SOME HEROIC DISCIPLINE

William Butler Yeats and the *Oxford Book of Modern Verse*

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ABSTRACT

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Some Heroic Discipline: William Butler Yeats and the *Oxford Book of Modern Verse*
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This project explores William Butler Yeats's work as editor of the 1936 *Oxford Book of Modern Verse*, with emphasis on Yeats's sense of his own place among the poets of his day. The study considers all of the 379 poems by the ninety-seven writers included in the anthology (as well as notable omissions) in the context of Yeats's critical writings and correspondence; where possible, it identifies the sources consulted by Yeats for his selections, and the circumstances of publication. It also examines the degree to which Yeats saw the anthology as a way to influence the emerging literary consensus of the mid-1930s. Finally, it argues that the anthology offers the same essentially neo-Romantic critique of modernity that can be found in Yeats's own poems—a sense that to be modern is to wrestle with an impulse to believe, despite circumstances that weaken the basis for such belief.

Chapter I relates the details of the book's conception, gestation, and publication. Chapter II addresses the late-Victorian poets, including both avant-garde "decadents" with whom he identified and late-Victorian mainstream poets against whom he reacted. Chapter III explores Yeats's selections from contemporaries among the Edwardian-era writers, including those whose modern sensibility separated them from the Victorians. Chapter IV considers the many Irish poets that Yeats included in the anthology, and the

ways in which the Irish experience embodied the modern problem for him. Chapter V addresses his reaction to the Georgian-era writers and "war poets" whose sensibility was shaped before the First World War, but whose best-known work appeared during and after it. Finally, Chapter VI considers the modernist poets inspired by T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, whom he answered with a more idiosyncratic version of what it meant to be "modern."

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Introduction:

An Unsuitable Modernity

The peculiar problems posed by *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse: 1892–1935*,[1] edited by William Butler Yeats and published in 1936, might best be illustrated by an incident that took place fifteen years after he finished work on the anthology, and twelve years after his death in 1939. In February of 1951, the Irish-born poet Louis MacNeice received an unexpected proposition from an acquaintance, Daniel M. Davin, Assistant Secretary to the Delegates of the Oxford University Press. At the time, MacNeice was working in Athens for an overseas cultural organization, the British Council, and Davin wrote proposing to meet with him there in April to discuss a project. Davin was interested in visiting World War II battlefields in Greece, where he had fought, but memoranda in the Press's archives make it clear that he also hoped to buttonhole MacNeice and nail down contract terms that would allow the Press to salvage an increasingly problematic anthology.

"As you know," Davin wrote MacNeice, "the *Oxford Book of Modern Verse*, edited by Yeats, goes only as far as 1935 and we have lately begun to think that it ought perhaps to be brought up to date. The difficulty is to find an editor who could live inside the same pair of covers as Yeats" (26 Jan 1951).

Davin had been getting periodic inquiries from the chief executive of the Press, Arthur Norrington, about updating the book. Norrington had written six months earlier, after meeting with Oxford's book salesmen, "The Travelers told us yesterday that they

1. Henceforth referred to as *OBMV*.

are occasionally asked why we do not bring this book up to date. The word 'modern' in the title is becoming unsuitable" (28 Jul 1950).

From Oxford's point of view, the word "modern" had actually been unsuitable ever since the anthology first appeared on November 19, 1936. It had immediately caused a furor among poets and critics, who argued that it was unrepresentative of the main currents of modern poetry, or reactionary in its modernity,[2] or modern only in ways idiosyncratic to Yeats. In seeking a poet able to "live inside the same pair of covers," Davin wanted someone who could not only add current poetry to the book, but someone willing, by implication, to get into bed with Yeats's idiosyncratic vision of what "modern" meant.

MacNeice was more than a casual choice. His own work had been included in Yeats's original selection, he was well known, and he had written a study of Yeats for Oxford. More to the point, he was the sort of person the Oxford editors felt they could depend on to make the title "suitable": "[T. S.] Eliot seems to me too set and too out of touch with poetry since 1935," Davin wrote Norrington before contacting MacNeice.

> Edith Sitwell is rather remote, has the Sitwell unpredictability—she might use half the space for her own stuff—and has enemies. Dylan Thomas has a wonderful ear and appreciative taste but is erratic and I should expect him to be inefficient in[3] the necessary donkey-work. He also has enemies and would be harder to make people like [influential Oxford don H. W.]

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2. Cecil Day-Lewis, for example, was typical in reviewing Yeats's selection (which included some of Day-Lewis's own poems), calling it "capricious to the verge of eccentricity, scandalously unrepresentative, as arrogant in its vulnerability as any aristocrat riding in a tumbril" (qtd. in Foster, *Arch-Poet,* 565-66). Day-Lewis will henceforth be referred to as C. Day Lewis, as he styled it in his work.

3. Read "too drunk for."

> Garrod swallow. [W. H.] Auden made such a mess of his Tennyson anthology and is so associated with the pre-1939 political school[4] that I think we ought to avoid him. [W. R.] Rodgers is less well-known than the others and is also a bit unpractical. . . . That leaves [Stephen] Spender, Day Lewis and MacNeice. The first is quite a good critic but out of favor with many poets. (For example, he and Roy Campbell came to blows last year.) Day Lewis is already associated with another anthology. So I come to MacNeice who has good judgment, is reasonably efficient, is very well-known, and is very well-liked, and is himself one of the few contemporary poets of any standing. (17 Jan 1951)

Davin's gossipy memo offers a good glimpse into the cautious mindset of an Oxford editor at mid-century: the opinions of persons in a position to attack or support the book are in the forefront of his thinking because they can dramatically affect its commercial and critical prospects. This is understandable because the anthology was part of the significant portion of Oxford's list each year that comprised trade (non-scholarly) publications meant to make money[5]—to subsidize, to some extent, the money-losing scholarly publications that advanced the press's higher mission as part of the university

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4. By 1951, with the Cold War in full chill, the Marxism of the "Auden Group" that had made them seem advanced thinkers in the early 1930s was no longer a selling point.

5. There was much precedent for this attitude. Oxford Vice-Chancellor Benjamin Jowett, who appointed members of the governing body, the Delegates of the Oxford University Press, instructed them in the 1860s that the Press had "adopted the maxim that to make money rather than to advance learning was the primary policy of the University Press" (Sutcliffe 59). In 1892, Secretary Littleton Gell wrote, "I have it constantly in mind . . . that in the steady development of the Commercial side of the Publishing Business, we are building up a future resource upon which we can fall back in days of adversity" (qtd. in Sutcliffe 78).

and an expression of English literary culture. Oxford's popular anthologies, beginning with Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch's *Oxford Book of English Verse* in 1900, had been remarkably successful in doing so, and Oxford had sought to build on the franchise throughout the century by producing similar anthologies of poetry and prose intended to be sold to the nonspecialist, taught from in school courses, given as gifts, or added to a home library. For the Press, a trade book was evaluated as a commercial product first and foremost; even in a book wrestling with revolutionary literary developments such as Modernism, what was wanted was an editor whose modernity would not repel the general reading public. In MacNeice, Davin felt he had found someone who possessed the cachet of a well-known contemporary poet, but who would pay attention to Oxford's wishes for a suitable revision of the book and not allow himself to be carried away—as detractors declared Yeats had been—by his own literary enthusiasms.

Which is not to say that Yeats's book had been a commercial failure; most assuredly it had not, or else Davin and Norrington would have been seeking to replace rather than revise it. In fact, the editors noted that the English edition of the anthology was in its eighth printing, and some seventy thousand copies were in print, not counting the American edition, then in its third printing. In 1951, fifteen years after its original appearance, Norrington said, it was still selling a healthy three thousand copies a year in the United Kingdom (18 Jun 1951). As a successful Oxford anthology it could simply be listed in the catalog each year and reprinted as needed, earning profits without requiring much investment beyond printing costs. (It would, in fact, remain in print for more than forty years, until the early 1980s, when sales finally dried up and Oxford formally

declared it out of print.) The Press simply wanted to ensure steady demand—what publishers refer to as "backlist" sales—by freshening up the book and making it current.

In doing so, though, Oxford's editors faced a problem that they didn't at first perceive. Unlike most other Oxford literary anthologies, for which the major appeal was the Press's prestige and scholarly authority, a major part of the *OBMV*'s ongoing appeal lay in its editor's name. W. B. Yeats might be dead, but he could still sell books; the Yeats industry of the early 1950s was booming—scholars were digging into every aspect of the poet's career and work, a major new edition of his poetry was forthcoming, and lines from his great lyrics were often alluded to knowingly in literary circles to evoke modernity, much as one might allude to Shakespeare or Milton or Wordsworth to evoke literary greatness.

The Yeats name had achieved exactly what Oxford's editors of nearly two decades earlier had envisioned when they decided to approach the aging poet about compiling the anthology in the first place: he had brought an audience. From Oxford's perspective in the 1950s, the problem was that he had also brought himself; if the editor, rather than the poetry, was the chief attraction of the anthology, how might the book be made current without undoing or rejecting his idiosyncrasies? Yeats had been dead for more than a decade, and could not very well update the selection himself, so Davin's solution had been to turn to another "name" poet in the hope that the choice would overcome any dissonance.[6]

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6. Davin wrote Norrington,

> I think that if we are going to get an editor who will go with Yeats we must look for a poet. If two poets produce markedly different kinds of selective tastes we can answer: what do you expect? Whereas poet and critic are bound to differ, without there being even a harmony in

MacNeice and Davin were unable to schedule a meeting in Greece, but the poet saw the problem immediately:

> I should quite like to take this on — although it may mean losing a number of friends. My fee, I think, would depend on the amount of work involved which, I cannot assess at the moment — [but] I take it you can illuminate me?
>
> Just two questions in the meanwhile: —
>
> . . . As presumably everything chosen by Yeats stands, how much are we to have of later work by poets already represented? (12 Feb 1951)

The question caught Davin by surprise, as his reply showed:

> You are right in thinking that Yeats' selections would stand but the question of what to include of the later works of the poets already represented is a tricky one of which I must confess I had not previously thought. It will make the shape ugly, I am afraid, to have work by Edith Sitwell, for example, in two different places but I do not see how we are to avoid this. We had better wait until we can talk. (20 Feb 1951)

The original *OBMV* had come in at 500 pages. The Oxford anthologies were intended to be representative, and Yeats's stated intention had appeared to accord with that; he said he wanted "to include in this book all good poets who have lived or died

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> difference. And if we turned to a critic now all the poets—most of them very vocal critics—could turn on us for academic backsliding. Selecting from so recent a period is venturesome anyway; so we may as well venture wholeheartedly. (17 Jan 1951)

from three years before the death of Tennyson [in 1892] to the present moment [in 1935]" (*OBMV* v). Thus, in the view of the Oxford editors, the representative "shape" needed to remain fairly consistent. "We gave 500 [pages] to Yeats for 44 years which would mean 167 [pages] for 15 years," Davin wrote Norrington. "But that is of course too much for a supplement" (17 Jan 1951).

Practical considerations played a role too. The Press did not want to have to undertake a costly resetting of type for the first five hundred pages, which would be required if the book were revised in the traditional sense. Davin and Norrington wanted merely to add to it a new sixty-four-page signature (the most cost-effective printing unit) in the form of a "supplement" that could be bound in between the covers along with the original pages, and to provide a revised table of contents and index. But now that the question of current work by poets already represented had arisen, the aesthetic drawbacks of this plan became apparent. Would some poets appear in both the original volume and the supplement? What about name poets that Yeats had left out? Would the stately, authoritative order of an Oxford anthology begin to seem like a mere hodgepodge?

The problem with the volume's "shape" came into focus with MacNeice's next letter:

> One ~~proposal~~ suggestion I would make straightaway. I've been glancing at Yeats's selection & there's quite a surprising number of good people <u>not</u> included in it. In view of this I think it would be best to confine the appendix to the above & not let in <u>any</u> of those represented in Yeats's batch; it's a bit hard on the latter some of whom are v. seriously or badly represented there but it will a) give

> more room for the new crop & b) avoid embarrassments with the Sitwells, Spenders etc. (21 May 1951)

The Oxford editors quickly realized that MacNeice's plan presented its own problems. Poets such as Auden (whose recent work—including his well-known elegy on Yeats's death—was widely viewed as superior to the more ideological 1930s-era poems that Yeats had included) would consequently not be represented by their best-known work, which would invite criticism too.

Some well-known poets such as Dylan Thomas had been left out of the anthology altogether as young men but were now important figures; would the Press be criticized for violating Yeats's vision for the book if they were included? What about other deliberate omissions, such as the well regarded "war poets" of World War I that he had snubbed? What about major American names like William Carlos Williams, Robert Frost, and Wallace Stevens, who were omitted because Yeats had chosen only to include American poets with "European" reputations in the 1930s? Could it be possible to harmonize such things in only sixty-four pages?

Certainty about the project quickly dissolved as Davin explored the implications in a memo to Norrington:

> The problem is what to do about people already in but badly represented (e.g. later T.S. Eliot, Edith Sitwell etc.). M. now inclines to leave them out, add people like Wilfrid [*sic*] Owen whom Yeats on a sophistry omitted. This would be more convenient as M. says but it does mean that the supplement is not truly representative [of writers from 1935–1950]. The alternative, I

> suppose, would be to add a bare specimen of each of the poets in Yeats but developed since. (14 Jun 1951)

The shape of the revised book was looking uglier and uglier, calling renewed attention to the strange, unrepresentative nature of Yeats's original selection and risking ongoing sales by, in essence, undercutting the name that made it sell.

Norrington shared Davin's lack of enthusiasm, admitting in a handwritten note that he didn't "like either alternative. . . . I see we have printed 8 impressions totaling nearly 70,000. Is it worth waiting a few years, and then re-setting?" (18 Jun 1951). In other words, rather than produce an oddly shaped and potentially controversial revision that would please nobody, it might be safer to do nothing: simply sell the current book until its sales flagged, and later revise it more drastically. Norrington later told R. W. Chapman, "To rename it would affront the Yeats clan, depress owners of the book and publicize our failure to produce a book of 'Oxford' calibre. Nor can it be revised. So I say, let sleeping mongrels lie" (5 Nov 1953).

Davin passed these second thoughts on to MacNeice, and sought to let him down gently with the vague promise of work on the more ambitious future revision:

> [The Secretary] wonders whether the best thing is not to wait a few years and then to reset the whole book so as to include the fresh material for any particular people in the right place. The objection to this is, of course, that it means the book is no longer a genuine Yeats selection. I should like to talk the whole thing over with you and as you are to be in London in September I think the best thing is to leave it till then. (19 Jul 1951)

Correspondence in the Oxford archives reveals that Davin and the editors at Oxford honored this statement of intent, coming back to MacNeice again a decade later to propose doing an entirely new volume, to be called "The Oxford Book of Twentieth Century Verse," but the poet died before the project could move forward.

The Oxford Book of Modern Verse was destined never to be revised by Oxford. No other editor, it turned out, could live inside the covers with Yeats. So problematic were the circumstances of its publication that the Press couldn't even pass it on to another publisher to wrestle with; archival files show that the editors were forced to back out of an agreement in the 1970s to sell reprint rights to Granada Publishing (which wanted to do a paperback edition in parallel with its reprint of Quiller-Couch's original *Oxford Book of English Verse*), because too much work was required in straightening out permissions problems.

Thus the book was ultimately allowed to fade away and go out of print after its final printing in 1978.[7] It can still be found in used book stores or online, but any student now picking up Yeats's anthology cheap and hoping to find a canonical collection of poetry written in English during the early modern period is likely to be disappointed—unless, that is, that student intends to learn instead about how William Butler Yeats

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7. Some years after MacNeice's death the editors contracted with Philip Larkin to edit a replacement, *The Oxford Book of Twentieth Century English Verse*, but the results were nearly as idiosyncratic as with Yeats. As Anne Ferry writes in her 2001 critical study of poetry anthologies, "Neither poet produced what their publishers mainly wanted in an Oxford anthology, an uncontroversial retrospective representation of famous poets by their already well-known poems" (243). By 2001, when Oxford published a new *Anthology of Twentieth-Century Irish and English Poetry*, the Press seems to have despaired of name poets as editors completely and turned to a scholar, Keith Tuma, for the selection; notably, it was not an "Oxford Book."

viewed himself in the context of those currents. That is what I hope to do in this study of Yeats's anthology.

Chapter I is essentially narrative—it will tell the story of the book's editing and publication. I will examine his letters and Oxford archival material to explore the biographical and literary situation that led to Yeats's decision to take on the book, the process he went through in compiling it, and the publishing situation that produced it. Chapters II through VI will consider groups of the poets whose work he chose, and see what might be learned about Yeats's sense of his own place among his contemporaries when one compares his selections to his own body of work: Chapter II will address the late-Victorian poets, including both the avant-garde "decadents" with whom he identified, and certain late-Victorian mainstream poets against whom he reacted. Chapter III will explore Yeats's contemporaries among the Edwardian-era writers, including writers such as Thomas Hardy whose modern sensibility separated them from the Victorians. Chapter IV will consider the many Irish poets whom Yeats included in the anthology, and the ways in which the Irish experience embodied the modern problem for him. Chapter V will address the Georgian-era writers and "war poets" whose sensibility was shaped before the First World War, but whose best-known work appeared during and after it. Finally, Chapter VI will consider the modernist poets inspired by T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound that Yeats termed the "Ezra, Eliot, Auden school" (*CL* #6189*,* 21 Feb 1935*),*[8]

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8. Quotations from Yeats's letters are primarily from the Intelex electronic edition of his collected letters, hereafter referred to as *CL,* which includes both published and unpublished letters. Unpublished letters are identified by accession number and date. Published letters are cited by date only; notes from the published letters are cited by page number.

and those other "moderns" that Yeats offered as a kind of answer to the modernists and "Thirties poets" with a more idiosyncratic notion of what it meant to be modern.

When corresponding with the poet Laura Riding while compiling the book, Yeats characterized his work on the anthology as "despotic" (*CL* #6541, 26 Apr 1936). But ultimately *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse* was more than a collection of arbitrary choices by an old despot. A popular anthology, by its very nature, orders the material that it selects to suit a purpose. As I shall suggest, this one went further, offering the same response to modernity that Yeats's own poems presented. When Yeats writes in his introduction that he has included "all good poets" who wrote during the period covered by the book, "good" does not mean (as Oxford's editors had hoped) a reflection of the literary consensus of the time. It means what seems good to Yeats. The anthology is not a scholar's compilation but a poet's meditation at the end of a long career about why one man's poetic sensibility exemplifies the proper matter of modern poetry. In his visionary essay *Per Amica Silentia Lunae,* Yeats famously drew a distinction between poetry and rhetoric: "We make out of the quarrel with others, rhetoric, but of the quarrel with ourselves, poetry. Unlike the rhetoricians, who get a confident voice from remembering the crowd they have won or may win, we sing amid our uncertainty . . . " (*Mythologies* 331). Ultimately, I contend, for Yeats in his last years, the act of compiling the *OBMV* represented rhetoric and poetry in tension with one another—a quarrel with others about what it meant to be modern, and a quarrel with himself as he considered his obligation to speak out passionately with an "unsuitable" voice amid the rising clamor of the twentieth century.

I.

"That I Might Be Reborn in Imagination": Editing and Publishing *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse*

Perhaps a scrap of onionskin paper in the archives of the Oxford University Press—marked with pencil-strokes in the jagged, notoriously illegible scrawl that Secretary to the Delegates R. W. Chapman often employed to hector his publishing subordinates with notes (Sutcliffe 202, 246)—best captures the mood of the Press's top editors regarding W. B. Yeats's *Oxford Book of Modern Verse* as its publication date neared. The book was set for late 1936, just in time for the Christmas gift-buying season. Presses were running, pages were already printed and bound in England, and the first batches of finished books had been shipped to reviewers and booksellers across the British Empire; but now a first-class controversy was erupting over Yeats's selection, and potential legal trouble hovered over the copyright acknowledgments of the book.

The sedate, conservative routine of publishing distinguished volumes of literature had suddenly been rattled by a round of frantic telegrams, memos, telephone calls, and letters in late September and early October in advance of the book's November release. Poets were complaining about being left out—and about being put in. Publishers and agents were complaining about not having been paid, or about unauthorized use of copyrighted poems. Critics who'd seen advance copies were complaining about the Press's choice of Yeats as the volume editor. Booksellers were complaining that the book wasn't available yet. The staff editors were frantically trying to recall volumes sent out to reviewers, so that corrections could be pasted in. Yeats had just given a talk about

modern poetry on the BBC that had outraged many listeners. It was all infuriating to Chapman. "I am very sorry that Yeats did not die too soon to finish," he scratched on the onionskin (n. d.).[1]

The Secretary can perhaps be forgiven his ill humor at having all this thrust on his office at the end of the publishing process; the *OBMV* had been contracted for and acquired by way of the Press's London office—known as "Amen House"—by Publisher to the Delegates Humphrey Milford, who ran the London branch and was essentially a co-director of the Press with Chapman. Once the book had been deemed ready for production it was handed over from London to the staff in Oxford itself—the Clarendon Press—in order to harmonize with the line of Oxford literary anthologies published under the Clarendon imprint. When Milford approached Yeats in October of 1934 about editing the book, it had seemed a very good idea indeed, and Chapman had approved, but had been largely uninvolved since then. Yeats was arguably the most famous living poet writing in English, and with his famous name the book promised to be a sales success. By October 1936, though, it was easy to forget all that; scholarly and historical books were more typical fare for the Clarendon Press than a popular anthology of copyrighted contemporary poems, and none of the staff editors in Oxford had been confident enough about the subject matter to edit it (Chapman, 13 Nov 1934), nor were they prepared for the complaints that started pouring in. Nevertheless, there was nothing for it but tying up

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1. Although the note itself is not dated, it is bound into the Oxford archival file between other correspondence of October 1936, and was probably meant for Assistant Secretary Kenneth Sisam, who had been involved in discussions about the *OBMV* from the beginning.

Amen House's loose ends, fending off potential copyright lawsuits, and doing so while keeping a stiff upper lip under a very tight deadline.

For Yeats, it had seemed like a good idea too. He had been sixty-nine years old in 1934, when Milford first approached him at just the right moment. Earlier that year Yeats had entered a sustained period of almost manic creativity after he underwent the notorious Steinach "rejuvenation" operation, which promised to restore his sexual potency. His biographers, including R. F. Foster and Richard Ellmann, have observed that the operation (essentially a vasectomy with some attendant pseudo-medical razzle-dazzle involving follow-up injections at the sexologist's office) excited the poet and spurred his imagination, even if it did not cure his impotence; continuing ill health did not prevent revised editions, new books, poems, plays and theatrical productions, prose pamphlets, broadsides, critical essays, and other Yeats endeavors from proliferating from 1934 until his final illness and death in January 1939. "Schemes succeeded each other with bewildering rapidity," Foster observed (*Arch-Poet* 504). Shortly after Oxford's editors settled on Yeats as the ideal editor for an anthology of modern poetry in English, the poet was telling a young poet and actress with whom he had become infatuated, Margot Ruddock, that "I want the rest of practical work, or of a change to prose" (*CL* #6124, 13 Nov 1934). The idea of compiling an anthology seemed appropriately restful and practical; "I have been asked to edit 'The Oxford Book of Modern Verse'—poetry since 1900," he wrote his wife, George. "It might bring a great deal of money. It would not take me much trouble" (*CL* #6112, 26 Oct 1934).

In fact the anthology was to prove more trouble than he anticipated, particularly as illness interrupted him over the next two years, but it brought great rewards too—

introducing him to new writers and new ideas that would become important to him and find their way into his own last poems and essays. Unlike anthologies of "Celtic" poetry and prose he had edited as a young man, the *OBMV* selection promised to be more than mere hack-work undertaken to pay bills and promote his name in the publishing world. In it he could wrestle with the very idea of modernity itself, examining his own place as a "modern poet" in the context of his contemporaries. And, whether readers across the rest of the world agreed or disagreed with his vision of what it meant to be a modern poet, his name in gilt type on the royal blue spine of a book published by England's oldest and most authoritative publishing house would mean that he could be certain that they were paying attention.

i. The Oxford Books

In a 1965 article, "Yeats As Anthologist," Jon Stallworthy documented the colorful publishing story of the *OBMV* from an insider's perspective, including how Oxford's editors settled on Yeats, tried to influence him, and wrestled with what he produced.[2]

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2. The publication of Stallworthy's article makes for a colorful story too. At the time, Stallworthy—a poet himself—worked for the Press's London office and, encouraged by Assistant Secretary D. M. Davin, traveled to Oxford and took home the *OBMV* editorial file to read. Oxford's archives show that he wrote Davin excitedly to say that it had given him "one of the most entertaining mornings I have had for many months: what a saga the O.B.M.V. has!" (Stallworthy 6 Apr 1963). Inspired by what he'd found, he did further research in the files of Yeats's agent, A. P. Watt, and reconstructed the book's publishing history, intending an article for a popular literary periodical such as *TLS* (Stallworthy, 6 Jul 1963). His first draft, though, was vetoed by Davin and higher-ups who feared revealing too much about the Press's internal workings and financial considerations, and

Stallworthy's account makes it clear that Oxford's editors viewed the anthology from the beginning as a commercial undertaking, one meant to appeal squarely to the public's appetite for what was newest and best, even during the worldwide economic downturn of the 1930s. We can perhaps better understand the alacrity with which they pursued the idea when we consider it in the context of one of the Press's notable publishing successes of 1900, *The Oxford Book of English Verse*, edited by Arthur Quiller-Couch—an anthology that became a model for Yeats and editors of many other "Oxford Books" that followed it.

At the time that the Press published *The Oxford Book of English Verse*, Francis Turner Palgrave's *Golden Treasury of the Best Songs and Lyrical Poems in the English Language* stood unrivalled (though much criticized and imitated) as the authoritative popular collection of the best English poetry. First compiled by Palgrave in 1861, and published with the guidance and imprimatur of Alfred, Lord Tennyson, *The Golden Treasury* was hugely successful in England and America, and had been much revised over the years in an effort to keep it current. Suffice it to say that *The Golden Treasury* was recognized by publishers as a phenomenon, one that held sway over the canon of English lyric poetry for the Victorian-era reading public (and one that still remains in

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about offending living luminaries mentioned in the files. "In fact there are live coals under these ashes, something perhaps more apparent to us who are closer to the period than to you," Davin wrote. "You will think this craven and curmudgeonly, but one develops an acute nose for trouble in this business and I scent it on the wind. So, very regretfully, I think we've got to discourage publication" (14 Aug 1963). To Stallworthy's credit, he persevered, submitting multiple drafts, trimming out and generalizing over the offending parts until he eventually earned a "*nihil obstat*" from Davin (Davin 29 Nov 1963); to Davin's credit, he recognized the importance of the material as part of the literary record, and continued to work with Stallworthy until the article was rendered unobjectionable. However, some parts of the story and some documents, such as Chapman's angry note regretting Yeats's continued survival and other pointed internal observations about people and publishing, did not make it into print.

print today). From a competitive perspective, though, after forty years it had become somewhat long in the tooth. With the nineteenth century drawing to a close and poetic tastes changing, Oxford's board of directors, the Delegates, recognized a chance to challenge its supremacy as the standard popular anthology. In his history of the Press, Peter Sutcliffe calls *The Oxford Book of English Verse* "[o]ne of the first and more famous deviations from [the Clarendon Press's] principle of publishing exclusively works of original scholarship or school-books," and notes that its "editor, Arthur Quiller-Couch, was not strictly speaking academically respectable at that time or indeed at any other time" (119). He surmises that Oxford Delegate Frederick York Powell (who, ironically, would end up in Yeats's "modern" anthology for two translations from the French poetry of Paul Fort) came up with the idea of challenging Palgrave's anthology in 1897, the year of Palgrave's death. Delegate Charles Cannan, working behind the back of the increasingly *non compos* Secretary to the Delegates Littleton Gell, urged that his friend Quiller-Couch be made editor (119). Cannan was seeking to shake things up at the Press and broaden the scope of its list to include such things as collections of literature intended for the nonexpert. It is no accident that the book was issued at a time when Cannan was taking over as Secretary and directing the Press to expand its list aggressively, moving beyond staid academic titles to become "what it ought to be: the first Press in the world" (qtd. in Sutcliffe 109).

The period between Cannan's installation as Secretary in 1898 and the onset of World War I was one of a seemingly insatiable demand for literature by the reading public and marked the apex of Oxford's prestige and influence among English publishers—a period that arguably coincides with the peak moment of English literary

culture's influence on the public consciousness.[3] The Press's own history notes that from 1900 to 1909 the number of titles published by the Clarendon Press alone quadrupled (Sutcliffe 115), and "[g]etting on for 500 titles were issued by the O.U.P. in 1913 under one or other of the twenty-three imprints then in use. The total number of books published by British publishers that year was about 12,000" (168). In other words, the Press's output accounted for approximately 4.2 percent of all British book publishing, and the Press could see itself complacently as a "national institution" upon whose survival depended the civilized culture of all of world (170). It had achieved Cannan's goal. During that period, Oxford's signature sales success, other than ongoing editions of the Bible and prayer-books, was Quiller-Couch's *Oxford Book of English Verse*. By the time a new edition of the anthology was finally published in 1939, it was in its twenty-first printing (124); all told, half a million copies had been sold by the time Quiller-Couch died in 1944 (Waller 63). At the height of the British Empire's military, political, and cultural sway in the world, the *Oxford Book* had become an essential cultural touchstone: Quiller-Couch's friend and biographer Frederick Brittain observed that "[i]n 1912 *The Oxford Magazine* jocularly remarked that 'no civilized person in Great Britain, the Dominions or the United States is married or given in marriage' without being presented with one or more copies of the *Oxford Book"* (39).

The success of the *Oxford Book* led to many spin-offs over the ensuing decades, including several edited by Quiller-Couch—*The Oxford Book of Ballads, The Oxford*

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3. Philip J. Waller, in his study of literary life in Britain from 1870–1919, proposes a marker of a shift in the public consumption of information from print to other mass media, namely the fact that 1914 was first year on record that the number of books checked out in Edinburgh public libraries actually declined. *The New Statesman* "attributed [it] to the rise of cinema" (3).

Book of Victorian Verse, and *The Oxford Book of English Prose*. Sutcliffe notes that "[b]y 1914 there were Oxford Books of French, Italian, German, Latin, and Spanish Verse, and also one of Canadian verse published by the Canada Branch" (124). Today, the "brand" has expanded further and comprises everything from the somewhat obscure, such as the 1999 *Oxford Book of Australian Letters*), to the scientific, such as the 1964 *Oxford Book of Flowerless Plants: Ferns, Fungi, Mosses and Liverworts*, and to the practical and trendy, such as the 2003 *Oxford Book of Health Foods*. The Oxford Books of the 1900s, 1910s, and 1920s mostly dealt with literature, though, and had typically been the work of professional anthologists like Quiller-Couch, or of academicians or public intellectuals with specialized academic knowledge of their subject (Sutcliffe 210). At the time the Press began negotiating with Yeats to edit the modern poetry anthology, contracting with a brilliant autodidact and working poet who lacked any sort of academic credentials (never mind that he had won the Nobel Prize for Literature) meant breaking with precedent.

ii. The "Q" Precedent

Many hundreds of books published by Oxford now carry the "Oxford Book" label, but it was first coined by Arthur Quiller-Couch for his anthology.[4] The life and career of

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4. His original title was "Lyra Britannica," and he suggested "Oxford Book of English Verse" as an alternative; he feared, however, that "Oxford Book" might confuse people familiar with the Oxford Bibles that the Press was famous for. His editors persuaded him that there was no danger of confusion (Sutcliffe 122). Quite the contrary: Anne Ferry

Quiller-Couch (1863–1944) was roughly contemporaneous with that of Yeats (1865–1939), and like Yeats he came to the late Victorian English literary scene from a provincial background. He was born in Cornwall, the eldest son of a small-town physician, but unlike Yeats, "Q" (as he was known to friends) did not long remain an outsider. He went to good schools and attended Oxford, where he studied humane letters (known as "Greats"). He earned only a second-class degree on the exam because, according to one biographer, he had become too interested in athletics and social activities[5] (Brittain 8). This failure to excel ruled out starting a purely academic career, but he nevertheless parlayed his literary facility, broad schooling in classics and philosophy, and his Oxford connections into success across a range of endeavors: as a popular freelance writer of novels, stories for boys, and light verse;[6] as a contributor to *The Oxford Magazine*; as an editor of periodicals; as a reader for the Press; as a professional anthologist and public intellectual; as a knight of the realm (so honored more for political than literary activities); and ultimately as professor of literature at Cambridge by appointment of the King. While Yeats remained an outsider, constantly challenging

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argues that the echo of the Bible in "Oxford Book" titles gave the little-respected genre of popular anthology the "slightest suggestion . . . of sanctity" (21).

5. Another admirer and biographer, the historian A. L. Rowse, emphasized Q's devotion to rowing and the comradeship of sport (8), which contributed to this failure to get top marks. For the outsider from Cornwall, fitting in trumped excelling.

6. Q's success as a popular writer before the *OBEV* is often overlooked. As Phillip Waller notes, his

> was a name that carried popular appeal, because of his own stories written in Robert Louis Stevenson style. When the *Westminster Gazette* polled public libraries in 1896 about what boys read, Q had run a close second to G. A. Henty, quite an achievement when it is reckoned that 'Henty the Great' (J. M. Barrie's designation) had authored scores of books compared with Q's handful at that date. (63)

conventional taste from beyond the Pale and championing eccentric literary and spiritual movements in Dublin and London, Q's genius was in shaping and satisfying that taste from the very center of the English literary establishment. In 1895 he published *The Golden Pomp*, a poetry anthology derivative of Palgrave's best-selling *Golden Treasury* (Ferry 105), which in turn led to his recruitment by Cannan, his old college friend, who helped him work up a proposal for what became *The Oxford Book of English Verse*; "Q later described [Cannan] as its 'onlie begetter'" (Sutcliffe 119).

To understand what made the original *Oxford Book* such a success, it helps to look more closely at the sensibility of its editor. Q's essential impulse was to explain and clarify rather than to challenge. He was not a scholar seeking to discover new things, but rather a teacher seeking to communicate eternal truths. From a psychological point of view, it might be said that his college interests in such things as rowing and clever light verse were all ways of fitting into and navigating the mainstream of English culture. One of the features that distinguished his *Oxford Book* from Palgrave's *Golden Treasury* was that it took in a larger and more comprehensive part of that main current—it went back to Middle English (Palgrave had begun with the Elizabethans) and sought to provide a more stately survey of the literature.[7] Initially, when York Powell discussed the book with him and insisted that the early English selections should retain their original spellings, Q resisted (121). His impulse was to normalize and regularize, as can be seen in the titles he gave to untitled poems from literary periods in which titling was spotty. (He did give in

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7. Oxford saw advances in print technology as one of the main justifications for it: they could print it on the newly developed thin "India Paper" used in Bibles, and thus produce a much more comprehensive volume that would take up no more shelf space than Palgrave (Sutcliffe 119). Ultimately, though, most copies of the anthology appeared in the blocky "dry paper" format rather than in the India Paper format.

on the old spellings, and later championed them, but his initial reaction is telling.) One effect of regularizing is to make a text seem less distant in time and form—more a part of the reader's familiar world (Ferry 86)—and so it was with Q's edition: he stressed the history and continuity of English verse rather than its strangeness, in essence linking the England of the old poems to the contemporary empire on which the sun never set.

As a writer, Quiller-Couch first made his mark in that most earnest and Victorian of genres, the boy's adventure tale. His early work as an editor included collections of tales such as *The World of Adventure*. Travel, fighting, the sea, the wild, the far-away—what could be more British? What could be more mainstream? A. L. Rowse notes, revealingly, that Q

> told me once that, in his early prentice years in London, in the 1880s and '90s, literary life fell into two main schools. One was that of the aesthetes, who held not only to "art for art's sake" but regarded their art, their writing, as all in all. The other school, to which Q. belonged—by nature no less than by conviction—was that of action, adventure, the romance of life itself.
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> The first included Pater, Wilde, Yeats, Arthur Symons . . . and these he knew. But he himself belonged to the school of Stevenson, Kipling, Henley, Rider Haggard. . . . (3)

Rowse also characterizes Q as someone who

> resolutely turned his face to comedy. . . . A dark view of life was contrary to Q's code. This is evident in his choice of poems in *The Oxford Book of English Verse*—the chief defect of the book. . . . Nor did he care for satire;

> any sort of cynicism went against the grain. . . . Similarly with sex. With him it is always love—delicately, gallantly, romantically treated; never sex, crude, raw sex. [*sic*] (4)

As an eminent professor at Cambridge, in his later years, Q was notable in working to normalize and modernize the curriculum at the university to include the formal study of English literature—not for him the obscurities of specialized classical obsessions and academic myopia. He took the broad view, and argued that it was the university's job to make sure its students swam in the culture's main currents. Frank Kermode has characterized this as the mindset of the professional "bookman," rather than that of the scholar (14), and he numbers Quiller-Couch in that company. As we will see, the elderly Yeats, fresh off correcting proofs for *A Vision*, his esoteric symbolic system, and in the randy flush of his post-Steinach creative surge, brought a quite different sensibility to his selections. Q, predictably, did not approve.

