:

33 *Ibid.*, p.1.
34 *Ibid.*
35 *Ibid.*

Cops and cops that used to club me
Never come around—
Solo:
'Cept when they
Come by to play
Play without a sound.[36]

The cops return and join in to sing about how much they love the park and how it's a haven to lovers after dark. Tramps and cops then sing the chorus: "Glory, glory, hunky-dory / No more poverty!"[37] Eventually, the goddess of the statue joins in the surreal ensemble and ends the song with the cry "I AM LIBERTY,"[38] drawing the symbolic connection between the statues of Plenty and Liberty. The statue thus introduces the ironic theme that living in the park means "freedom" from all the economic pressures of the residents' former lives, as well as freedom from having food, clothing, and housing.

After the song, Mr. Privation takes up a seat on a bench and a passerby, Mr. Privilege asks to join him. Mr. Privilege is a banker who is sad because his income has dropped from one million to only $100,000 a year. His problems are on a rather different scale than that of the tramps. He laments: "The more a man owns, the worse off he is. And the more he loses, the more he worries about losing more."[39] Mr. Privilege is chagrinned that he has had to sell his two cars and borrow his wife's, and recently even stoop to riding the subway. He worries he might have to sell one of his vacation houses.

Mr. Privation listens attentively, like a fellow gentleman, until he suddenly dives on a cigarette butt thrown by a passerby. He offers to share it with Mr. Privilege who at first hesitates, but then takes a puff and thanks Privation: "ah that's democratic of you."[40] The remark denotes the inversion of the social hierarchy in the park, a mid-summer forest where property and privilege are ostensibly unknown, an idyll free of capitalism. Privilege finds himself idolizing what he sees as the freedom in the park. "All you have to do is look after yourselves and loaf,"[41] he remarks, as he continues his tale of woe of shrinking economic power. He laments the contraction of his lifestyle, and relates how he is now forced to pay for the children "falling back on dad" and each with a

36 *Ibid.*, pp.1-2.
37 *Ibid.*, p.2.
38 *Ibid.*, p.3.
39 *Ibid.*, p.4.
40 *Ibid.*, p.5.
41 *Ibid.*, p.7.

"townhouse, a country house and car," all now "around his neck." "Rockefeller can't eat anymore,"[42] responds Privation sympathetically.

Kreymborg then returns here to the theme of the treachery of the corporations towards the workers exposed in *Frank and Mr. Frankenstein*. Privilege echoes Frankenstein's comments about the bank/corporation's parental status for its employees, quoting "Jim Stillman," (presumably American banker James Jewett Stillman) that the "bank is our mother." However, Privilege complains that, because of his recent reductions, "she's been no mother to me."[43] Privation gasps: "You're killing me, sir,"[44] beginning an elaborate, extended satire in which he identifies with the bankers, as slaves once were expected to sympathize with their masters' troubles and in which Privation excoriates himself and his fellow unemployed for all the trouble they have caused the poor managers. "We treated you worst of all....when we had jobs," he cries to Privilege, "[e]very time you needed a rest, we asked for a raise...and when you had to dock us you docked only half our pay...we ruined you."[45] Privilege protests all of these comments with humility, but Privation concludes his symphony of support: "And why did you sack us? [...] Because we deserved it!"[46] Privilege tumbles prostrate on the ground in abject guilt, as Privation forces him to say the common refrain of managers of the era, that he had "sacked them" only because "he had to."[47]

The two then sing a serenade to the Goddess of Plenty—to the tune of *Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star*—including lines like: "Dollar, dollar in the bank...You have grown so very small/I can see you not at all," with the various tramps taking solos. The last of the tramps serenades them:

> You have joined the many millions and
> And the billions and quadrillions
> That belong to Henry Ford,
> Mister Morgan and good lord
> Left me lying in a ditch,
> Plinka planka plunka plank[48]

42 *Ibid.*, p.7.
43 *Ibid.*
44 *Ibid.*, p.8.
45 *Ibid.*
46 *Ibid.*
47 *Ibid.*, pp.8-9.
48 *Ibid.*, p.11.

Finally, he holds out his hat to the goddess of plenty who drops in a penny to end the number.