From the Press's point of view, though, Quiller-Couch was nearly perfect. His reputation as a popular writer, combined with Oxford's name, gave the anthology both authority and accessibility. Its essential appeal was that in one substantial, elegantly bound volume, it offered the best of English poetry to your well-rounded person intent on joining the club of establishment culture (or announcing membership therein). It belongs to a type of anthology that Anne Ferry characterizes as "literary histories" (227), in which the anthologist seeks to represent the current consensus narrative of broad literary development. She contrasts it with other types of anthologies such as scholarly surveys intended for specialists, or narrowly focused collections (such as love lyrics or light verse), or polemical anthologies of certain poetic schools (such as those edited by Ezra

Pound and Michael Roberts) in which the anthologist seeks to speak for or promote an ignored or elite school of thought. This is precisely what the Oxford editors were talking about when they discussed questions of editorial temperament and suitability. An Oxford Book should confirm rather than challenge the assumptions of a reader who opened it:

> Cannan's maxim, impressed at some time or other on the editor of every "Oxford Book," was that anthologies must include anthology pieces, old favourites the public would expect to find there. The temptation to omit a poem on the grounds that it was already hackneyed was strong in editors who felt that the Oxford imprint was license to explore new ground. Q, however, was sensitive to popular taste. (Sutcliffe 120)

When Secretary R. W. Chapman consented to approaching an eminent but idiosyncratic poet about editing the book of modern verse, he urged Publisher Humphrey Milford to impress on Yeats the argument that "you [Milford] as 'Oxford' have a point of view—universality—*Quod semper quod ubique*[8]—which you are entitled to put. This chimes with what I said the time before, that I think you ought to see Y. at an early stage to feel his literary pulse" (13 Nov 1934). At the time, Yeats's literary pulse was racing, and the poet was in a state of high excitement that might have given Chapman pause, had he only known.

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8. A reference to the Christian test of catholicity, as formulated by St. Vincent of Lérins: "what had been believed everywhere in the Church, always and by everyone ('*quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus creditum est'*)" (MacCulloch 316).

iii. Answering the "Ezra, Eliot, Auden School"

Yeats was the second choice to edit the book. The Press, cautious as always, had in 1930 approached the Georgian poet Lascelles Abercrombie, whose inclinations flowed with the main current of literary taste. Abercrombie had initially embraced the idea enthusiastically: "that would be a delightful pie to cook, and I would love to have a finger, or even two, in it" (qtd. in Milford, 25 Jul 1930). When first contacted, Abercrombie was already working on an anthology of previously unpublished poetry, *New English Poems*, and enthusiastically began work on the Oxford project too. Four years later, though, Oxford's editors realized that Abercrombie had not delivered anything, nor was he likely to. Amen House had assigned the job of shepherding the book through to editor Charles Williams because he was most in tune with contemporary writers, being a poet himself (Abercrombie had included something by Williams in *New English Poems*) and the author of the introduction to Oxford's very successful 1930 second edition of Gerard Manley Hopkins' poetry. Williams reported that "[i]t has begun to dawn on [Abercrombie] (i) that none of his poetic acquaintances are going to love him afterwards, (ii) and more bitterly, that he hasn't really the time to exercise a proper judicious choice, and that his reputation may suffer" (2 Oct 1934). A note from Chapman's right-hand man, Assistant Secretary Kenneth Sisam, suggests that Abercrombie's virtue of being mainstream also made him averse to making waves: "I didn't expect Abercrombie to do anything. He is really hopelessly evasive, even where the literary acts are of the smallest, and I think his excuses are excuses for himself" (9 Oct 1934). Now that it was clear he wouldn't come through, Williams favored relying on

the Oxford reputation and going without a marquee name, building on preliminary work that Milford's niece Anne Bradby (later Anne Ridler, a well respected poet, editor, and anthologist herself[9]) had done for Abercrombie in compiling lists and making general choices, and perhaps getting a well-regarded young poet such as Dylan Thomas to introduce the volume. Sisam wanted a famous editor, however, and Chapman agreed, scratching out a note to Milford and Williams: "Quality—even your quality—IS NOT ENOUGH" (10 Oct 1934). Memoranda in the archives show that the Press's editors in London and Oxford swiftly considered possible alternatives, and Yeats's name came up several times as the ideal replacement; his was a name that would, in Williams's words, "awe all sides" (11 Oct 1934).

The money was good, given the bad economy of the 1930s. Yeats would get £500 after the contract was signed, out of which he was to pay royalties to contributors, and a £250 advance against royalties on publication, plus royalties over the expected long life of the book.[10] In return for that largesse, Milford was urged to make it clear that Oxford wanted Yeats to include popular material:

> You are dealing with an editor who has himself passed from the popular to the very select audience. At Amen House I think you are all inclined to the highbrow attitude in [f]act. Therefore, better tell him at the outset that a popular book which ordinary people can enjoy is intended: that, even if

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9. Ridler edited *The Little Book of Modern Verse* in 1941, in addition to a supplement included in the 1951 edition of *The Faber Book of Modern Verse*, which was a direct rival to the Oxford book.

10. In 2005 dollars, that 1934 total of £750 would work out to about $72,000, depending on which indicator of worth one uses as a standard for comparison ("Measuring Worth").

> "The Fiddler of Dooney" is inferior to his latest bits of hard and high thinking, you (at least in your capacity of publisher) expect him to fiddle. (Sisam 10 Nov 1934)

Milford contacted Yeats through Watt in mid-October, and received a favorable reply. Yeats began work on the anthology that spring, roughed out a manuscript the following fall, and the book was published in November 1936, about two years after Yeats was first approached. Thus the anthology was produced in a timely way, and the Oxford editors were ultimately satisfied with the amount of popular material included (although the music of "The Fiddler of Dooney" was nowhere to be heard). Ultimately, if not exactly as suitable as they'd hoped it would be, it met their expectations as both a commercial and a literary product.

But what about Yeats? Why did he take on the project? What were his expectations? The simplest answer to those questions is that it looked like easy work for good money at a time when his family had many expenses; the possibility of matching Quiller-Couch's runaway popular success must have been tempting. Next, as was apparent in his letters to Margot Ruddock, it also seemed like a good creative change of pace from the verse and drama he'd been writing. Finally, though, his letters also suggest a deeper reason: he needed to feel modern—and relevant—to a younger generation of writers, and took on the anthology as a way of exploring that feeling and finding an audience for his ideas.

At the time that Yeats agreed to edit the *OBMV*, he had become briefly infatuated with Ruddock, a member of that generation. She was a beautiful but mentally unstable married woman of twenty-seven who had sought his patronage and whose flirtations with

him excited him sexually despite his continued impotence (Foster 505). Yeats would ultimately include several of her poems in the anthology. In London that fall and winter, as he worked with her in private, read her poems, and composed poems about her, he explored the world of avant-garde theatre with an eye to finding dramatic vehicles for her to perform in. In the process he met with young producers and directors interested in staging poetic dramas, including his own. On the same day that he announced the *OBMV* project to his wife, who was home in Ireland, he wrote that "I am . . . seeing all kind of people, dancers, musicians, actors" (*CL* #6112, 23 Oct 1934). Three days later he elaborated: "I swan from little theatre to little theatre & have now decided to work with what is called 'the group theatre'. They are about to get up displays of work by Elliot [*sic*] & Auden & are I believe highly skilled" (*CL* #6113, 26 Oct 1934). Yeats thus spent the beginning of the winter of 1934–1935 in London meeting with his new theatrical contacts at arty restaurants such as the Ivy to plan productions for the spring. During this time, in addition to his infatuation with Ruddock, with the encouragement of sexologist Norman Haire he also became involved with another younger writer, the thirty-four-year-old novelist Ethel Mannin. "Wonderful things have happened," he wrote his longtime friend Olivia Shakespear, after meeting Mannin. "This is Bagdad. This is not London" (qtd. in Foster, *Arch-Poet* 510). His letters from this period include many references to meals with Eliot and other writers discussing poetry and drama; his younger rivals and contemporaries were clearly on his mind and all around him as he dined and wrote letters at the Savile Club, where he and some other prominent members of London's literary set were members.

This fevered, highly sexualized period of vitality proved unsustainable. He fell ill again when crossing to Ireland during a spell of bad weather in late January, catching a cold that led to a flare-up of a chronic pulmonary condition. He was diagnosed during this period with high blood pressure and an enlarged heart (514), and ordered to slow down. This proved problematic. Although he spent the next couple of months quietly, recovering, reading, and corresponding, his mind was still on London. He wrote Ruddock,

> I may go to England to pay a couple of country visits and to see you[.] I am trying to understand for the sake of my Cambridge [*sic*] Book of Modern Verse the Auden, Eliot school[.] I do not mean to give it a great deal of space, but must define my objections to it, and I cannot know this till I see clearly what quality it has [that has] made it delight young Cambridge and young Oxford. (*CL* #6189, 25 Feb 1935)

Many critics and biographers have shown how closely tied Yeats's sexuality was to his sense of his own creativity in his late career. In this same letter it is easy to see it—how his thoughts about poetry and art become entangled with Ruddock's youthful beauty in his imagination. He goes on, recalling the excitement he has felt as he has talked with her—like the sultan and Scheherazade in the book he is reading:

> My life is for the moment made up of such discoveries as I re-read Balzac and The Arabian Nights. When I lay down my book I watch the great tits, the blue tits and the tom-tits eating bread on the windowsill. The best Arabian nights, and even certain parts of Balzac have as little psychology as those birds, and that is why we never forget them. Perhaps I want to see

> your beauty again for no better reason than that which makes me like looking at the blue tits.

In Yeats's letters we can see that Ruddock is not only the subject of erotic interest, but that she manifests the idea of a younger audience he hopes to speak to and guide, just as he has worked with her on her poetry and performance. His invalidism during the late winter of 1934–35 may have meant an end to actual sexual adventures, but it turned out to be a time for reflection and fantasy and planning that found its way into the anthology—correspondence reveals that he intended to spend the spring and summer on that project, among others. An allusion to "Ancient Music" suggests that Ezra Pound's poetry was on his mind in a note to Olivia Shakespear: "I am always in the midst of a spiders web of my own spinning. Every day I expect to learn that all the threads are tangled or broken, through lack of attention. 'Summer is a coming in—God damn'" (*CL* #6184, 4 Feb 1935). In another letter to her, he lays out in more detail the plans he has mentioned to Ruddock:

> The proof sheets & typed script I am correcting are for the Cuala edition of Dramatis Personae, as I call the coming installment of autobiography. After that will come the proof sheets of "A Vision" & then my work on edition of The Cambridge Book [*sic*] of Modern Verse. I can never do any kind of work (apart from verse) unless I have a clear problem to solve. My problem this time will be: "how far do I like the Ezra, Elliot [*sic*], Auden school & if I do not why not?" Then this further problem "why do the younger generation like it so much? What do they see or hope?" I am to

> write a long introduction. But for months to come I shall have no serious writing to do. (*CL* #6191, 28 Feb 1935)

Here we can see Yeats in the process of brooding over how he will tie up three major "problems" having to do with his poetic legacy—the autobiographical account of his theatrical work, the symbolic key to his esoteric thought, and his own attempt through the anthology to offer an answer to the increasingly influential "school" of modern poetry represented by Pound, Eliot, and Auden that he finds at odds with his own work.

Yeats's eagerness to get on with it all prompted his return to London in April, even though he had not yet recovered fully, only to find that many of the theatrical connections he'd made earlier had not borne fruit. A March production of *The Player Queen* had fallen through. The young impresarios of the Group Theatre, many of them Marxists, seemed more interested in Auden's left-wing poetic dramas, and in Eliot's experimental verse dramas *Sweeney Agonistes* and *Murder in the Cathedral* (Foster, *Arch-Poet* 517); Foster notes that the young dramatists, though interested in and respectful of Yeats's work, saw it as dated—"pure nineties" (510), one called it. Later that year he would write Ruddock to say that a phrase ("hot lobster") used by his wife to put down Edna St. Vincent Millay's poetry "perfectly expressed what Eliot, [Rupert] Doone, perhaps [Edmund] Dulac, think of romantic acting and poetry" (*CL* #6278, Jul 1935)—which presumably included their reservations about his own work. Dramatists Ashley Dukes and Doone at the Group Theatre were unwilling to cede creative control of proposed productions of Yeats's work to the poet. Yeats met with both Eliot and Auden during this

period about drama and about an essay he was writing for Eliot,[11] so he would have been acutely aware of how his own work was being received in comparison.

During this period, Yeats would also have become aware that another major anthology of modern poetry was in the works. He received a permissions request in March from Michael Roberts, who was compiling it for Faber & Faber, and wanted permission to publish "A Dialogue of Self & Soul," "Easter 1916," "Red Hanrahan's Song of Ireland," "An Irish Airman Forsees His Death," "The Second Coming," "The Tower," "Byzantium," and "For Anne Gregory" in the unnamed anthology, which became *The Faber Book of Modern Verse*. Ultimately the Faber Book would offer a much more accurate reflection of the shape of the poetic avant-garde in the 1930s than the Oxford Book (and indeed its selection of Yeats's own poetry was a better predictor of which of his poems would become canonical works of Modernism than the *OBMV*'s). In contrast to Oxford, the bastion of tradition, Faber was seen at the time as the house most associated with experimental work, in part because of Eliot's tenure there as a poetry editor and as editor of *The Criterion* under Faber's imprint. In England, Faber was the publisher for Eliot, Pound, Auden, and many other rising stars. Yeats clearly was aware of its cachet—when he compiled a selection of Dorothy Wellesley's poems later that year and sought to increase her prestige by having them published together with an introduction by himself, he first sent them to Eliot at Faber rather than to Macmillan, his own (and Wellesley's) publisher; he knew it was not Faber's sort of poetry—when they rejected it, he called it "sending the wooden horse into Troy" (*CL* #6403, 20 Oct 1935).

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11. The essay, written for Eliot's *The Criterion*, became Yeats's introduction to *The Holy Mountain* by Baghwam Shri Hamsa.

Later in the editorial process for the *OBMV*, as he was negotiating with other poets and publishers for permissions, he became acutely aware of the degree to which the Faber book would rival his own. The poet Robert Graves wrote him in high dudgeon, refusing permission and contrasting Yeats's picks to those of Roberts, who had solicited Graves's (and his collaborator Laura Riding's) opinions about which poems of theirs should be included. Graves cited the couple's philosophical objection to anthologies, and noted they had made an exception in the case of the Faber Book because it was "the most important" anthology, because Roberts had worked with the couple on the choices, because Roberts told them who else would be anthologized and had taken some of their suggestions about including others, and because Roberts had permitted them to approve his introduction[12] (Finneran 579–80). After receiving Graves's huffy refusal (Yeats had not requested any of Riding's poems, which doubly incensed Graves—who nevertheless refused permission on her behalf), he informed Charles Williams at the Press that he'd heard "Faber and Faber are bringing out an anthology and as the entire contents seem to have been approved by Laura Riding we are apparently in for a war of the books" (*CL* #6415, 24 Oct 1935). He would tell another correspondent that the Roberts book was "ultra-radical, its contents having been all approved by Robert Graves and Laura Riding" (*CL* #6411, 24 Oct 1935).

By that time, though, he had already decided that his book would not attempt to catch the fancy of "young Oxford" and "young Cambridge," or even try to reflect the

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12. Laura (Riding) Jackson's biographer notes that she actually contributed to Roberts's introduction, her work "apparent . . . in several places, particularly in the passages on Charles Doughty and in the mention of Riding and Graves themselves" (Friedmann 276).

most radical directions being taken by modern poets. It would answer the Ezra, Eliot, Auden school with something altogether different.

iv. "Towards Some Heroic Discipline": Reading for the Anthology

By April 1935, Yeats's fervor for Margot Ruddock and Ethel Mannin had cooled somewhat as he became more aware of Ruddock's erratic behavior caused by her bipolar disease, and of his own inability to respond sexually to either woman in his debilitated state. While in London that spring he mostly stayed in a room at the Savile, where he took all his meals and entertained visitors. His letters home to George note that he has begun work on the *OBMV* project: "I shall stay on for a bit partly because I do not want to break off until I have finished the Criterion essay which grows important & because I would like to start (here where I am near to book sellers) the Anthology. Last night Sir John Squire who has made several most successful anthologies from my period offered to read my proofs[13]. . . . I hope I shall hear that you are coming over" (*CL* #6223, 10 Apr

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13. The poet Sir John Collings Squire was former editor of *The New Statesman* and *The London Mercury*, and anthologies including *The Book of Women's Verse* (1921), *The Cambridge Book of Lesser Poets* (1927), *The Augustan Book of Modern Poetry* (1925), *Book of Bodley Head Verse* (1926), *Comic Muse: An Anthology of Humorous Verse* (1925), *Selections from Modern Poets* (1921, 1924), and *Younger Poets of To-Day* (1932). Writers in his circle were sometimes referred to as "The Squirearchy." Yeats noted that he discovered Dorothy Wellesley's poetry while reading one of Squire's anthologies for the *OBMV*. Squire was politically right-wing, and a central figure in the mainstream of Georgian poetry that Eliot, Pound, and Auden reacted against. Yeats included one of his poems in the *OBMV*: a satire on popular poetry.

1935). In May his wife arrived in London, a publishing contract from the Press arrived for his signature, and work on *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse* began in earnest.

Yeats's pulmonary ailments worsened while he was in London, and George Yeats moved him from his room at the Savile Club to a house near Hyde Park, where she nursed him back to health. In May, the playwright Sean O'Casey visited him there and found him in bed, still racked with coughing, surrounded by books of poetry for the anthology, and "wild-west" adventures (Foster, *Arch-Poet* 517) that his wife made him read for relaxation when she thought he was working too hard. It is during this period that he first discovered the work of Dorothy Wellesley, who would become a close friend and correspondent for the last years of his life, and whose poems would make up a large section of the finished anthology. In June he wrote a longtime friend, Lady Ottoline Morrell, that

> I have Lady Dorothy Wellesley's book "Poems of Ten Years." The idea came into George's head—she was out shopping & into my head—I was here—that I must have this book which contains Lady Dorothy's latest work. Ten minutes ago George arrived with her copy, five minutes ago Bumpus messenger with my copy. Did the thought first come to me or first to George? (*CL* #6240, 1 Jun 1935).

Perhaps, as Yeats implies, it was harmonic inspiration that led him to Wellesley's work, but in addition to Squire's anthology he may in fact have had a preliminary list with her name on it too. At the Press, Milford noted that his niece, Anne Bradby (later

Anne Ridler) had compiled such a list for Lascelles Abercrombie,[14] and it had been passed along to Yeats:

> Her results—lists of chosen poems from nearly every modern poet; I should think she must have worked through all the published work of some fifty or more: and given enough attention to be able to defend her choice in every case . . . were all sent on to Yeats, though I don't know what use, if any, he made of them. (23 Oct 1936)

The poet was well enough in early June to employ his shared friendship with Lady Ottoline to wangle an invitation to Wellesley's elegant estate in Sussex. Following this visit, on the heels of the initial period of anthology reading and bookstore browsing in London, Yeats and his wife returned to Ireland, where he wrote back to John G. Wilson, manager of London's fashionable Oxford Street bookseller Bumpus & Bumpus, requesting a selection of anthologies, retrospective collections, and individual volumes of poetry for his further reading:

> In sending them please fill in the customs form "Books of poetry not bound in leather or imitation leather."[15]

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14. The work was apparently substantial. An obituary for Anne Ridler noted that she spent nine months in the British Museum's reading room doing the research.

15. Other requests to Wilson that summer and fall included a cheap edition of Oscar Wilde's poetry, and a number of anthologies: *Recent Poetry 1923–1933,* edited by Alida Munro; *The Modern Muse: Poems of Today, British and American*, by the English Association (1934); *Poems of To-Day*, by the English Association (1915, 1922); *Poems of Tomorrow*, from *The Listener*, edited by Janet Adam Smith (1935); and *Northern Numbers*, edited by Hugh MacDiarmid (1921). Yeats also requested "the principal volumes of poetry by Edward Shanks & by Robert Nichols" (*CL* #6291, 12 Jul 1935); *Poems 1922,* by Isaac Rosenberg; *Collected Poems*, by A. E. Coppard; *These Our Matins*, by Michael Roberts; and *Time to Dance*, by C. Day Lewis. During this period he

Can you send me a good Anthology of American poetry, & please any volumes of published poetry by Elinor Wylie.

Is there any particular volume of Doughty's poems I should read? (Not "Dawn in Britain") any volume of short poems? Please also send me the most representative volume of Herbert [*sic*] Wolfe's poetry & there is no collected edition.

Has Mr W. H. Davies published anything since 1915? [. . .]

"Best Poems of each year"	ed Thomas Moult
"Modern Poetry"	ed. M Woolmann (Macmillan)
"New English Poems"	ed. Lascelles Abercrombie (Gollancz)
"New Signatures"	Hogarth Press.
Mr Monro	Anthology ed by G. Alide Klemantark. [*sic*]
"Collected Poems" 1932	Padraic Colum Macmillan
"Collected Poems"	John Masefield Heinimann
"Collected Poems"	T Hardy
"Collected Poems"	Wilfrid Blunt
"Collected Poems"	Alice Meynell
"Collected Poems"	Gilbert K. Chesterton
"Rambling Sailor"	by Charlotte Mew, 1929
"Collected Poems"	Laurence Binyon Macmillan
"Poems of 30 Years"	Gordon Bottomley Constable
Poems 2nd series	J. C. Squire

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told Wellesley he had ordered all the books of Edna St. Vincent Millay (*CL* #6300, 26 Jul 1935).

Collected Poems	James Stephens
Collected Poems	Ralph Hodgson
New English Poems	Joseph Campbell Golancz 1931
The Mountainy Singer	Maunsel 1907
Verses 2nd edn	Elizabeth Daryush O.U. Press 1932
Collected Poems, 2 vols	Constable W. de la Mare.
The Veil	Constable
Epitaphs for Ding Dong Bell	—Selwyn & Blount.
Wild Honey	Michael Field Fisher Unwin
Collected Poems	W. W. Gibson Macmillan
Poems	John Freeman ???
Collected Poems	Richard Aldington George Allen & Unwin
Adamastor	Roy Campbell Faber & Faber
Flowering Reeds	” ” Boriswood Ltd.
Collected Poems	Lord Alfred Douglas (Secker)
One Two Blind Countries	Sidgwich [*sic*] & Jackson
Rose Macauley	Three Days (Constable)
Collected Satires & Poems	Osbert Sitwell Duckworth
People’s Palace	Blackwell Sir Sacheverell Sitwell
101 Harlequins	Grant Richards ” ”
The Cyder Feast	Duckworth ” ”
Sonnets & Verse	Hilaire Belloc Duckworth

Christ in the Synagogue }	L. Aaronson	Gollancz
Poems }		
Collected Poems	Rupert Brooke	
The Other World	F. S. Flint	Poetry Bookshop
Poems 1914–26 }	Robert Graves	Heinemann
” 1930–36 }	”	”
” 1930–33 }		
~~The Yellow Placard~~	~~Sylvia Lynd~~	
Auralia [*sic*]	Peter [*sic*] Nichols	Chatto & Windus.
Collected Poems	Richard Hughes	Chatto & Windus.
” ”	Alfred Noyes	Blackwoods.
Selected ”	Sir William Watson	Thornton
Poems		
— a joking word	Laura Riding	Cape.
Collected Poems	Herbert Read	Faber.
Smetharts Journey	Sassoon	
Satirical Poems	Heinemann	
Poems by Punchenello	Duckworth	
Poems 1914–1930	Edmund Blunden.	
Last Poems	A. E. Housman.	

(*CL* #6267, 26 Jun 1935; punctuation is Yeats’s)

As usual, Yeats managed to garble many of the names and titles, and it was not a definitive list, as he had to spend additional time at the reading room of the British

Museum in late August chasing down another forty-five titles (*CL* #6326 29 Aug 1935). Nor is it even clear how closely he looked at every book that made it to Ireland. He hoped to finish by the fall, and compared to a painstaking professional reader and anthologist like Quiller-Couch his book lists and letters reveal a willingness to rely on earlier anthologies and recommendations of friends rather than a systematic attempt to personally hunt through periodicals or individual poetry collections. He even farmed some of the reading out to his wife and family: Anne Saddlemeyer writes that his daughter "Anne [Yeats] was sent down to the summerhouse to read through three volumes of Alfred Noyes—who did not make the cut" (490). Introducing a selection he had made of Dorothy Wellesley's poems in early September, he wrote that "recovering from a long illness I read many anthologies, skipping all the names I knew, discovering what poetry had been written since I was young and read everybody" (Wellesley 23). Inevitably, perhaps, he seems to have done some skimming even of those new to him: Laura Riding Jackson's biographer notes that during an exchange of letters the following winter Yeats sought permission to include her work after rediscovering it, and "explained that he had 'some months ago' looked through a book of hers to find suitable poems for his anthology but did not like what he found. 'I must have searched, or glanced as is more likely in impatient stupidity,' he confessed" (Friedmann 277). Notably absent are books from the Ezra, Eliot, Auden school, many of which Yeats already owned.[16]

In late June and July his correspondence is full of references to his reading for the *OBMV*, and he tells one correspondent, "Every poet is a week's reading" (*CL* #6265, 24

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16. Wayne Chapman's short-title catalog of Yeats's personal library lists seventeen titles by Eliot, twenty-four by Pound, four by C. Day Lewis, two by Stephen Spender, one by Louis MacNeice, and three by Auden—all with publication dates of 1935 or earlier.

Jun 1935). As this would have allowed for a selection of only eight or nine poets over the summer, he probably meant the ones that interested him most. In the early summer these seem to have been Wellesley and her former lover Victoria Sackville-West, as well as the work of Edith Sitwell, Sacheverell Sitwell, Richard Hughes, and the American Elinor Wylie. His letters to Wellesley during June and July began to spell out what it was he didn't like about the writing of high modernism, and what he liked in the work of these other contemporary writers not typically regarded as "modernists"; of the latter he wrote, "I think that the true poetic movement of our time is towards some heroic discipline" (*CL* #6274, 6 Jul 1935).

About this time, as his conception of the book was taking shape, Yeats asked his agent to contact Milford and request an exception from the contract, extending the starting date that the anthology would cover by eight years, from 1900 to 1892, the year of Tennyson's death.[17]

> This new date will enable me to put Gerald [*sic*] Hopkins at the beginning, instead of in [a] period with which he has no connection except that he remained unpublished for so many years. It will also enable me to bring in Dowson and some others who belong to the Modern Movement, though they died before 1900. (*CL* #6273, 5 Jul 1935)

Yeats's early memories of and personal dislike for Hopkins made it difficult for him to evaluate the poet's growing influence in the 1930s; changing the date allowed him to

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17. In fact, Yeats ended up pushing the starting date even further back—to 1889, the year of Hopkins's death, although he did not request Oxford's approval in doing so. And he includes poems by Hopkins and others written in the 1870s. No one seems to have quarreled with this as the book went to press. Despite this change, the dates on the title page remained "*1892–1935*."

treat Hopkins as a Victorian, rather than someone like William Blake or Emily Dickinson whose writing, unrecognized during the poet's lifetime, prefigured a poetic revolution and proved influential to later writers. In Oxford, where the historical argument predictably found a sympathetic audience, the Press's editors agreed to go along,

> provided he goes back to 1892 only to show a development, i.e. he does not treat all poets between 1892 and 1900 on the same basis as those from 1900 onwards; but takes from 1892 to 1900 those poets whom he thinks important for the purposes of his book, because they represent a developing rather than a dying tradition. (Sisam 9 Jul 1935)

In mid-August, Yeats returned to England, traveling first to visit Wellesley in Sussex for a fortnight, then staying in London briefly before returning to Ireland at month's end. In her book on their correspondence, Wellesley recalled the scene of Yeats's visit, and one of Yeats's choices that would cause controversy among his contemporaries once the book appeared—the omission of Wilfred Owen and the "war poets":

> We sat, indoors or out, surrounded by the piled volumes of contemporary poets, for I was anxious to persuade him to reconsider some of his selections and omissions for *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse*, and especially his decision to omit nearly all the war poets, including Wilfred Owen. On this point he remained adamant, holding that "passive suffering was not a subject for poetry," even as a passive attitude toward nature did not make fine poetry. The creative man must impose himself upon

> suffering, as he must also upon Nature. . . . He preferred sitting out of doors, even on windy days. (19–20)

Although Wellesley's letters to Yeats prior to the *OBMV's* publication do include some discussion of likes and dislikes, there are few such arguments in the correspondence. Chapter VI will look more closely at his selections from her work, but it should be noted that in her book, published in 1940 (only a year after Yeats's death), Wellesley portrays herself as steadfastly resisting Yeats's efforts to influence her poetry and edit her verse, even though the record of the anthology suggests otherwise. At the time, the omission of the war poets was so notorious among her contemporaries that she may well have felt it necessary to portray herself as arguing nobly in favor of their inclusion rather than risk appearing overly deferential.

During late summer and fall Yeats mostly stayed in Ireland for a steady three months of reading and selecting poems for the anthology and correcting proofs of *A Vision*, passing poems along to George for typing, turning in a proposed list of contents in September, and composing an introduction that stretched to thirty typescript pages. He had initially intended to leave for a winter writing retreat on the Mediterranean island of Majorca in early November, but ended up putting it off for a month to get the book finished. For one week in early November he visited Wellesley again in Sussex, and met with his agent in London, but he seems to have stuck to his task, finishing most of the *OBMV* work in a last furious rush of correspondence about permissions and selections. His most enthusiastic discoveries during this period included the writing of W. J. Turner

and George Barker, the latter called to his attention by Eliot, with whom Yeats had met two weeks before writing Wellesley on September 8, 1935 about the discovery.[18]

The initial list of poems has not survived. A permissions memorandum in the Oxford archives offers some clues about Yeats's original plans for the book before he was confronted with demands and refusals from poets, and permissions charges from publishers. It lists all the poets by name, and the number of poems by each that he intended to include (Williams 14 Oct 1935), as illustrated in Table 1.

Many poets on the original list[19] were cut by a poem or two due to permissions issues or fees that Yeats had to reconsider after the original £500 set aside for fees proved insufficient; he later estimated that he spent another £250 on permissions out of his own royalties (6753, 13 December 1936). Permissions fees are the reason for significant cuts in the number of poems by Pound, and are likely in the cases of Eliot, Lewis, Masefield, and Strong. Graves and Daryush refused permission, as did Watson's and John Gray's estates. Two American poets, Millay and Wylie (despite his early enthusiasm for her), were dropped entirely, for reasons that Yeats's letters do not reveal; it seems likely, given his wish to include younger poets and a late decision to avoid most Americans that they were omitted to keep the book in proper balance. Robert Louis Stevenson's poems were omitted, with no reason given. The number of poems by Ruddock, Field, Dowson, and

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18. Yeats wrote Eliot about the manuscript of Wellesley's, which he had submitted for her to Faber & Faber. He noted, "In my Anthology, by the by, I shall give much of George Barker" (*CL* #6353, 23 Sep 1935), a comment that at least suggests they had already discussed Barker's work.

19. The following authors were omitted from the finished book: Elizabeth Daryush, Robert Graves, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Robert Louis Stevenson, Sir William Watson, and Elinor Wylie. The following were added: Thomas Boyd, Charles Madge, Sir John Collings Squire, Herbert Trench, and Arthur Waley.

Table 1

Authors in *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse* (*d.*=draft list; *f.*=final book):

Poet	*d.*	*f.*	*Poet*	*d.*	*f.*
Abercrombie, Lascelles	5	4	Davies, W. H.	7	7
Auden, W. H.	3	4	Davison, Edward	1	1
Barker, George	8	4	De la Mare, Walter	7	6
Bell, Julian	1	1	Dowson, Ernest	8	9
Belloc, Hillaire	1	1	Drinkwater, John	3	2
Binyon, Lawrence	1	1	Eliot, T. S.	11	7
Blunden, Edmund	5	6	Ellis, Edwin J.	1	1
Blunt, Wilfred Scawen	7	6	Empson, William	1	1
Bottomley, Gordon	1	1	Field, Michael	8	9
Bridges, Robert	7	6	Flecker, James Elroy	3	3
Brooke, Rupert	3	1	Freeman, John	3	3
Boyd, Thomas	—	1	Ghose, Manmohan	1	1
Campbell, Joseph	1	1	Gibson, Wilfrid	4	4
Campbell, Roy	5	4	Gogarty, Oliver St. John	17	17
Church, Richard	1	1	Graves, Robert	4	—
Coleridge, Mary	1	1	Gray, John	4	—
Colum, Padriac	4	4	Gregory, Lady Augusta	6	5
Coppard, A. E.	3	3	Grenfell, Julian	1	1
Cornford, Frances	4	4	Hardy, Thomas	5	4
Daryush, Elizabeth	3	—	Henley, William Ernest	5	4

Poet	*d.*	*f.*	*Poet*	*d.*	*f.*
Higgins, F. R.	6	6	Nichols, Robert	10	7
Hodgson, Ralph	2	1	O'Connor, Frank	7	7
Hopkins, Gerard Manley	7	7	Pater, Walter	1	1
Housman, A. E.	6	5	Pinto, Vivian de Sola	1	1
Hughes, Richard	9	8	Pound, Ezra	13	3
Johnson, Lionel	6	6	Powell, F. York	2	2
Joyce, James	3	3	Purohit Swami, Shri	3	3
Kipling, Rudyard	3	2	Read, Herbert	1	1
Lawrence, D. H.	4	6	Rhys, Ernest	2	2
Lewis, C. Day	11	8	Roberts, Michael	2	2
MacDiarmid, Hugh	4	4	Rolleston, T. W.	1	1
MacNeice, Louis	1	4	Ruddock, Margot	3	7
Masefield, John	11	6	Russell, George W.	8	8
Madge, Charles	—	2	Sackville-West, V.	2	2
Mathers, Edward Powys	1	1	Sassoon, Siegfried	4	4
McGreevy, Thomas	2	2	Scott, Geoffrey	4	4
Meynell, Alice	3	3	Shanks, Edward	4	4
Millay, Edna St. Vincent	2	—	Sitwell, Edith	7	6
Monro, Harold	6	6	Sitwell, Sacheverell	1	1
Moore, Thomas Sturge	6	6	Spender, Stephen	2	2
Newbolt, Sir Henry	1	1	Squires, Sir John Collings	—	1

Poet	*d.*	*f.*	*Poet*	*d.*	*f.*
Stead, William Force	2	2	Trench, Herbert	—	1
Stephens, James	8	8	Turner, W. J.	11	12
Stevenson, Robert Louis	5	—	Waley, Arthur	—	1
Strong, L. A. G.	6	3	Warner, Sylvia Townsend	1	1
Sturm, Frank Pearce	1	1	Watson, Sir William	9	—
Symons, Arthur	3	3	Wellesley, Dorothy	9	8
Synge, John Millington	12	12	Wilde, Oscar	1	1
Tagore, Rabindranath	7	7	Wylie, Elinor	4	—
Thomas, Edward	1	1	Yeats, W. B.	—	14
Thompson, Francis	3	3			

Auden was increased, although in the case of Auden this may have been inadvertent, as noted in Chapter VI. Otherwise, the basic outline mostly proved an accurate guide for the final book.

v. Production of the Anthology

During the late summer of 1935, Yeats had written Wellesley that the anthology work was energizing and feeding him creatively: "It has been an excitement reading & selecting modern poets. . . . I began this volume of selections, just as I planned to spend the winter with the Indian monk, [Purohit] Swami working at the Upanishads that I might

be reborn in imagination" (*CL* #6317, 11 Aug 1935). By November, as he put the finishing touches on the introduction and negotiated permissions fees with authors, it had become merely exhausting. The irritation is apparent in a letter to his old friend, Ezra Pound, who he felt was holding him up for too much money (see p. 313).

Yeats also had to wrestle some with Oxford's editors, notably Williams, who kept trying to suggest poets to him. Yeats complained to Gogarty that "[t]he publisher's circular is stressing Hopkins because they have a bad poet [*i.e.*, Williams] in the office with a topical mind" (*CL* #6413, 24 Oct 1935). At first, the Oxford editors were wary of his wish to include American poets, but agreed "as long as Yeats will [represent] them properly" (Milford 8 Nov 1934). Sisam responded to this, saying it would "help out a thin volume, and help also the American sales. Therefore, from a publisher's point of view, I think it is right, but I expect there will be plenty of trouble when the actual selection of Americans is made: they are so very sensitive, and so is Yeats" (9 Nov 1934). Later, when Williams queried him about the mere smattering of American poets he had chosen, Yeats claimed that Eliot had advised him not to venture across the Atlantic, but rather to include only those Americans whose work he knew or those well known in England and Europe (*CL* #6415, 24 Oct 1945). In a letter to Robert Nichols he also mentioned that Williams had joined the chorus urging him to include the war poets: "I am putting neither Sorley nor Wilfred Owen into my book, though my Publisher says the last will 'be regretted by old and young'" (*CL* #6417, 24 Oct 1935).

During the two days before he was to catch a steamer for Majorca, he wrote a host of letters tying up various loose ends with the project. He wrote Williams at the Press that he had

> finished my introduction (about thirty pages) finished except for verbal revision which I will do in Majorca. My wife thinks it is best bit of prose I have written for years. . . . The Anthology is complete so far as I can make it so—my wife has still some letters to write, some poems to type that I could not get in print. (*CL* #6465, 27 Nov 1935)

The following day, Thursday, he wrote Wellesley, "I await Friday with longing, on that day a curtain blots out all my public life, theatre, academy, Cuala. My work on the anthology is finished—the rest, the business arrangements, are my wife's task. . . . But first I must rest a week or two—too much has happened of late" (*CL* #6466, 28 Nov 1935). Getting away from everything turned out to be wishful thinking, but the next day he was indeed headed for warmer parts. His wife accompanied him across the Irish Sea to Liverpool, where she handed care for him over to two traveling companions, Gwynneth Foden and Shri Purohit Swami, bound for Majorca and a planned winter of writing verse and enjoying warmer weather away from the distractions of Dublin and London.

In reality, there were other distractions, and the final manuscript wouldn't be turned in until late the following April. Part of this delay may have been due to lingering problems with permissions, but George Yeats perhaps allowed things to languish without the urgency of W. B.'s presence to spur her on. In mid-January Yeats badgered her a bit about the work he'd left her: "What has happened about my various new books. What about the Scribner–Macmillan collected edition? What about 'autobiographical papers' or what ever called it? How many broadsides have now been published?" (*CL* #6511, 24 Jan 1936). He had reason to fret. Not only had he left her at home in Ireland with much of his work to do, on top of her regular responsibilities for taking care of their home and

children, but for the last few years she had been drinking too much too often—understandable, perhaps, since she had long been well aware of his frenzy to feel young again in the company of younger women. Iseult Gonne, once the object of Yeats's desire herself, recalled him saying shortly before he left that "everything was terrible, he and his wife had gradually been alienated—he said that she was a mother rather than a wife—she had humiliated him in public" (qtd. in Foster, *Arch-Poet* 535); though the Yeatses remained mostly on affectionate terms, there were such periods of strain. In any case, George mailed him some additional poems to consider while he was at Majorca, but there was little progress on the final manuscript until mid-January of 1936, when an aspiring biographer showed up in Ireland asking questions, and news began to filter back home that the poet's health was worsening again—both of which seem to have spurred George to wrap things up. Anne Saddlemeyer writes that "[i]n a burst of energy she spent thirteen and a quarter hours finishing the index for the anthology. 'Really the whole thing could go off any day now if that kitty-bitch Margaret Gough[20] would reply,'" she wrote Yeats on January 20 (qtd. in Saddlemeyer 496). As his health failed at the end of the month, she flew to Barcelona, then hurried to Majorca to take care of him. It is not clear if she took the manuscript with her, or had it sent later. After she had gotten things settled, and Yeats was through the worst, she explained things to Wellesley, saying,

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20. Gough was the widow of Robert Gregory and daughter-in-law of Lady Gregory: the letter presumably concerned permissions for the poems of Lady Gregory he had chosen for the anthology. Gough and Yeats had been at odds over Gregory's literary estate.

> Delay in sending MSS largely due to Milford not sending Elizabeth Bridges Daryush Willy's selection of her poems until January[21] and her objections to his choice. He has decided not to include her, so they can now have the stuff. Will send you proofs of your poems directly they come, as you asked. He hasnt [*sic*] been able to make final corrections on his introduction yet—will send you a copy as soon as I can. (*CL* #6527, 12 Mar 1936)

The manuscript would eventually be hand-carried to Yeats's literary agent by his fourteen-year-old son Michael, who came to visit in Majorca in late April, and who dropped by in London on his way back to school (Saddlemeyer 503) to convey the package to Watt personally, while the Yeatses remained in Majorca. Oxford's archives show that George sent a note to Watt, in advance:

> My son will leave the manuscript of the Oxford Book of Modern Verse at your office on Thursday morning. It is impossible to [mail] registered parcels from this island and so it is safer to send it with him.
>
> The poems are numbered one to 386. I am sorry that I have to ask you to get the poems from Mr. Yeats typed. I wrote a month ago for his volume of collected poems but it has not yet arrived. The list is in the bundle of poems which starts with Pater (No.1) among the poets born in 1865 [*sic*]. I have numbered the poems, so would you very kindly ask the

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21. Correspondence in Oxford's archives indicates that she was exaggerating about the Press's tardiness. The editors, who assumed there would be no difficulty with Daryush (she was one of their own authors and the daughter of Robert Bridges, a friend of Yeats), contacted her early in December. They were surprised and miffed when she wrote on December 20, refusing permission.

typist to number them. His Introduction is included, but not the index of first lines or the index of authors; these are completed but I thought it would be better to send them when the paged proofs come so that the page numbers can be inserted. If Sir Humphrey [M]ilford wants them at once please let me know and I will send them at once by air mail. The list of acknowledgements can't be sent until I get to London the first week in June (D.V.). I have not the material here to compile it from.

There is one other point: Macmillan asked Mr Yeats to cut down to one fourth the two poems he had originally chosen from Ralph Hodgson. He does not feel able to do this yet, and as waiting to feel well enough might delay the anthology still longer I wonder if you could communicate with them and ask them to allow him to include the whole of THE BULL (No. 132) and leave out THE SONG OF HONOUR. This may meet theirmobjection [*sic*] to using so much material from Ralph Hodgson's very small book of poems. Hodgson, I should say, gave his personal permission for both poems, but Messrs Macmillan explained that in his (Hodgson's) own interests they could not allow both the long poems used. Apart from his inability to concentrate on the "cuts" Mr Yeats would prefer not to cut either poem.

When Mr Yeats [*sic*] poems are typed and Macmillan have decided about the Hodgson poem the MSS. could go to Sir Humphrey Milford. (27 Apr 1936)

Despite George's care, Yeats remained seriously ill for most of February 1936, and his doctors were worried he might die (Foster, *Arch-Poet* 541). The couple stayed in Majorca until late May while he recuperated, becoming embroiled, near the end of their stay, in a bizarre and much-publicized episode in which Ruddock, in a fit of mania, arrived on the island and showed up at Yeats's door, then shortly afterward attempted suicide. It was only the last of many distractions. False reports of Yeats's impending death, some spread by his disaffected traveling companion, Mrs. Foden, had circulated in English newspapers that winter (540); in Oxford, Chapman's regret over Yeats's failure to die may have been based on this news, though there is no archival record of any sort of contingency planning at Oxford. The Press's archives show only that by March the editors were getting nervous about making their planned fall publication date, and wrote his agent inquiring about the manuscript's status (Milford, 10 Mar 1936). Watt replied that he couldn't get in touch with Yeats, but that, with one exception, all the permissions had been taken care of (17 Mar 1936). The Press's editors received the manuscript on 1 May with great relief. They had apparently been alarmed the previous fall to see that Yeats had picked seventeen of Oliver St. John Gogarty's poems, but Williams wrote Chapman that "Mr Gogarty is better than I feared. The whole book varies most amazingly from the most imbecilic simple poems of Masefield and Drinkwater to Mr Empson. You cannot however, say that it has not a great deal of very popular stuff in it" (1 May 1936). Sisam agreed, and was relieved that Oxford could give the go-ahead to put the book into production: "Some queer stuff, but perhaps as popular as we could expect" (4 May 1936).

There is no evidence that Yeats ever saw a copy-edited manuscript, but once the manuscript was handed in, production moved forward swiftly. He received galley proofs on 19 June, after he had returned to England and was staying with Wellesley in Sussex, and made some major changes when he returned with them to Ireland later that month—revising his selections of Kipling and Turner, and making additional cuts. He kept the galleys until early August, writing Wellesley, "Now that I have had all my Anthology in galley proof I am astonished at the greatness of much of the poetry, & at its sadness" (*CL* #6614, 14 July 1936). By early August George Yeats was doing more work on indexes, this time from page proofs that Oxford had sent. These Yeats returned in early September. He answered queries from Clarendon Press proofreaders in mid-September, writing and sending telegrams to poets to clarify small points about wording. He had sent a preliminary list of permissions acknowledgements to Oxford in June, but asked for it back in July, as he made changes.

Advance copies of the printed book were sent to Yeats and to reviewers on 15 October, and were shown at a mid-October book exposition sponsored by the *Times* of London. With the advance copy, reviewers were given a promotional blurb touting the anthology's significance:

> This anthology is probably the most important anthology of the year—certainly the most important if the name of its compiler is considered. Mr. Yeats is the one poet who is admired by old and young, by the traditionalists and by the revolutionaries. He has a greater acquaintance with the principles and technique of verse than any other living poet and his own achievement puts him among the all but greatest poets of our

> literature. Reviewers of the book may disagree with him over certain poems but his judgment is bound to be treated with respect and concern. ("This")

Respected or not, when visitors to the book exposition saw the advance copies, trouble ensued. It became clear that Yeats and his wife had made a hash of permissions. One poet, Edward Shanks, had personally denied Yeats permission, but the letter had been lost, probably by George; Shanks's publisher, not knowing this, had granted permission when Yeats inquired again, to Shanks' later dismay. Shanks tried to have his poems removed from the anthology during the last-minute revisions, but ultimately gave up. Letters and Press archives also show that Yeats had relied on a number of informal permissions given to him by friendly poets, some of whom had already signed authority for their anthology rights over to their publishers and could not legally grant permission to Yeats on their own say-so. Once these publishers realized that a major anthology by a prosperous publishing firm was about to appear without proper agreements on file, they immediately began assailing the Press with outraged letters of demand. As the Press had made the mistake of allowing Yeats to send out his permissions requests on Oxford University Press letterhead, the outrage was directed against the Press rather than the poet. In reviewing the files a decade later for Yeats bibliographer Allan Wade, a Press editor noted that the Clarendon editors had hastily inserted a corrected acknowledgments slip in the advance copies, then discovered that there were still more problems, and had another set of corrections printed up and pasted into the copies coming off the press (Davin, 14 Feb 1949).

The book's reception among reviewers was furious and mostly negative, although Yeats confidently assured friends that it was a sign only that he had hit his target. "The Oxford University Press has congratulated me on my 'courage' in stirring up 'such a hornets nest' & offers me a further advance on royalties," he wrote Wellesley. "Most of my critics are very vindictive, a sure sign that I have some where got down to reality" (*CL* #6746, 9 Dec 1936). Two weeks later, he wrote the Swami in a similar vein:

> I am sending you a copy of the Anthology with your poems in it & will send you the broadcast in a day or two. The Anthology is having an emmense [*sic*] sale but is being attacked with great virulence by people I have left out or by their friends & husbands. Instead of putting in everybody who had some little scrap of reputation I have only put in the people I thought good poets. I never thought of doing anything else & have ~~against all the vested interests~~ done it seems something unheard of. (*CL* #6760, 21 Dec 1936).

He also found consolation in the fact that the anthology was selling well. It was quickly reprinted twice to keep up with demand. "I have just had a press-cutting which tells me that the Anthology in Glasgow & Edinburgh heads a list of best sellers in general literature," he wrote Wellesley. "To be a best-seller three months after publication is I think rare. I hear the sale in America is very great" (130). His deeper feelings may have been more equivocal. In another letter, he admits to feeling ill and depressed by a number of things, one of which is "[a]ttacks on Anthology (Fealing [*sic*] that I have no nation, that somebody has bitten my apple all round)" (*CL* #6764, 30 Dec 1936). A slashing review from the left by Stephen Spender in *The Daily Worker* proved particularly

upsetting, especially since he had included Spender's poems in his book. In the same letter, Yeats writes,

> Spender has transferred his fury to me (you may have seen him in Time & Tide) direct falsehood & suggestion of falsehood but no education, no culture gives a man good taste—except in superficial things—if the nursery was wrong. Recent attacks have concentrated on my putting in your & Gogarty—the [latter] because he sings a brave song & so makes a whinging propaganda look ridiculous, you because you are a woman of rank . . . & because I have left out Wilfred Owen who seems to me a bad poet though a good letter writer. One American fury, mentions neither you, nor Owen, but denounces Gogorty [*sic*] & Wilfred Blunt (Wilfred Blunt did several anti-pacifist things including Bull-fighting). Meanwhile the book continues to sell. (*CL* #6764, 30 Dec 1936)

Even three-quarters of a century after its publication, the anthology still proves able to confound interested readers. In his recent two-volume biography of Yeats, literary historian Roy F. Foster offers a thoughtful summary of the anthology's publication and reception, but then drifts off into an assessment of his own that manages to miss the point once more:

> Anthologies both represent a reflection of their times and attempt to predict what contemporary work will last. Judged by this last criterion, WBY's Oxford book falls down badly. Laurence Binyon, Edith Sitwell, Sturge Moore, W. J. Turner, Dorothy Wellesley, and Margot Ruddock received respectively sixteen, eighteen, ten, sixteen, fifteen, and four pages

> each, which does not reflect their staying-power. The Irish representation (which was enormous) allowed Gogarty twelve pages, Higgins six, O'Connor ten, Synge seven, AE six, Gregory three, and WBY himself twelve. . . . No one could miss the fact that all of those most generously represented were friends and associates of WBY. . . . Partiality and the assertion of his own influence against that of Pound and Eliot could also be inferred in his choice of three poems by L. A. G. Strong, two from MacGreevy, three from the Swami, and one from Frank Pearce Sturm—whose one book of poetry WBY had helped bring to birth fifteen years before. By contrast, Auden's four pages and Spender's one and a half not only drastically underrepresented the new generation but chose a strangely quixotic sample. . . .

The anthology, Foster finally suggests, unfairly represents the "*Zeitgeist*" (*Arch-Poet* 556) of the decade before World War II.

His mistake is that he ignores Yeats's introduction, which makes it clear that the anthology is meant to offer no sort of prediction or reflection of the *zeitgeist* at all. That is purely something that a reader such as Foster brings to it. Remarkably, what Foster and Yeats's contemporary critics miss is, like Poe's purloined letter, plainly in sight all the time: the anthology is not about defining its time and identifying the future of poetry, but about defining Yeats. Although he began his work painfully conscious of the reasons why members of a younger generation were finding the high modernist work of the "Ezra, Elliot, Auden school" increasingly compelling, admiring his work but not finding in it the sort of models meaningful to their poetry, ultimately his anthology did not set out to win

them over with arguments. In it, rather, he settles on a goal of simply presenting himself in the context of past verse that has shaped him, recent verse that he has shaped, and current verse that he finds compelling. One notable letter to Laura Riding spells this out straightforwardly:

> I am a despotic man, trying to impose my will upon the times (an anthology one instrument) not co-operative. My anthology has however a first domestic object, to get under one cover poems I want to read to myself, to a friend, or to my children. I do not care whether a poem has been in a hundred anthologies. I do not think that a reason for including or excluding it. If I give my anthology to a man, or as is more likely to a woman, I must be able to say this is my table of values. (*CL* #6541, 26 Apr 1936)

Clearly, Yeats's table of values did not reflect his times, and he was well aware of that when he compiled the book and wrote the introduction to it. He was not a Quiller-Couch, setting forth the prescribed course of reading for his era. He was, instead, a poet reacting to a changing world. Everything is right there to be seen by the reader who approaches it without a predetermined set of expectations about what anthologies aim to do.

Though not really a central part of this study, one further observation seems warranted at this point. It seems to me an irony that Yeats, famously aristocratic and dismissive of the common taste, ultimately offered up in this anthology a sort of neo-Romantic reaction against the pace and complexity of the modern life. Attitudes according with his vision of modernity, and his discomfort with its consequences, became more and more apparent as the century progressed—not so much as a direct influence on

the work of elite literary poets, who have spent the decades since the *Oxford Book of Modern Verse* appeared deconstructing their own work and their own audiences until there is very little of either left, but in the popular escapist entertainments and aspirations of popular taste that Yeats himself scorned. Popular taste, one could say, has caught up with him.

The editors of the Oxford University Press worried in the 1930s that he had become too obscure and difficult in his later work, and that consequently his choices wouldn't be popular enough to sell books. What they could not have known was that the popular audience for poetry would never again reach the peak that they saw when they brought forth Quiller-Couch's anthology of English verse in 1900, or that the audience would continue to decline to the point where most young readers today know only the names of a few dead poets that they're forced to memorize if they're studying for college entrance exams, and generally confuse Yeats with Keats. Yet the sort of longing for meaning, connection, authority, and purpose that infuses Yeats's work—and manifested itself in his selections for the anthology—is more alive than ever. Such a yearning underlies today's booming market for escapist mainstream popular culture. It is a yearning that produces many billions of dollars in revenues for the Press's non-literary successors as they churn out today's multimedia cultural touchstones, much as Oxford printers churned out the ink-stained India-paper sheets of Quiller-Couch's book at the end of the nineteenth century.

II.

The Anti-Victorian

We tend to read the poetry of W. B. Yeats along with that of Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, and the early twentieth-century modernists, forgetting that he lived nearly half of his threescore and thirteen as a subject of Queen Victoria. Much of his autobiographical prose concerns experiences as a young man in Victorian or early Edwardian England and Ireland, and with learning his craft as apprentice or rival to late-Victorian literary figures. In his Autobiography he declares that his intense interests in esoteric spirituality and Irish folk literature grew partly out of reactions to Victorian-era imperialism and the scientific rationalism that he came to regard "with a monkish hate" (54). Despite this, students of Yeats frequently ignore the Victorian context, skipping over poems he wrote before the change in his style that became apparent about the time of the First World War, and turning directly to the tougher, mature, "modern" poems of the 1920s and '30s. Even *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse* does this, with the earliest of his own poems dating from 1914 (although this could well have been George Yeats's doing rather than her husband's[1]). Yet skipping the Victorian and Edwardian Yeats for the modern one begs the question of what is meant by "modern"—a question that the anthology itself was an attempt to answer.

"Even a long-lived man has the right to call his contemporaries 'modern,'" Yeats observes, as he begins his long introductory essay (*OBMV* v), using the word in its descriptive sense rather than to identify a particular movement. Yet by 1935, when he

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1. See p. 241.

wrote the introduction, "modern" had already become firmly associated with the artistic and literary movements of the early twentieth century that we now think of as High Modernism—the era of Picasso and Pound, *Ulysses* and *The Waste Land*. By the same token, a door had shut on the "Victorians" in the minds of many readers; the *Oxford English Dictionary* cites a reference from 1934 as the first use of "Victorian" to disparage something as dated and kitschy, and it is during this period, of course, that Yeats was putting together his anthology. Although he had many quarrels with Victorian poetics, kitsch and sentimentality were not what he complained about; rather it was what he saw as complacency, agnosticism, and scientific determinism—attitudes that he found it worthwhile to confront in the anthology. His notion of what it meant to be modern cannot be properly understood without coming to grips with the late-Victorian poets he knew, read, and reacted to as a young man, some of whom he included in the *OBMV,* and all of whom doubtless thought of themselves as literary "moderns."

i. *Paterfamilias* of the Modern

Yeats begins his re-visioning of what modernism meant by cutting a well-known passage out of its context as part of an essay on Da Vinci in Walter Pater's 1873 volume, *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (later retitled *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*), and presenting it as the anthology's first poem, "Mona Lisa." It was a move that took the Oxford University Press editors aback when Yeats first listed it among his selections. "One entry perplexed me, and no-one here can help," Charles Williams wrote

Yeats. "'Pater: The Monna [*sic*] Lisa'—was there a poem? I knew—stupidly, perhaps—nothing but the prose purple of the essay on Lionardo [*sic*]" (9 Oct 1935). Its inclusion also puzzled readers and reviewers of the anthology: What was Walter Pater (1839–1894), a writer associated with the pre-Raphaelites, doing in an anthology of modern poetry? By the 1930s, when Yeats selected it, the passage was still celebrated, but its renown was of the questionable sort seen in Williams's letter—as an example of overwritten Victorian aestheticism. The question remained: what did Pater have to do with modern verse? And, more to the point, what did Yeats see in his work?

One thing Yeats saw was his own imagery: "Mona Lisa" introduces themes shared by many of his own poems. Pater begins, "She is older than the rocks on which she sits" (*OBMV* 1), and goes on to describe Mona Lisa as a woman of secrets, hidden wisdom, and terrible knowledge. In Yeats's poems,[2] such rocks are the dwelling-place of fairies ("The Two Kings") and ghosts ("The Peacock"), places to seek otherworldly wisdom ("Fergus and the Druid," "The Grey Rock," "The Gyres"), and a threshold between worlds ("The Stolen Child"); such women are enigmatic sources of wisdom and desire ("No Second Troy," "A Crazed Girl"). Even more directly Yeatsian are some of the images, including vampires ("Oil and Blood"), Leda ("Leda and the Swan"), and Helen of Troy ("Among School Children").[3] But beyond the commonalities that identify

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2. Unless otherwise noted, all references to Yeats's poems are from *W. B. Yeats: The Poems*, 2nd ed., ed. Finneran, hereafter referred to as *YP*. Variant readings are from *The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W. B. Yeats*, eds. Allt and Alspach, hereafter referred to as *VP*.

3. In an early version of "Among School Children," Yeats writes of the "present image" of the swan's daughter: "Da Vinci' [*sic*] finger so had fashioned it" (*VP* 444). The revised poem asks, "Did Quattrocento finger fashion it . . . ?"

it as a precursor to Yeats's own poetry, the selection from Pater mostly functions to set the tone for the anthology as a whole.[4]

First, and most dramatically, it serves as an announcement. Typographically, the poem has been set off in isolation from the rest of the anthology, like a epigraph; the poems on subsequent pages follow closely, one after the next, sometimes two or three to a page, but Pater's "Mona Lisa" stands alone, with ample white space separating it from what follows. It invites careful reading. Formally, in presenting the selection as rhythmic *vers libre* (*OBMV* viii), Yeats defamiliarizes Pater's words and challenges readers to reexamine them on their own terms, not unlike what he will do with other poems throughout the anthology. Recast as rhythmic poetry, the imaginative intensity of Pater's writing no longer seems inappropriately "purple." Yeats wants his reader to take another look at the words, put aside condescension and preconceptions, and actually *see* them as freshly as they were seen when Pater first wrote them. The selection thus also announces Yeats's role as editor, which will not be that of a self-effacing anthologist-compiler, dutifully identifying the brightest gems of accepted tradition and presenting them to be admired and memorized, but rather that of a conscious artist.

Second, the passage is selected from an essay that sets forth Leonardo as a type of the modern artist (and, by extension, the modern poet). In the excerpt, which seems at first to be about the woman who has posed for the painting, Leonardo himself can be glimpsed where his style "has moulded the changing lineaments, / And tinged the eyelids and the hands" (*OBMV* 1). In fact, it is Leonardo, not Mona Lisa, who is Pater's

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4. Compare Pater's image of Mona Lisa's hands and eyelids, on the anthology's first page, with the severed eyelid and hand in George Barker's "The Crystal," on its last page. By the anthology's end, Pater's view of the modern has been effectively dismembered—a development Yeats is not at peace with.

subject—and Yeats's; Yeats has chosen to begin his anthology with a portrait of the artist. Elsewhere in the essay, Pater notes that Leonardo's aesthetic sense

> is so exotic that it fascinates a larger number than it delights, and seems more than any other artist to reflect ideas and views and some scheme of the world within; so that he seemed to his contemporaries to be the possessor of some unsanctified and secret wisdom. . . . He trifles with his genius, and crowds all his chief work into a few tormented years of later life; yet he is so possessed by his genius that he passes unmoved through the most tragic events, overwhelming his country and friends, like one who comes across them by chance on some secret errand. (Pater 102)

Pater thus portrays Leonardo as someone whose work (exemplified in the painting) is informed by a scientific view of the world, and yet who still confounds rationality:

> [I]f we think of him as the mere reasoner who subjects design to anatomy and composition to mathematical rules, we shall hardly have of him that impression which those about him received from him. . . . [H]e seemed to them rather the sorcerer or the magician, possessed of curious secrets and a hidden knowledge, living in a world of which he alone possessed the key. (110–11)

This description of the artist could just as well have been written about Yeats himself, as he would wish to be seen. Although the context is missing from the *OBMV* selection, it is there to be inferred by a sensitive reader. Yeats signals that one of the important themes that the anthology will explore is the role of the artist, or poet, in a modern world.

Third, its inclusion calls attention to Pater's argument about the painting itself, and invites us to revisit his essay and the whole question of what defines the "modern." Yeats has re-read Pater while considering how to address modern poetry in his anthology, and his selection and introduction point readers to Pater's essay as well. If we follow his lead and turn back to it, we see how Pater represents Leonardo as the first modern, four centuries before modernism had a name: "The movement of the fifteenth century is twofold; partly of the Renaissance, partly also the coming of what is called the 'modern spirit,' with its realism, its appeal to experience: it comprehended a return to antiquity, and a return to nature" (Pater 113).

Finally, the poem puts forward a model of one of the things that Yeats contends modern poetry *does*. Just as Joyce defamiliarizes the myth of Odysseus and recasts it in 1904 Dublin as comic prose, or Eliot turns a medieval knight into a modern English bureaucrat spinning the death of Becket, or Pound glosses modern life with a consciousness sifting through ancient fragments of poetry and language, Pater takes a cultural artifact from the past—Leonardo's masterpiece—and inhabits it imaginatively, turning an ostensibly simple portrait into the repository for an entire culture's mythology and history as seen from the perspective of an alienated present-day. He puts aside scholarly objectivity and instead seeks to burn like the famous "gem-like flame" (*OBMV* ix)—seeing the world ecstatically, with his imagination, much as Yeats himself in certain poems seeks to inhabit the courts of Byzantium or Tara, making them part of the fabric of his own twentieth-century life. The world may have forgotten that Pater was doing this half a century before High Modernism flowered, but Yeats has not.

ii. Reinventing Oscar Wilde

Almost as notorious as Yeats's appropriation of Pater for his own editorial purposes is his reworking of Oscar Wilde's *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*, the only selection from Wilde (1854–1900) in the anthology. As a young man, he had admired Wilde greatly before Wilde's imprisonment for gross indecency, when his fellow Irishman was the most celebrated figure associated with the group of Nineties poets that Yeats later mythologized as "the Tragic Generation." By the 1930s, although Wilde's name still was anathema to the general public because of his homosexuality, as Richard Whittington-Egan notes, in literary circles he had begun to be seen as a "kind of martyr" (96) in the battle against middle-class taste and morality. Èibhar Walsche observes that James Joyce had celebrated him as an example of the subversive artist, and Yeats "construct[ed] his friend as the archetype of the Irish tragic artist, the lone figure standing against the commonplace" (53). Looking back on Wilde, Yeats wrote that "he seemed to us, baffled as we were by youth, or by infirmity, a triumphant figure, and to some of us a figure from another age, an audacious Italian fifteenth century figure" (*Autobiography* 87)—a figure, that is, not unlike Pater's portrait of Da Vinci, modern before his time.

Stylistically, however, Wilde's verse belonged very much to the nineteenth century. To evoke what Yeats saw as its modernity in the *OBMV*, he edited the poem severely, removing part numbers and cutting out sixty-six of the poem's stanzas, leaving

only forty.[5] The resulting lyric seemed more fragmented and evocative, while at the same time less polished, rhetorical, and stylized.

The *Ballad* shares with Yeats's poetry of the 1890s an emotionally charged color palette. It paints a scene highlighted by a scarlet coat, red blood, blue sky, gray clothing, silver clouds, black Despair, red Hell, a black dock, faces white and gray with fear, and red and white roses. Similarly, poems from Yeats's 1892 *Countess Kathleen and Various Legends and Lyrics*[6] are full of such painterly images: "dancing silver-sandalled" ("To the Rose upon the Rood of Time"), "the green forest rim" ("Cuchulain's Fight with the Sea"), "white stars" ("The Rose of Peace"), "a purple glow" ("The Lake Isle of Innisfree"), "the blue star of twilight" ("The White Birds"), and a "red-rose bordered hem" ("To Ireland in the Coming Times"). In his essay "The Symbolism of Poetry," written two years after Wilde composed his *Ballad,* Yeats argued that such symbolic coloring connected the matter of the poem to a higher presence:

> All sounds, all colors, all forms, either because of their preordained energies or because of long association, evoke indefinable and yet precise emotions, or, as I prefer to think, call down among us certain disembodied powers, whose footsteps over our hearts we call emotions; and when sound, and colour, and form are in a musical relation, a beautiful relation

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5. Even shortened by almost two-thirds, the poem is among the longest in the anthology, and Wilde is given a generous eight pages—compared, for example, to four pages for Thomas Hardy. The anthology's longest selections are two dramatic poems: Herbert Read's "The End of a War" (475 lines) and Laurence Binyon's "Tristram's End" (422 lines). Next comes Sacheverell Sitwell's "Agamemnon's Tomb" (271 lines), Arthur Waley's "The Temple" (262 lines), and then the excerpt from Wilde's *Ballad* (240 lines).

6. See *VP*—many of these are variants that Yeats later revised out of his early work as he sought to make it appear less self-consciously ethereal.

> to one another, they become, as it were, one sound, one colour, one form, and evoke an emotion that is made out of their distinct evocations and yet is one emotion. (*Essays* 156–7)

For the Yeats of 1935 and ’36, the easy connections of colors and forms to disembodied powers might no longer have seemed so compelling as a poetic device, but the impulse behind it still rang true as an illustration of how his generation reacted to Victorianism.

There is, of course, a long English tradition, dating back to the days of *Tottel’s Miscellany* in the sixteenth century, of anthology editors inventing titles and editing poems to suit their own designs (Ferry 75). Quiller-Couch had established the precedent in the Oxford anthologies, but by 1936, with advances in literary scholarship and textual criticism making themselves felt in literary publishing, such editorial mediation was increasingly frowned upon. Yeats acknowledged as much in the anthology’s introduction, feeling it necessary to justify his revision of Wilde. He claims the privilege of having “have stood in judgement upon Wilde, bringing into the light a great, or almost great poem, as he himself had done had he lived” (*OBMV* vii–viii).

The last seems unlikely, given that Wilde’s impulse with regard to the poem had been adding to rather than subtracting from it (Ellmann 532, 534). During the course of Wilde’s career he showed little inclination to second-guess himself artistically. What it reflects, rather, is Yeats’s strong identification with him as a transitional figure. Wilde, he suggests, wore the same sort of deliberately affected mask that he himself adopted during the 1890s (one he replaced with something more appropriate for the times about the same time that he began heavily revising his early style):

> Wilde, a man of action, a born dramatist, finding himself overshadowed by old famous men he could not attack, for he was of their time and shared its admirations, tricked and clowned to draw attention to himself. Now that I have plucked from the *Ballad of Reading Gaol* its foreign feathers it shows a stark realism akin to that of Thomas Hardy, the contrary to all its author deliberately sought. (*OBMV* vii)

That younger man, "overshadowed" by older artists, could as easily be Yeats himself during that early period of his life. During the early 1890s he was still living in his father's lodgings in Dublin and London's Bedford Park, struggling to establish his own identity, identifying with the Romantic poets, and trying to decide if he loved or hated the Pre-Raphaelites. And just as he himself has since shed that old skin, and the reader is conscious of him as a modern poet, he would have us believe that he has done the same for Wilde by revising the *Ballad.*

While Yeats's revision of Wilde's poem might improve it as a lyric for modern readers, it completely changes the focus, making it simply a prison execution seen through the eyes of a narrator who empathizes with (and perhaps loves) the condemned man; it resembles the modernist method in that such a reading depends on knowledge of Wilde's biography for its poignancy, much as "Mona Lisa" depends on knowledge of Pater's theories, which are nowhere to be found in the text. The original offered a broader, more melodramatic and freestanding critique of human nature and society that moralized on the mindless and unfeeling system that controlled the prisoner; it reflected on and revolved around an epigrammatic center more typical of Wilde, but one that Yeats cut from the *OBMV* version:

Yet each man kills the thing he loves,

By each let this be heard,

Some do it with a bitter look,

Some with a flattering word,

The coward does it with a kiss,

The brave man with a sword! (Wilde 2)

Such heavy-handedness might not have been to the taste of 1930s readers, but is essential to Wilde as Wilde, rather than Wilde as Yeats would reinvent him. In effect the revised poem has become Yeats's, although the words are Wilde's. Yeats realizes this, and excuses it by including the excised stanza in his introduction to the anthology, while arguing that it actually detracts from Wilde's message. "Effective in themselves," he writes, "put into the Ballad [such lines] become artificial, trivial, arbitrary; a work of art can have but one subject" (*OBMV* vii). This conviction about art's need for a single subject will, later in the anthology, similarly impel him to "edit" (through omission) fragmented modernist poems such as "The Waste Land" that argue against his dictum.

iii. Ballads and Lyrics in Translation

Wilde's is one of numerous selections in the *OBMV* that employ variations of the ballad, a form that Yeats used extensively himself. His introduction to the anthology stresses the folk origins of the form, and two of the ballads that illustrate this are by a writer not normally thought of as a poet at all. These are translations by Frederick York

Powell (1850–1904), a polymath who, as noted in Chapter I, was a delegate of the Oxford University Press and played a key role in the publication of Quiller-Couch's Oxford anthology. He was also a close friend of Yeats's father, J. B. Yeats, and a frequent guest at the Yeats home in the London suburb of Bedford Park in the 1880s and '90s. York Powell's literary specialization was in old Icelandic and Scandinavian languages, but a childhood spent in France and Spain led to an interest in contemporary French poetry (he helped arrange lectures by Paul Verlaine and Stéphane Mallarmé at Oxford). Yeats's brother Jack used several of his translations of recent French poems in *A Broad Sheet*, a limited-edition series of illustrated, hand-colored broadsides published by Elkin Matthews in 1902 and 1903[7] that were the source for the *OBMV* texts, and that later inspired W. B. Yeats's *Broadsides* of the 1930s. The *OBMV* includes "The Sailor and the Shark" and "The Pretty Maid," both translations that York Powell made from Paul Fort's *Ballades Français* series: "La Reine a la Mer" and "La Fille Morte dans ses Amours."[8]

It is worth noting that Yeats shows little interest in the scholarship underlying the translations, or even in the source of the translations as such. Consequently he has very little to say about Paul Fort, whose lyrics intentionally set out to evoke folk balladry. In

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7. Digitized copies of the broadsheets can be viewed in the Jack B. Yeats Broadsheet Collection of the University of Pittsburgh, at http://images.library.pitt.edu/y/yeats/. York Powell's ballads appear in the February and May editions for 1902.

8. Literal translations of the titles would be, "The Queen of the Sea," and "The Dead Girl in her Loves" or "The Dead Girl's Love"; Powell called the first "A Ballad of the Sea," and it was retitled "The Sailor and the Shark" for the broadside. The other poem was left untitled. In the *OBMV*, it seems likely that W. B. Yeats chose a title taken from the first line of Powell's translation.

"The Pretty Maid," for example, a more literal translation of Fort's original[9] might read, "The girl, she is dead—dead while in love. / They carried her under ground, under ground at break of day. / They laid her all alone there, all alone in her Sunday best." York Powell translates it as, "The pretty maid she died, she died, in love-bed as she lay; / They took her to the churchyard; all at the break of day; / They laid her all alone there, all in her white array" (*OBMV* 31). In a notebook, York Powell commented that "I wish I could get tunes written to [the poems]. Drawly tunes like the songs Fort had in his head when he made them. The metre is exactly copied. They seem to me very funny, and pathetic in their way" (Elton 404).

Actually, York Powell changed the meter from Fort's original Alexandrines (hexameter broken by a caesura) into common measure (tetrameter followed by trimeter), and with words like "maid" and phrases like "her white array" he gave the simple colloquial French of Fort's original a more poeticized diction—thereby losing the naturalness and irony that first caught his eye. Yet the rhythmic character of the translations helps explain Yeats's interest. In "A General Introduction for My Work," Yeats alluded to "The Sailor and the Shark," and observed that for him the traditional rhythm of the ballad and of blank verse was a necessary background to his later prosodic development:

> I stand at a moment of history when instinct, its traditional songs and dances, its general agreement, is of the past. I have been cast up out of the whale's belly though I still remember the sound and sway that came from

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9. *Cette fille, elle est morte, est morte dans ses amours. / Ils l'ont portée en terre, en terre au point de jours. / Ils l'ont couchée toute seule, toute seule en ses atours*" (Fort 43).

> beyond its ribs, and like the Queen in Paul Fort's ballad, I smell of the fish of the sea. (*Essays* 524)[10]

In the introduction to the *OBMV*, he writes, "Folk-song, unknown to the Victorians as their attempts to imitate it show, must, because never declamatory or eloquent, fill the scene. If anybody will turn these pages attending to poets born in the 'fifties, 'sixties, and 'seventies, he will find how successful are their folk-songs and their imitations" (*OBMV* xiii). Even though Yeats read French haltingly, he saw that French Symbolists and their successors such as Paul Fort had successfully captured the spirit of the folk ballad; York Powell, for all his thorough Victorian scholarship, was held back by the conventional poeticism of Victorian style as he sought to translate its unaffected expression into something similar in English.

Another friend of Yeats's youth whose work appears in the anthology is Edwin Ellis (1848–1916). Ellis attended some meetings of the Rhymers Club, but he did not really figure in the mythology of the "tragic generation" that Yeats created for his autobiographical writings and embellishd in the introduction to the *OBMV*. The sixty-eight-line excerpt from Ellis's "Himself" evokes balladic storytelling, though it is written in rhyming *abab* rather than in traditional ballad stanzas. Like York Powell, Ellis was older than Yeats and belonged to J. B. Yeats's circle of friends; a shared interest in mysticism had led the two of them to collaborate on a massive (and massively flawed) deluxe illustrated edition of William Blake's poetry and prophetic books. In the unpublished version of his memoirs, Yeats writes that Ellis also "wrote and published

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10. In "Three Movements," a poem that decries the gradual death of passion in poetry (Jeffares 334), Yeats makes a similar point: "Shakespearean fish swam the sea, far away from land; / Romantic fish swam in nets coming to the hand; / What are all those fish that lie gasping on the strand?" (*YP* 244)

much poetry that still seems to me to have great occasional beauty and wisdom" (30). Yeats praised "Himself" as a poem he commended to others, and that showed "nobility of rhythm," but also described it as "a too hurriedly written ballad, where the half of Christ sacrificed to the divine half 'that fled to seek felicity' wanders wailing through Golgotha" (*Autobiography* 107–8).

Besides its rhythm, Yeats was doubtless attracted to Ellis's poem by its subject matter, a complaint by a ghost. Many of his own poems summon wandering spirits, ghosts, and figures from legend and myth to tell their stories; one of these is his important early dramatic poem, "The Wanderings of Oisin," which he wrote during the time he was working with Ellis, and dedicated to him. In "Himself," Ellis imagines the striking presence of a ghost, the mournful shade of the wholly human Jesus of Nazareth (which he distinguishes from the Spirit embodied by the divine Christ[11]), who haunts the hill of Golgotha, having been left behind by the miracles of the Resurrection and Ascension. The ghost's complaint makes up most of the section that Yeats excerpted:

> "My God who lived in me to bless
>
> The earth He made has passed away;
>
> And left me here companionless,
>
> A weary spectre night and day.
>
> "I am the Ghost of Christ the Less,
>
> Jesus the man . . . . " (*OBMV* 29)

---

11. Ellis's depiction appears to be informed by the ancient docetic Christian doctrines of Marcion, a heresy professing that a divine spirit had inhabited the human body of Jesus the man, and departed when he died.