Privilege, glancing at his watch, is surprised by the time, and coming back to reality indicates he must go because, after all, it's time for lunch. Privation and crew are shocked. To a bewildered Privilege, Privation recounts an alternative history where for "eons" humanity spent its time "gorging" until some of the "finer minds," such as his own rebelled. In mock gentility, he claims he hadn't heard the word "lunch for years," and declares: "Eating has gone out of fashion. It's too vulgar." When Privilege demands: "How do you live?" Privation explains, in the park, they live "in the air—everywhere—debonair."[49] While somewhat mystified, Privilege's growing belief in the life of the tramp free from all the pressures of property is confirmed. After a discourse on the use of the different sections of the newspaper for their bedsheets and pillows, Privilege decides he will "sell out everything and come and sleep in the park."[50] At this moment, a German band strikes up a march tune and they sing:

> Balance up the budget
> And keep the rich alive
> For if the rich should grow
> Too poor
> How could
> the poor
> survive?[51]

The cast waltz with one another, and, in the melee, Kreymborg employs the old vaudeville gag of having the men exchange hats. Privilege appears to be a full-fledged member of the gang now, wearing Privation's crushed bowler as Privation sports Privilege's silk top hat. The music ends and the other tramps disappear. Privilege asks where they've gone and is shocked to learn they've disappeared into the bushes. Privilege assumes they have gone to relieve themselves, but Privation explains that of course by living on a diet of air, they've no need to, and, implies, no longer have the capability to urinate or defecate. Privilege, suddenly shocked and terrified, snatches back his top hat and runs off.

Kreymborg had evidently sought a dramatic and comedic conclusion for the play (the other version of the script has Privilege remaining with the tramps in the park),

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49 *Ibid.*
50 *Ibid.*, p.13.
51 *Ibid.*, p.17.

though one imagines the scatological conclusion would seem to disqualify the play for Broadway success. The sudden turn in the ending may expose weakness in Kreymborg's plotting, but it is a sufficient vehicle for telegraphing the lampoon of upper class "suffering" and the abhorrence of the values of the business class at the core of the play. The ironically light dialogue and music throughout *Privilege and Privation* thus belie a derisive satire—part comedy, part tragedy, and part satyr-play. Kreymborg's logic must force the audience to reject both the forest and city to demand a reality in which they can live, neither on food nor ideologies composed of "air."

While Kreymborg set *Frank and Mr. Frankenstein* in the interior of the bank, in the heart of the corporate layoff machine and *Privilege and Privation* on the exterior where the victims of the machine have been banished, In *America, America!: a Mass Recital*, he takes us into the home of the workers where all three plays have implied the effects of unemployment are the most destructive. He then takes us back into the street, but now as a contested public space where the workers and the unemployed will fight. Kremyborg's mass recital is divided into three formal sections—in the first, we meet an orator speaking to a crowd on some "Union Square corner" where the orator indicts America for the plight of the working, and, now not-working poor.[52] In part II, a joyriding teenage couple of loose morals is used in agitprop style to contrast the decadence of the bourgeois class with the poor, struggling married couple that appears in part III. Kreymborg's contrasting pairs of lovers are again minimalist sketches of type and represent their respective classes, rather than being realistic depictions of individuals. As the orator recounts his tale of capitalist decadence and working-class oppression, the crowd joins in on the refrain "America, America!" which builds in intensity throughout the three parts to a crescendo in the final stanza.

Kreymborg dubs *America, America!* a "dramatic ode," presumably an ode to the workers. The verse begins with long 10-13-line stanzas in iambic tetrameter. The meter does not seem to follow either a classical or English odes, frequently giving way to free verse, anaphora, and repeating lists which recall Kreymborg's obsession with repetition in his earlier verse plays. However, there is some sense of the classical ode's 3-part structure and movements, strophe, anti-strophe, and epode in the three sections of the poem. Thus, in the strophe, the poet catalogs the woes of the poor who no longer thrive and can no longer partake of their liberty in America, the anti-strophe shows us the freedom enjoyed by the bourgeois teenagers whose families effectively own the country, and finally, in the epode, the first two movements are juxtaposed as the workers vow to take back their land.