Like Oisin, complaining to St. Patrick in Yeats's poem, Ellis's ghostly Jesus is blind and out of place in the world he haunts. "Himself" also offers an image of the human and the divine which has strong parallels with Yeats's early mystical theory of moods—a theory that embraces the sort of "disembodied powers" Yeats described in his essay on symbolism, as noted above. For Yeats during the 1890s, moods were messengers of the divine that descended upon and inspired the creative artist (and, by extension, left just as suddenly). Thus Ellis's ghostly Jesus, no longer possessed by such a messenger, the divinity that he once embodied, looks back on his life and wonders what it would have been like if he had not been so possessed: "'Where is the life I might have known / If God had never lit on me?" (*OBMV* 29). He is a complementary opposite to the speaker in Yeats's "The Moods," written during this same period, who marvels at how his sense of the world and time has changed as he has become possessed, and wonders what has dropped to earth from the heavens and possessed him: "What one in the rout / of the fire-born moods / Has fallen away?" (*YP* 52).[12]

iv. Religious Lyrics

According to an early essay by Yeats, the priest is the poet's shadow (*Essays* 158), and many of the poems of the *OBMV* are by poets wrestling with philosophical and religious questions, as Yeats himself often does. One such poet is Francis Thompson

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12. That Yeats saw moods as eternal qualities, which do not perish even when they fall from the heavens to inhabit mortal humans, is suggested in an early variant of the poem, "But kindly old rout / Of the fire-born moods, / You pass not away" (*VP* 142).

(1859–1907). Yeats includes the whole of Thompson's "The Hound of Heaven," along with a fragment from his long poem, *Sister Songs*, and "The Heart," a pair of sonnets. At six pages and 182 lines, "The Hound of Heaven" is the sixth-longest poem included in the anthology, and the second-longest pure lyric (most of the longer poems are either dramatic—like Herbert Read's "The End of a War"— excerpts, or translations). In six irregularly structured stanzas "The Hound of Heaven" tells of the speaker's flight from a pursuing Christ, and his futile attempts to hide himself in love of sensation, debauchery, beauty, nature, and self-destruction rather than allow the "Hound" to overtake him. It was a famous and popular anthology-piece, and a conventional choice for Yeats, even though by 1936 Thompson's literary reputation had fallen from heights it occupied early in the century.

Unlike Yeats's friends Lionel Johnson and Ernest Dowson, both converts, Thompson was raised a Catholic. The dramatic circumstances of his discovery and "rescue" from opium and destitution by Wilfrid and Alice Meynell made him much talked about at the Rhymers' Club, according to Yeats, but except for one visit he never joined the group, remaining instead part of a circle of Catholic writers and thinkers associated with Wilfrid Meynell's magazine *Merry England*. Yeats says little about the three poems he includes in the *OBMV*; his most revealing reference to Thompson is a brief allusion in his essay "The Symbolism of Poetry," in which he quotes a line from Blake and three from Thompson's "Hearts" to illustrate a point about the way in which the poetic imagination creates—rather than is created by—the world:

> I doubt indeed if the crude circumstance of the world, which seems to create all our emotions, does more than reflect, as in multiplying mirrors,

> the emotions that have come to solitary men in moments of poetical contemplation; or that love itself would be more than an animal hunger but for the poet and his shadow the priest, for unless we believe that outer things are the reality, we must believe that the gross is the shadow of the subtle. . . . Solitary men in moments of contemplation receive, as I think, the creative impulse from the lowest of the Nine [angelic] Hierarchies, and so make and unmake mankind, and even the world itself, for does not "the eye altering alter all"?
>
> Our towns are copied fragments from our breast;
> And all man's Babylons strive but to impart
> The grandeurs of his Babylonian heart. (*Essays* 158–59)

Yeats's 1932 poem "Vacillation," a portion of which he includes in the *OBMV*, ponders the destruction of just such a created Babylon as part of a meditation (*YP* 256) in which the poet vacillates between giving himself over to the world of mystical or religious exaltation and that of a living man's responsibilities. In the portion included in the *OBMV,* he imagines a debate with the Catholic theologian Baron Friedrich von Hügel, author of *The Mystic Element in Religion*. In the poem he considers adopting von Hügel's sort of liberal Catholic modernist ideas, rather than holding on to his own complicated imaginative sense of spirituality, and admits that his own "heart might find relief / Did I become a Christian man and choose for my belief / What seems most welcome in the tomb" (*OBMV* 82). But, unlike the speaker in Thompson's "Hound of Heaven," Yeats decides that his path leads where the pursuing "Hound" cannot follow.

Perhaps the most illuminating comparison of Yeats and Thompson along these lines would be to read "The Hound of Heaven" as a counterpoint to "The Wanderings of Oisin." That poem is framed by a debate between Oisin, the last of the Fenian heroes from Irish mythology, and St. Patrick, who converted the Irish to Catholicism. In a sense, its story is the converse of "The Hound of Heaven"; rather than being pursued by the eternal, and seeking refuge in the living world, Oisin adventures off into eternal lands of feasting, fighting, and sleep only to find them unsatisfactory. He returns at the end as an old man, out of place and time yet unwilling to renounce the pagan friends of his youth for the orthodox eternity that St. Patrick offers.

Also part of the circle of Catholic poets and essayists surrounding *Merry England* editor Wilfrid Meynell was Alice Meynell (1847–1922), Wilfrid's wife. The young Yeats would have known her work on the magazine, as a contributor to many of the magazines in which he saw his early writing published (including W. E. Henley's *Scots Observer*), and as a friend of his early literary confidante, Irish Catholic poet Katherine Tynan. Although the mature Yeats says nothing about Meynell in his introduction to the *OBMV* (or, for that matter, in his other critical writings), the three of her poems included in his anthology suggest that he saw her very much in the same context in which he placed Thompson and Lionel Johnson, that of a poet who yearns to find transcendent mystical experience in the rituals and doctrines of Catholicism, but who ultimately gets tangled up in orthodoxy.

Harriet Monroe, the editor of *Poetry,* reviewing Meynell's *Poems* in 1914, complained that in comparison with Thompson's her verse lacked "mystical rapture or ritualistic color," and even went so far as to characterize her "religious motive" as "an

early Protestant severity" (70) despite Meynell's well-known Catholic background. Yeats's selections from Meynell suggest he thought otherwise. Of the Meynell poems in the *OBMV*, the third, "Renouncement," is probably the best-known, having been included by Quiller-Couch in the *Oxford Book of English Verse*; by 1936 it was a standard anthology-piece and a well-known love lyric. In it, the poet—probably writing to a priest with whom she fell in love as a young woman (Peterson 415)—represses an impossible love in her waking hours, but in her dreams finds rapturous union.

"I Am the Way," which was one of Meynell's late poems, meditates on Jesus's words (John 14:6) in a most un-Protestant fashion. Instead of a puritanical severity and a sense of election, or even a confidence in blessed assurance of salvation, the poet's journey along the "way" seems very Catholic in its philosophical surrender to a higher purpose—Christ is a road that she follows because she cannot do anything else. She lacks any sort of mystical vision of the end that the way leads toward, but nevertheless finds transcendence and unity with Christ in the journey:

> I'll not reproach
> The road that winds, my feet that err.
> Access, approach
> Art Thou, Time, Way, and Wayfarer. (*OBMV* 32)

Yeats would later play with a similar idea in his poem "Crazy Jane on God," rhyming "road" and "God," and turning Meynell's image around so that it is Crazy Jane who becomes the way, the "road / That men pass over" on their journey toward an end in which "all things remain in God" (*YP* 263).

One might also read Meynell's late poem "The Lady Poverty," Yeats's other selection from her work, as anticipating Crazy Jane. In it, personified Poverty, who was noble in the Middle Ages when St. Francis lived according to "her" precepts (along with Obedience and Chastity), has become a "slattern," one who "has lost her looks of late, / With change of times and change of air" (*OBMV* 32). Meynell's critique of Victorian urban squalor, which has made honest women from rural England into shabby, carping housemaids or street sluts, is certainly in keeping with Yeats's aristocratic and aesthetic disdain for the banality of modern life. Unlike Meynell, though, he is not content to leave it there. Crazy Jane may be filthy and disreputable, but her madness gives her access to a revelatory, wild wisdom that the poet endorses; it is her interlocutor in several of the poems, the cultivated and rational Bishop, who seems the hypocritical prig able to see only through the lens of Victorian-era convention. In one of the last poems that Yeats wrote, "The Circus Animals' Desertion," the poet finds himself stripped of all the conventions of his art, at the foot of the Platonic ladder of love he hoped to ascend to pure truth, in the realm of Crazy Jane and Meynell's Lady Poverty:

> A mound of refuse or the sweepings of a street,
> Old kettles, old bottles, and a broken can,
> Old iron, old bones, old rags, that raving slut
> Who keeps the till. Now that my ladder's gone,
> I must lie down where all the ladders start,
> In the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart. (*YP* 356)

v. The Rhymers

Where York Powell's translations show Yeats's interest in the folk ballad as a source for modern poetry, those by his friend and close contemporary Arthur Symons (1865–1945) show the influence of Paterian aestheticism on the poets of Yeats's generation. Symons, a devotee of Pater and sometime member of the Rhymers' Club, was also drawn strongly to modern French literature, and worked with York Powell in 1893 at sponsoring Verlaine's English tour (Foster, *Apprentice* 138). Unlike York Powell, though, the relationship between contemporary French and English literature was no mere sideline for him, but his main focus, and his work as a critic and translator was an important touchstone for Yeats. The two men lived together in London for a short period in the mid-1890s, and it is through Symons that Yeats came to know the work of Verlaine, Mallarmé, Phillipe Auguste Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, and other French symbolists, Impressionists, and decadents who were part of the avant-garde.

Though Symons had written and published a substantial body of original poetry, Yeats did not think particularly highly of his technique (Foster, *Apprentice* 154) and chose to include none of it in the *OBMV*. He did, however, call Symons's translations "the most accomplished metrical translations of our time" (*Autobiography* 214), even though in retrospect that seems rather equivocal praise. The translations themselves cleave faithfully to the original meter and form of their sources, and only occasionally lapse into Victorian poeticism, but as verse on their own terms they lack character. Yeats's interest was perhaps more in what they represented—an attempt by poets of his

generation to break with the examples of Tennyson and Swinburne and to find lyric forms appropriate for modern verse.

For the anthology he chose two translations of Verlaine that Symons included in his influential 1899 book, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature.* Yeats makes the importance of Verlaine's example apparent, citing the poet (probably by way of Symons's book, where the quotation appears) as insisting that poetry's job was to "[w]ring the neck of rhetoric" (*OBMV* xii), which is what he says his generation was trying to do in reaction to Victorian poetic attitudes. The selection of Symons's work also includes a translation of the sixteenth-century Spanish mystic, St. John of the Cross; all three poems had appeared in *The Savoy*, under Symons's editorship, when Yeats was a frequent contributor to the controversial and self-consciously continental magazine.

The two Verlaine lyrics were not new when Symons translated them. Inspired by scenes from the *fêtes gallantes* paintings of Antoine Watteau, they were originally published in French in 1869, but had become current again in 1891 and 1892 when they were set to music in song cycles by Gabriel Fauré and Claude Debussy. Debussy, in particular, was on the rise as a young composer associated with the circle around Mallarmé and the Impressionists. That is probably what brought them to the attention of Symons, who was studying the work and theories of the French Symbolists closely,[13] strongly influenced by the approach of Pater, who had argued that all "art constantly aspires towards the condition of music" (qtd. in Symons 135). In his essay on Verlaine, in *The Symbolist Movement in Literature,* Symons echoed these ideas, approvingly

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13. Symons helped sponsor Verlaine's English appearances in late 1893, translated Verlaine's account of the lectures for *The Savoy*, and sent Yeats to meet the French poet and other Symbolists in 1894, an experience that Yeats recounts in his *Autobiography*.

describing Verlaine as one who "paints with sound, and his line and atmosphere become music" (217).

"Mandoline" certainly does that, taking as its subject a scene from a rococo Watteau painting in which stock pastoral characters appear in a woodland idyll, listening to string music beneath the trees. Yeats would have found the lack of narrative, combined with the way in which Symons's translation mixes sound and color, particularly compelling:

> And the mandolines and they,
> Faintlier breathing, swoon
> Into the rose and grey
> Ecstasy of the moon" (*OBMV* 76).

Writing about symbolism in painting, Yeats observed that a

> person or a landscape that is a part of a story or a portrait, evokes but so much emotion as the story of the portrait can permit without loosening the bonds that make it a story or a portrait; but if you liberate a person or a landscape from the bonds of motive and their actions, causes and their effects, and from all bonds but the bonds of your love, it will change under your eyes and become a symbol of an infinite emotion, a perfected emotion, a part of the Divine Essence; for we love nothing but the perfect, and our dreams make all things perfect, that we may love them. (*Essays* 148-9)

Similarly, in "Fantoches" (puppets), Verlaine describes a Watteau scene in which the subjects portray characters such as Pulcinella (Punch) and Scaramouche from the

commedia dell'arte. Again, with its lack of narrative context, and its evocation of idealized types in a symbolic arrangement of color and sound, Yeats would have found compelling connections with his early theories.

The third Symons translation, of St. John of the Cross's "The Obscure Night of the Soul," strikes a slightly different note. Here, instead of idealized art serving as the pathway to revelation, the vehicle is personal mystical experience. In the dark of night the speaker in the poem leaves home and his familiar surroundings for an ecstatic union with a symbolic lover; the passage evokes Christian readings of the Old Testament Song of Songs, in which the bridegroom prefigures Christ. Where the Verlaine poems offered an example of art producing a mystical vision, in the third translation the mystical vision produces art. Both reach for the same ideal. "Poetry was a tradition like religion and liable to corruption," Yeats said of the views that he and his contemporaries held during this period, "and it seemed that [we] could best restore it by writing lyrics technically perfect, their emotion pitched high . . . " (*OBMV* ix).

The picture that Yeats's anthology paints of the Rhymers—Symons, Ernest Rhys, John Gray,[14] Ernest Dowson, Lionel Johnson, and, by extension, Yeats himself—is one in which they are the avant-garde, struggling in obscurity to renew English poetry from the excesses of Victorian religious skepticism and poeticized rhetoric. His assessment of the Rhymers in the introduction to the *OBMV* is more ironic than the myth-making of his autobiographies. Even so, he links aspects of his own modernism with this group of poets, many of whom had been inspired by the examples of Pater and Wilde and who met

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14. Gray's poems were omitted from the anthology because his literary executors refused permission. Yeats had originally intended to include four of his poems, according to the list compiled by Charles Williams (see Table 1).

to hear each other's work, make literary connections, and consider art for art's sake: "We poets continued to write verse and read it out at 'The Cheshire Cheese', convinced that to take part in [social and political] . . . movements would be only less disgraceful than to write for the newspapers" (xi). He portrays the Rhymers as if they were taking part in a late-Victorian stage show in which the essentially modern disquiet of their art was hidden behind decorous disguises:

> Some of these Hamlets went mad, some drank, drinking not as happy men drink but in solitude, all had courage, all suffered public opprobrium—generally for their virtues or for sins they did not commit—all had good manners. Good manners in written and spoken word were an essential part of their tradition—'Life', said Lionel Johnson, 'must be a ritual'; all in the presence of women or even with one another put aside their perplexities; all had gaiety, some had wit:
>
> > Unto us they belong,
> > To us the bitter and the gay,
> > Wine and woman and song. (*OBMV* x)

The last lines are Dowson's, and appear twice in the anthology—in the introduction, where Yeats appropriates them into his critique of recent poetry, and in "Villanelle of the Poet's Road." Tellingly, variations of the word "bitter" appear in more than forty of Yeats's own poems, and as he was mulling over his selections on 6 July 1935, he wrote Dorothy Wellesley that he liked Dowson's juxtaposition of "[b]itter and gay" because it exemplified "the heroic mood" that he thought poetry should evoke. It

brought to mind for him, in the same letter, the carved lapis lazuli that would inspire a poem that he was beginning to compose as he compiled the anthology:

> Someone has sent me a present of a great piece carved by some Chinese sculptor into the semblance of a mountain with temple, trees, paths and an ascetic and pupil about the climb the mountain. Ascetic, pupil, hard stone, eternal theme of the sensual east. The heroic cry in the midst of despair. But no, I am wrong, the east has its solutions always and therefore knows nothing of tragedy. It is we, not the east, that must raise the heroic cry.
>
> (*CL* #6274, 6 Jul 1935)

In the completed poem, "Lapis Lazuli," he would describe a third element of the carving, a serving-man carrying a stringed instrument; he imagines the servant playing music for the ascetic and pupil climbing the mountain. With the imagery and language of that poem in mind, his appraisal of the Rhymers becomes clearer. The self-conscious "Hamlets" of the Rhymers' Club—the outwardly cheerful poets who masked inner despair with good manners and wit—resemble dramatic characters from Shakespeare who embody the heroic mood he finds missing in so much of modern poetry: "Hamlet and Lear are gay; / Gaiety transforming all that dread" (*YP* 300). Like the serving-man in the poem, and like Shakespeare, the true artist transfigures the bitterness of modern life into something beautiful and eternal.

Yeats allots Ernest Dowson (1867–1900) seven pages in the anthology and prints nine of his poems, including the "Villanelle of the Poet's Road" and Dowson's most famous lyric, "*Non Sum Qualis Eram Bonae Sub Regno Cynarae*" (which Harold Bloom has called "splendidly dreadful" (38))—along with "*Flos Lunae*," "Exchanges," "*O*

Mors! Quam Amara Est Memoria Tua Homini Pacem Habenti in Substantiis Suis," "Vesperal," "Dregs," "To One in Bedlam," and "Extreme Unction." "*Non Sum Quails . . . ,*" or "Cynara" as it was commonly called, was a Yeats favorite: William Carlos Williams recalled seeing him reading it "by candle-light to a small, very small gathering of his [Abbey Theatre] protéges" in 1910 (qtd. in Reising 180).

With that in mind, the incantatory rhymes of its refrain, "But I was desolate and sick of an old passion, / . . . I have been faithful to thee, Cynara! in my fashion" (*OBMV* 92), and its wine-intoxicated meditation on unsatisfactory carnal love become an interesting gloss on a section of Yeats's 1906 dramatic poem, *The Shadowy Waters*, as the characters debate some of the same themes:

> But he that gets their love after the fashion
> Loves in brief longing and deceiving hope
> And bodily tenderness, and finds that even
> The bed of love, that in the imagination
> Had seemed to be the giver of all peace,
> Is no more than a wine-cup in the tasting,
> And as soon finished.
> . . . . . .
> Yet never have two lovers kissed but they
> Believed there was some other near at hand,
> And almost wept because they could not find it.
> . . . . . .
> It's not a dream,

But the reality that makes our passion

As a lamp shadow—no—no lamp, the sun. (*YP* 422)

Yeats himself employs the *fashion/passion* rhyme when he recalls Dowson and the Rhymers in "The Grey Rock," and goes on to eulogize them:

You had to face your ends when young—

'Twas wine or women, or some curse—

But never made a poorer song

That you might have a heavier purse,

Nor gave loud service to a cause

That you might have a troop of friends. (*YP* 103)

There are several other echoes of his own work among the Dowson selections. "*Flos Lunae"* must have been irresistible to Yeats, employing as it does two typically Yeatsian tropes—cold passion, such as that he celebrated in "The Fisherman," and the moon, the subjective center of his system in *A Vision* and a controlling image in many of his poems. Its tormented refrain, "I would not alter thy cold eyes!" (*OBMV* 93), addressed to the beloved who orbits in the poet's dreams, calls to mind the timeless "cold eye" of the apocalyptic horseman that the aging Yeats addresses as he writes his own epitaph in "Under Ben Bulben" (*YP* 336). In Dowson's "Dregs," the poet reflects over an empty glass at the end of the day on bitter memories, ghosts, and lost loves; Yeats's epilogue to *A Vision,* "All Souls Night," begins with the poet in a similar mood and situation, summoning up old spirits in memory over the fumes of a glass of wine. Dowson's "Exchanges" shares with several early Yeats poems the conventional theme of the lover's unacknowledged gift of verses.

Taken as a group, several general characteristics distinguish the Dowson selections and link them to Yeats's poetic interests. Many of them employ repetitive verse forms, with refrains—a technique Yeats liked and used often, especially later in his career. The effect with Dowson's verse is incantatory, a quality that Yeats often sought to achieve in his own work, and that he emphasized when reading his poems aloud (Foster, *Arch-Poet* 455). Indeed, he said of Dowson's poems that "[t]hey were not speech but perfect song, though song for the speaking voice" (*Autobiography* 200). The diction has much in common with his own—adjectives like "bitter" and "gay," images of shadows, moons, wine, sounds of music and many other exact parallels. Furthermore, Dowson's subject matter was sometimes like his own: as Dowson's biographer Jad Adams has observed, when the two were meeting with the Rhymers in the early 1890s they were equally obscure young poets, both hopelessly in love with women (a barely pubescent girl, in Dowson's case) who could not or would not reciprocate (32–33). Many of their poems—including five of the Dowson poems Yeats selected—were variations on this theme. Finally, their poems of the period share an underlying longing for the spiritual, a desire for an unattainable transcendence. Yeats had described Dowson's religion as "a desire for a condition of virginal ecstasy" (*Autobiography* 207), which was manifested in an impulse toward Catholicism, to which Dowson converted in 1891 (Adams 58). Yeats's work shows a similar desire for spiritual ecstasy, but it takes the form of a fascination with mysticism and occult ritual, with which he was deeply involved in the early 1890s. Over the years, that fascination matured into the private symbolic system of *A Vision*, which he had finished revising just prior to editing the *OBMV*.

Overall, perhaps the greatest commonality between the two is tonal: Yeats often gives to the speakers of his poems the same sort of heroic desperation he claimed to find in Dowson's work. Consider, for example, his signal poem of the era, "The Lake Isle of Innisfree," published in 1890:

> I will arise and go now, for always night and day
> I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore;
> While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements grey,
> I hear it in the deep heart's core. (*YP* 35)

In its long lines, and its imagery of the gray urban world from which the speaker resolves to escape in his imagination, it shares the tone of the speaker in Dowson's 1896 "Vesperal":

> Strange grows the river on the sunless evenings!
> The river comforts me, grown spectral, vague and dumb:
> Long was the day; at last the consoling shadows come:
> *Sufficient for the day are the day's evil things!*" (*OBMV* 95)

The difference, of course, is that Yeats's speaker clings to the hopeful imaginative vision of the Lake Isle, and will persevere in seeking it, whereas Dowson's speaker despairs, and will bury himself in the shadows of impending night and the consolations of St. Matthew 6:34.

The poetry of Lionel Johnson (1867–1902) is arguably better verse than Dowson's, but it shares fewer similarities of style and diction with Yeats's work. While Yeats had been closer to Johnson, and was more impressed with him as a scholar and thinker at the time of their acquaintance, from the vantage point of the 1936 *OBMV* he

had less to say about him. Perhaps this was because he had already discussed Johnson at great length in autobiographical writings, years earlier. The portrait of Johnson that emerged from that work was of a inspired but conflicted classicist, trapped in a self-wrought prison of repressed emotions, whose promise and brilliance were increasingly squandered in an alcoholic haze, and whose literary and intellectual name-dropping Yeats ultimately came to see as self-delusion that he described as "A long blast upon the horn that brought / A little nearer to his thought / A measureless consummation that he dreamed" (*YP* 132).

Johnson, like Dowson, was raised in a Church of England family but converted to Catholicism after leaving Oxford, finding in the ritual and complexity of the Catholic faith some spiritual consolation for repressed sexual and emotional impulses. Unlike Dowson, the repressed feelings seem to have been homosexual, although, as one critic writes, "the sexual life of Johnson ultimately remains largely a matter of unsubstantiated conjecture" (Paterson 126). Also unlike Dowson, Johnson's response to internal conflicts seems to have been sexual asceticism rather than sexual debauchery. The end result was much the same: alcoholism, early death, and unrealized promise.

Nevertheless, Yeats and Johnson were close contemporaries and good friends in the early 1890s, and echoes of shared themes and spiritual concerns resonate in the *OBMV* selections. The introduction does not reflect much of this, lumping Johnson generally with the Rhymers, and only touches on the substance of his poetry as it treats religion and ritual, the intensely felt nature of which Yeats contrasts favorably with that found in T. S. Eliot's work of the next century (*OBMV* xxiii). Since Yeats goes to some pains in the introduction and in other writings to pigeonhole Johnson as a religious poet, a

reading of the selections in the anthology can begin there. Four of the six are explicitly religious: "The Dark Angel," "The Age of a Dream," "The Church of a Dream," and "*Te Martyrum Candidatus*." A fifth, "By the Statue of King Charles at Charing Cross," has a clear religious subtext. (The sixth selection, "To Morfydd," is purely a love lyric.) Their inclusion suggests both Yeats's admiration for the intensity of Johnson's religious devotion and his own critical distance from such religious orthodoxy, which in his eyes fails to answer the needs of a modern poet.

Harold Bloom has called "The Dark Angel," which opens the selection of Johnson's work in the *OBMV,* "the representative poem of its decade, and much the best poem written in English during the Nineties" (46). In it, the dark angel—the temptations the poet recognizes in himself of sexuality, depression, and alcohol—becomes the malicious counterpart to the Holy Spirit, and Johnson characterizes it as the "dark Paraclete":

> Thou art the whisper in the gloom,
> The hinting tone, the haunting laugh:
> Thou art the adorner of my tomb,
> The minstrel of mine epitaph.
>
> I fight thee, in the Holy Name! (*OBMV* 106)

Johnson's battle with the darkness becomes, for him, paradoxical evidence of the existence of light: "what thou dost, is what God saith: / Tempter! should I escape thy flame, / Thou wilt have helped my soul from Death" (*OBMV* 106).

Bloom argues that "the companion to Johnson's great lyric of anguished self-recognition is nowhere to be found in Yeats" (46). This is certainly true of Yeats's poetry of the nineteenth century, but perhaps not of his mature work.[15] Bloom is correct that there is no explicitly religious analogue in Yeats's poetry; Yeats, as is well known, rejected conventional religion, noting how little it ultimately answered for contemporaries like Dowson and Johnson. Nor can one find in Yeats's work a dark spirit that presents the same sort of active threat to the present-day poet's immortal soul—he is typically protected from such spirits by his scholarship or by an imaginative framework. Yet there are counterparts.

For example, I think Bloom forgets, or chooses to overlook, the anguished self-recognition and the temptations that Yeats turns away from in his sweeping sequence-poem, "Meditations in Time of Civil War." In that sequence, Yeats wrestles with dark angels in the form of envy of inherited wealth, admiration for the beautiful objects that have been created through the ambition of violent men, the promise of literary immortality, pride and vanity as he imagines himself taking an active role in the warfare outside his door, visions of his own material legacy to his descendants, and finally, explicitly, spirits that swirl around him at the tower-top of Thoor Ballylee:

> Frenzies bewilder, reveries perturb the mind;
>
> Monstrous familiar images swim to the mind's eye.

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15. More intriguingly, Bloom suggests that what would have most interested the later Yeats about the poem would be the image of the Dark Angel as a kind of doppelganger of the Holy Spirit; "dark Paraclete" would have brought to mind the "Shadow" in Yeats's readings of Blake and Shelley (46), he argues. The Yeats of 1936, having just revised *A Vision,* found in such ideas compelling resonances with his theory of occult correspondences between darkness and light in history, myth, spirit, and character. In that book he associated Johnson's talk of angels with his own concept of the *daimon,* or ghostly self (209) that mirrors the self that a person presents to the world.

. . . . . .

. . . and I, my wits astray

Because of all that senseless tumult, all but cried

For vengeance on the murderers of Jacques Molay. (*YP* 209)

He recognizes that these temptations, which he pictures as "brazen hawks" rather than feathered angels, could sweep him away—not to everlasting perdition, but to the banality of an unreflective life, which for Yeats is perhaps more frightening. They ultimately offer "Nothing but grip of claw, and the eye's complacency, / The innumerable clanging wings that have put out the moon" (*YP* 210). Like Johnson, who vows that the Dark Angel will not triumph over him no matter the cost to his earthly peace of mind, Yeats turns away from the temptations. But rather than turning to ascetic self-sacrifice, he turns to his occult scholarship and creative art—"The abstract joy, / The half-read wisdom of daemonic images" that will "Suffice the aging man as once the growing boy" (*YP* 210).

"Meditations" also provides a useful background against which to read one of the two Johnson sonnets that Yeats anthologizes in the *OBMV*: In "The Age of a Dream," Johnson evokes a super-idealized world of the past, illuminated by lights "more fair, than shone from Plato's page" (*OBMV* 107). His lament for that world is unqualified: "Now from the broken tower, what solemn bell still tolls, / Mourning what piteous death? Answer, O saddened souls! / Who mourn the death of beauty and the death of grace" (*OBMV* 107). For Yeats, writing from inside his own broken tower, such a world might have been imagined by "*Il Penseroso's* Platonist," John Milton (*YP* 205). But he reflects

on what Johnson called "dreams [of a] gracious age" (*OBMV* 107) and finds the graciousness illusory, a product of violence and bitterness:

> What if the glory of escutcheoned doors,
> And buildings that a haughtier age designed,
> The pacing to and fro on polished floors
> Amid great chambers and long galleries, lined
> With famous portraits of our ancestors;
> What if those things the greatest of mankind
> Consider most to magnify, or to bless,
> But take our greatness with our bitterness? (*YP* 205)

In the companion sonnet, "The Church of a Dream," Johnson depicts a small, forgotten Catholic church tended by an aging priest who swings a censer in the golden light. It is a beautiful place that has escaped the depredations of time: "The Saints in golden vesture shake before the gale; / The glorious windows shake, where still they dwell enshrined; / Old Saints by long-dead, shriveled hands, long since designed" (*OBMV* 107). As several critics have pointed out, the obvious analogue here is Yeats's "Sailing to Byzantium," where an aged poet, rather than an aged priest, evokes timeless "sages standing in God's holy fire, / As in the gold mosaic on a wall . . . " (*OBMV* 83), and imagines the ecstatic artifice of Byzantine goldsmiths crafting trees and birds of precious metals. But rather than taking a nostalgic look back at Byzantium from a present-day world that is "no place for old men," Yeats looks at the very yearning itself; his subject is the desire for timelessness, rather than the timelessness itself. Mere ritual of

the sort Johnson espoused, however beautiful an escape it offers, cannot answer Yeats's need to engage creatively with the world he inhabits.

In an 1898 review, Yeats quoted phrases from the two poems[16] when he observed that Johnson's

> delight is in "the courtesy of saints," "the courtesy of knights," "the courtesy of love," in "saints in golden vesture," in the "murmuring" of "holy Latin immemorial," in "black armour, falling lace, and altar lights at dawn," in "rosaries blanched in Alban air," in all "memorial melancholy" things.

His criticism of these poems was that Johnson had essentially given in to nostalgia, leaving the poems beautiful but bloodless:

> He utters the passions of souls too ascetic with a Christian asceticism to know strong passions, violent sensations, too stoical with a pagan stoicism to wholly lose themselves in any Christian ecstasy. He has made for himself a twilight world where all the colours are like the colours of the rainbow, that is cast by the moon, and all the people as far from modern tumults as the people upon fading and dropping [*sic*] tapestries.
>
> (*Early Articles* 388)

Johnson's "*Te Martyrum Candidatus,"* which takes its title from a verse of the *Te Deum Laudamus*, strikes much the same bloodless note as "The Church of a Dream." The *Book of Common Prayer* translates the Latin as referring to "the glorious army of

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16. Yeats would also choose them as two of the twenty-one poems he selected for a limited-edition anthology of Johnson's verse that his sister's Dun Emer Press published in 1904, two years after the poet's death.

martyrs," but another translation of *candidatus* might refer to the garment of the martyr's office, which Johnson would wear if he could. In the poem, Johnson imagines a mounted cavalry of Christian martyrs awakening in the hereafter, face to face with the risen Christ, parading forth at the side of the divinity, earthly cares forgotten. In the 1902 lyric "Adam's Curse," published the year Johnson died, Yeats questions the worth of such martyrdom, referring to martyrs dismissively, as if in their renunciation of the world they have somehow missed the point, much as have the courtly lovers who

> thought love should be
> So much compounded of high courtesy
> That they would sigh and quote with learned looks
> Precedents out of beautiful old books." (*YP* 79)

In that poem, Yeats describes himself at a moment of pained realization, as he suddenly perceives his own martyrdom in the name of love to be hollow— empty pursuit of an idea while life flows by without him.

The final selection of Johnson's work, "By the Statue of King Charles at Charing Cross," depicts one such martyr with whom Johnson identifies. The regicide of Charles was in part due to his Catholic sympathies and belief in the divine right of kings, but Johnson seems to find in him also an emblem of someone who becomes a kind of martyr for beauty:

> Vanquished in life, his death
> By beauty made amends:
> The passing of his breath
> Won his defeated ends.

. . . . . .

Our wearier spirit faints,

Vexed in the world's employ:

His soul was of the saints;

And art to him was joy. (*OBMV* 110–11)

Yeats had praised Johnson's reading of the poem at the Rhymers' Club, saying it sounded like "a great speech," delivered in a "musical monotone, where meaning and cadence found the most precise elocution" (*Autobiography* 200). But he goes on to say that the poem suffered in his estimation after that first hearing. Perhaps this is because Johnson's equation of saint and artist would have conflicted with one of Yeats's basic arguments about what separated aesthetic from ascetic: "The imaginative writer differs from the saint in that he identifies himself—to the neglect of his own soul, alas!—with the soul of the world, and frees himself from all that is impermanent in that soul, an ascetic not of women and wine, but of the newspapers" (*Essays* 286). In Yeats's view this was ultimately Johnson's great shortcoming: his religious asceticism became something that held him back and tormented him as an artist, leading to self-sacrifice and unfulfilled promise.

vi. Celtic Themes

One of the complaints about the *OBMV* when it was first published was the degree to which Yeats had packed it with the work of Irish, Scots, and other "Celtic"

writers of his acquaintance. Consequently, it is something of a surprise that so few of the late Victorian-era writers in the anthology reflect Yeats's Celtic interests. There was a strong Celtic element among the Rhymers of the 1890s (Foster, *Apprentice* 107): not only Yeats himself, who carefully cultivated the image of an exotic provincial amongst the Victorian English, but (under varying definitions of Celticity) also Johnson, Dowson, Symons, Ernest Rhys, along with other Rhymers whose work was not included in the *OBMV*. Yet aside from one poem by Johnson, and two translations by Rhys, the contributions of the Rhymers in the anthology notably lack that Celtic character.

There are many reasons for this. By 1935 the fad of Celticism among English intellectuals of the late 1880s and 1890s, which flourished during the Parliamentary campaign for Irish Home Rule and lent its flavor to the work of the Rhymers, had long since passed. Irish independence had been fought for in a bitter and bloody series of revolts and civil conflicts. The Irish Free State had been established, and there was far less English romanticizing of the newly self-governing and much-disgruntled member of the Commonwealth. Perhaps a simpler reason, though, is that by the time the anthology was published, Yeats did not need Victorians striking a Celtic pose to validate his interests; he could choose from a wide range of more recent Irish and Scots writers to illustrate the importance of folk and pan-Celtic traditions to modern verse.

His treatment of Johnson in the anthology's introduction conspicuously does not mention Johnson's Celtic interests and supposed Irish heritage, although he did include one poem that reflected them, "To Morfydd." This lyric revolves around three lines evocative of the Chaucerian-era Welsh bard Dafydd ap Gwilym, who addressed many love poems to the beautiful Morfydd. Yeats had praised it highly during the time of his

friendship with Johnson, and anthologized it in his *Book of Irish Verse*, but later had second thoughts about it, particularly as he came to doubt the authenticity of some of Johnson's anecdotes: "Did he really know Welsh, for instance, had he really as he told me, made his only love song his incomparable *Morfydd* out of three lines in Welsh, heard sung by a woman at her door on a walking tour in Wales, or did he but wish to hide that he shared in their emotion?" (*Autobiography* 204).

Questions of authenticity were not an issue with Ernest Rhys (1859–1946), a bookman who did not obscure his sources. In an 1898 review of Rhys's *Welsh Ballads*, Yeats had observed that

> Rhys' poems, with the exception of a few poems by Mr. Lionel Johnson, which follow far less closely in the manner of the old Welsh poetry, are, so far as I know, the first Welsh poetry in the English language which is moving and beautiful. Mr. Rhys' book contains ten free translations from the Welsh, some dozen poems inspired by Welsh legends, and some eighteen or nineteen poems more or less inspired by Welsh scenery, and one translation from the Irish. The translations are particularly excellent . . . .

He went on to call one of these, "The Song of the Graves" a ballad from *The Black Book of Carmarthen*, "a dirge which must fade out with the same impassioned monotony with which it began . . ." (*Early Articles* 392) as it solemnly catalogues the burial places and names of legendary Welsh heroes:

> In graves where drips the winter rain
> Lie those that loved me most of men:

Cerwyd, Cywrid, Caw, lie slain.

In graves where the grass grows rank and tall,

Lie, well avenged ere they did fall:

Gwrien, Morien, Morial. (*OBMV* 50)

Yeats frequently recited names in his own poetry. From "Caoilte, and Conan, and Finn" (*YP* 361) in "The Wanderings of Oisin, to "MacDonagh and MacBride / And Connolly and Pearse" (*YP* 184) in "Easter 1916," to "Calvert and Wilson, Blake and Claude" (*YP* 335) in "Under Ben Bulben," it was a device he returned to again and again during his career. The other Rhys selection, "The Lament of Urien," is of much the same character—tonally somber, highly alliterative iambic tercets, ringing with unfamiliar names and exotic spellings much like Yeats's own 1890s evocations of material from the Irish Red Branch and Fenian myth cycles.

Rhys is now seen as a minor figure, more important as a publisher than a poet in his own right, but his work with Welsh sources seemed notable to Yeats. In the decades to come, Ezra Pound would turn to translations from Anglo-Saxon England and medieval Provence as sources for a modern poetic voice; Gerard Manley Hopkins's distinctive prosody, steeped in Welsh rhythms and English philology, would be rediscovered and internalized by the moderns; and T.S. Eliot would argue that poetic translations deserved attention on their own terms, rather than as stand-ins for the originals. Yeats would have been well aware of these developments when compiling the *OBMV* in 1935 and '36, and it is tempting to read his inclusion of Rhys's translations as an attempt to show his own prescience during his "Celtic Twilight" years.

One additional Victorian "Celt" does not appear in the anthology, but Charles Williams's list at the Oxford University Press indicated that Yeats planned to include five poems by Robert Louis Stevenson (1850–1894), who was still extremely popular in the 1930s, forty years after his death. Stevenson, whose poetic works included a series of Scots dialect poems and ballads, had been a friend and close collaborator of William Ernest Henley, an important mentor for Yeats, before Stevenson and Henley fell out in the 1880s. Yeats commented on their feud in his *Autobiography*, but never actually discussed Stevenson's work as a lyric poet. There is no evidence in the Oxford files to indicate any permissions problem with the Stevenson poems, and Oxford's editors had urged Yeats to include popular writers—among which they would surely have numbered Stevenson—in addition to more highbrow authors. It is thus tempting to speculate that Yeats simply had second thoughts about the stagey Scottishness of the poems during the final stage of selections for the book.

vii. The Hearties

Gary H. Paterson has suggested that "eighteen nineties literature can be divided into two major camps: the 'hearties,' among them Kipling and Henley, who praised the active life and the growing empire, and the Decadents, members of a final phase of Aestheticism which had been gaining ever greater importance in English letters since the 1870s" (17). As noted earlier, the main thrust of Yeats's writing and his membership in the Rhymers' Club linked him with writers influenced by Walter Pater's theories and the

"art for art's sake" of Wilde and Aestheticism. But despite this association, and Irish political allegiances that often saw him opposed to British imperial domination, the anthology recognizes several outspoken "hearties" as being important to Yeats's concept of modern literature.

William Ernest Henley (1849–1903), Yeats wrote, was "like a great actor with a bad part" (*Autobiography* 83), and the portrait of Henley that emerges in the autobiographical writings and the introduction of the *OBMV* pays as much tribute to Henley's attitude and character as it does to his verse: "With the exception of some early poems founded upon old French models I disliked his poetry, mainly because he wrote in *vers libre*, which I associated with [Victorian rationalists such as] Tyndall and Huxley" (83). All four of the Henley selections in the *OBMV* are rhymed: the much-quoted (and much-derided) anthology-piece "Invictus," which was given its well-known title by Quiller-Couch in the *Oxford Book of English Verse* rather than by its author; "Ballade of Dead Actors"; and two untitled verses from Henley's late book *Hawthorn and Lavender* that look back to the seventeenth century, and which Yeats entitles "All in a Garden Green" and "Since those we love and those we hate." Absent are the patriotic poems that Henley was best known for in his own day.

Yeats's critical comments about Henley's poetry are mostly cutting, despite the obvious affection and regard he had for Henley personally and as an editor: "I can read his poetry with emotion, but I read it for some glimpse of what he might have been as a Border balladist, or Cavalier, or of what he actually was, not as poet but as man" (197). One trait that Henley shares with Yeats is a strong public voice—the sense that he is a

spokesman for his age.[17] Compare, for example, the public voice in these lines from Henley's "Ballade of Dead Actors" with Yeats's own "Lapis Lazuli":

> Where are the passions they essayed,
>
> And where the tears they made to flow?
>
> Where the wild humours they portrayed
>
> For laughing worlds to see and know?
>
> Othello's wrath and Juliet's woe?
>
> Sir Peter's whims and Timon's gall?
>
> And Millamant and Romeo?
>
> Into the night go one and all. (*OBMV* 24)

Use of the older French forms, as here, is one of the few traits of Henley's that Yeats praises unreservedly, and the public voice—the sense that Henley speaks for a generation of theatre-goers—comes through clearly. One can also see what Yeats likes in the theme of the poem—the idea that higher passions and essences once animated the actors, and have now left them as their lives pass away.

Indeed, "Lapis Lazuli" employs a similar conceit, but where Henley was content to let the poignancy of the *ubi sunt* theme speak for itself, and leave it at that, Yeats twists it into the beginning of a public meditation on the poet's duty to discover the joy in tragic art:

> All perform their tragic play,
>
> There struts Hamlet, there is Lear,

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17 . Work by both poets expresses public regret at the passing away of the great, in the tradition of Latin *ubi sunt* and French *ou sont* verses, a form notably employed in the Renaissance-era ballades of François Villon.

That's Ophelia, that Cordelia;

Yet they, should the last scene be there,

The great stage curtain about to drop,

If worthy their prominent part in the play,

Do not break up their lines to weep.

They know that Hamlet and Lear are gay;

Gaiety transfiguring all that dread. (*YP* 300)

Another "hearty," Sir William Watson (1858–1935), was to have gotten a larger selection than Henley or Blunt. The Oxford Press archives and Yeats letters do not specify which of Watson's poems he intended to include, but there were nine of them numbered in the preliminary permissions list—more than by Hardy, Hopkins, Robert Bridges, or even Rhymers such as Johnson and Dowson. Oxford's archives show that Charles Williams warned Yeats that permission was unlikely to be forthcoming from Watson's estate, since the widow of the notoriously quarrelsome poet did "not, I think, love the Oxford Press" (11 Oct 1935), and his fears proved well founded. Yeats nevertheless included bits of two Watson poems in his *OBMV* introduction (xxi), and made more of Watson than many of the poets whose work made it into the anthology.

Watson's work belongs squarely in the post-Tennyson era, but is not associated with the Rhymers' Club, although Yeats identifies him as a member who never attended (*Autobiography* 111). Although Yeats later adjusted his chronological criteria to allow for inclusion of Gerard Manley Hopkins, he originally intended the poetic era reflected in the *OBMV* to begin with the death of Tennyson in 1892, which he saw as signaling an end for the dominant Victorian poetic attitude against which his generation defined itself. Many

thought that Watson would succeed Tennyson as Laureate, and hehad a popular following in the 1880s and ’90s. Yeats likened him to that heartiest of hearties, Rudyard Kipling, who, like Watson, had “never heard of [the] defeat [of Victorianism]” (*OBMV* xii), and who both continued to write vigorously in the old manner well into the new century. Unlike Kipling, whose work remained so sought-after in the 1930s that Yeats complained he could not afford permission to include many of his poems (*OBMV* xlii), Watson’s popular reputation had fallen dramatically from its late-Victorian heights—partly over his opposition to the Boer War, a political stance that also doomed his chances of ever becoming Laureate. Later in his career, Watson came out strongly in support of the Irish Easter Rising of 1916 (Nelson), which further distanced him from other English hearties, and likely endeared him to Yeats.

Today he is almost completely overlooked, and his reputation shows no sign of rehabilitation, yet what Yeats seems to have liked in his work, despite its Toryism and consciousness of a popular middle-class audience, was its avoidance of Victorian sentimentality and sententiousness, and a willingness to look imaginatively beyond what scientific rationality could reveal. One review by the young Yeats had praised Watson for his restraint and craftsmanship: “no emotion is ever extreme; no belief is held immoderately, unless it be Tory patriotism; no violent emotion ever tips the beam of his balance” (*Letters to a New Island* 104). This admiration for Watson’s eloquence had changed little by the time he wrote the introduction, forty-five years later; “at his best,” Yeats wrote, “As I turn his pages I find verse after verse read long ago and still unforgettable” (*OBMV* xii).

The fragments in the introduction are both from later poems: "To a Strenuous Critic," which Watson published in 1917, and a sonnet, "Melancholia," from 1904. The first, written after Watson had fallen from public favor, echoes Yeats's disdain of middlebrow opinion-makers. Yeats approvingly quotes the concluding lines, which set timeless art against topical criticism, but it seems equally likely that what appeals to him about the poem is its invective against hack reviewers

> . . . who praise
> Each posturing hero of the herd—
> The lofty bearing of a phrase,
> The noble countenance of a word. (Watson, *Retrogression* 31)

The tone is much like Yeats's in "On those that hated 'The Playboy of the Western World', 1907," when he characterizes middlebrow critics as "Eunuchs" who "[run] through Hell . . . to stare . . . upon [Don Juan's] sinewy thigh" (*YP* 110). Of "Melancholia," Yeats comments enigmatically that it seems "received from some Miltonic cliff that had it from a Roman voice" (*OBMV* xii). A closer look at the sonnet, though, helps explain why Yeats saw Watson's work as part of the transition from Victorian to neo-Romantic poetry: it reads as an answer to the glum Victorian agnosticism of Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach." The same scene that evokes resignation in Arnold fires Watson's imagination:

> I heard the long hiss of the backward wave
> Down the steep shingle, and the hollow speech
> Of murmurous cavern-lips, nor other breach
> Of ancient silence. None was with me, save

> Thoughts that were neither glad nor sweet nor brave.
>
> But restless comrades, each the foe of each.
>
> And I beheld the waters in their might
>
> Writhe as a dragon by some great spell curbed
>
> And foiled . . . . (*Poems* 24)

Praising Watson back in 1890, Yeats had specifically called to mind Arnold's "Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse" as a point of comparison, and argued that Watson was an important transitional figure for the times:

> there will hardly be another book of the same type written in the coming generation. The struggle of labor and capital, of mysticism and science, and many another contest now but dimly foreshadowed, will more and more absorb or deafen into silence all such cloistered lives—the products of periods of rest between two worlds, 'one dead, one powerless to be born.' (*Letters to a New Island* 107)

viii. "Not Quite Infidel"? Yeats and Hopkins

By the time that the *OBMV* was published, of course, the roar of an expanding Empire had grown confused. The political parties that had led the United Kingdom confidently into the First World War were flagging at the polls, public sentiment for colonial ventures was fraying as the expense of maintaining them during a time of economic collapse drained British confidence and coffers, and the Victorian dream of a civilizing colonial overlordship was increasingly proving problematic as Ireland and

other dominions ungratefully asserted themselves. It was easy for Yeats to dismiss the hearties as artifacts of a passing era. It was not so easy for him to dismiss a different kind of John Bull Englishman—a long-dead, cloistered, closeted Catholic whose idiosyncratic Victorian-era poetic theories were proving more influential among writers of the 1930s than those of Yeats himself, or the disciples of Pater he had known as a young man.

Yeats ended up including a selection of seven poems by Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844–1889) in the *OBMV*, while making his personal dislike of Hopkins apparent in the introduction. The circles of the two poets' lives had overlapped briefly when Hopkins was posted by the Jesuits to teach in Ireland. In a letter to Robert Bridges, Yeats recalled discussing Bridges's theories of prosody with Hopkins (16 Mar 1897), but did not specify when the meeting took place. Although Yeats recalls meeting him in J. B. Yeats's studio "on different occasions" (*OBMV* v), neither poet's biographers have been able to pin down the precise dates of such encounters, though such a meeting probably occurred around November 1886, when Yeats was twenty-one and Hopkins about forty-two (White, *Hopkins* 435). One imagines them in the studio, where Yeats's early literary confidante Katherine Tynan—whom Hopkins dismissed as "a simple brightlooking Biddy with glossy very pretty red hair" (qtd. in Foster, *Apprentice* 54)—was sitting for a portrait by his father, with the painter rattling on about art theories and the two poets sizing up each other, like strange cats circling.

To Hopkins, the young poet probably resembled the Irish undergraduates in his classrooms who conversed among themselves while he lectured.[18] Yeats would have

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18. Tynan described Hopkins's classroom presence as that of "an English Conservative of the old-fashioned sort and they ragged him. With his strange innocent seriousness he

appeared to be a defensive autodidact from the provinces, lacking respect for a proper Oxford classical education and lacking the discipline of systematic thought; a Protestant youth whose pagan enthusiasms and sloppy craftsmanship needed reining in, and who resented Englishmen on general principle, refusing to appreciate the informed criticism being offered. To Yeats, an angry young man who did not even know that Hopkins was a serious poet, the small, effeminate cleric must have seemed another prudish Catholic priest or a condescending English aesthete trying not very effectively to hide his disdain for Irish "culture" behind good manners, and ready to make cutting comments to others as soon as Yeats turned his back. Years later he wrote Monk Gibbons that "Hopkins believed in nothing" (*CL* #5613, 12 Mar 1932), and that "His whole life was a form of 'poetic diction.' He brought his faint theatrical Catholicism to Ireland where it was mocked by the sons of peasants & perhaps died of the shock" (*CL* #5623, 26 Mar 1932).

The reason he nursed his resentment of Hopkins for half a century can only be speculated about, but is probably simple enough: Hopkins had scorned the poetry, talked about it in Dublin, and Yeats had somehow heard about what was said. We know that Hopkins was willing to gossip about Yeats's poetry with others; a Hopkins letter to Coventry Patmore in November 1886, which the author admits is basically gossip, tells how J. B. Yeats pressed a copy of his son's *Mosada* on Hopkins when the priest visited the studio to discuss art. Hopkins told Patmore he disliked *Mosada*; he had already read Yeats's "The Two Titans," finding it "a strained and unworkable allegory about a young man and a sphinx on a rock in the sea," and asked obtuse questions: "how did they get there / what did they eat? and so on: people think such criticism very prosaic; but

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would have invited ragging, though I don't like to think of it as a manifestation of Irish patriotism. Apparently he held his classes in an uproar" (qtd. in Muller 103).

commonsense is never out of place anywhere, neither on Parnassus . . . nor on the Mount where our Lord preached" (qtd. in White, *Ireland* 171).

We also know that Dublin's literary circle was small, and the young Yeats cared desperately about what was said of him in it. He had Catholic friends such as Tynan who had occasion to discuss literature and aesthetics with Hopkins, and Yeats probably would have learned of the bad opinion at a time in his career when he was extraordinarily sensitive about—and vulnerable to—criticism. This helps explain why in 1936, when Hopkins had become famous for his aesthetic, Yeats chose to distort the historical record and claim in the *OBMV* introduction that their meeting occurred before he had published any of his works, when he was only "a boy of seventeen,[19] Walt Whitman in his pocket, [who] had little interest in a querulous, sensitive scholar" (*OBMV* v).

This grudge against Hopkins must have caused some awkwardness for Yeats half a century later, since he was working with Charles Williams, Oxford's editor of Hopkins's poetry. When Yeats asked Oxford for permission to include the seven Hopkins poems, Williams granted the permission at no charge, and worried about permissions from other poets being less readily forthcoming. Yeats replied,

> it will amuse you to hear that A.E. Housman refused me leave to quote even from his LAST POEMS (which he generally allows) because of my supposed enthusiasm (or that of your publishing house) for Hopkins (with

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19. In fact, when Yeats was seventeen, Hopkins was still at Stonyhurst College in Lancashire, and was not appointed to teach at University College, Dublin, for another two years. By the time they met, Yeats would have been twenty-one, and had already begun publishing his work and cultivating friendships with Irish nationalists (Foster, *Apprentice* 44), to whom he argued that the Irish "had no sympathy with English Aesthetic Catholicism" (qtd. in White, *Hopkins* 435). He wrote a nationalist friend that he "hate[d] reasonable people [because] the activity of their brains sucks up all the blood out of their hearts" (*CL* 8, [late summer 1886]).

> [Charles] Doughty as runner-up). I have had to turn infidel and deride both as if they [were] relics of the True Cross, and I am not quite infidel where Hopkins is concerned; Doughty I cannot abide except in prose. (*CL* #6415, 24 Oct 1935)[20]

Yeats's quip to Williams suggesting that he is "not quite infidel" about Hopkins seems disingenuous, and flies in the face of most existing evidence. As one Hopkins biographer observed,

> On each occasion Yeats was asked about Hopkins he found bad-tempered ways of denouncing both his personality and his poetry. . . . In March 1932 Yeats wrote to a young Irish poet, Monk Gibbon:
>
> > Gerard Hopkins, whom I knew, was an excitable man—unfitted to active life and his speech is always sedentary. . . . [He] never understood the variety of pace that constitutes natural utterance. . . . Hopkins is the way out of life. . . . Hopkins believed in nothing. Remember what Heine said about an Englishman saying his prayers [a Frenchman cursing was more pleasing in the sight of God]. (White, *Ireland* 206–7, brackets are White's)

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20. Yeats wrote Housman,

> I think Doughty in his verse a stiff pedant, I do not give a line of him, and though I do give certain poems of Hopkins I cherish a distaste ~~for all his works and ways~~ for his personality acquired from encounters with him in my father's studio fifty years ago. You are mistaken in supposing that the passions of my publishers are throbbing in my breast. (*CL* #6416, 24 Oct 1935,)

Compared to the rival 1936 *Faber Book of Modern Verse*, which includes twenty pages of poetry by Hopkins and an extensive introductory discussion of his significance, Yeats in his introduction affects to dislike all that fiddle: "I read Gerard Hopkins with great difficulty, I cannot keep my attention fixed for more than a few minutes." He limits his discussion of Hopkins's prosodic innovations to the narrow question of sprung verse, and damns Hopkins with faint praise, ignoring what others found "modern" in his verse and pigeonholing him as belonging to the very attitudes of Victorianism that Yeats's generation had sought to overthrow: "He is typical of his generation where most opposed to mine. His meaning is like some faint sound that strains the ear, comes out of words, passes to and fro between them, goes back into words, his manner a last development of poetical diction." Yeats goes on to hesitate a dislike about the birdy, treeish, towery subjects of the poems, noting that his own "generation began that search for hard positive subject matter, still a predominant purpose."

Sprung verse fares no better. From Yeats's point of view, it is merely a fad—"the publication of [Hopkins's] work in 1918 made 'sprung verse' the fashion" (*OBMV* xxxix). Worst of all, sprung verse

> enables a poet to employ words taken over from science or the newspaper without stressing the more unmusical syllables, or to suggest hurried conversation where only one or two words in a sentence are important, to bring about a change in poetical writing like that in the modern speech of the stage where only those words which affect the situation are important. (*OBMV* xxxix–xl)

Any theory that took the music out of poetry and replaced it with the language of science and newspapers was not going find much favor with Yeats. This was what he believed Victorianism had done to belief and imagination; instead, he subscribed to Pater's argument that art should aspire to the condition of music. A good parallel for his attitude toward sprung verse would be his youthful "raging hatred" of a realistic actor performing verse drama, "breaking up the verse to make it conversational, jerking his body or his arms that he might seem no austere poetical image but very man" (*Autobiography* 80).

Was Yeats being unfair? The selection in the *Faber Book* suggests so, as it includes "The Wreck of the Deutschland," "The Windhover," and most of the other major poems on which Hopkins's modern reputation stands. By comparison, the choice of Hopkins's poems in the *OBMV* is representative but scattershot. It contains one early poem from Hopkins's college days, "The Habit of Perfection"; one song from a play, "The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo"; and five mature sonnet variations, including the curtal sonnet "Pied Beauty," "Spring," "The Caged Skylark," "The Sea and the Skylark," and "Duns Scotus's Oxford." From the vantage point of critics of the *OBMV* in 1936, the image of Hopkins that Yeats conveyed was of a pious Victorian naturalist writing tightly wound lyrics celebrating faith and natural beauty—it got across little of the impulse toward radical re-visioning of things and language that Hopkins had stirred in readers encountering him after the regularity and convention that characterized so much Edwardian- and Georgian-era verse.

I would argue, however, that petulant as Yeats might have been, he was not wrong in looking at Hopkins from the context of Victorianism rather than that of Modernism. Anthologies such as the *Faber Book*, which presented Hopkins as a sort of

John the Baptizer for Modernism, equally distorted the poet in the other direction, making it seem as if he shared twentieth-century attitudes toward difficulty, discontinuity, solipsism, and alienation. Hopkins certainly shows some of these traits, but in his Ruskin-like attitude toward empirical study of nature, his devotion to John Henry Newman's Oxford-flavored English Catholicism, his moral scrupulousness and repressed sexuality, and his patriotic attitude toward the Empire, he was decidedly a man of his time; Yeats is probably right in suspecting that he would have disliked the "increase of realism" (*OBMV* xl) that his example inspired in poets of the 1930s.

In fact, Yeats has more in common with Hopkins than he might have liked to admit.[21] A poem such as "Pied Beauty," which praises God for "All things counter, original, spare, strange; / Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?) / With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim . . . " (*OBMV* 18) may seem wholly un-Yeatsian in its diction, but the argument is one that Yeats could make—that contrast and opposition reveal a grand design. Nor is its religious imagery wholly dissimilar. Compare Yeats's "These are the Clouds," which finds wholeness in negation:

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21. William Harmon provocatively makes the case that Yeats's "Leda and the Swan" owes much to Hopkins's "The Windhover," which was not included in the *OBMV*. Both sonnets, he writes, have

> to do with a dangerous bird and a god, with humankind in between. One of Yeats's lines—"So mastered by the brute blood of the air"—repeats three elements from Hopkins's poem in the same order, "mastery," "Brute," and "air." In some respects the poems seem antithetical: Hopkins's has an "I" and moves from the past to the present; Yeats's has no "I" and moves from the present to the past. But both poems have to do with the paradoxes of divine love, while using a verse form traditionally devoted to secular love poems. (470)

To be sure, swans appeared in many Irish folktales, as well as in Yeats works written both before and after Hopkins's poetry first appeared in print, but further supporting this reading, the variorum edition of Yeats's poems reveals that an early published version of "Leda and the Swan" described "the bird" as "hovering" (*VP* 441).

> These are the clouds about the fallen sun,
>
> The majesty that shuts his burning eye:
>
> The weak lay hand on what the strong has done,
>
> Till that be tumbled that was lifted high
>
> And discord follow upon unison,
>
> And all things at one common level lie. (*YP* 95)

Surely Yeats must be aware that a phrase such as "fallen sun" will suggest the old Son/sun wordplay of Christian poetry, or Milton's Lucifer, and that the imagery and the diction of the poem will evoke Isaiah 40:4 and Luke 3:5 ("Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low"). The divinity he finds in such oppositions is not that of the Christian God, but divinity nevertheless.

One can also see in "The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo" that Hopkins's themes are not so different from those of a Yeats poem such as "Among School Children." Both poems wrestle with how to reconcile oneself to the loss of youthful beauty. Hopkins, using the structure of a dramatic dialogue (a structure that Yeats often employed as well), poses a question from the voice of the Leaden Echo in St. Winifred's Well: "How to keep—is there ány any, is there none such, nowhere known some, bow or brooch or braid or brace, lace, latch or catch or key to keep / Back beauty, keep it, beauty, beauty, beauty, . . . from vanishing away?" The echo answers its own question with a despairing "No." The Golden Echo takes up the ringing despair and re-echoes it until it becomes consolation in the act of offering up beauty as a gift to God that will be returned in eternity: "Give beauty back, beauty, beauty, beauty, back to God, beauty's self and beauty's giver. / See; not a hair is, not an eyelash, not the least lash lost; every hair / Is,

hair of the head, numbered" (*OBMV* 21–23). Rather than being some fleeting element of transitory human lives, beauty becomes part of the wholeness of God's creation, something not fully knowable until one is whole in God.

The questions that Yeats asks in his poem are similar, as are the answers—at least on an abstract level. Yeats imagines Maud Gonne or another woman as a beautiful child, in comparison to the old woman he knows, then considers his own aging self: "What youthful mother," he asks,

> a shape upon her lap
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Would think her son, did she but see that shape
>
> With sixty or more winters on its head,
>
> A compensation for the pang of his birth,
>
> Or the uncertainty of his setting forth?

Like Hopkins, Yeats concludes that the wholeness which consoles the poet for beauty's transitory nature is not something that can be seen fully in this life, but rather is only fully knowable in the eternal realm he aspires to, the realm of "Presences / That passion, piety or affection knows, / And that all heavenly glory symbolize. . . . " Only at that level can beauty be seen as complete and unitary, like the tree that is "the leaf, the blossom [and] the bole. . . . " In our sublunar lives, however, we are left vainly trying to "know the dancer from the dance" (*YP* 220–21).

Still, it would be a mistake to overemphasize the similarities between Yeats and Hopkins. Stylistically and temperamentally they are separated by more than just the Irish Sea. Nor is Yeats wholly wrong in suggesting that Hopkins's poems eschew the "hard

positive subject matter" that defines the modern attitude for him in favor of a more empirical and discursive "Victorian" approach. The poems typically meditate on the study of natural objects, rather than human drama or political conflict, aiming at understanding the "inscape" of the objects they examine much as a Victorian naturalist might hope to understand variation in the beaks of finches. Jude Nixon, writing about Hopkins and Darwin, has determined that about a third of Hopkins's poems focus on the natural world (139). He suggests that Hopkins must be understood in the context of the era's naturalism, and notes that the poet showed a lifelong interest in science, which Hopkins did not see as opposed to faith. Yeats's misreading of Hopkins is in taking this attitude to its logical conclusion and assuming that it puts him squarely in the Victorian camp of Tyndall and Huxley, whose scientific explanations for the world Yeats hated as a young man. He misses the degree to which Hopkins's supposedly objective observations are subjectified by the way in which the poet forces them into revealing the sacramental unity he perceives in nature.

By 1936, although Yeats's personal dislike for Hopkins remained, he was at least trying to see the larger picture in which both of them had been writing. In lumping Hopkins with the Victorians, Yeats is not so much condemning Victorian verse as illustrating what his generation reacted against:

> a revolt against irrelevant descriptions of nature, the scientific and moral discursiveness of *In Memoriam*—"When he should have been broken-hearted," said Verlaine, "he had many reminiscences"—the political eloquence of Swinburne, the psychological curiosity of Browning, and the poetical diction of everybody. (*OBMV* ix)

Certainly this implies some degree of condemnation of the Victorian vision of the world, as Yeats understood it, but more important is the ironic criticism of his generation's response to that vision. In the introduction to the *OBMV*, he is not simply rehashing his old objections to Victorian attitudes. He is in fact offering a portrait of his contemporaries—and his younger anti-Victorian self—as rebels without a clue.

The thrust of Yeats's introduction and the selections of the anthology suggest that his mature view is that his youthful reaction against Victorianism was more for the sake of reacting than for the sake of seriously proposing something to take its place. Like the Romantics earlier in the century, he and his contemporaries looked for the answers in their own feelings and reactions, rather than any sort of vision of what such rebellion would set in place of the old orthodoxy. What his generation was not yet questioning—and what the Modernists would reexamine—were the assumptions underlying both the Victorian and Edwardian attitudes: "All civilized men had believed in progress, in a warless future, in always-increasing wealth . . . " (*Essays* 499).

At the time, though, it had not yet occurred to anyone to doubt those. The old century was rung out, Victoria was laid to rest, and Yeats could jest about what happened next: "henceforth nobody drank absinthe with his black coffee; nobody went mad; nobody committed suicide; nobody joined the Catholic church; or if they did I have forgotten" (*OBMV* xi–xii).

III.

"King of the Cats" in Pre-War England

Having discussed the *fin-de-siècle* poets in his introduction to *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse*, W. B. Yeats glibly moves on, jesting that "in 1900 everybody got down off his stilts" (xi). And, from the perspective of his 1936 readers, the version of the 1890s portrayed in his autobiographical writings might indeed have seemed like a kind of circus show. During the Edwardian period, however, the developments of the Nineties were no joke to him, and the first decade of the new century was one in which he strategically distanced himself from his late-Victorian career. The anthology likewise holds the writers of that period at arm's length.

Samuel Hynes has called the Edwardian decade "The Age of Propriety" (*Edwardian* 6): Queen Victoria might have been dead, but outraged reaction to the supposed immorality of the previous decade hardened under Edward VII, and many of the avant-garde writers associated with the disgraced Oscar Wilde, *The Yellow Book,* and *The Savoy* found themselves on the defensive as publishers and theatres shunned edgy material rather than risk official censorship or accusations of indecency and impropriety. Yeats had in fact been closely connected with those writers. He had spent the middle part of the decade mostly in London, amid the literary ferment of the times, and had shared his contemporaries' interest in continental theories of symbolism and art for art's sake. But in the minds of Edwardian-era poetry readers in England, he was more closely linked with exotic Celtic myths and folktales than with the "immorality" of Oscar Wilde or the "indecency" of Aubrey Beardsley.

Even so, the years following the collapse of *The Savoy* in 1896 (and the consequent loss of income as a frequent contributor to it) often saw Yeats looking back to Ireland for support and inspiration: the first of his many long stays at Lady Gregory’s estate at Coole was, not coincidentally, in 1897. His energies for the next twelve years were much given over to Irish cultural politics, to playwriting, and to promoting and dominating the nascent theatre movement in Dublin; he wrote comparatively little lyric poetry. What he learned would eventually drive him toward a more dramatic and muscular style. His work with the Irish theatre had the added benefit of taking him away from London during a conservative and largely unproductive period for English poets, while at the same time permitting him to remain visible on the literary scene until attitudes began to favor experimental work again. Although his reputation as a poet grew steadily, it was largely on the strength of earlier accomplishments. Thus it was the subtle versifier of *The Wind Among the Reeds* (1899) that Ezra Pound talked about meeting when he arrived in London in 1908, not the author of the more uneven, modern, and rougher-textured *In the Seven Woods* (1904).

His work in the Irish theatre and his failure to publish much verse in the first decade of the century did not, however, mean that he cut his ties to literary London. By the beginning of the second decade of the century, his hard work networking with the literary establishment began to pay off with an English Civil List pension (to the horror of his Irish critics) and other honors, despite his exoticism. One can see his efforts along these lines in a delegation he led representing the Royal Society of Literature to Thomas Hardy’s home in 1912 (Millgate 477), and in a similar delegation of younger writers he and Ezra Pound led to honor Wilfred Scawen Blunt in 1914. These dinners were intended

as much to publicize his own place in the hierarchy as to honor the recipients. This strategy succeeded so well that his became a marquee name for ambitious scholars and writers from other parts of the world such as Rabindranath Tagore, who sought association with “the undisputed First Poet of the day. ‘How slowly but surely Yeats has eclipsed Kipling,’” Robert Frost observed to a correspondent in 1913 (Foster, *Apprentice* 471).

In a similar vein, James Longenbach recounts the story of how, in 1909, after hearing of the death of Algernon Charles Swinburne, Yeats wrote to his sister Lily that, as far as living poets writing in English were concerned, he was now “King of the Cats” (15). Somehow he had transformed himself: he had been a holdover from the Nineties at the turn of the century, seemingly at a creative dead end, but by the eve of the First World War he had become a touchstone for the new avant-garde. His selections in this part of the *OBMV* illustrate how the king viewed himself—as someone both aloof from and indispensable to the developing currents of Edwardian-era poetic modernity.

i. Imperial Affinities and Antipathies

In the late 1880s and early ’90s, the young Yeats had cagily moved back and forth between the late-Victorian avant-garde and the poets of Empire as it suited his literary ambitions. After his own reputation solidified in the 1890s, and the latter—particularly William Ernest Henley and Rudyard Kipling—grew more closely associated with the attack on Wilde and Decadence, he had less to do with them. If the years of the Boer War (1899–1902) marked the high water mark of John Bull Imperialism in English literature,

the general reaction against reflexive support of the Empire began soon thereafter, with a change in poetic tastes coinciding with the reaction that saw the Tories voted out of power after the conflict ended. Although Kipling would be awarded a Nobel Prize in 1907, and retained a vast popularity, that was about the time his literary reputation began a long decline.

Yeats’s anti-imperialist Irishness and sympathies with the Boers further separated him from the English mainstream, but looking back on the period from 1936, he nevertheless finds something compelling in Henley’s work, particularly as a model for Irish writers, even though Henley himself was anything but Irish. In Section VI of the *OBMV* introduction, Yeats suddenly shifts to the first-person plural, and emphasizes his distance from the literary center of gravity: “We have more affinity with Henley and [Wilfrid Scawen] Blunt than with other modern English poets, but have not felt their influence; we are what we are because almost without exception we have had some part in public life in a country where public life is simple and exciting” (*OBMV* xvi). Despite political differences, Henley and Blunt shared this activist attitude. And action, as we will see, has much to do with Yeats’s sense of the proper direction for modern poetry.

His association of Blunt (1840–1922) with Henley might at first seem strange, not least because Blunt’s anti-imperial politics opposed many of the things that Henley favored. But from Yeats’s point of view he was merely the reverse of the same coin—men from an earlier generation who proclaimed the virtues of action[1] and strong will. In a 1888 review of Blunt’s verse, Yeats says that the English aristocrat

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1. It must be noted that for Henley, who limped around on a wooden leg, such action was mostly theoretical.

> writes . . . like one who is intent on living his life out. . . . As in the writings of all strong natures, whether men of thought or men of action—of men of action more than any, perhaps—there is much melancholy, very different from the ignoble, self-pitying wretchedness—with a whimper in it—of feeble natures (*Uncollected* 124–25).

In many ways Blunt embodied the sort of all-around man that Yeats longed to be, aspects of which he brooded upon in “Meditations in Time of Civil War.” The two were on formal but friendly terms, shared a close acquaintance with Lady Gregory,[2] and corresponded about an Abbey Theatre production of Blunt’s play, *Fand,* in 1907. Blunt also represented, for Yeats, the best aspects of the poetic sensibility that Yeats saw himself as succeeding. In January of 1914, by which time Blunt was something of a gray eminence in English letters (if a rather neglected one), Yeats and Ezra Pound hatched a scheme to have the newer generation of poets announce itself by holding a dinner in Blunt’s honor (and, by implication, declaring its own ascendance). That storied “Peacock Dinner” at Blunt’s Sussex estate, facilitated by Lady Gregory, was one in which the roast bird was one of Blunt’s own peacocks, and the guests read verses in his honor, depositing them in a sculpted vault carved by Pound’s friend Henri Gaudier-Brzeska. Yeats addressed Blunt, saying,

> When you published your first work, sir, it was the very height of the Victorian period. The abstract poet was in a state of glory. . . . [I]nstead of abstract poetry you wrote verses that were good poetry because they were

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2. Lady Gregory and Blunt had been lovers in the 1880s, and Blunt had actually included several of her poems in his book, *Love Songs of Proteus*, as “A Woman’s Sonnets” (Jeffares, *W. B. Yeats* 83). Yeats seems not to have known of this.

> first of all fine things to have thought and said in some real situation of life. . . . As the tide of romance recedes, I am driven back simply on myself and my thoughts in actual life, and my work becomes more and more like your earlier work, which seems fascinating and wonderful to me. (Qtd. in McDiarmid 76)

The *OBMV* includes four of Blunt's sonnets from three sonnet sequences. Also included are "A Nocturne" from *Love Lyrics and Songs of Proteus*, and eleven stanzas selected by Yeats from Blunt's 104-stanza collection of verse proverbs, *The Wisdom of Merlyn*. In general, the poems have little in common stylistically with Yeats's work, but share certain themes.

The linked sonnets, "He who has once been happy is for aye" and "When I hear laughter from a tavern door," from *Esther: A Young Man's Tragedy,* were a standard anthology-piece of the time, appearing in both Quiller-Couch's *Oxford Book of English Verse* and *Oxford Book of Victorian Verse*, as well as other anthologies.[3] They look back from experience to the memory of a great passion with all the earnestness of Yeats's early love poems to Maud Gonne. "Depreciating her Beauty," from *The Love Sonnets of Proteus,* turns the tradition of the blazon around and leads the poet to scorn his beloved's beauty as praised by others, in the process striking the same bitter tone as several of Yeats's more ironic Edwardian-era love poems to Gonne in "From 'The Green Helmet' and Other Poems." "Honour Dishonoured," from *In Viniculis,* connects with Yeats's political interests, written as it was during a period in the 1880s when Blunt was imprisoned in Ireland for supporting Irish independence. Although its point of view, that

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3. The short-title catalog of Yeats's personal library does not list a copy of *Esther,* so Yeats may have simply followed anthology precedent in making his selection.

of a rich man insulated from the injustices of life, is not one that Yeats adopted, it resonates with one of his signal themes—the aristocracy of art. “A Nocturne” offers a conventional lyric in which the poet awaits the dawn and laments his loneliness in the dark of night, once the moon has set; Yeats’s second of “Two Songs Rewritten for the Tune’s Sake,” a late poem also conceived as a musical composition, treats the same theme with more humor:

> I would that I were . . .
>
> . . . . . .
>
> . . . anything else but a rhymer
>
> Without a thing in his head
>
> But rhymes for a beautiful lady,
>
> He rhyming alone in his bed. (*YP* 288)

As insights into Yeats’s thinking, the most interesting selections from Blunt are the excerpts he chooses from “The Wisdom of Merlyn,” stanzas 25–27, 29, 37, 51–53, 61, and 77.[4] Rather than pick a coherent unit from the poem, Yeats selects a miscellany on topics that interest him: the wisdom of women, the impetuous actions of youth, physical passion, loyalty and the love of mother and daughter, friendship compared with love, the grief of experience, and the prospects of growing old. Stanzas 25 and 26, for example, meditate on what Blunt, a notorious philanderer, has learned from women—a sentiment that accords with Yeats’s lifelong practice of cultivating sympathetic women as confidantes:

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4. He had originally selected more broadly. During final proofreading for the *OBMV*, Yeats wrote his wife that he was forced to trim his selections from this poem because of space problems (*CL* #6582, 20 Jun 1936).

Wouldst thou be wise, O Man? At the knees of a woman begin.

Her eyes shall teach thee thy road, the worth of the thing called pleasure, the joy of the thing called sin.

Else shalt thou go to thy grave in pain for the folly that might have been.

For know, the knowledge of women the beginning of wisdom is.

Who has seven hundred wives and concubines hundreds three, as we read in the book of bliss?

Solomon, wisest of men and kings, and ‘all of them princesses.’

Yeats concludes the selection with Blunt’s stanza 83, which reads,

I have tried all pleasures but one, the last and sweetest; it waits.

Childhood, the childhood of age, to totter again on the lawns, to have done with the loves and the hates,

To gather the daisies, and drop them, and sleep on the nursing knees of the Fates. (*OBMV* 4)

A good comparison for these is Yeats’s 1916 lyric “On Woman,” in which he explores themes he would develop further once he began studying the automatic writing of his wife in 1917. Like Blunt, Yeats begins with the example of the wisdom of Solomon:

May God be praised for woman

That gives up all her mind,

. . . . . .

It’s plain that the Bible means

That Solomon grew wise

While talking with his queens . . .

From there, he moves into a meditation on the cycles of life and reincarnation, ending up in a wise second childhood much like Blunt’s:

God grant me . . .

. . . . . .