52 A. Kreymborg, *America, America!*, *op. cit.*, p.47.

Kreymborg subtitles his work a "mass recital" and follows some of the aspects of this genre of socialist ensemble performance that was emerging from worker theatres in New York. Influenced by the mass pageants that had been held on the American left, such as John Reed and Robert Edmond Jones's *Patterson Silk Strike Workers Pageant* of 1913, the "mass recitation was a dramatic form in which actors chanted in verse, using rhymed or unrhymed couplets, to the accompaniment of choreographed movements and gestures."[53] The form seems ideally suited to Kreymborg's goal of celebrating the crowd. Moreover, choreographed movements of chanted verse were the staple of Kreymborg's earlier experiments in the Little Theatre. One imagines in a fully staged production of *America, America!*, Kreymborg would have directed the actors to move stage left or stage right for the strophe and anti-strophe movements of the ode. Kreymborg had also experimented with non-movement—stasis on the stage—having actors play sculptures in another of his early playlets *Mannikin and Minnikin* (1916). There seems to be an echo of these experiments in the opening stage directions where the orator remains "stationary" but the "background of street scenes, moving crowds."[54]

America, America! reveals a Kreymborg confident with modern techniques and at home in the theatre as it begins with a montage of off-stage sound effects to greet the audience before the curtain rises: "off-stage echoes of a patriotic past: 'I pledge allegiance to my (sic) flag,' spoken by school children; Sousa's *Stars and Stripes Forever*; snatches of modern jazz..."[55] The sound montage adds a collage element—not unlike the elements used in the *Living Newspaper*. The chorus repeats the lines "America, America." In the opening, the orator gives us the strophe as a sort of anti-ode of Depression-era America:

> What have you done with all your gold,
> America, America?
> What have you bought and calmly sold
> Of human flesh and misery;
> What has it cost the growing poor
> To earn their cornered liberty
> The right to live awhile and wed;
> The right to share a loaf of bread,
> The right to one dark room and bed,

53 George W. Chilcoat, "Workers' Theatre as an Inquiry Process for Exploring Social Issues of the 1930s," *Social Education*, April/May 1998, vol.62, no.4, n.p.

54 A. Kreymborg, *America, America!*, *op. cit.*, p.47.

55 *Ibid.*

The right to love before they're dead,
and all the children comforted—
Why are the children thin and cold,
America?[56]

The first portion of the poem thus concludes with the orator recounting the difficult conditions of the poor in their one-room, cold-water flats, the evaporation of the money in the economy, and their abandonment by society at large.

In part II, a sing-song dialogue is introduced for the two bourgeois lovers, Jack and Jill. Kreymborg had often used a meter like this before for childlike innocents, but here the decadence of the children of the upper class is shown as cruel and irresponsible. The reduction of the couple to nursery rhyme characters Jack and Jill underscores their infantilism. The teenagers, engage in casual sex in the back of Dad's car and will rely on dad the banker to pay for an abortion if necessary:

Nothing in the world to worry about,
the old Harry's in and the old Harry's out,
nothing in the world to be sorry about—
"Who the hell cares what mother will say?—
Daddy's got a bank and the bank will pay—"[57]

In part III, Kreymborg juxtaposes the joyriders with his proletarian heroes, Jim and Jane. Jim returns home having found no work, where Jane has done her best to find food for the family:

"What have you got for dinner, Honey?"
"Yesterday's soup—I'm out o' money—"
(America, America.)
"What'll we do when the rent comes round?"
"Butter's gone up ten cents a pound."
"I've been all over—no job in sight."[58]

The couple recites further details of their hardships and contemplates an impossible future. Kreymborg intends to show how traditional values are being undermined by the bosses.

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56 *Ibid.*, pp.47-48.
57 *Ibid.*, pp.50-51.
58 *Ibid.*, pp.47-48.

When Jane offers to go out and work on top of her domestic drudgery, Jim breaks free of his dogged acceptance of their family's plight, blaming the "great bastards" and "king after king" who "show him the door." He demands action and the play ends on the call to revolution:

> "Up on your feet, Jane—up again now!"
> Now we'll start fighting—*"How dear how?"*
> "Tomorrow I'll tear down the whole damn sky!"
> *"An' we'll run beside you—the children an' I!"*
> "Tomorrow we'll start all over and ah—"
> *"Die if we have to—"* (America)![59]

If Kreymborg followed his classical models, the ensemble would be brought together to the center of the stage for the final chanting of "America." The epode brings together not only the first two part of the ode but also strands from the two previous playlets as well: it is time for the workers to organize, not to faint as had the poor clerk Frank, but to "start the riot." Kreymborg's politics and his aesthetics found their perfect juxtaposition in the conclusion. While details about specific stagings and choreography are limited for *America, America!: a Mass Recital*, a substantial number of photographs do document Kreymborg's next project with the FTP, *The Dance of Death*.

THE FTP POETIC DRAMA DIVISION – AUDEN'S *THE DANCE OF DEATH*

In the fall of 1935, even as he took the helm of the Manhattan Bronx Unit, Kreymborg wrote to Hallie Flannigan to suggest creating a Poetic Theatre Unit. She responded positively on December 14, and Kreymborg became head of this unit in February of 1936.[60] The new unit's only production would be W.H. Auden's verse play *The Dance of Death*, which had had its American debut directed by Flanigan herself at her home port, Vassar College. Composer and Vassar professor Claire Leonard had created a piano score for Flanigan, and Kreymborg hired him to create a full score for the New York production. Subsequent correspondence shows Kreymborg making various requests, including asking for stills of the Vassar production and making an appeal for younger actors who could handle the dancing and movement he envisioned

59 *Ibid.*

60 Correspondence between Kreymborg and Flanigan, Works Projects Administration, Federal Theatre Project Records, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), College Park, Maryland.

for the piece.[61] Auden's play afforded Kreymborg another opportunity to assail the capitalist establishment. The title signals the play as a modernist *dance macabre*, the dance led by the grim reaper to which all, regardless of station must ultimately join. The intervention of the off-stage voice of Karl Marx in the ending shows Auden exploiting the theme for class struggle in a move widely considered to be pro-communist at the time.[62] Kreymborg's approach to staging the play as a grand spectacle was his greatest, and would prove his last opportunity to create a fusion of poetic theatre and politics on stage.

W.H. Auden's *The Dance of Death: A problem in mass rhythmic pantomime and recitation*, "directed" by Emile Beliveau, with Alfred Kreymborg listed as "supervising director"[63] ran from May 19-June 6, 1936. The subtitle is clearly Kreymborg's as is the idea of having the cast move in time with poetic rhythm, following closely his concept for the Others Players, which included: "Pantomime in the form of a semi-dance of gesture, in accordance with the sense more than the rhythm of the lines."[64] No doubt it was the Kreymborgian terminology and objectives for the show that led some sources to refer to Kreymborg rather than Beliveau as director. Kreymborg undoubtedly wrote the program notes as well. After praising Auden and the poets of his generation for "a consciousness of British decadence and a determination to do something about it,"[65] the notes evolve into a manifesto for poetic theatre, showing Kreymborg balancing in mid-career the modernist impulse for ambiguity and indeterminacy against his ambition to reach and involve the masses:

> *The Dance of Death* is susceptible to many meanings and interpretations. The pace of the lines and situations is so rapid as to defeat a specific interpretation made in haste. So much is left to the actors by the author and by the actors to the audience that the audience itself has a part in the play, or what might be called the mood of cooperation. The genial announcer states our common plight: "We present to you this evening a

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61 Alfred Kreymborg to Hallie Flannigan, January 13, 1936, Correspondence, Works Projects Administration, Federal Theatre Project Records, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), College Park, Maryland.

62 In 1942, Auden apparently scribbled in a friend's copy of the printed play: "the communists never spotted this was a nihilistic leg-pull" (Edward Mendelson, *Early Auden; Late Auden*, Princeton, Princeton UP, 1981, p.270).

63 *Dance of Death* program, Federal Theatre Project Collection, The Library of Congress Collection of U.S. Works Progress Administration Records, Special Collections in the Music Division, Washington, DC, p.1.