Now I am growing old,

. . . when, if the tale’s true,

The Pestle of the moon

That pounds up all anew

Brings me to birth again—

To find what once I had

And know what once I have known. . . . (*YP* 147)

Rudyard Kipling (1865–1936) died as the *OBMV* was being prepared, and only two of his poems ended up in the anthology: “A St. Helena Lullaby,” and “The Looking-glass (A Country Dance).” Part of this was doubtless a reflection of Yeats’s antipathy to his Tory imperialism (Kipling had opposed Home Rule for Ireland among other conservative political stances). But in 1936 Kipling was dead, his reputation greatly diminished in literary circles (though he remained popular with the public), and Yeats could thus afford to be magnanimous—if he could afford the permissions fees. This proved to be a problem. Kipling’s widow demanded £35 for three poems (Chapman, 23 Nov 1936), which amounted to seven percent of Yeats’s £500 budget for the book; to drive the fees down he cut his selection to a single poem, the famous “Danny Deever,”

then ended up replacing that with two poems (at £15 apiece) urged on him by his friend Dorothy Wellesley.[5]

Yeats's chief interest in Kipling's poetry is in its use of ballad conventions. The introduction depicts Kipling as an anachronism—a Victorian whose Indian colonial background and peripatetic life isolated him to the point that he did not know that time had passed Victorianism by as the modern era dawned:

> he was full of opinions, of politics, of impurities—to use our word—and the word must have been right, for he interests a critical audience to-day by the grotesque tragedy of "Danny Deever," the matter but not the form of old street ballads, and by songs traditional in matter and form like the "*St. Helena Lullaby.*" (*OBMV* xii)

In his 1936 BBC broadcast on modern poetry, Yeats associates the two Kipling ballads with the writing of Housman and Hardy, all of which he sees as attempts to avoid Victorian rhetoric by employing the conventions of old folk poems (*Essays* 94). Yeats and Kipling had both been part of the "Henley Regatta," the circle of young writers around Henley's *Scots* (later *National*) *Observer* from 1888 to 1894; at first, neither was well known, both were grateful for Henley's patronage, and both were victims of editorial bullying by Henley. In his *Autobiography*, Yeats surmises that he and Kipling attended meetings together at the magazine, but never formally met (85). Later, some of the Kipling poems that Henley published in his small-circulation weekly, including "Danny Deever," "Gunga Din," and "Fuzzy-Wuzzy," were incorporated into the very

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5. Yeats wrote Wellesley, after the anthology was published and critical comment began to appear, "I do not know what Clifford Bax meant by saying I had not made the anthology myself. You chose those two Kipling poems, my wife made the selections from my own work. All the rest I did" (*CL* #6762, 23 Dec 1936).

popular *Barrack-Room Ballads* that helped secure Kipling’s fame. A Tory biographer of Kipling’s has observed,

> [u]tterly unlike anything coming from the Decadents’ school of absinthe drinkers, almost entirely breaking with the subjects and styles of Tennyson or the Pre-Raphaelites, the ballads were original both in language and in content. . . . Here was a poet not writing about impossible love, improbable valor, wine and roses, or the Middle Ages, but a bard using the dialect of the London working class in traditional ballad form to depict the personal and much neglected feelings of the British soldier. (Gilmour 91)

The two poems in the *OBMV* were written during the Edwardian period, after Kipling had become the intimate of kings and industrial magnates; both are from his 1910 book *Rewards and Fairies,* ostensibly a children’s miscellany (though meant to resonate with adults as well) that mixes a linked series of fanciful stories on English historical themes with poems that expand on or comment on elements of the stories. They are hardly Kipling at his most bombastic: “A St. Helena Lullaby” offers a cautionary tale about the importance of the English upbringing that could have been entitled, “Mamas, Don’t Let Your Babies Grow Up to Be Napoleon”; “The Looking Glass” imagines an aging Queen Elizabeth I, haunted by ghosts of her past, weighing her vanity against her greatness. Yeats included them at a time in his career, during the late 1930s, when he was returning to the ballad form in his own verse again and again, and some of his late ballad work strongly resembles these in meter, in its use of refrains, and in the way that it contrasts vernacular sentiments and the strong, popular ballad rhythm with harder, more complicated moral ideas. One poem that Yeats composed about the time the *OBMV* was

published, “The Ghost of Roger Casement,” could even be read as a mock Kipling ballad—an attack on John Bull and Empire, written with the same stirring rhythm as “A Saint Helena Lullaby.”

Yeats had little time for Kipling’s brand of English patriotism. Such was not the case with another loud Edwardian patriot and close contemporary, Sir Henry Newbolt (1862–1938). Theirs was a useful friendship for him, especially because Newbolt was an influential editor in the early 1900s, and well connected[6]: he published Yeats’s essays “Magic” and “Speaking to the Psaltry” in *The Monthly Review* in 1901 and 1902, along with several important Yeats poems of the period, including “Adam’s Curse.” Yeats was careful not to let conflicting political sympathies come between them; in a veiled swipe at Kipling in 1901, while the Boer War was dragging on, Yeats wrote to Newbolt, “Yours is patriotism of the fine sort—patriotism that lays burdens upon a man, & not the patriotism that takes burdens off. The British Press just now, as I think, only understands the other sort, the sort that makes a man say ‘I need not trouble to get wisdom for I am English, & my vices have made me great’” (*CL* #63, 25 Apr 1901). Compared with Kipling’s verse, Newbolt’s work from the 1880s and ’90s tended to celebrate British naval valor and tradition rather than the Empire’s role as conqueror, governor, and civilizer.

A good example of this can be seen in the Newbolt poem that Yeats chose for the *OBMV*, “Drake’s Drum,” which he also chose to read aloud for a 1937 broadcast on the BBC program, *The Poet’s Pub*, shortly after the anthology’s publication. The poem had originally appeared in 1896, at a time when politicians were debating the size of the British Navy in the face of growing challenges around the world, especially ambitious

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6. Newbolt was instrumental in arranging Civil List pensions for both Yeats and Walter de la Mare, and was an important member of the Royal Society of Literature.

navy-building by imperial Germany and the burgeoning United States. It was an immediate success, and became a standard anthology-piece for years afterward. “Drake’s Drum” is in ballad meter, very much in the mode of Kipling—a rousing song in the dialect of the ordinary seaman that celebrates a folk legend about the drum brought back from Sir Francis Drake’s last journey, a drum which the spirit of Drake will supposedly return to beat at time of peril for the island kingdom: “Where the old trade’s plyin’ an’ the old flag flyin’ / They shall find him ware an’ wakin,’ as they found him long ago!” (*OBMV* 68). Such cheerful bombast was easier for Yeats to take than Kipling’s patronizing Colonial bluffness.

One of Newbolt’s editorial collaborators on the *Monthly Review* was the essayist and novelist Mary Elizabeth Coleridge (1861–1907), who was part of a complicated domestic ménage involving Newbolt’s wife and other women friends. Robert Bridges had been an important influence in convincing her to publish her poetry, which is generally in the mode of 1890s aestheticism, with its focus on the personal experience of the poet, but with a strong emphasis on a woman’s point of view. She published poetry pseudonymously under the name of “Anodos” until her death from appendicitis. “Our Lady,” the lone poem by Coleridge in the *OBMV,* appeared in her 1897 collection, *Fancy’s Guerdon* and became a frequently anthologized lyric, appearing in the new edition of the *Oxford Book of English Verse* (1939) as well as in Yeats’s anthology.

“Our Lady” offers a social commentary that attacks assumptions of class and gentility by a well-to-do society. Coleridge stresses the Virgin Mary’s humble origins, rather than her iconic image, and tries to see the ordinary woman behind all the layers of worship and adoration: “no lady thou: / Common woman of common earth . . . .” She

meditates on this theme, observing that Jesus could only be the son of a woman of plain birth, a “daughter of the people.” In the concluding stanza of the short lyric, she quotes from the English version of the Magnificat and attacks the complacency of the rich who worship Mary but ignore the message of her song:

> And still for men to come she sings,
>
> Nor shall her singing pass away.
>
> *‘He hath fillèd the hungry with good things’*
>
> Oh, listen, lords and ladies gay!—
>
> *‘And the rich He hath sent empty away.’* (*OBMV* 62)

Yeats did not know Coleridge personally, but it is likely that his friendship with Newbolt brought her work to his attention. His letters show that he ended up paying Newbolt for permission, as “Our Lady” had been published in the posthumous edition of her poems that Newbolt edited in 1909 as her literary executor. Thematically, “Our Lady” echoes Pater’s portrait of the Mona Lisa, with which Yeats opened the anthology—a woman who incarnates divine power and mystery, and serves as a source of creative inspiration. Yeats’s own poems often focus on the incarnation of divinity through women, and the connection between religious and poetic inspiration. It is a recurring theme in the anthology as well.

ii. The Threshold Poets: Hardy, Housman, and Bridges

Kipling was not the only well-known late-Victorian or Edwardian poet to have died by the time the *OBMV* was published. When Yeats made his selections for the anthology, Thomas Hardy and Robert Bridges were also gone; A.E. Housman, after grudgingly granting permission to include certain poems, died as the manuscript was being transmitted to Oxford for editing. In Yeats's formulation, Hardy, Housman, and Bridges had been unknown or little-read by the Victorians, but nevertheless should be seen as reacting against Victorianism, if in different ways than his own generation did. By 1936, they were no longer generally perceived as being particularly modern: none of the three appears, for example, in the more avant-garde Faber anthology that Michael Roberts compiled under the guidance of T. S. Eliot, published the same year as Yeats's *OBMV*, even though all three produced major works that appeared after the First World War. In contrast, Yeats was represented in the *Faber Book* with fifteen pages of poems.[7]

Hardy and Bridges were major literary figures early in the century, but by 1936 it appeared to Yeats as if their poetry had not proven particularly influential: he makes the curious claim in his introduction that he will "consider [their] genius . . . when the development of schools gives them great influence" (v). He does not link Housman with them, though he might as well have done so; despite achieving broad popularity, Housman had published only two slim volumes, shunned literary politics, and seemed an isolated phenomenon. As an observer of the poetic landscape in 1936, Yeats was being accurate, if shortsighted: few poets knew quite what to make of these writers. But he

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7. The young T.S. Eliot remarked that he saw Yeats more as an "eminent contemporary than an elder from whom we could learn" (qtd. in Foster, *Arch-Poet* 41).

acknowledged modern elements in their work—particularly that of Hardy and Housman. Today we can see that these three were on the threshold of twentieth century poetry in a way that could perhaps only be recognized in hindsight.

Thomas Hardy (1840–1928) was not much known as a poet during the nineteenth century; it was not until his last novels were attacked by late-Victorian censors that he devoted himself full-time to publishing the verse that he had been writing for most of his life. Yeats selected only four poems by Hardy: “Weathers,” “Snow in the Suburbs,” “Night of Trafalgar,” and “Former Beauties.” Over the years, critics of the anthology have pointed out that the four little poems neither accurately represented Hardy nor reached the level of his greatest poetry. F. O. Matthiessen, reviewing the book in 1937, commented that if

> we knew Hardy only through his four pages here, we would estimate him as a minor experimenter with the ballad form, author of “The Night at Trafalgar.” We would not even suspect the range of thought and feeling that gives urgency, in spite of some metrical awkwardness, not only to the choruses of *The Dynasts* but especially to such lyrics as “Hap” and “The Darkling Thrush.” (815)

Some critics have gone a step farther and held out Yeats and Hardy as examples of opposing poetic approaches. For example, Richard Hoffpauir, writing in *The Southern Review*, suggests that their divergent approaches to modern poetry have forced later poets and critics to choose one or the other as a model or a favorite:

> Hardy and Yeats defined the options for poets at the beginning of this century and . . . consequently poets have tended to divide into two

> distinguishable streams, variously (and unsatisfactorily) called traditional and experimental, anti-Modernist and Modernist, discursive and visionary, plain and rhetorical. Yeats and Hardy are in modern poetry what, according to F.R. Leavis . . . , Lawrence and Joyce are in modern fiction, “pre-eminently the testing, the crucial authors”; if you take one for a major creative writer, then you can have little *serious* use for the other. (520)

Hoffpauir picks Hardy’s side, and charges Yeats with being an imprecise, dreamy Romantic, out of touch with the sort of “real” concerns that Hardy’s poetry touches. Hardy, he argues, is not “a profound philosopher in his verse . . . but he is a sound moralist; Yeats is too often in and out of his verse a foolish philosopher” (541–2). He concludes that Yeats’s “vision” has been overvalued, and Hardy's “morality” undervalued.

But did the poets themselves see the same sort of conflict in their respective work? Yeats rarely mentions Hardy in his correspondence, and alludes to his poetry only four times in his critical writings: three times in his introduction to the *OBMV*, and once in his BBC “Modern Poetry” broadcast. Some kind of feud or personal jealousy between the two that prompted Yeats to snub Hardy posthumously might seem the most human and understandable of motives, but little direct evidence suggests that any such enmity existed. The closest thing to a snub occurred in 1912, as noted earlier, when Yeats and Newbolt presented Hardy with the medal from the Royal Society of Literature, and Hardy insisted on keeping the ceremony private. As Yeats and Newbolt had hoped to publicize their society, this could only have been exasperating: the extreme formality that Hardy insisted on thwarted any such plans. This could have been enough of a personal affront to

Yeats to prompt lasting enmity, and certainly Yeats was an experienced hand at literary feuds, but later tributes to Hardy by Yeats make it doubtful. In 1919, for example, Yeats was among a group of forty-three poets who contributed to the “Poets’ Tribute,” a bound anthology of manuscript poems for the elderly Hardy, each poem inscribed by the poet who wrote it (Millgate 528).

More likely the key lies elsewhere, in the way Yeats viewed the role of the poet in the modern world. Although Hardy, like Yeats, reacted against Victorian sentimentality and faith in progress, the nature of his reaction was such that Yeats, caught up in his own vision of the coming times, may have had difficulty understanding or appreciating it. In the *OBMV* introduction, he includes Hardy among poets with whom he was unfamiliar when he first started writing poetry himself: “Thomas Hardy’s poems were unwritten or unpublished” (*OBMV* v), he writes, and later likens the anthology’s version of Oscar Wilde’s *Ballad of Reading Gaol* to the “stark realism” of Hardy (*OBMV* vii). Realism—particularly that of novels by Stendahl and his school—comes under a strong attack in the *OBMV*’s introduction: “I may dismiss all that ancient history and say [the mischief of ‘passivity’ and ‘mechanized nature’] began when Stendhal described a masterpiece as a ‘mirror dawdling down a lane’” (*OBMV* xxvii). Yeats seems to have been unable to get beyond the idea that Hardy was merely mirroring society.

This was unfair. Hardy, though twenty-five years older than Yeats, did not publish his first book of poetry until 1898, nearly a decade after Yeats’s work first appeared in print. When his poetry did appear, however, it was already mature, and dug exactingly beneath the surfaces of the Victorian and Edwardian worlds to reveal the ironies at their centers. This was the “stark realism” that Yeats referred to. A good

example is “I Look Into My Glass,” which literally uses the device of a mirror to address aging, a frequent Yeats theme:

> I look into my glass
> And view my wasting skin,
> And say, “Would God it came to pass
> My heart had shrunk as thin!”
>
> For then, I, undistrest
> By hearts grown cold to me,
> Could lonely wait my endless rest
> With equanimity.
>
> But Time, to make me grieve,
> Part steals, lets part abide;
> And shakes this fragile frame at eve
> With throbbings of noontide. (Hardy 81)

Thematically, it resembles Yeats poems such as “Owen Aherne and his Dancers,” where an old man talks to his heart about stirrings of passion in it for a far younger woman:

> A strange thing surely that my Heart, when love had come unsought
> Upon the Norman upland or in that poplar shade,
> Should find no burden but itself and yet should be worn out.
> It could not bear that burden and therefore it went mad. (*YP* 224)

Yeats’s lines are longer, but the caesura gives them a strong rhythmic similarity to the short measure of Hardy’s poem. Hardy’s lines are more focused, and their rhymes carry

more emphasis, more of a sense of closure. The greatest difference is in the level of rhetoric. Hardy’s poem only touches on the universal—it mainly focuses on the speaker and his perception of time. Its subject is both the image in the mirror, and the act of gazing at it—a complicated transaction indeed. In Yeats’s poem the more fanciful rhetoric personifies the speaker’s heart, reports the dramatic dialogue between the speaker and his heart, and presents the dramatic rhetorical figure of a heart gone mad; its movement is outward, away from the speaker, where Hardy’s looks inward.

Yeats and Hardy certainly shared an interest in “the folk”: in Yeats’s case, folktales and myths of Ireland; in Hardy’s case, his native Dorset’s language and traditions. Both were part of a movement back to folk themes, which Yeats’s introduction says was good in itself but easily led astray by “a too soft simplicity.” He faintly praises Hardy in that context: “Thomas Hardy, though his work lacked technical accomplishment, made the necessary correction [of that simplicity] through his use of the impersonal objective scene” (*OBMV* xiii-xiv), and thus moved beyond Victorian sentimentality. It is Hardy’s unsparing gaze that separates him from the Victorians. In Yeats’s 1936 BBC talk, he associates Hardy with those folk-inspired poets of his own generation who, “because [they] disliked all Victorian rhetorical moral fervour, came to dislike all rhetoric. . . . People began to imitate old ballads because an old ballad is never rhetorical” (*Essays* 94).

Among those poems of Hardy’s that Yeats chose for his anthology, “Weathers,” the poem that opens Hardy’s *Late Lyrics and Early,* illustrates some of the differences in rhetorical approach. It starts off as a jaunty, lighthearted celebration of spring, full of birds, birdcalls and new life.

This is the weather the cuckoo likes,

And so do I;

When showers betumble the chestnut spikes,

And nestlings fly:

And the little brown nightingale bills his best [. . . .]

The dactyls and anapests give it a light, bouncy rhythm like a folk song or a traditional nursery rhyme. Then the focus moves from the natural world to the human:

And they sit outside at “The Travellers’ Rest,”

And maids come forth sprig-muslin drest,

And citizens dream of the south and west,

And so do I.

This vision of Hardy’s “folk” shows an idyllic rural world innocent of modern alienation: countrymen sitting outside an inn watching the young women walk by, townsmen dreaming of far lands and warm climates. But the poem’s second stanza counters the upbeat mood. The spring showers that speak of new life and hope are counterbalanced by fall weather that “the shepherd shuns,” and the speaker does too:

When beeches drip in browns and duns,

And thresh and ply;

And hill-hid tides throb, throe on throe,

And meadow rivulets overflow,

And drops on gate-bars hang in a row,

And rooks in families homeward go,

And so do I. (*OBMV* 7)

The rhythm in the final stanza becomes more regularly iambic and repetitive, and the imagery takes on a cold, wet, violent cast that separates the poet from the idyll of the first stanza. Here we can see why Yeats called Hardy’s images “stark” and associated him with Hopkins and Robert Bridges: the complex alliterative *cynghanedd* of the dripping beeches, the muscular, spasmodic sea beating audibly through Hardy’s lines, and the onomatopoeic threshing of trees in the wind all combine to give the moment an almost tangible presence. Black rooks have replaced brown nightingales, and dripping gate-bars remind us of human limits and the frequent futility of dreams. Both the weather of the land and the weather of the poet’s life have changed, and the poem shows us both the “passive, lighter and traditional” images of the world and the “grave, positive, stark delineations” that Hardy, in his “Apology” to *Late Lyrics* (*Thomas Hardy* 556), said must accompany them.

By way of comparison, in Yeats’s hands, folk literature serves a much more thematic purpose. For example, in Yeats’s early volume *The Wind Among the Reeds,*

which Hardy commented on approvingly,[8] “The Valley of the Black Pig” uses the myth of a final battle from Irish folklore that symbolizes Yeats’s own apocalyptic vision of coming struggle in Ireland:

> The dews drop slowly and dreams gather: unknown spears
> Suddenly hurtle before my dream-awakened eyes,
> And then the clash of fallen horsemen and the cries
> Of unknown perishing armies beat about my ears.
> We who still labour by the cromlech on the shore,
> The grey cairn on the hill, when day sinks drowned in the dew,
> Being weary of the world’s empires, bow down to you,
> Master of the still stars and of the flaming door. (*YP* 62)

In Yeats’s hands the lore becomes something high and terrible, not quaintly pastoral—an emblem for the disturbed world, not a idyllic point of comparison for it. It shares with Hardy’s “Weathers” a dewy landscape, the seashore, dreams, and muted colors, but the rhetorical pitch transforms it into something wholly unlike Hardy’s poem. It is a mystic dream vision, a glimpse of eternity, not a nuanced scene.

By the time he gets to “The Tower,” in 1925, a decade before he wrote his introduction to the Oxford anthology, Yeats had reconsidered his own use of folk motifs and themes. The speaker in that poem, searching for spirits to answer his questions about old age, starts to retell a story about his fictional folk hero, Red Hanrahan: “Hanrahan rose in frenzy there / And followed up those baying creatures towards—”; but he cannot finish the story: “O towards I have forgotten what—enough!” (*YP* 200). Yeats doesn't

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8. Hardy chose Yeats’s 1899 *The Wind among the Reeds*, along with the letters of Robert and Elizabeth Browning, as one of his two favorite books of the year (Bjork 513).

renounce the folk-inspired material, but his poetry has gone beyond it. Instead of focusing on the material itself, he now focuses on the hold it has on his imagination—another remove distant. And from the *OBMV* introduction’s qualified, almost patronizing approval of folk themes in Hardy’s writing, we get the sense that such themes are an outdated idea whose time has passed. For Yeats, Hardy’s work belongs to the past, not the future that the anthology addresses.

The best proof that Yeats could not appreciate the modernity of Hardy lies in the selections themselves. They illustrate the argument of Yeats’s introduction—an argument that might have seemed less compelling had it been illustrated by works such as “The Darkling Thrush,” “Channel Firing,” “Hap,” or “The Convergence of the Twain.” “Weathers,” as noted, with its country airs and nursery-rhyme cadence, leaves itself open to Yeats’s charge of folk poetry’s “facile charm”: its heavily alliterative second stanza clashes with the first stanza’s light cadence, which an unsympathetic reader might take to support Yeats’s charge of awkward versification, and it exhibits many of the same formal qualities, noted in the previous chapter, that Yeats disliked about the work of Gerard Manley Hopkins.

Actually, with “Snow in the Suburbs,” Hardy created an intricately designed poem whose various single, double, and triple rhymes, along with its unusual stanza forms, resulted in a uniqueness that conventionally minded readers might find awkward. Yeats probably considered this poem technically difficult and thematically slight, one in which meaning “is like some faint sound that strains the ear” (*OBMV* xxxix), as he said of Hopkins. The final image, in which a freezing cat is welcomed into a warm suburban

home, perhaps smacked of sentimentality to a reader inclined to read the poem in the context of most Victorian poetry.

That Yeats did in fact misrepresent Hardy’s achievement should be apparent even from the minor poems he selected for his anthology. “Snow in the Suburbs,” for instance, is awkward only if one accepts Yeats’s values on the topic of scansion. Hardy’s poem embraces a different aesthetic, using meter and form as a way of turning back in on itself introspectively rather than gyring outward. We can see this carefully enclosed design in the first four lines, which focus on many single things; the words themselves are small units of a syllable or two, the sounds are small and soft, the vowels are open and the consonants are muted:

Every branch big with it,
Bent every twig with it;
Every fork like a white web-foot;
Every street and pavement mute:

The poem, which resembles Longfellow’s 1863 “Snowflakes,” moves from short lines that describe small things to a larger picture; the lines lengthen, swelling finally to a sharply focused wide-angle view of sky and yard:

Some flakes have lost their way, and grope back upward, when
Meeting those meandering down they turn and descend again.
The palings are glued together like a wall,
And there is no waft of wind with the fleecy fall. (*OBMV* 7–8)

From this general view of the landscape, with its soft alliteration in the last line of the stanza, the poem’s focus shifts to the living world, a small sparrow in the tree, nearly

overwhelmed by the silent snow. The scene is humorous but also shows us a somber word, “inurns,” that suggests the potentially fatal cold of an uncaring snowfall. The poem’s final stanza risks the charge of sentimentality as it focuses on a pitiful cat, struggling to survive winter like the sparrow, but a less elemental animal itself—one about to be overwhelmed by the cold, quiet fall of snow:

> The steps are a blanched slope
> Up which, with feeble hope,
> A black cat comes, wide-eyed and thin;
> And we take him in. (*OBMV* 8)

What rescues “Snow in the Suburbs” from sentimentality is the design—how the “we” of the final line takes us from the impersonality of the snowfall to the personality of the poet, in his own way equally at the mercy of the world but able to identify sympathetically with the cat’s plight; he answers its feeble hope. The final word, “in,” brings the poem around to particularity from the universal, impersonal “every” of the poem’s first word.

Of the four Hardy poems that Yeats chose, a selection from Hardy’s *A Set of Country Songs*, the lyric “Former Beauties,” is possibly the best known and most often anthologized. Its focus on the theme of fading beauty is another of Yeats’s frequent topics. But again, its imagery is much like that of the first stanza of “Weathers”—full of country muslin, sunny weather, lilting tunes, and days gone by.

Wilfrid Scawen Blunt once said of Hardy’s *The Dynasts* that he “read it conscientiously through, without finding anything at all in it which has any business to be called poetry except the little piece of the battle of Talfalgar [*sic*] imitated from Kipling”

(qtd. in Southworth 183). Since Yeats put Kipling squarely amid the late-Victorian mainstream that he saw most modern poetry attempting to swim against, he probably read “The Night of Trafalgar” much as Blunt did. But “Night of Trafalgar,” far from being a Kipling-esque celebration of imperial martial glory, in fact shows us the participants—victors, vanquished, and noncombatants alike—at the mercy of a world that makes even a great military victory insignificant. Hardy’s response to the terrible world lacks the drama of Yeats’s defiance and despair, but its appeal is that of people rather than archetypes, of “stark realism” and the endurance of human spirit rather than fantastic symbols for that spirit.

A. E. Housman (1859–1936) shared Hardy’s interest in provincial England, and in the shock of its encounter with the violence and isolation of the modern era. Housman published only two small books of poetry during his lifetime, but the sixty-three poems of *A Shropshire Lad*, which appeared with little fanfare in 1896, tapped into British nostalgia for rural simplicity in the face of modernity and empire at the time of the Boer War, and became a lasting best-seller. Selections from it would have certainly satisfied Yeats’s editors’ wish for “popular” material, had Housman agreed to Yeats’s initial inquiry about permission. But he wrote refusing the request:

> Some thirty years ago requests to include pieces from *A Shropshire Lad* in anthologies had become so disproportionate to the meagreness of my output that I began to refuse my consent, and this practice I have ever since maintained, alleging an inflexible rule, so that I cannot now desert it without breach of faith. (qtd. in Finneran 579)

Yeats thus could only discuss *A Shropshire Lad* in his introduction, where he likened it to some of his own early work, and to lyrics by younger Irish poets:

> In Ireland, where still lives almost undisturbed the last folk tradition of western Europe, the songs of [Joseph] Campbell and [Padraic] Colum draw from that tradition their themes, return to it, and are sung to Irish airs by boys and girls who have never heard the names of the authors; but the reaction from rhetoric, from all that was prepense and artificial, has forced upon these writers now and again, as upon my own early work, a facile charm, a too soft simplicity. In England came like temptations. The *Shropshire Lad* is worthy of its fame, but a mile further and all had been marsh. (*OBMV* xiii–xiv)

Despite the initial refusal, it turned out that Housman was not in principle utterly opposed to an Oxford anthology edited by Yeats. He agreed to let him select instead from his second published collection, *Last Poems* (1922), with the caveat that he was “unwilling to countenance an anthology which by its very conception allots so much importance to [Gerard Manley] Hopkins, not chiefly because I myself regard him as a moth blundering round a candle but from a craven fear of being some day made to look foolish if, for instance, posterity decides that [Charles] Doughty was the epoch maker” (qtd. in Finneran 579). Only after being assured of Yeats’s lack of sympathy for Hopkins and exclusion of Doughty (*CL* #6416, 24 Oct 1935) was Housman mollified.

Yeats’s introduction does not discuss the selections on their own terms, which suggests that he saw them as stand-ins for poems from *A Shropshire Lad*. They do explore many of the same subjects as the earlier volume. “Grenadier” is told from the

point of view of a provincial speaker in the time of Victoria, who has enlisted in the army and died in a foreign field. In “Soldier from the Wars Returning,” the poet wistfully envisions a world in which such a soldier, returned from the trenches of South Africa or Europe, might discover a peaceful eternity. “The Chestnut Casts his Flambeaux” offers a meditation on passing youth. “Could a Man be Drunk Forever” reflects gnomically about sobriety and love. Last, “The Deserter” dramatizes a conversation between two lovers as one abandons the other’s bed, lured away by the call of war and death. All show the “elegiac temper” in Housman that John Vickery says anticipated Eliot, Joyce and other modernists in its untraditional treatment of loss, sacrifice, and deprivation (409).

The selections from *Last Poems* contrast with the way in which Yeats’s own poetry so often answers loss with the consolations of transcendence. For example, Yeats’s “An Irish Airman Foresees His Death” (1918) shares with “Grenadier” a hard look at issues of duty, mortality, and empire. But the treatment of such themes is quite different. Housman’s grenadier serves as an ironic answer to the gruff Tommies of Rudyard Kipling’s *Barrack-Room Ballads.* Rather than romantic working-class heroics in the name of Empire, the grenadier lays down his life (probably in South Africa) for a pittance, and a recognition that his simple sense of duty has been cynically exploited:

> For thirteen pence a day did I
>
> Take off the things I wore,
>
> And I have marched to where I lie,
>
> And I shall march no more.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> To-morrow after new young men

The sergeant he must see,

For things will all be over then

Between the Queen and me. (*OBMV* 46)

Housman’s sympathies are with the soldier, and the price he pays for the world’s demands on him; the tale of his death ultimately is one of pathos, not heroism.

“An Irish Airman Foresees His Death” is likewise written in the voice of a doomed provincial fighter in the British Empire’s wars who serves for reasons other than patriotic fervor. Yeats’s airman (modeled on Lady Gregory’s son) is an Irish aristocrat rather than an English countryman, and the poet portrays his demise as transcendent rather than pathetic. Like the grenadier, the airman does not go to war to because of patriotism, saying, “Those that I fight I do not hate, / Those that I guard I do not love[.]” He shows his affection for his home at the crossroads community of Kiltartan, and displays an aristocratic sense of duty to the poor people who live there, but they do not really have a dog in the dogfights, so to speak. The Empire’s wars will not improve their lot: “No likely end could bring them loss / Or leave them happier than before.” Unlike Housman’s grenadier, it is aesthetic transport—the “lonely impulse of delight” (*OBMV* 87)—that sends the airman to his fate in the skies. His death becomes an artistic gesture of connection to a mystical impulse that, like his plane, soars above the earthly conflict.

The search for connection in transcendence rather than in human relationships is what essentially separates Yeats’s vision from Housman’s, at least as reflected in the poems Yeats chose for the *OBMV*. Traditional religion has proven inadequate for both poets, but Housman is far more skeptical of the abstract demands placed on human nature by religion’s underlying impulse. “Soldier from the Wars Returning,” written with

deliberate irony in the common meter of the English hymnal, reads like a sacred song to oblivion. The poet invites a soldier returning from an unspecified war (one that is both old-fashioned, employing cavalry chargers, and modern, employing trench warfare) to a dark, peaceful eternity:

> Rest you, charger, rust you, bridle;
>
> Kings and kesars, keep your pay;
>
> Soldier, sit you down and idle
>
> At the inn of night for aye. (*OBMV* 47)

Here human hopes, dreams, and pleasures have been stripped away by duty, leaving only rest and endless night as comfort. Compare this to Yeats’s 1914 poem, “A Meditation in Time of War,” in which he denies the very reality to which such duty belongs. It presents a moment of vision in which all of mankind—and by implication its wars—are revealed to the poet as “inanimate phantasy” in the mind of a divine “One” (*YP* 202). In this short meditation, one of the few poems of his explicitly tied to the First World War, we see an impulse to turn away from the mundane reality of war toward a mystical experience similar to that of “An Irish Airman Foresees His Death.”

“The Chestnut Casts His Flambeaux” presents another of Housman’s many meditations on how the demands of the world lead young men to squander what is most precious to them. In it, the speaker in a tavern urges his companion to drink up and enjoy the moment, rather than wait for the passing of the storm outside:

> We for a certainty are not the first
>
> Have sat in taverns while the tempest hurled
>
> Their hopeful plans to emptiness, and cursed

Whatever brute and blackguard made the world.

The moments of vital life that the young man might have known are embodied in the torchlike blossoms of the trees (the flambeaux) that the storm has stripped away and which now litters the ground. The speaker in Housman’s poem shrugs his shoulders at the unfairness of it all—how the “The troubles of our proud and angry dust / Are from eternity, and shall not fail. / Bear them we can, and if we can we must” (*OBMV* 48). For Housman, this stoicism in the face of meaningless sacrifice is more meaningful than any grand gesture.

The Yeats of 1936 finds Housman’s realistic fatalism to be modern, in the sense that it is part of the reaction to Victorian discursiveness and sentimentality, but of only limited interest. As noted above, he criticizes realism as something that merely mirrors the world, rather than attempting to change or transcend it: “When man has withdrawn into the quicksilver at the back of the mirror no great event becomes luminous in his mind” (*OBMV* xxxv). In two of his own poems, written about the same time, he treats a similar theme quite differently.

“The Fascination of What’s Difficult” and “Brown Penny” were originally grouped in *The Green Helmet and Other Poems* (1910) as the first and last of eleven “Momentary Thoughts” (“Brown Penny” was initially entitled “The Young Man’s Song”; *VP* 260, 268). In the first poem, we can see Yeats’s frustration with (admittedly interesting) work that has taken him away from lyric poetry during the first decade of the new century. Rather than two young men drinking in a tavern, what is trapped is the winged Pegasus of his poetic art: in the stable of its “day’s war with every knave and dolt, / Theatre business, management of men,” it can only “Shiver under the lash, strain,

sweat and jolt / As though it dragged road-metal” when it should be “on Olympus [leaping] from cloud to cloud.” The work has “dried the sap out of [his] veins” (*VP* 260) much as Housman’s storm has broken and strewn the chestnut flowers; where Housman’s speaker drinks another round, Yeats longs to fly away with the winged horse.

In “Brown Penny,” the poet advises his younger self to act now, rather than try to puzzle through the mysteries of love:

> There is nobody wise enough
> To find out all that is in it,
> For he would be thinking of love
> Till the stars had run away
> And the shadows eaten the moon.
> Ah, penny, brown penny, brown penny,
> One cannot begin it too soon. (*YP* 97)

This is essentially what Housman is saying in “The Chestnut Casts Its Flambeaux,” but Housman is far more skeptical about the chances that the world will actually allow the young man to follow his dreams and his loves.

Similarly, Housman’s “Could Man Be Drunk Forever” (*OBMV* 48) and Yeats’s “A Drinking Song,” another of the “Momentary Thoughts” group, could easily be bookends bracketing the two poets’ differing approaches. Both are drinking songs written to light, bouncy meters: Housman’s poem pairs three-stress iambic stanzas of four lines each, in which the second and fourth lines rhyme, like short measure, and the first and third lines end with an amphibrach; Yeats’s is a sestet, rhyming *ababab*, less regular and more anapestic. Housman’s argues that all would be well if men just lived in the moment,

as when drunk, going to bed and waking up without thinking much about it. The problem, he observes ironically, is that when (supposedly) sober, men do all sorts of things that go against their true nature and desires. Yeats, rather than dwelling on the irony of things making more sense when under the influence of strong drink, simply revels in the irrational:

> Wine comes in at the mouth
> And love comes in at the eye;
> That’s all we shall know for truth
> Before we grow old and die.
> I lift the glass to my mouth,
> I look at you, and I sigh. (*YP* 92)

Love, for Yeats, demands a kind of willful irrationality and self-deception by both lover and beloved. According to his theories, the lover “divines the secret self of the other, and refusing to believe in the mere daily self, creates a mirror where the lover or the beloved sees an image to copy in daily life; for love also creates the Mask” (*Autobiographies* 464). This Yeatsian notion is openly on display in another of his “Momentary Thoughts” poems, “The Mask,” which offers a good contrast to the last Housman poem in the *OBMV*, “The Deserter.” For Yeats, the artifice of such masks can make them truer than the “real” self behind them. In his poem, presented as a dramatic dialogue between two lovers, the beloved demands that the lover “Put off that mask of burning gold / With emerald eyes,” discarding the beauty of artifice for the reality that lies behind it. The lover refuses, arguing that the love is no less real for being lavished on an aesthetic creation: “What matter, so there is but fire / In you, in me?” (*YP* 94).

As a closeted homosexual, Housman had to live disguised every day, so it is perhaps no surprise that when one of his characters in “The Deserter” puts on the mask of the dutiful, brave hero, it prompts only resentment in the other lover. The poem offers an ironic twist on the expectations evoked by the title, dramatizing the patriotic lover’s “desertion” of his bedmate in favor of a rival, the bullet that will penetrate him. Housman’s longing for pure uncomplicated connection becomes apparent when he pulls back from the dramatic dialogue between the two characters to offer an omniscient comment that sets the scene and wishes away the realities that would keep two small people apart. His true sympathies lie with the lovers in their safe bed, not the abstractions that will kill one of them:

> Toil at sea and two in haven
>
> And trouble far:
>
> Fly, crow, away, and follow, raven,
>
> And all that croaks for war. (*OBMV* 49)

Unlike Hardy and Housman, Robert Bridges (1844–1930) corresponded frequently with Yeats over the years. Yeats greatly respected Bridges’s expertise in matters of meter and form, but was more excited by the technique of his lyric poems than their content. The *OBMV* selection is perfunctory, which suggests that Bridges had not been much on his mind since the Laureate’s death in 1930. It comprises anthology standards and old favorites from Bridges’s nineteenth-century work that Yeats had praised to friends decades earlier. Yeats sometimes seems to have been working from memory—misquoting, for example, a lyric from Bridges’s drama *Achilles in Scyros* that he had quoted accurately in other essays and letters.