64 A. Kreymborg, *Troubadour*, *op. cit.*, p.131.

65 Alfred Kreymborg (?), "Program Notes" (ms.), Wystan Hugh Auden, *Dance of Death*. Federal Theatre Project Collection, The Library of Congress Collection, n.p.

picture of the decline of a class, of how its members dream of a new life, but secretly desire the old, for there is death inside them. We show you that death as a dancer." Those among us who have worked many years toward the revival of poetic drama in modern terms are greatly cheered by the sudden advance in public interest, abroad as well as at home.... Poetic drama, whether in verse or prose, is nothing more or less than the broadcast interpretation of a common experience.[66]

1. Chorus, Announcer, Dancer before ensemble. Federal Theatre Project Collection, Music Division, Library of Congress.

Pre-show publicity from the FTP's office of information appeared in an article by Burns Mantle, announcing the goal of a synthesis of the arts: "It is an attempt to return to the fundamental union of the three dramatic arts and employs singers, dancers, and actors performing against a musical and plastic background."[67] Mantle continues reporting "Death in the play is a dancer. The other characters in the play are men and

66 *Ibid.*

67 Burns Mantle, *Daily News*, New York, May 18, 1936, p.216.

women who are fleeing from life to the beach, to the sun, anywhere away from life and trouble."[68] In *The Dance of Death*, Auden depicts the English middle class's aversion to the unpleasantness of depression reality as they flock to the sun, although linear plot lines are immersed in a myriad of high modernist or expressionist fragmentation with many different characters, choruses, and obscure allusions.

2. The episode, "In the sun." Federal Theatre Project Collection, Music Division, Library of Congress

There are five poetic choruses repeated at particular intervals during the show. The first invites people from all countries to enjoy a Cunard-style vacation in the sun on "the ship of England" and declares its quasi-revolutionary theme: "Revolutionary Worker, I get what you mean / But what you need is a revolution within / So let's begin".[69] The events are presided over by an Announcer—appearing in bourgeois evening dress and top hat in Kreymborg's production—who declares that the play will picture the "decline of a class"[70]—the lines Kreymborg chose to include in his program notes. There is a Chorus proper that serves as a foil during dramatic moments but is primarily a send-up of the Greek tragic chorus of prominent citizens with conservative attitudes; there are also numerous cast members with obvious Anglo-Saxon surnames; and numerous

68 *Ibid.*

69 W.H. Auden, "Choruses for *The Dance of Death*," in *The Dance of Death* (ms.), Federal Theatre Project Collection, The Library of Congress Collection, pp.1-4.

70 *Ibid.*, p.1.

symbolic characters in the expressionist tradition such as the Three Professors and the Three Graces (see **fig.1**). Auden gives us several episodes on a sunny cruise ship to lampoon the English middle class—such as the *Alma Mater* episode—parodying the English who hang onto the status of their *Alma Maters* (the old school tie and such) far into advanced age and bear other classic marks of the leisure class.

Kreymborg's script is reasonably faithful to the published text but with numerous cuts and minor changes. The rhythmic movement Kreymborg created to follow the verse, the music, and the Dancer's choreography were all original to the FTP production. Several photographs preserve something of the dances and the staging, such as the "The Sun God Dance" which diverts the crowd of sunbathers.

3. The dance in the sun. Federal Theatre Project Collection, Music Division, Library of Congress

Here, the Dancer appears for the first time (**fig.4**), an idealization of beauty, drawing the attention of the sunbathers, although the Announcer warns his beauty is "leading you on."[71]

In Scene One, the sunbathers discover their clothes have been stolen and eventually they find a basket of old band uniforms and put on a musical review in the style of 1916, which turns into a pantomime of the First World War. The characters cry "a sword," "a gun," and the Chorus: "Look what they've gone and done,"[72] as a lead into a mass recital in which the audience is invited to join on war and revolution. It's not clear how the lines were communicated to the audience in the FTP production, but the script asks the audience to chant along with the actors:

71 *Ibid.*, p.3.
72 *Ibid.*, p.8.

4. The Dancer. Federal Theatre Project Collection, Music Division, Library of Congress

> One, two, three, four—the last war was a bosses' war! Five, six, seven, eight—rise and make a worker's state! Nine, ten, eleven, twelve—seize the factories and run them yourselves!
> We will liquidate the capitalist state![73]

The Chorus and Audience conclude with a chant of "Overthrow!" However, the popular revolution soon takes a satirical turn as the Announcer points out that Russia has not a middle class, and cannot offer a model for England, and anyhow Russians

73 *Ibid.*

just aren't English: "After all, are we not all of one blood, the blood of King Arthur... our first duty is to keep the race pure...and not let the dirty foreigners come in and take our jobs!" [74] It's then decided that because women are needed as caretakers for men, they too should be excluded from the English revolution. All join in a cry of "revolution," which has thus now been completely co-opted by traditional class and gender prejudices and is, of course, no revolution at all (**fig. 5**).

5. Dance of Death, Unidentified Scene. Federal Theatre Project Collection, Music Division, Library of Congress

The FTP production featured an intermission of 15 minutes and recommences with the Dancer appearing as if he were a daredevil pilot—at the time a role popular with young aristocrats. The Dancer is a shifting signifier throughout the play; earlier on the beach, we are told he symbolizes beauty; here as he prepares for a fatal dance, he represents the titular death. Here Auden throws out a philosophical allusion. If something happens to the Dancer: "Who will be our master, who will teach to fly from the alone to the alone?" [75] The allusion is to Plotinus who praised the individual, mystic

74 *Ibid.*, p.9.
75 *Ibid.*, p.18.

contemplation of works of art—suggesting the importance of the ego and individualistic consciousness or self—in fact, the aristocratic consciousness of Nietzsche as opposed to the collective consciousness of the masses. Thus in representing an excess of ego, of an unlimited aestheticism, Auden's dancer may be interpreted as, and was recognized by at least one reviewer[76] of Kreymborg's production as a symbol of fascism, the most alluring and seductive temptation for the hypocritical middle class.

6. The Dancer Collapses. Federal Theatre Project Collection, Music Division, Library of Congress

The narration of the Dancer's aeronautical stunt is covered by Box and Cox, two sports reporters, and the Audience is instructed to make the "oohs," and "ahs," and other noises appropriate for his various turns and leaps. The dancer falls and is injured—he is placed in a chair, paralyzed from the waist down (**fig.6**). In Auden's text, the audience is invited on stage at this point, although there is no mention of this in Kreymborg's script.

The Dancer makes out his will which sounds like that of an English country gentleman and industrialist, promising both the means of production and his wealth to the workers:

76 "The Dance of Death," *The Brooklyn Citizen*, May 20, 1936, p.14.

He leaves you his engines and his machines
The sum of all his productive means
He leaves you his railways, his liners, his banks
And he leaves you his money to spend with thanks[77]

The reading of the will seems to recount the history of the bourgeois rising against the landed nobility and the industrial revolution (**fig.7**), and ends by promising the workers both control of the means of production and the wealth of capitalism, possibly logically irreconcilable outcomes, and those so often promised by populist and fascist leaders. The set-piece also offers the opportunity for Claire Leonard's climactic number in the FTP show, the *Bourgeoise Blues*.

7. Rendition of *Bourgeoise Blues.* Federal Theatre Project Collection, Music Division, Library of Congress

The Dancer dies, and, in the FTP production, a lavish funeral is enacted. The chorus appeals to and sings of the *Alma Maters* and of the class that depends on them, although one of the English characters, McLaughlin, recognizes how they have sold out the working classes and unemployed who may seek revenge. "Quick, under the table, it's the bread lines in the parks,"[78] he cries. They hide like Ostriches but are soon vanquished by the voice of Karl Marx: "The instruments of production have been too much for them. They are liquidated."[79]