When the two poets first began corresponding, and discussed meeting to talk about matters of craft, Yeats appeared a bit overawed by Bridges's metrical expertise, and deferred to the older poet: "I too would much like to discuss with you questions of rhythm, for though I work very hard at my rhythm I have but little science on the matter and as a result probably offend often. Without a consistent science it is difficult to distinguish between license and freedom" (*CL* 10 January 1897). He allowed Bridges to review and criticize the 1895 edition of *Poems* (Finneran, *Correspondence* xii), and even amiably recalled discussing poetic craft with Bridges's friend Gerard Manley Hopkins in Ireland (*CL* 16 Mar 1897), conveniently overlooking his personal distaste for Hopkins. Bridges discouraged performances of his poetic dramas, despite Yeats's enthusiasm for them, and sought to deflate Yeats's interest in public recitations of his lyrics.[9] Later, Yeats would feel confident enough as a craftsman himself to brush off Bridges's characteristic technical quibbles and corrections, and to criticize what he perceived as the Laureate's lack of originality in a letter to Rabindranath Tagore: "His creative power is not great though very exquisite" (*CL* 31 Jul 1915).

Yeats's portrait of Bridges in the *OBMV* is laudatory enough on the surface, but ultimately depicts him as a craftsman and minor innovator whose lack of anything important to say kept him from rivaling Yeats as a leader for the post-Tennyson

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9. Yeats wrote Bridges in 1901 that he had chosen three of the latter's poems to be chanted by his friend and sometime lover Florence Farr as part of their attempts to find a new way to present lyric poetry aloud. He mentioned two that ended up in the *OBMV*: "Muse and Poet" and "Nightingales," and could not remember the third. Bridges replied that he was skeptical about the whole notion of the sort of stylized recitation to musical accompaniment that Yeats had in mind, as it called attention to the performance rather than the poetry (Finneran, *Correspondence* 23).

generation. He comes across in the introduction as a poet of commonplaces and emptiness—qualities that Yeats unconvincingly presents as strengths:

> Robert Bridges seemed for a time, through his influence on Laurence Binyon and others less known, the patron saint of the movement. His influence—practice, not theory—was never deadening; he gave to lyric poetry a new cadence, a distinction as deliberate as that of Whistler's painting, an impulse moulded and checked like that in certain poems of Landor, but different, more in the nerves, less in the blood, more birdlike, less human; words often commonplace made unforgettable by some trick of speeding and slowing,
>
> > A [*sic*] glitter of pleasure
> > And a dark tomb,
>
> or by some trick of simplicity. . . . Every metaphor, every thought a commonplace, emptiness everywhere, the whole magnificent.
>
> (*OBMV* xvii–xviii)

The selection includes six poems, five of which Yeats had written about or commented on over the years: “Muse and Poet,” which presents a playful poetic dialogue where a sleeping poet is dragged unwillingly from his dreams and must be argued into admitting the muse; “On a Dead Child,” which somberly harks back to Bridges’s days as a physician, considering the body of a child the doctor could not save; “The Storm is over,” which describes the aftermath of a late summer storm that has devastated the forest canopy; “Weep not To-day,” the only poem of the six that Yeats never commented on

specifically,[10] which offers a variation on the traditional *carpe diem* theme; "I heard a Linnet courting," which is written in the voice of a poet who is perhaps more concerned with his inability to do the birdsong justice than with the song itself; and "Nightingales," which is a much-anthologized lyric by Bridges[11] in which the poet asks about the heavenly source of the bird's singing, only to be answered that the song actually comes from longing and loss, and that the present day is far more pleasant.

"Muse and Poet" resembles Yeats's "Adam's Curse" in its subject matter, a bantering dialogue on the poet's craft and the nature of inspiration. Where Yeats anchors his poem with real-life muses—women he knows—Bridges keeps his muse abstract, and the business of allowing the muse to talk the poet into writing a love poem remains playfully impersonal, without any sense that it connects with Bridges's real life. In contrast, although it risks sentimentalism, the knowledge that Bridges had been a doctor gives "On a Dead Child" additional resonance; in a letter to Bridges, Yeats recalled how his own ill health had helped him appreciate the poem: "I was ill a year ago & the first sign of getting well again was that one morning I felt again a desire to read poetry. I chanced on the poem but found it unendurably poignant" (*CL* 31 Jul 1915).

Three of the selections—"The Storm is over," "I heard the Linnet courting," and "Nightingales"—employ a device Bridges often turned to, like his friend Hopkins, in which birds and the natural world became a way of writing about more complex issues. This was far less common for Yeats, who reacted against the Victorian fascination with the empirical observation of nature; when he did so, rather than songbirds, the traditional

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10. It was, however, a well-known lyric by Bridges, having been included in Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch's *Oxford Book of Victorian Verse*.

11. "Nightingales" appears in two of Quiller-Couch's Oxford poetry anthologies.

subject of poets, his bird-poems tend to be about hawks, swans, peacocks, and other proud, powerful, and violent fliers.

A good contrast would be Bridges’s “I head the Linnet courting” and Yeats’s “The Wild Swans at Coole.” The poems are of similar lengths—Yeats’s is thirty lines long, and Bridges’s is twenty-eight—and the message of both poems is similar: the poet hears or observes wild birds doing what wild birds do, and thinks of his own art and mortality. Formally, the poems resemble each other as well: the stanzas mix a quatrain of traditional meter (a variant on ballad meter for Yeats, a variant of short measure for Bridges) with closing lines in a different meter in which the poet turns from the subject of the quatrain to reflect on more complicated questions. The speaker in Bridges’s poem admires the songbirds’ courting, heedless of mortality or the troubles that may come: it is springtime, and songbirds court in the spring. His main regret is that he is not poet enough to fully convey the song:

> I heard a linnet courting
>
> His lady in the spring:
>
> His mates were idly sporting,
>
> Nor stayed to hear him sing
>
> His song of love. —
>
> I fear my speech distorting
>
> His tender love. (*OBMV* 15)

The speaker in Yeats’s poem, similarly, finds a tension between the timeless repetition of the swans’ cycles of life, and wonders about his own growing sense of mortality:

> But now they drift on the still water,
>
> Mysterious, beautiful;
>
> Among what rushes will they build,
>
> By what lake’s edge or pool
>
> Delight men’s eyes when I awake some day
>
> To find they have flown away? (*YP* 131)

For both poets, the structure reinforces their meditations on the patterns of nature that they describe. Both seek to order wildness and recognize both the irony of so doing and the ultimate futility of their efforts. But when Yeats writes in his introduction that Bridges “seemed for a time . . . the patron saint of the movement,” the implication is that he failed to live up to the initial promise—he did not go far enough. We can see this in the ways in which his poem still clings to Victorian conventions: abstractions about love, sentiment about pretty songbirds, an artificially poeticized diction, and, most of all, a hesitation about linking the poem’s meditation to identifiably real things in his life. It commits to neither the transcendence of Yeats’s own work nor to the realism of Hardy or Housman.

iii. The Sturge Moore Circle of Edwardian “Belles Lettres”

Yeats observes that many of the writers

> during the first years of the century . . . wrote what the young communist scornfully calls “Belles lettres”: Binyon when at his best, as I think, of

> Tristram and Isoult: Sturge Moore of centaurs, amazons, gazelles copied from a Persian picture: De la Mare short lyrics that carry us back through *Christabel* or *Kubla Khan.*” (*OBMV* xvi)

Rather than a particular young communist such as Sean O’Casey, Yeats probably had in mind the left-leaning poets of the 1930s that the introduction was arguing with. In any event, he both endorses the belles-lettres label and quarrels with its negative connotations. It may be useful to read this in the light of Samuel Hynes’s contention that “the essential Edwardian mood is somber—a feeling of nostalgia for what has gone, and apprehension for what is to come,” which in turn inhibited stylistic innovation (*Occasions* 2, 9). In his *OBMV* selections, Yeats seems to approve of the mood, but disapprove of the stylistic timidity it bred, especially when compared with the risks he took as part of his own poetic development during the period.

T. Sturge Moore (1870–1944) perhaps best embodies the heirs of Nineties aestheticism that Yeats saw publishing “belles lettres.” Yeats wrote, early in 1910, that he had planned a lecture on contemporary poetry in which he would present a “eulogy” that identified Moore as “the typical poet of the movement immediately after that of The Rhymers Club” (*CL* #1293, 9 Feb 1910). Moore’s reaction to being called “typical” is nowhere recorded, but it did not affect his friendship with Yeats; they remained frequent collaborators and correspondents.

Moore’s work had first been urged on Yeats by Laurence Binyon (also generously represented in the *OBMV*), and it proved to be an important introduction. A broad-ranging analysis of themes, language, and imagery shared by Moore and Yeats would reveal many commonalities. For instance, Moore’s 1904 ode, “To Leda,” has strong

parallels to Yeats's 1923 sonnet, "Leda and the Swan,"[12] and is only one of many examples in which Edwardian-era work by Moore was echoed years later by his older friend, returning to the subject matter with a more modern perspective.

Moore's poems, read today, seem well crafted and thoughtful, blandly exploring the same sort of subject matter that Yeats made memorable. Yeats explicitly acknowledged the influence of at least one of them on an important poem, and the two men also shared philosophical interests that they debated over the years; Moore was aware that Yeats was reading him closely, and even complained that his friend had essentially lifted from his work part of an introduction to the poems of Rabindranath Tagore (Foster, *Apprentice* 472). He nevertheless continued to work with Yeats as both a fellow poet and an illustrator; his illustrations of themes and symbols from Yeats's work sometimes became, in turn, inspirations for Yeats's poems themselves.

Moore is almost completely ignored today other than as Yeats's confidant and collaborator, and his reputation was already fading in the 1930s. Even so, Yeats allotted a generous eleven pages to six of his poems in the anthology: "The Dying Swan," in which the poet urges the wounded swan, mute during its lifetime, to sing a beautiful song as it dies; "Kindness," a meditation on the meaning of the word, and how it is manifested in

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12. The imagery of Moore's long poem, full of Edwardian poeticisms and wordy sentiment, nevertheless offers some interesting comparisons to Yeats's brutal sonnet of two decades later. Consider, for instance, Moore's vision of the rape's consequence:

> Sounds that made thee know, Troy must be burned,
> Helen be loved and blamed;
> Ay, distant, 'neath thy closed lids, were discerned
> Those shriek-pulsed towers that flamed. . . . (Moore xi)

In Yeats poem the vision is simpler and more shocking: "A shudder in the loins engenders there / The broken wall, the burning roof and tower / And Agamemnon dead" (*YP* 218). Moore asserts that Leda was given foreknowledge of all that; for Yeats, it is a question that he leaves unanswered.

the natural world; “Response to Rimbaud’s Later Manner,” a playful if clumsy tribute to the style of the symbolist poet’s short lyrics; “Variation on Ronsard,” which explores a conceit from Ronsard’s *carpe diem* sonnet, “*Je vous envoye un bouquet que ma main*” (Yandall 1284); “The Event,” which notes how empty forms of art are transformed by the event of an infusion of living energy (not unlike Yeats’s famous observation about the dancer and the dance); and “The Gazelles,” an ambitious 164-line poem that Yeats’s introduction says had been inspired by a printed image of Persian aristocrats hunting (*OBMV* xvi).

In a note about “The Tower” in the *Collected Poems* of 1933, Yeats writes, “In the passage about the Swan in Part III I have unconsciously echoed one of the loveliest lyrics of our time—Mr. Sturge Moore’s ‘Dying Swan.’ I often recited it during an American lecturing tour, which explains the theft” (*YP* 605). He prints the poem in its entirety, which invites readers to compare it to the text of “The Tower.” The theft in question involves the part of the poem in which Moore addresses the bleeding swan, wounded by love’s golden arrow, and urges it to swim away and sing a beautiful song to its slayer: “ruby-dye thy track / Down thy last living reach / Of river” (*OBMV* 134). Yeats employs similar phrasing, describing a swan that is an emblem of the aging poet’s pride, as night draws near for him:

> . . . the hour
> When the swan must fix his eye
> Upon a fading gleam,
> Float out upon a long

Last reach of glittering stream

And there sing his last song. (*YP* 202)

The notion of a dying bird's "swan song," which both poems draw upon, was a poetic commonplace used by Ovid, Chaucer, Baudelaire, and Tennyson, among others. Moore, writing in the late 1890s, is content to make it an exquisitely wrought freestanding symbol of wounded love. Yeats, writing in the mid-1920s, gives it a more modern treatment. He presents it at an ironic remove as the poet's conscious image of his pride, part of a complicated meditation on the tower—the imaginative life that he has built for himself, and which he is aware of as a constructed symbol.

"The Gazelles" is a far more complex poem, written early in the 1900s, which Yeats's introduction cites as embodying the "belles-lettres" approach.[13] It begins with a meditation on the empty Persian landscape that the gazelles inhabit, then describes the wary herds, "Frail crowds that a delicate hearing saves" (*OBMV* 139), and their fraught existence. From there, it moves on to show Persian aristocrats hunting them for sport, and parallels their vulnerable lives with those of the beautiful women in the hunting parties. It

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13. By holding "The Gazelles" at arm's length as a product of "Belles lettres," Yeats can portray it as a sort of proto-modernist poem. Seen from this light, Moore touches on modern themes, but does not take them far enough. Yeats's attitude toward Moore resembles that of Ford Madox Ford, who was impressed by Moore, although he argued that his work sometimes "tasted a little too strongly of the honeycomb" (29). Nevertheless, Ford wrote, a poem such as "The Gazelles" was an important attempt to get past old-fashioned classicism and deal with more modern questions. Writers such as Moore, he said, "must put aside—or at least they must digest—their derivations: they must forget that they are literary men . . . [and] abandon the attempt to 'write poetic' and express themselves—not themselves in the mantles of the dead Elijahs that they variously affect" (32). Although Yeats and Ford had few direct dealings, Ford's view of modernism had an important influence on Ezra Pound, who in turn certainly influenced Yeats's sense of what it meant to be "modern."

concludes with a meditation on the theodicean question of why the beauty and cruelty are so inextricably linked:

> Yet why are they born to roam and die?
>
> Can their beauty answer thy query, O soul?
>
> Nay, nor that of hopes which were born to fly,
>
> But whose pinions the common and coarse day stole. (*OBMV* 144)

Perhaps Yeats had Moore’s poem in the back of his mind when he used the image of a gazelle in a poem that touches on similar themes, “In Memory of Eva Gore-Booth and Con Markiewicz,” written in 1927 after Gore-Booth’s death. He describes Gore-Booth as “a gazelle,” using the same word he employed in the unpublished manuscript of his memoirs a decade earlier, when he recalled how he “was at once in closer sympathy with . . . Eva, whose delicate, gazelle-like beauty reflected a mind far more subtle and distinguished. Eva was for a couple of happy weeks my close friend, and I told her all of my unhappiness in love” (*Memoirs* 78). In another poem, “Easter 1916,” he recalls Markiewicz gracefully riding at a society hunt, a more genteel version of the Persian blood-sport of Moore’s poem. “In Memory of Eva Gore-Booth and Constance Markiewicz” contrasts his memory of the young, beautiful women with the toll exacted by passing time, which through the workings of politics and circumstance has coarsened and ruined them, making Gore-Booth “withered old and skeleton-gaunt, / An image of such politics” (*OBMV* 86), and Markiewicz’s voice “shrill” (*YP* 182). They were members of the Irish Protestant ascendancy who forsook their aristocratic heritage for the modern attack on property and class that destroyed the great houses from which they hailed.

Yeats goes on in the poem to observe, “The innocent and the beautiful / Have no enemy but time” (*OBMV* 86), a statement that resembles Moore’s concluding question and answer. But rather than merely exploring the cruelty and irony of the connection between beauty and death, Yeats focuses on how our innocence leads us to build beautiful things that in time we ultimately destroy; he ends his poem asking the spirits of the women to speak to him, and challenges them to instruct him to become a destructive agent himself, setting fire to both great cultural constructs and the wrongs committed in their making—presumably destroying also those beautiful things that he has himself created.

The poet who brought Sturge Moore’s work to Yeats’s attention occupies a disproportionate place in the *OBMV*. At sixteen pages and 422 lines, “Tristram’s End,” by the sometime poet and art curator Laurence Binyon (1869–1943), is the second-longest selection in the anthology, yet Yeats gives no explicit justification for allotting so much space to it. Instead, he talks about two long Victorian-era poems in the same mode as Binyon’s, Browning’s *The Ring and the Book* and Tennyson’s *Idylls of the King*. Browning’s poem, he writes, is one in which “great intellect analyses the suffering of one passive soul, [and] weighs the persecutor’s guilt . . .”; Tennyson’s poem is one “where a poetry in itself an exquisite passivity is built about an allegory where a characterless king represents the soul” (*OBMV* xxvii).

His attacks on Browning and Tennyson help explain what he likes about Binyon’s poem: its “heroic” attitude. As noted in Chapter II, Yeats told Dorothy Wellesley in 1935 that the “bitter and gay” attitude of Ernest Dowson and Lionel Johnson exemplified what he considered to be the heroic response to modern life. This built on his thinking from

early in the century, when he had written Binyon, praising “Tristram’s End” extravagantly and trying to explain why he thought it struck a note that had been missing in much modern poetry:

> There is something in this poem & in Sturge Moores [*sic*] recent themes—though he lacks as yet the crowning perfection of a great style—that moves one with a strange personal emotion. It is as though a new thing, long prophesied, but never seen, had come at last. It is the beauty of the heroic life. It has come to you & him in visable [*sic*] substance, lyric or dramatic, to me only as something far off that I reach for on unsteady feet, an invisible essense [*sic*], a flying star, a wandering wind. (*CL* 5 Jan 1901)

At the time, in his own plays and in narrative poems such as “Baile and Aillinn” (1902), Yeats was exploring the heroic landscape of Irish myths and legends opened up to him through Lady Augusta Gregory’s recent work on English versions of the Red Branch and Fenian cycles.

Binyon’s three-part poem, drawing on a story from the Arthurian legends, mined a similar vein of folklore. In the first part, the poet describes how the exiled hero Tristram, dying in Brittany, discovers that his lost love, Isoult, Queen of Cornwall (whom he gave up rather than break his vow to fetch her for King Mark of Cornwall), has returned to him at the end of his life. In the second part, written in dramatic dialogue, the two lovers rediscover their love, lament what could have been, and celebrate what they had. In the third part, the poet describes how, after their reunion, he and Isoult choose to leave Brittany (and Tristram’s young wife, also named Isoult) to return to Cornwall. It

concludes as they arrive at the castle of King Mark, hands entwined in death, brought in on a bier.

Unlike the behavior of the characters in Browning’s and Tennyson’s poems, one infers, Yeats saw the choices and sacrifices of the characters in Binyon’s poem as active rather than passive. By comparison, in his own “Baile and Aillinn,” a sort of Romeo-and-Juliet story of doomed love set in Irish mythology, the two lovers are kept from one another by the god Aengus, who fools them separately into taking their own lives. But they are reincarnated in the form of swans, joined by a golden chain, and find a transcendent, eternal union together. Yeats’s developing theory of the heroic mood was one in which, as the editors of his letters note, “We do not begin to live . . . until we have recognized that life is a tragedy; but caught in the tragedy, man should meet the inevitable with a defiant gaiety” (*CL* III, ii).

Not coincidentally, both Binyon’s “Tristram’s End” and Yeats’s “Baile and Aillinn,” with their stories of doomed lovers separated by distance and fate, are evocative of Yeats’s futile courtship of Maud Gonne, the subject of so much of his early and middle poetry. His mythologizing of his own unhappy pursuit of Gonne, living as she did out of his reach in Normandy for many years, must have made other such tales of separated lovers especially poignant for him. When Binyon first wrote the poem, Yeats told him, “It seems to me a great poem[,] among the greatest for many years. I cannot criticize it. One criticizes the imperfect but when the perfect comes one can but say ‘How gladly I would have died such a death or lived such a life’” (*CL* 5 Jan 1901). In his “Modern Poetry” BBC broadcast, he admits that the coming of the First World War made such Romantic storytelling seem outmoded (*Essays* 95), but his enthusiasm for the poem

remained nearly as great at the end of his career as it was when he first read it, even though it was clear by then that Binyon was a minor poetic talent who had not influenced other modern poets.

Sturge Moore ended up as literary executor for “Michael Field,” the pen-name for his family friend Katharine Bradley (1846–1914) and her niece Edith Cooper (1862–1913), who were both literary and romantic partners. Yeats’s selections in the *OBMV* came from Moore’s posthumous and textually problematic compilation, *A Selection from the Poems of Michael Field* (1922).

The anthology’s selection was generous in comparison to many other authors in the book, and offered a representative sampling of the two women’s work at a time when they were largely forgotten. The poems include two lyrics from Field’s drama *The Tragic Mary*, which Moore excerpted from the play and entitled “The Tragic Mary Queen of Scots.” Both excerpts are songs that Mary sings in the play, and are presented in the *OBMV* without the dramatic context that frames them. Moore selected “Bury her at Even” from the initial printing of *Underneath the Bough* (1893); Field later omitted the lyric in a “revised and decreased edition.” The poem was originally published in periodical form in 1889. Five of the selections are taken from Field’s *Long Ago* (1889), a collection of poems that expanded on Sapphic fragments: “And on my Eyes Dark Sleep by Night,” “Gold Is the Son of Zeus: Neither Moth nor Worm May Gnaw It,” “Sweeter Far Than the Harp, More Gold Than Gold,” and “If They Honoured Me, Giving Me Their Gifts.” The final two poems come from Field’s Edwardian period, after the authors had converted to Catholicism: “To The Lord Love” appeared their late collection, *Wild Honey from Various Thyme* (1908); “Aridity” appeared in *Mystic Trees* (1913).

As a young man, Yeats had learned of Michael Field and was initially excited by the idea of two women writing in a male persona; in an early letter to Katherine Tynan he gushed about plans to attend a 1887 meeting of the Fellowship of New Life, a precursor to the Fabian Society, which they were hosting. He does not appear to have actually met Bradley and Cooper at the time, and five years later appeared to write off the co-authors in a disparaging review of their 1892 collection *Sight and Song*, saying that the book of lyrics, “following as it does ‘The Tragic Mary,’ is enough to make us turn our eyes for ever from the ‘false dawn’ we believed to be the coming day” (*Uncollected* 327). He did finally meet the pair at an amiable dinner at their Richmond house in June 1902, arranged by stage designer Charles Ricketts and Sturge Moore. Yeats chanted some of his poems (*Later* 92), and Field’s journal indicates that the women found him entertaining and interesting. The acquaintance led to a brief consideration by Yeats of Field’s play *Deirdre*, for the Irish National Theatre Society in 1903, though he subsequently rejected it as impractical to stage.

Yeats clearly did not understand the progression of Michael Field’s career, or the shared creative process of the two women, and generalized erroneously about it in his letters and essays despite his close friendship with their literary executor. For example, in 1936, as he was finishing up his *OBMV* introduction, he urged his young acolyte Margot Ruddock to read several of their lyrics: “‘Michael Field’ wrote nothing lasting until a few years before her death when probably under the influence of Charles Ricketts, a fine mind and man of great knowledge, she wrote a few lyrics very classical in form. It would not harm you to imitate her, there are some models that can be copied without loss” (*CL* #6505, 13 Jan 1936). Yeats was mistaken, as the Sapphic lyrics were from early in

Field’s career, a quarter-century before Bradley and Cooper died, and not, as he thought, solely the work of Cooper, whom he described in a BBC broadcast as “a dry, precise, precious, pious, finicking old maid” (*Later* 93), though she was his junior by two years. Suggesting that their strongest work showed the influence of Ricketts likewise displays a certain uninformed condescension.

Yet Yeats in his later years somehow found an affinity for Field he had not felt earlier. One possible explanation is that while he was reading for the *OBMV,* in addition to encountering the best of their work in a compilation by someone he respected, he was deeply immersed in a creative correspondence and confidential friendship with Dorothy Wellesley, herself a lesbian. He admitted to being fascinated by issues of identity and gender that Wellesley’s poetry raised (Foster, *Arch-Poet* 527). Although their correspondence does not mention Michael Field, it seems likely that his interest in Wellesley helped him see some of the sexual ambiguities of Field’s work in a new way. In the introduction, he even suggests that his own work, for a time, was of the same “school” as Sturge Moore and Field (*OBMV* xlii). In the same radio talk in which he disparages Cooper, he concludes that “she had studied Greek and found a new character, a second youth. She had begun, though I did not know it for many years, a series of little poems, masterpieces of simplicity, which resemble certain of Landor's lyrics, though her voice is not so deep, but high, thin and sweet” (*Later* 93).

Yeats recited two of the anthologized lyrics, “Sweeter Far Than the Harp, More Gold Than Gold” and “If They Honored Me,” in his 1936 BBC broadcast. Both offer good comparisons with his own work. In the latter poem, the speaker utters lines that

bring to mind the youngsters crowding around the “sixty-year-old smiling public man” of Yeats’s great poem about old age and beauty, “Among School Children”:

> They bring me gifts, they honour me,
>
> Now I am growing old;
>
> And wondering youth crowds round my knee,
>
> As if I had a mystery
>
> And worship to unfold. (*OBMV* 71)

The other poem comprises two iambic quatrains addressed to “Alcaeus” (possibly Alkaios of Mytilene, a poet and contemporary of Sappho) written in the voice of an older lover to a younger suitor:

> Thine elder that I am, thou must not cling
>
> To me, nor mournful for my love entreat:
>
> And yet, Alcaeus, as the sudden spring
>
> Is love, yea, and to veiled Demeter sweet.
>
>
> Sweeter than tone of harp, more gold than gold
>
> Is thy young voice to me; yet ah, the pain
>
> To learn I am beloved now I am old,
>
> Who, in my youth, loved, as thou must, in vain. (*OBMV* 71)

Here, perhaps, in the older woman’s erotic love for the younger one, Yeats finds himself identifying with the poet much as he does with Wellesley, despite the sexual orientation.

This is the sort of poem that Yeats was recommending to Ruddock, a much younger poet with whom he had become infatuated during late 1934 and 1935, at the time

he was preparing to edit the *OBMV*. The lyric offers parallels to his inability to respond sexually to her, despite his fevered imagination. That same regret is a subtext to an unpublished poem, “Margot,” that Yeats enclosed in a letter to Ruddock. It shows much the same longing for passion that Michael Field’s lyric did:

> All famine struck sat I, and then
>
> Those generous eyes on mine were cast,
>
> Sat like other aged men
>
> Dumfoundered [*sic*], gazing on a past
>
> That appeared constructed of
>
> Lost opportunities to love. (*CL* #6136, 21 Nov 1934)

Another poet in the *OBMV* whose work links Sturge Moore and Yeats was the Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941). Yeats and Moore worked hard to promote Tagore in literary circles when he visited England in 1912, introducing him to others in a position to help him, talking him up wherever possible, and promoting his first volume of English verse, which Yeats selected, revised, and edited from Tagore’s own translations out of the Bengali. They worked to improve the poems’ rhythm and imagery for an English audience—Yeats with Tagore’s *Gitanjali* and *The Gardener*, Moore with Tagore’s *The Crescent Moon*. The campaign proved quite successful: a Tagore “craze” ensued for a short while before the First World War, during which Tagore’s first English book, *Gitanjali*, rapidly sold through twenty printings (Foster *Apprentice* 472), and additional books quickly found their way into print. Moore nominated Tagore for the Nobel Prize in literature (Jelnikar 1006), which Tagore was awarded late in 1913—the first non-European to be so honored. According to Yeats’s biographer, Tagore was

initially thrilled by the help, but grew defensive as word spread about the extent of the revisions (472).

Ana Jelnikar recently launched a postcolonialist attack on Yeats’s infatuation with Tagore, seeing in it a condescending English paternalism (despite Yeats’s Irishness) that welcomed the Indian poet while he seemed a noble exotic, and then wrote him off when he refused to be pigeonholed as such by the English literary establishment. But even Jelnikar concedes that Yeats was genuinely excited about the poems. He wrote letters to friends about how he was carrying them around with him, and praised the poems of *Gitanjali* as “the work of a supreme culture, they yet appear as much the growth of the common soil as the grass and the rushes” (*Later* 167). This is not condescension to an exotic, but the same argument he made in “Adam’s Curse” about the need for great art to “seem a moment’s thought” (*YP* 78). Whether the effusive praise was justified is a different question.

A more useful question to examine might be why he chose to put his own reputation on the line in 1912 by campaigning so aggressively on the poet’s behalf. To be sure, he was paid for the work by Tagore’s (and his own) publisher, Macmillan & Co.; for later books by Tagore the ten-guinea fee (equivalent today to about £500) would certainly have been useful for the perpetually strapped-for-cash Yeats. Yet clearly he had also invested his own creative capital in the work: when in 1917 Macmillan asked him to make some light revisions on Tagore’s forthcoming *The Love Knot*, Yeats boasted that the process for the first two books involved

> a continual revision of vocabulary & even more of cadence. Tagore’s English was a foreigner’s English & as he wrote to me he ‘could never tell

> the words that had lost their souls or the words that had not yet got their souls’ from the rest. I left out sentence after sentence & probably putting one day with another spent some weeks on the task.” (*CL* #3137, 28 Jan 1917)

At a time of his life when many projects in the theater and with his own poems put demands on his time and energies, the Tagore editions could easily have been put aside. That he gave himself over to them so fully suggests that his imagination was truly engaged.

Yeats included seven Tagore poems in the *OBMV*, all of which were selected from the two volumes that he helped revise during the poet’s fifteen-month stay in England. They take the form of short lyrics comprising long, unrhymed lines, most indented and justified like prose, but lacking a consistent meter or stress pattern; some of the lines and images do repeat, but the effect is closer to rhythmic prose than verse. In the original Bengali, the poems followed an elaborate meter and rhyme scheme (Foster, *Apprentice* 470); the translations focus more on the imagery and emotional content than on any sort of formal structure.

Five of the poems are from the first book, *Gitanjali,* a compilation of metaphysically-tinged love songs and lyrics addressed to the divinity: “Day after Day,” in which the poet laments the human condition and anticipates meeting the divinity face to face; “If it is not my Portion,” in which the poet prays that his worldly success and daily occupations do not cause him to forget his regret at not encountering the divine directly; “I have got my Leave,” in which the poet bids farewell to his human brethren as he sets out on a mystical journey; “On the Slope of the Desolate River,” in which the lonely poet

is repeatedly refused by a young woman, occupied by the foolish business of day-to-day life; and “Thou art the Sky,” in which the poet praises the divinity as embodied in the sky and the earth around him. Two of the poems are from *The Gardener,* a collection of more secular love songs: “The Yellow Bird sings,” in which the poet lovingly describes details of his village and their proximity to his beloved; and “In the Dusky Path of a Dream,” in which the poet tells of meeting a woman who was his lover in a former life.

A few years later, developing his own theories of great cycles that govern human history and aspiration, Yeats would imagine a Byzantium that embodied the timelessness of great art. In his introduction to Tagore’s *Gitanjali*, he offers a similar vision, if one not yet fully thought through. It would not survive the disillusionment of dealing with a living poet rather than a metaphor, but illustrates the degree to which his taste for Tagore’s work was a natural outgrowth of his own philosophical enthusiasms:

> A tradition, where poetry and religion are the same thing, has passed through the centuries, gathering from learned and unlearned metaphor and emotion, and carried back again to the multitude the thought of the scholar and of the noble. If the civilization of Bengal remains unbroken, if that common mind which—as one divines—runs through all, is not, as with us, broken into a dozen minds that know nothing of each other, something even of what is most subtle in these verses will have come, in a few generations, to the beggar on the roads. (*Later* 167)

Tagore remains an important figure in the history of Indian letters, but from the perspective of almost a century later, his translations hold little interest stylistically as English poetry. Nor did Tagore himself prove to be an important contributor to the late-

Edwardian/early-Georgian conversation about poetry’s place in modern English letters. Once he had left the London literary scene, leaving only his poems behind, Yeats’s enthusiasm flagged somewhat, and he criticized some of the poet’s later work severely, claiming that Tagore had rushed out bad translations that ruined the reputation Yeats had helped him establish.

But Yeats never renounced his enthusiasm for the early volumes that had captivated him, and for its time, Yeats’s interest in India gives the *OBMV* a remarkably multicultural view of modern English poetry, if hopelessly narrow by today’s standards. What is perhaps most interesting about the episode is what it reveals about how Yeats saw himself. Two motivations seem obvious. First, he liked the material when he first encountered it, and found it fired his own imagination, and did not hesitate to promote it. Second, sponsoring Tagore became a sort of power play: it demonstrated that he had finally achieved the sort of influence as “King of the Cats” that could launch someone like Tagore. Yeats had returned from the wilderness like a Biblical prophet, and moved the center of English poetry in a new direction, beyond imperialist bluster and “belles-lettres” of the previous decade.

Taken as a whole, Yeats’s treatment of the Edwardian era in the *OBMV* lacks a clear argument. Compared with his treatment of the 1890s, in which he portrayed the Rhymers’ Club as an elite swimming against the Victorian mainstream, Yeats makes no effort in the *OBMV’*s introduction to identify different camps of English poetry during the first decade of the new century. With the quiescence of a literary avant-garde in England, at least until the years just before the First World War, he seems not to have perceived competing poetic sensibilities such as he saw and participated in previously.

This began to change as he became friends with Ezra Pound, but it was interrupted by the outbreak of war in 1914.

When the fighting broke out, four generations of writers that had more or less existed quietly alongside one another came into conflict. Yeats did not really belong to any of these groups and consequently did not have as much at stake in such generational rivalries. As we will see in the next chapter, the main distinction that mattered to him was the one between Ireland and England.

IV.

"We Were The Last Romantics": The Irishness of the *OBMV*

W. B. Yeats scattered poems by Americans, South Africans, Australians and other poets from English-speaking countries throughout *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse,* but he paid special attention to poems written in English by Irish poets. Nearly one-fifth of the writers anthologized in the book are Irish, and that does not include those Englishmen such as Lionel Johnson, who chose Celtic themes for some of their work, Frank Pearce Sturm, whose claim to Irishness Yeats doubted,[1] or George Barker, who had Irish family members.

Oscar Wilde's former lover, the poet Lord Alfred Douglas (then in his late sixties), blasted the Oxford University Press in late 1936 over being left out of the *OBMV*, and made a dig at the many obscure Irishmen that had been favored over himself. Rather than modern verse, he fumed, "[w]ould not shoneen[2] Irish be a more correct description?" (Sutcliffe 209). Many early reviewers, such as one from *The New York Times* in 1936*,* attacked the anthology as unrepresentative because of its strong Irish flavor. The reviewer complained that including so many Irish writers, and so many of

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1. With good reason. Sturm (1879–1942), a physician and minor poet, was born in Manchester. But his interests in mysticism, Celtic folklore, and poetry led to a long correspondence with Yeats (*CL* 19 Nov 1902). One of Sturm's poems, "Still-Heart," from *Eternal Helen,* was included in the *OBMV*, and showed a strong influence of early Yeats, as in its first line, "Dread are the death-pale Kings. . ." (*OBMV* 211). Yeats had urged Lennox Robinson to include it in *A Little Anthology of Modern Irish Poetry* for the Cuala Press (*CL* #5086, 27 Feb 1928), even though he was skeptical of Sturm's claim.

2. From the Irish *Seoinîn* (flunky, or toady): literally "little John [Bull]," sometimes used as a dig at Irish Protestants whose attitudes were a bit too English for the tastes of Irish Catholics.

their poems, made the supposedly representative anthology "not . . . fairly assembled." As proof, she noted that "on a personal decision that the Irishman Oliver Gogarty is one of England's greatest poets, Yeats includes seventeen of his poems to six apiece for [John] Masefield and A. E. Housman" (Widdemer). That reviewer, like many other critics, seems not to have noticed that Yeats was making a point about the way in which the Irish experience got to the heart of the "problem" faced by modern poets.

By 1935 and '36, he had come to see his early work in the context of a larger Irish cultural project that involved laying the folkloric foundation for a modern Irish literature, contributing vital new work in drama and verse to that literature himself, and passing along his influence for a new generation of Irish writers to build upon. Richard Finneran observes that Yeats described this project as "a scheme of intellectual nationalism . . ." (qtd. in "Literature" 19)[3].

His choices for the anthology suggest that, despite charges by contemporaries that he was encouraging provincialism and antiquarianism, he considered the Irish work essentially modern; he saw it as a foundation on which he and other modern writers were building. Seen in this light, the Irish element of the book goes beyond a mere excursion into supporting friends (though there was certainly some of that as well): For Yeats, the development of a modern Irish literature becomes as relevant to modern poetry as Pound's Vorticist and Imagist projects in the 1910s, Eliot's high modernism of the 1920s,

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3. Finneran explains this concept as follows: "The artist, avoiding the extreme of propaganda and going beyond the simplicity of mimesis [i.e., mere insistence on "Irish subject matter and Irish imagery"], attempts to elevate the ideals of the nation; and by so doing he hopes to provide both his later career and future writers with a more viable inheritance" (19). In other words, Yeats identified the Irish revival, which began with a rediscovery of folk traditions and led to *Finnegan's Wake,* as a kind of microcosm. And he saw, in certain Irish responses to change and the loss of the old hierarchies, the kind of "heroic" quality he thought most appropriate for modern poets.

or the Marxist-influenced verse of Auden in the early 1930s. The Irish experience thus distils the essence of the modern experience.

i. Early Revivalists: Rolleston, Boyd, and Trench

During the late 1880s and 1890s, as Yeats was publishing his first books of verse and cultivating friendships with the poets of the Rhymers' Club and other English contemporaries in London, he also spent a good deal of time reading Irish folklore in the British Museum and corresponding with folklorists such as Douglas Hyde. He wrote and compiled anthologies and prose works including *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry* (1888)*, Representative Irish Tales* (1891), *Irish Faerie Tales* (1892), *The Celtic Twilight* (1893), and *A Book of Irish Verse* (1895), with an eye toward establishing an authentic Irish voice and folk subject matter. The *OBMV* includes work by three Irish writers from this period: "Clonmacnoise," by Thomas William Rolleston (1857–1920), "Jean Richepin's Song," by Herbert Trench (1865–1923), and "The King's Son," by Thomas Boyd (1867–1927).