77 *Ibid.*, p.24.
78 *Ibid.*, p.27.
79 *Ibid.*

As had happened so often in Kreymborg's career, his work on *The Dance of Death* was misunderstood and derided for its oddity and somewhat impractical execution, while loyalists defended the temerity and intrepidity of his experimentation. George Kazacoff, the only scholar of the FTP to seriously consider the production, notes that "most reviewers did not feel that the life of the bourgeoisie would end imminently,"[80] dismissing the production's political insurgency. *The Wall Street Journal* "assured its readers that there was nothing to worry about" and suggested the production was more "a satire of itself than a serious philosophical statement."[81] However, the reviewers cited by Kazacoff grumbled less about politics and more about the modernist aesthetics of the disconnected dialogue, symbolic characters, and the absurdity of the plot, typical biases of American theatre critics' of the era towards non-realistic theatre. Kreymborg's defenders gave the show positive marks, such as the critic of *The Brooklyn Citizen* who, after dutifully noting a flaw in the "excess of sound caused by the actors' movement across the stage" argued:

> A tradition of allaying contemporary poetic drama with some form of social protest was upheld [...] the outstanding characteristic of the drama is its abandonment of traditional forms of expression. Not only have music and choreography been employed in conjunction with rhyme and prose, but they are presented in bitter, vivid phrases. The effect is interesting, albeit if not always clear because of the appearance of the puzzling imagery.[82]

The Dance of Death offered Kreymborg the chance to fully exercise his theories of poetic movement and showcase formally protean modernism fused with proletarian politics with the size of cast and stage befitting participative drama for the masses. His efforts should be seen as a *tour de force* for the collaborative arts. Yet *The Dance of Death* was the first and last production for the Poetic Drama Unit, and it remains unclear if the unit's demise was for lack of a more receptive public or mounting political pressure on the FTP from Washington.

Kreymborg reappears in the FTP Radio Unit in 1937. Once again, he announced ambitious goals for the new unit: "Famous poets from all over the country will cooperate with the actors and directors of the project for a series of half-hour programs," while

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80 George Kazacoff, *Dangerous Theatre*, La Vergne, PageTurner Press and Media 2011, p.171.

81 Cited *ibid.*

82 "The Dance of Death," art. cit., p.14.

plans were "afoot" for the dramatization of classic works, and "later programs" would be "devoted to the living American novelist, dramatist, and critic."[83] More research needs to be undertaken to trace Kreymborg's involvement with the Radio Unit and the conditions under which he left the FTP, but by 1938 he had emerged on radio not with the FTP but with NBC, where he would have his greatest popular success with a pacifist radio play based on Holst's symphony *The Planets*. His success was short-lived, however, and after the war, Kreymborg's career would be limited by his political views. Poetry scholar Alan Filreis quotes from a letter of Kreymborg's from 1946 complaining about difficulties finding a publisher for his then-latest manuscript of poems. Kreymborg feared that with his poetry's "embattled pacifism" and its expression of a wish for "peaceful coexistence" with the Soviet Union, "it won't be easy to place in the current marketplace." Kreymborg further lamented that he had "a temporarily exhausted and depleted heart" as the anti-communist obsession took hold in the United States. Poet Aron Kramer, then a young friend of Kreymborg's was blunt in his assessment: Kreymborg was "bludgeoned into silence by the McCarthy period.[84] Indeed, Kreymborg was eventually blacklisted by the House Un-American Activities Committee, and his name became virtually unknown by the end of the 1950s. The author hopes that the present study will encourage further recovery of one of America's most unusual voices, the troubadour who sang for the people instead of the king.

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NOTICE

Drew Eisenhauer is the editor with Brenda Murphy of *Intertextuality in American Drama: Critical Essays on Eugene O'Neill, Susan Glaspell, Thornton Wilder, Arthur Miller, and Other Playwrights* (2011). His most recent article, "Greece and the Delphic Imaginary: Glaspell in Broader Geographical Contexts" (J. Ellen Gainor [ed.], *Susan Glaspell and Her Contexts*, Cambridge UP), has been published in 2023. Eisenhauer regularly presents on American drama and modernist writers associated with the Provincetown Players at international conferences. He was a recipient of a City of Paris Postdoctoral Research Fellowship and can be found teaching English language, literature, and theatre at the University Le Havre, Normandy and Paris College of Art.

ABSTRACT

Despite his recognition as an important editor of modernist poetry and the acknowledgment of the significance of his early poetic plays performed with the Provincetown Players, scholarship about Alfred Kreymborg remains scarce, particularly his involvement with the FTP from 1934-1938. This paper is among the first efforts to recover this period of Kreymborg's work, offering an initial exploration of the materials available in the National Archives and Records Administration and the Library of Congress. The present study discusses Kreymborg's work both as writer and administrator for the Manhattan-Bronx unit of the FTP and offers the first critical analysis of his anti-capitalist ensemble verse-plays: *America, America!: a Mass Recital* (1934), *Frank and Mr. Frankenstein* (1934), and *Privilege and Privation* (1937). The paper also discusses Kreymborg's application of his theatrical and political theories in a major production of W.H. Auden's *The Dance of Death* (1936), undertaken as head of the Poetic Drama Unit in 1936.

Keywords

Kreymborg, Federal Theatre Project, poetic drama, Modernism, *Others*, Marxist literature, Auden, Yiddish theatre, Provincetown Players, agitprop

RÉSUMÉ

En dépit de sa reconnaissance en tant qu'éditeur de poésie moderniste, et la publication de quelques critiques de ses premières pièces en vers produites par les Provincetown Players, les études sur Alfred Kreymborg restent rares, en particulier sur son investissement auprès du FTP de 1934 à 1938. Cet article s'appuie sur des documents conservés à la National Archives and Records Administration et à la Bibliothèque du Congrès. Il examine le travail de Kreymborg à la fois comme rédacteur et administrateur de l'unité Manhattan-Bronx du FTP et livre la première analyse critique de ses pièces chorales anticapitalistes : *America, America!: a Mass Recital* (1934), *Frank and Mr. Frankenstein* (1934) et *Privilege and Privation* (1937). L'article traite également de l'application des théories théâtrales et politique de Kreymborg dans sa mise en scène de *The Dance of Death* de W.H. Auden (1936), entreprise en tant que chef du Poetic Drama Unit.

Mots-Clés

Kreymborg, *Federal Theatre Project*, drame en vers, modernisme, *Others*, marxisme, W. H. Auden, théâtre yiddish, *Provincetown Players*, l'agit-prop

CRÉDITS PHOTO

VISUELS DE COUVERTURE (TOUS DANS LE DOMAINE PUBLIC)

1. Hallie Flanagan, director of the WPA Federal Theatre Project. Created *ca* 1939. Federal Theatre Project Collection, Library of Congress.
2. Windrip adresses the crowd in a rally in the San Francisco Federal Theatre Project production of *It Can't Happen Here*, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.
3. Photograph of the New York production of *One-Third of a Nation*, a Living Newspaper play by the Federal Theatre Project, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.
4. « Continue WPA ! », Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library. « Federal Theatre Project » The New York Public Library Digital Collections.
5. Crowd outside Lafayette Theatre on opening night, Classical Theatre, « *Voodoo* » *Macbeth*, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.
6. Scene from the Federal Theatre Project production of O'Neill's *One-Act Plays of the Sea* at the Lafayette Theatre (Oct. 1937-Jan. 1938), Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Photographs and Prints Division, New York Public Library, «Mr. Neil's Barn»The New York Public Library Digital Collections.

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Collection dirigée par Julie Vatain-Corfdir & Sophie Marchand

La collection « e-Theatrum Mundi » considère le théâtre sous tous ses angles et dans tous ses états. Dans la continuité de la collection papier à laquelle elle est adossée, elle se veut un lieu de réflexion sur les diverses manifestations d'expression théâtrale à travers le monde, et rassemble des travaux de recherche sur l'écriture, le jeu, les pratiques et les formes scéniques, la mise en scène et le spectateur. Sa particularité est de proposer uniquement des volumes interdisciplinaires, en lien avec le Programme de recherches interdisciplinaires sur le théâtre et les pratiques scéniques de Sorbonne Université (PRITEPS), dont elle reflète les activités. En croisant les angles d'approche, la collection vise à provoquer des confrontations fructueuses entre les scènes, les langues et les méthodologies, dans le domaine des études théâtrales.

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