Of the three, Yeats was best acquainted with Rolleston, who had been a don at Trinity College, Dublin, and was in London during the time when Yeats was first establishing his literary reputation. Rolleston helped him organize an Irish literary society there, and was also a member of the Rhymers' Club. Yeats had long carried a grudge against him, referring to him as an "intimate enemy" (*Memoirs* 51) after Rolleston

undermined his plans for publication of a "National Library of Ireland."[4] But despite lasting enmity, Yeats continued to work with him on various projects, and often recalled "Conmacnoise" as a particularly beautiful poem, even quoting it in one of his Irish Senate speeches of the 1920s in connection with a bill on rural electrification projects (*Senate* 88).

Rolleston's poem translates the first five of nineteen stanzas of a fourteenth-century original by Angus O'Gillan (Yeats, *Early Articles* 580). Yeats appears to have taken the text from the version of the poem he used in his *Book of Irish Verse*, where it was entitled "The Dead at Clonmacnoise"; Rolleston did not publish it in book form until the early 1900s. Like his fellow Rhymer Ernest Rhys's "Song of the Graves" in the *OBMV*, the poem presents an elegiac litany of names from heroic times; in this case the names are on Irish gravestones on the grounds of the ruined monastery at Clonmacnoise. Graves and churchyards are common elements in Yeats's own verse, and in "Under Ben Bulben," his famous final meditation on his own death, he chooses to describe the imagined gravesite at Drumcliff in the same sort of heroic mood that Rolleston establishes while describing the final resting place of the sons of the clan of Conn.

Herbert Trench's "Jean Richepin's Song" is a translation too, but of a recent lyric ("The Mother's Heart," or "La Chanson de Marie-des-Anges") by the French poet and novelist Jean Richepin (1849–1926). Yeats was perhaps more interested in the song, than in Trench: he had heard it recited by the Irish actress Sara Allgood, and wrote to ask her for the specifics as he was beginning his work on the anthology (*CL* #5757, 5 Oct 1935).

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4. Swayed by the radical ideas of Maud Gonne and his old Fenian mentor John O'Leary, Yeats had been trying to build a literary foundation for a new Fenian movement, but was outmaneuvered by Rolleston and Charles Gavin Duffy, who advocated a more middle-of-the-road political approach (Foster, *Apprentice* 119).

It is a darkly humorous ballad that tells the story of a young man whose vampish lover demands that he bring her his mother's heart to feed to her dog; when the young man complies, but trips and falls, the mother's heart is heard fretting about whether the young man has injured himself in his fall. It originally appeared in Richepin's 1881 novel, *La Glu*, then was part of an opera libretto of the same title, and became a popular cabaret song in France (Ruttkowski 48), where Trench may have encountered it. Its attraction for an Irish writer may have lain in the way it echoed the traditional image of Ireland as a poor old woman betrayed by her children—an image that is repeated in another *OBMV* selection, Lady Gregory's translation of Patrick Pearse's "I am Ireland." Yeats himself had famously made the symbolic old woman into the key character of his play, *Cathleen ni Hoolihan.*

Trench was a writer, minor poet, and theater manager whose translation of Richepin appeared in 1907, in his *New Poems*. Yeats had previously praised poems by Trench that reworked old Irish stories into modern verse (*Prefaces* 108). "Jean Richepin's Song" is the sort of ballad he delighted in late in his career, about the time of the *OBMV* and the Cuala Press *Broadsides* that he worked on with F.R. Higgins and Dorothy Wellesley. In fact, two of Yeats's poems of the 1930s, "Crazy Jane Reproved," and "The Pilgrim," employ variations of the common nonsense-word refrain ("Fol de rol de raly O") that Trench uses in his lyric[5] (Trench uses it to translate a French nonsense

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5. Yeats wrote to his protégé, Margot Ruddock,

> I would like you to look at a poem (not to learn it) called, I think, "Crazy Jane reproved" because after each stanza I write 'fol de roll, fol de rol.' I think when you find words like that in an old ballad, they are meant to be sung to a melody, as [Harry] Partch, the California musician, I told you of sings his "meaningless words." He uses them to break the monotony of monotone. There is no special value in "fol de rol" any meaningless words

phrase, "*Et lon lan laire, et lon lan la*" (Richepin 133) in the original). Yeats cites the refrain in his letter to Allgood. One verse of "The Pilgrim" is particularly evocative of Trench's poem, both in its speaker's use of the refrain and its dark treatment of a mother's love:

> All know that all the dead in the world about that place are stuck,
> And that should mother seek her son she'd have but little luck
> Because the fires of Purgatory have ate their shapes away;
> I swear to God I questioned them, and all they had to say
> *Was fol de rol de rolly O.* (*YP* 320)

The Irish journalist Thomas Boyd published one book of poetry, *Poems* (1906), that drew on Irish heroic legends, then vanished into obscurity late in life.[6] In a letter to Katharine Tynan, Yeats wrote him off as "no good as a whole" (*CL* 1 Sept 1906), but praised one of his poems, "Ballyvourny." He includes instead an often-anthologized[7] poem, "The King's Son" (*OBMV* 98), which tells a story from Irish legend of a king's son who is cursed to ride a horse by day, and change into a horse himself by night.

Even though all three men were undistinguished part-time poets, it would be a mistake to conclude that Yeats included them merely to pad the anthology with Irish

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> would do. Kingsley once used "barrum, barrum, barrum, baree." (*CL* #6134, 23 Nov 1934)

6. So obscure did Boyd become that Yeats and the Oxford editors seem not to have even realized that he had died in 1927: early editions of the *OBMV* include only his birth date, even though he had died nine years before the anthology appeared. Earlier in the century Boyd had absconded with money from one of the societies that Yeats helped organize, and seems to have slipped out of sight into a life of dissipation in the years prior to his death (*CL* III, 487–488).

7. Boyd's book of poems was not in Yeats's library, which suggests that he may have taken the poem from an anthology.

writers. Many more widely published Irish contemporaries from this period of Yeats's career were omitted, notably his early friend and confidante Katharine Tynan Hinkson, whose work Yeats reviewed enthusiastically during the late 1880s, and included in his 1895 anthology of Irish verse. Tynan's work was derivitive of the English mainstream, and not rooted in the cultural traditions he sought to highlight; Yeats later came to see her work as insubstantial, even where it touched on Ireland. Rolleston, Trench, and Boyd, though less prolific poets than Tynan, and no friends of Yeats, seem to have more successfully hit on the element of the Irish project that he found relevant to the *OBMV*—its attempt to ground the often artificial and disconnected modern experience in something rooted and genuine, such as Irish folklore or balladry.

ii. The Revivalist Dialects of Lady Gregory, Synge, and AE

Augusta, Lady Gregory (1852–1932) and John Millington Synge were co-directors with Yeats during the formative years of the Abbey Theatre, and figured prominently in his account of the flowering of Irish literature before the First World War. While few would argue that they were not major dramatists and catalysts for modern Irish literature, making the case for their importance to modern poetry is more challenging.

Yeats says virtually nothing about Lady Gregory in his introduction, and the five poems of hers that he includes are all translations of other poets' work in Irish. She is nevertheless a major presence in the anthology: two of the fourteen anthologized poems by Yeats, "Coole Park, 1929" and "Coole and Ballylee, 1931," revolve around Gregory

and her home, while a third Yeats poem, "An Irish Airman Foresees His Death," takes its inspiration from the death of her son, and a fourth, "To a Friend Whose Work Has Come to Nothing," consoles her for frustrations in the cultural battle. In a sense, a lengthy discussion of her importance in the introduction would have been redundant: the poems themselves offer a complex portrait of Yeats's friend and collaborator, describe the place in his affections and imagination that she and her estate at Coole held for him, and suggest why he thought her work important.

The five translations by Gregory are prose, presented as lines of verse without any clear metrical or rhythmic pattern.[8] They appear at first to be of a piece with the other folk-inspired poems and translations of the anthology, but their significance lies in the way that they present an "Irish" English.[9] In a lecture delivered not long after her death, Yeats argued that Lady Gregory's stylistic innovation lay in the development of the "Kiltartan" dialect in which she rendered her translations from the Irish:

> Her great discovery in literature was that dignity and power of the form of English used by the Irish peasants. Into the dialect, which is sometimes Gaelic in construction, Tudor in vocabulary, she translated all the great epic stories of Ireland, and when Synge and she began to use [it] for

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8. The subtitle of Gregory's *Kiltartan Poetry Book* describes her work as "prose translations from the Irish."

9. Although I briefly discuss here the question of whether the Irish-flavored English of Lady Gregory and John Millington Synge reflects an authentic Irish voice, readers seeking a fuller discussion of the issue should see Elizabeth Gilmartin's thorough article on the subject, "The Anglo-Irish Dialect: Mediating Linguistic Conflict."

> dramatic purposes, modern Irish prose took its most characteristic shape.
>
> ("Modern" 259–60)[10]

The selections of her work in the *OBMV* are translations into this dialect of three original Irish lyrics written in the style of folk poetry by Douglas Hyde, one original lyric by Patrick Pearse, and one lyric by an anonymous eighteenth-century Irish poet; Hyde and Pearse also feature in Yeats's own poems in the anthology, which, when read alongside those about Gregory, makes for a complex web of associations. Including them also permits Yeats to present Hyde and Pearse as writers themselves, part of the larger Irish project, while at the same time calling attention to Lady Gregory's work.

Douglas Hyde (1860–1949) had been an early collaborator with Yeats in his explorations of Irish myths and folktales during the 1880s and 1890s. He was an expert linguist whose Protestant background and fluent Irish allowed him to bridge the divide between Anglo-Irish and native Irish literary traditions. Yeats praised Hyde's *Love Songs of Connacht*, which offered both the Irish originals of folk poems and Hyde's translations, though he privately commented that Hyde was ruled by the "folk mind, the . . . incapacity for knowing whether he is writing sense or nonsense" (*CL* #5512, 22 Sep 1931).

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10. Gilmartin puts Gregory in between Hyde and Synge in the context of the larger cultural project of the revival:

> In reading Synge and Gregory's use of the dialect, we can position Hyde as an inspirational figure for both Gregory and Synge. Gregory then bridged the ideas fostered by Hyde and those fostered by Synge. A cultural nationalist, Hyde aimed to conserve the use of the Irish language and the cultural material found in it. As a progressive figure, Synge wanted to make Ireland a European country, and he saw using the English language as the means to do this. (9)

In Yeats's preface to Hyde's *Love Songs of Connacht,* he said what he liked best was the rhythm of Hyde's prose; what he liked least was Hyde's tendency in verse translations to adopt traditional poeticisms:

> There had been other translators, but they had a formal eighteenth century style, that took what Dr Hyde would call the "sap and pleasure" out of simple thought and emotion. Their horses were always steeds and their cows kine, and their rhythms had the formal monotony or the oratorical energy of that middle class literature that comes more out of will and reason than out of imagination and sympathy. . . . Dr Hyde's prose translations, printed at the end of this book, are I think even better than his verse ones; for even he cannot always escape from the influence of his predecessors when he rhymes in English. His imagination is indeed at its best only when he writes in Irish or in that beautiful English of the country people who remember too much Irish to talk like a newspaper. . . .
>
> (*Essays* 135)

Although Yeats did not speak Irish, and thus was in no position to judge whether Hyde's translations were accurate, he could address the need for an unaffected modern voice for literature that would help banish Victorian poeticism. Hyde's prose suggested to him that it might be found in the everyday language of rural English-speaking Irish people.

Hyde's political program of "de-Anglicizing" Ireland through the work of the Gaelic League increasingly led him away from the literary work that Lady Gregory wanted him to pursue. In his capacity as the league's President, she said, he wrote "official odes . . . [and] national ballads . . . [that were] not so good as his more personal

poems" (*Poets* 76–77). In "Coole Park, 1929," when Yeats comments on the "noble blade the muses buckled on" Hyde, he recalls the years that Hyde came to Gregory's estate as an active collaborator on projects in folklore and drama, working from outlines that she and Yeats sketched out for Irish-language plays. Such poetic inspiration, though, was eventually "beaten into prose" (*OBMV* 88) by the demands of his political work.

Some of the *OBMV* poems by Hyde appeared in his book of original lyrics in Irish, *Úlla den Chraobh*,[11] and some appear to have been part of a manuscript of his published and unpublished poems that he gave to Lady Gregory in 1901 (Dunleavy 231). He had helped her learn written Irish; for spoken Irish, she initially required the help of some Irish-speaking schoolteachers when interviewing native speakers (206). Her translations of his poems were collected in her books *Poets and Dreamers* (1903) and *The Kiltartan Poetry Book* (1919), both of which reached a wide literary audience compared with the small Irish-reading public that read his original work.

What makes them notable is their avoidance of typically poeticized English, or even of standard conversational English, for that matter. For example, in "Cold, Sharp Lamentation," the speaker exclaims, "Oh, there was loneliness with me!" (*OBMV* 34). A more standard English translation of the Irish would be something like, "Oh, I was lonely," or the more poetic, "Oh, I knew such loneliness"; but by translating the Irish idiom *liom (le me*) as "with me" (which is its literal meaning; it connotes ownership; there is no verb in Irish for "to have"), Lady Gregory makes the expression more

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11. Originally published in 1900 as *Ubhla de'n Craoibh* by the Dublin firm Gill and Sons.

unfamiliar and interesting to an audience reading English.[12] The two other Hyde poems are a social satire spoken by a peasant, "He Meditates on the Life of a Rich Man," and a love song from a dying lover, "Will You Be as Hard?"

The other two poets whose work Lady Gregory translates in the *OBMV* are more directly nationalistic. One is an Irish Jacobite lyric from the eighteenth-century that she identifies as having been written by a priest, Shemus Cartan, living in exile (*Poets* 98). It went untitled in her 1903 book *Poets and Dreamers,* and was republished in her 1919 *Kiltartan Poetry Book* as "A Poem Written in Time of Trouble by an Irish Priest Who Had taken Orders in France," the title that Yeats used in the *OBMV.* In it the poet laments the fate of all the Irish social classes following the flight of the "strong men"; the music of the land—its harps, and organ-pipes—has been replaced by wailing and mourning, and the only favorable sign is the wind that will bear the poet's ship away. The other, "I am Ireland," is by Patrick Pearse (1879–1916), a radicalized student of Hyde's (Dunleavy 243) who was executed by the British for his role as a leader of the 1916 Easter Rising. Gregory's translation is a literal prose version of Pearse's Irish original, which evokes the mythic image of Ireland as the "poor old woman" betrayed by her children.

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12. Gilmartin notes that postcolonialist critics tend to view Gregory and Synge's "hybrid dialects of Anglo-Irish" as

> a means to a compromise that, at a time when language loyalty equaled national loyalty, allowed these writers to challenge this concept of linguistic identity. . . . Synge and Gregory sought to offer an "other" language that in its very foundation in English still maintained enough Irish influence as to no longer be recognized as Standard English. It is and is not the language of the colonizer. (13)

In the context of the OBMV, though, I would suggest that Yeats was more interested in it as a model for a fresh English poetic diction that eschewed traditional literary flourishes than as a statement of political identity.

The enigmatic final stanza of Yeats's "The Statues," one of Yeats's *Last Poems*, can be read as nodding to "I Am Ireland"; in Pearse's poem, the poor old woman notes with pride that she has given birth to Cuchulain, the hero of the Red Branch cycle that Lady Gregory's translation popularized for a modern audience. Yeats explicitly links the cultural rebirth of Ireland with the modern world, likening his lifelong project of giving voice to an Irish consciousness to a hero battling the waves of a "filthy modern tide": Pearse, embodying the "poor old woman" who symbolizes Ireland, has somehow used the cultural framework of the literary revival to become part of a timeless design—an impulse like that which Blake wrote about in "The Tyger" or "Jerusalem," poems whose imagery "The Statues" subtly evokes:

> When Pearse summoned Cuchulain to his side,
> What stalked through the Post Office? What intellect,
> What calculation, number, measurement, replied?
> We Irish, born into that ancient sect
> But thrown upon this filthy modern tide
> And by its formless spawning fury wrecked,
> Climb to our proper dark, that we may trace
> The lineaments of a plummet-measured face. (*YP* 344)

The portrait of Lady Gregory that emerges from Yeats's two poems about her in the *OBMV* is of a woman whose part in all of this has been, like the Kiltartan dialect through which the story of Cuchulain could finally be told in English, to enable the eternal design to make itself known. In "Coole Park, 1929," her work is equated with the estate on which she lives:

> Great works constructed there in nature's spite
>
> For scholars and for poets after us,
>
> Thoughts long knitted into a single thought,
>
> A dance-like glory that those walls begot. (*OBMV* 88–89)

The poem presents Hyde, Yeats himself, Synge, and Gregory's nephews Hugh Lane and John Shaw-Taylor as men drawn to Coole by Gregory's character who were there able to tap into mystical convergences of the place and time that inspired them to do great things. It concludes as an elegy to a place where the Irish literary revival was centered, and which would, on Lady Gregory's death, be lost to Yeats and future generations.

The more complex "Coole Park and Ballylee, 1931" (*OBMV* 89–90), offers a personal reflection on Gregory's home and Yeats's farewell to it. The poem opens with the poet viewing Coole Park from a distance, from the tower of Ballylee, across the intervening landscape, and reflecting on his affection for and attraction to the ancestral house of Lady Gregory's family. As he envisions Coole, his imagination flows like water to it ("What's water but the generated soul?" he asks) and arrives at the beech-wood around the lake. There, the leafless winter chill seems a tragic mirror of Yeats's mood, and brings to mind images from his years there: A departing swan (which in its whiteness seems to him to concentrate the sky, and echoes the symbolic birds of "The Wild Swans at Coole") becomes an emblem of the spirit departing the place as Lady Gregory nears her death. For the poet, the swan's beauty makes up for the loss of the place. He alludes to Lady Gregory's daughter-in-law (a "child"), who held title ("a spot of ink") to the property and sold it ("it can be murdered") so that the home would be torn down against Lady Gregory's wishes—and to some extent to spite Yeats (Foster, *Arch-Poet* 181).

Yeats's attention then shifts from the grounds to the house, and to the aged aristocrat herself (we see only her cane, "a stick upon the floor," rather than the woman), who "toils from chair to chair" in the library. That room encloses ideas of high art, greatness, accomplishment, and nobility that he and his family, and she, appreciated: "where none has reigned that lacked a name and fame / Or out of folly into folly came." The poet appears as a "travelled" man who reflects on his own affection for the place, and its associations with the inherited glory of the rich; once they "seemed once more dear than life." It was a place that "glorified / Marriages, alliances and families," and the female "ambition" to nurture offspring and live in sensuous comfort, as well as a point of stability for the male poet/traveler driven by "fashion" and "fantasy" to shift around from place to place, like the Bedouins in Charles Doughty's *Arabia Deserta* (a favorite book of Gregory's, according to Yeats ("Modern" 259)).

"We were the last romantics," Yeats writes, the "we" referring to himself and Lady Gregory, as well as the other Irish revivalists who came to Coole. Their themes were the heroic ones that their work embodied in an unheroic modern world: "traditional sanctity" (saintliness, spirituality, mysticism), "loveliness" (aesthetic and physical beauty); "the book of the people" (folk literature and belief); and talent and genius. But he realizes that with Lady Gregory's departure, the high, old ways of art—the aesthetic forms glimpsed in the library—now have no spirit to animate them. The eternal verities are still there, but Coole has changed: It is a horse, ready to be ridden again, wearing the saddle that great artists have mounted since the days of Homer, in a landscape now darkening at day's end, with the swanlike whiteness of Lady Gregory's spirit fading in the dusk.

Like Lady Gregory, the importance of John Millington Synge (1871–1909) to modern poetry lies less in his poetry itself and more in his importance to Yeats the modern poet. The selections from his work include eight original poems and four prose translations, three from Petrarch and one from Villon. All are taken from *Poems and Translations* (1909), a collection he submitted to Yeats for publication by the Cuala Press shortly before his death, and that Yeats worked through with him in November 1908 (Foster, *Apprentice* 399). In his introduction to the *OBMV*, Yeats discusses Synge in the context of the folk tradition that he saw in the work of Hardy and Housman, and their efforts to find in that tradition a poetic voice that did away with the abstract poeticisms of Victorian style. Synge, he wrote, "brought back masculinity to Irish verse with his harsh disillusionment" [13] (*OBMV* xiv).

As with the work of Lady Gregory, Yeats saw Synge's greatest strength in the way he discovered a distinctively Irish idiom in English that resisted the artifices of late-Victorian English verse. Just as he had praised Gregory's translation work for its "Tudor" qualities, he praised Synge for making "the speech of peasants seem . . . less a dialect than an ancient classic speech" ("Modern" 261). Of Synge's poems, he wrote, "Even the translations of poems that he has made his own by putting them into that melancholy dialect of his, seem to express his emotion at the memory of poverty and the approach of death. The whole book is of a kind almost unknown in a time when lyricism has become abstract and impersonal" (*Essays* 307).

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13. Synge was disillusioned with the notion, championed by Hyde and some literary nationalists, that Irish Gaelic could ever regain its status as Ireland's primary tongue. Most Irish people spoke English, if of a distinctive Irish-flavored variety, and Synge's work sought to capture the gritty realities of actual usage rather than the ideals vainly promoted by the Gaelic League.

Synge was conscious of trying to find an alternative to both traditional poetic manner and traditional subject matter. In a letter that Yeats published in the Cuala Press edition of the poems, Synge wrote that just as "there has been a false 'poetic diction' so there has been and is a false 'poetic material;' . . . if verse is to remain a living thing it must be occupied, when it likes, with the whole of a poet's life and experience" (vii). In his preface to the book, he wrote, "when men lose their poetic feeling for ordinary life, and cannot write poetry of ordinary things, their exalted poetry is likely to lose its strength of exaltation, in the way men cease to build beautiful churches when they have lost happiness in building shops" (1). Unlike Yeats's early work, which was preoccupied with the realms of Faerie and the heroic folktales of Irish tradition, Synge's rural Irishmen were denizens of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—modern people struggling with poverty and isolation in a changing world. The poems that Yeats selected for the *OBMV* offer examples of Synge's attempts to exalt the ordinary.

The eight original poems are mordant reflections on mortality, fame, and loneliness. They include one extended litany, "Queens," and seven epigrammatic lyrics. "Queens," like earlier *OBMV* selections by Ernest Rhys and T. W. Rolleston, rolls out a list of poetic-sounding names (in this case, the names of famous or obscure queens), but concludes with a darkly modern twist from litany to ironic love poem in which the poet notes that all those named are dead, while his beloved—his queen—isn't yet. In "On an Anniversary," Synge briefly reflects on the prospect of his own death-date appearing in a book of his poems. "On a Birthday" appeals to a lark of literary pedigree, requesting it to sing on the poet's birthday. "In Glencullen" is also ostensibly addressed to birds, the proud songsters beloved by poets; but, he reminds the birds, he is no different from the

other predators that plague the reality of their existence. "A Question" asks the poet's friend if she will attend his funeral,[14] and she replies that the crowd of "living idiots" there would make her "rave and rend them with [her] teeth" (*OBMV* 146). In "I've Thirty Months," written when Synge was dying of Hodgkin's lymphoma, the poet looks forward to his fortieth birthday and measures himself against other poets who have died young. "Prelude" recalls a rural idyll in which the poet retreats to a simpler life. In "Winter," an impoverished poet paces the streets of a foreign city. All of the poems share a dark, self-deprecating sense of irony and a plain, unpolished diction.

Synge's translations are in many ways more interesting than his original lyrics and, as Reed Dasenbrock suggests, anticipate the sort of work that Ezra Pound would do a few years later in searching for a new way of writing English by translating work from other languages and traditions (43).[15] It is no coincidence that both writers have been repeatedly cited as important influences on Yeats as he sought to move his verse away from the aestheticism of the 1890s and toward a harder-edged, more modern diction. The most notable feature of the translations is that instead of striving for the usual "poetic" English character, Synge presents his translations in West-of-Ireland vernacular English, complete with grammatical inversions and keenings: "and I crying out: Ohone, when will I see that day . . . ?" (*OBMV* 148). Unlike Lady Gregory's translations from the Irish, Synge does not merely translate the syntactical oddities of Irish poetry literally into

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14. In his *Memoirs*, Yeats wonders if this lyric came from something he had said to Synge (202–203); in his published autobiography, he writes that Synge's friend Molly Allgood claims it is based on her answer to Synge's question (519).

15. Yeats tended to give Synge more credit than Pound for helping him modernize his diction, and indeed, as James Longenbach observes, Pound acknowledged this during the winters he spent with Yeats at Stone Cottage (19, 209).

English, but rather chooses an Irish-flavored English as the best way to capture the feeling of the original classical and Romance languages. Yeats includes three of Synge's seventeen translations from Petrarch's *Canzoniere*: "He wishes he might die and follow Laura," "He understands the Great Cruelty of Death," and "Laura waits for him in Heaven."

The fourth translation is perhaps the most interesting of all. "An Old Woman's Lamentations" comes from the fifteenth-century French of François Villon, but in its rhythms and its subject matter it will remind any reader of Yeats of the voice of Crazy Jane and other crones who would speak in his later poems:

> That's what's left over from the beauty of a right woman—a bag of bones, and legs the like of two shrivelled sausages going beneath it.
>
> It's of the like of that we old hags do be thinking of the good times are gone away from us, and we crouching on our hunkers by a little fire of twigs, soon kindled and soon spent, we that were the pick of many. (*OBMV* 150)

Another major figure in the revival, George William Russell (1867–1935), who wrote under the pen-name "AE," was Yeats's oldest literary friend and shared with him an abiding interest in mysticism and the occult. He died while Yeats was compiling the anthology. His eight poems in the *OBMV* include four from early work, and four from *Enchantment and Other Poems* (1930), representing his later interests. Throughout his career Yeats was often at odds with Russell, particularly during the 1900s and 1910s, when Russell was at the center of a literary group in Dublin that clashed with certain projects and purposes of Yeats and his circle. In his introduction to the anthology Yeats

likens his friend's poetry to that of "translators," describing him as someone who "had little in common with his time" (*OBMV* xli). In a sense, his enthusiasm for the work of Gregory and Synge lies in the way they translate Irish speech into an authentic new modern voice; what Russell translates, however, has little to do with poetic style.

From their early days together in art school during the 1880s, Russell was a more doctrinaire mystic than Yeats, latching onto the ideas of the Theosophical Society at a time when Yeats was constantly challenging and testing them: AE later observed that the tension between Yeats's skepticism and his wish to believe was what distinguished him (Foster, *Arch-Poet* 524). For Yeats, that lack of a skeptical, critical eye was the main failing of Russell's poetry: He would have had AE go further, and subject his visions to the sort of systematic imaginative analysis that Yeats applies to his wife's automatic writing in *A Vision.* Even while praising an early collection extravagantly in the 1890s, Yeats was careful to portray his friend as someone inspired by a mystical vision rather than the discipline and technique of the conscious artist:

> These poems, perhaps the most beautiful and delicate that any Irishman of our time has written, seem to me all the more interesting because their writer has not come from any of our seats of literature and scholarship, but from among sectaries and visionaries whose ardour of belief and simplicity of mind has been his encouragement and his inspiration.
>
> (*Uncollected Prose I,* 123–24)

Thus, for Yeats, AE essentially "translates" mystical visions into language, much as the translations of Lady Gregory and Synge conveyed the Irish language in a provincial English untainted by traditional poeticisms. Where he saw their translations as

important contributions to finding a modern style, he saw AE's "translations" as a means of finding a voice for a modern subject matter—authentic mystical experience in a world hostile to it. But the very purity of AE's translation was a barrier to its success as poetry. In his unpublished *Memoirs,* he observed that AE simply wouldn't go far enough:

> He saw constantly before him in vision an extraordinary world, the nature spirits as he believed, and I wished him to record all as Swedenborg had recorded, and submit his clairvoyance to certain tests. This seemed to him an impiety, and perhaps the turning towards it of the analytic intellect checked his gift, and he became extremely angry; and my insistence on understanding symbolically what he took for literal truth increased his anger. (130-1)

AE's short lyrics "Reconciliation" and "Immortality," both written in the early 1890s, evoke a Walt Whitman-like Romantic mysticism in which the poet finds ecstatic union with parts of the world around him. In the former, the poet describes mystical connection with presences that evoke both natural (grass) and Judeo-Christian (a child/king) religious imagery. In the latter, he equates the soul and spirit to smoke and fire.[16] In two other early poems, "Desire" and "The Great Breath," the poet evokes eternal presences more abstractly, employing phrases such as "yearning inexpressible" and "the breath of Beauty"—a quality of AE's mid-career work that Yeats came to criticize.

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16. "Immortality" resembles a poem that Yeats wrote several years later, "The Blessed" (1898). Both poems explore the nature of the spirit, and both rhyme "desire" and "fire," a rhyme that Yeats also used in several other lyrics that explore mystical themes, including "No Second Troy," "On Woman," "Presences," "Sailing to Byzantium," and "Vacillation."

Yeats viewed AE's mindset as essentially religious rather than poetic, and thus one which led him to suffer fools and bad poets gladly: "Russell endures them because he has the religious genius, and to the religious genius all souls are of equal value: the queen is not more than the apple-woman. His poetical genius does not affect his mind as a whole, and probably he puts aside as unworthy every suggestion of his poetical genius which would separate man from man" (*Memoirs* 148). The four late poems from *Enchantment and Other Poems,* "The Gay," "The Cities," "New York," and "Germinal" share a less ecstatically religious tone than the early work: they are more detached, the work of an observer commenting on the transcendent rather than a visionary in the moment of revelation.

Writing in 1932, Yeats observed that Russell "believes that we can all trace back our lives as a whole from event to event to [the] first acts of the mind, and those acts through vision to the pre-natal life" (*Later Essays* 116). In the *OBMV,* he illustrates this with AE's "Germinal," which explores what happens when a young person goes knocking at the gate of the dream world, and is answered by that world:

> A door opens, a breath, a voice
>
> From the ancient room,
>
> Speaks to him now. Be it dark or bright
>
> He is knit with his doom. (*OBMV* 104)

While Yeats's system in *A Vision* explores similar notions that a person's nature was shaped according to the patterns of history and the phases of the moon, part of what distinguishes his poems from the "translation" that he sees in AE's work is the constant struggle to reconcile the particularities of life with the abstract forces that he sees

underlying it. His response is far less passive and fatalistic than AE's, something that Russell admitted in a letter to Yeats shortly before his death:

> There are deeps in the Irish character to be sounded. I could not sound them. I could only find intermittently access to some spiritual nature which is not more Irish than Hindu. But to find access to that however intermittently was the only thing I really care about in life & it is the reason why so often I could not or would not be with you in your work or policies. . . . (qtd. in Foster, *Arch Poet* 523)

iii. The Next Generation: Padraic Colum, Joseph Campbell, James Stephens, and James Joyce

Although Synge was a decade younger than Yeats, he shared with Lady Gregory and Yeats a basic approach to the Irishness of his subject; he undertook his sojourn in the Aran Islands as a Victorian anthropologist might, studying the folk ways of the Irish-speaking denizens of a West-of-Ireland culture to which he did not fully belong, however sympathetic he might be. The essential distinction between the generation of the three great Irish Revivialists and the generation that followed, besides their Anglo-Irish Protestant background, was that poets of the latter generation wrote from within the culture of the Revival, rather than from outside of it.

Yeats includes only one lyric by Belfast poet Joseph Campbell (1879–1944) in the anthology. In the introduction, he associates Campbell with Padraic Colum (1881–

1972) as a writer of modern folk songs, a reference to Campbell and Herbert Hughes's *Songs of Uladh* (1904), a popular success in which his lyrics were set to music by Hughes. "In Ireland," Yeats writes, "where still lives undisturbed the last folk tradition of western Europe, the songs of Campbell and Colum draw from that tradition their themes, return to it, and are sung to Irish airs by boys and girls who have never heard the names of the authors" *(OBMV* xiii). Campbell's poem, "The Dancer," which appeared in his *Irishry* (1913), describes a dancer who, in the Irish folk style, performs with an impassive face and stiff upper body, but "lightning in his tread" (*OBMV* 193); Yeats quoted the poem approvingly in his 1935 introduction to *Broadsides*, written as he was compiling the anthology. Although Campbell's play, *Judgment,* was performed by the Abbey Theatre in 1912, he was not closely associated with Yeats's group. Yeats's letters to him are patronizing and dismissive, and he referred to Campbell as "ill bred" (*CL* #1855, 21 Mar 1912) in one letter to Lady Gregory.

Padraic Colum was a closer acquaintance. He was one of a group of younger Irish writers who gravitated to AE's Dublin "salon," and his career in Ireland ultimately suffered because of tension between the camps of Yeats and AE. He was initially welcomed among the actors and playwrights of Yeats's Irish National Theatre Society in part because his Catholic background distinguished him from the mainly Protestant writers in Yeats's circle. Although he wrote a play about Irish peasants, *The Land*, that was an early success for the Abbey Theatre, he subsequently broke with Yeats and joined Russell to write for The Abbey's short-lived rival, the Theatre of Ireland. Colum's subsequent dramatic work never matched his early success. His 1907 book of poems, *Wild Earth*, has been called "a primary text of the [Irish] Revival" (Garratt 54), but lack

of opportunity in Dublin's small literary community led him to emigrate to the United States in search of better prospects. Once there, the subject matter of his writing began to move away from the portraits of Irish peasant life that had originally interested Yeats.

Yeats feared that the influence of Russell's circle had led Colum away from the craftsmanship and attention to technique required to make his poetry lasting: "A sensitive, naturally dreaming man like Colum, even if he does not consciously share their ideas, is lost in a world like this, a world where no technique is respected, no merely laborious attainment applauded, but where all the bad passions of the disappointed sit like crows" (*Memoirs* 147–8). Privately, he had been critical of Colum's handling of dialect (*CL* #113, 15 Feb 1905). He was less critical of this by the time of his 1936 introduction to the *OBMV*, but he essentially dismissed Colum as someone whose only real success had been in briefly finding a modern literary voice for the folk tradition (*OBMV* xiii).

For the anthology, Yeats selected four lyrics from Colum's 1932 collection, *Poems*: "A Drover" and "No Child" had first appeared in *Wild Earth*; "Old Soldier" and "The Poor Girl's Meditation" had appeared in *Dramatic Legends and Other Poems* (1922), published after Colum had emigrated. "A Drover" offers a nostalgic portrait of a cowherd exulting in the freedom of the road as he drives his cattle to new pastures, dreaming of romantic tales and scoffing at the constraints of the farmers and British soldiers he passes. "No Child" is the lament of a childless woman who is reminded of her barrenness by the cooing of pigeons in the night. "The Poor Girl's Meditation" is a rewriting of an Irish lyric, "The Brow of the Red Mountain," translated by Douglas Hyde in *Love Songs of Connacht* (21–23); Colum uses ballad form (Garratt 54) to render the poem in less accurate but more felicitous English than Hyde did, evoking the original

Irish sound scheme that Hyde's translation lost and omitting a stanza in which the speaker curses her rival. "Old Soldier," though it appeared after the First World War, is the lament of a nineteenth-century Irish soldier, perhaps a veteran of the Napoleonic Wars, reduced to wandering and penury.

These are the sorts of portraits of the folk that Yeats, conscious of literary precedent and technique, used as jumping-off points for more ambitious ideas in his own poetry, but that Colum, influenced by Russell, was content to present without much reflection. The Colum that Yeats gives us is the young writer he knew in Dublin, writing of peasant themes from a Catholic cultural background. (He rejected a collection of Colum's later poems for the Cuala Press, calling the title poem "curiously dry and cold" and other poems "lack[ing] emotion" (*CL* #5984, 29 Dec 1933).) The poems have few thematic connections to Yeats's own work aside from their evocation of the peasantry; their characters recall some of the speakers in Yeats's early verse, such as "The Ballad of Moll McGee" and "The Fiddler of Dooney," with more authentic Irish voices than Yeats managed, but their sentimentality works against the modern authenticity of their language. Yet Yeats's interest in Colum's Irish-flavored English, and in the folk ballad, make the work relevant to his exploration of emerging poetic reactions to modernity.

Like Colum and Frank O'Connor, James Stephens (1882–1950) was a discovery and early disciple of AE, but unlike Colum he became a close ally of Yeats, who championed Stephens as "the future of Irish literature" (qtd. in Finneran, "Literature" 22). Nor was Yeats the only major literary figure to see great promise in him: James Joyce recruited him to help him complete *Finnegans Wake* (Finneran, "Further" 143), though nothing ultimately came of the notion. Yeats's introduction to the *OBMV* notes

offhandedly that he considered himself to be of the same "school" as Synge and Stephens for a time (xli)[17], and the selected poems show Stephens to be a more ambitious poet than Colum, with more range and wit, and a more realistic eye less apt to be seduced by the sentimentality and romanticism of the folk material that he draws upon.

The *OBMV* includes eight poems by Stephens, all of which appear in his 1931 *Collected Poems*, which Yeats owned. Three ("Deirdre," "The Rivals," and "In the Night") were originally published in his 1915 collection, *Songs of the Clay.* Four ("A Glass of Beer," "Egan O Rahilly," "Blue Blood," and "Inis Fal") were published in his 1918 *Reincarnations,* in which Stephens translated or adopted the personas of older Irish poets for his own work. The last selection, "The Main-Deep," is written in the style of Imagism and differs markedly from the others; it was published after the others, appearing in *Dublin Magazine* in 1925.

Yeats singles out Stephens's "Egan O Rahilly" for special comment in the introduction as an example of "the Gaelic poets of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries wandering, after the flight of the Catholic nobility, among the boorish and the ignorant, singing their loneliness and their rage" (xiv). Stephens's poem is a translation from an Irish original attributed to the wandering bard O Rahilly, lamenting his poverty and the days of his youth when he was a celebrated poet in the courts of Irish nobles before the "flight of the Wild Geese."

Yeats does much the same thing in his 1937 poem, "The Curse of Cromwell," where a wandering Irish poet describes how he dreamed of

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17. As no such school existed, except in Yeats's imagination, one might speculate that he had in mind the mix of the earlier generation's interest in the folk and the later one's ironic awareness of its limits that can be found in Yeats's treatment of folk material in the last two decades of his poetic career.

. . . a great house in the middle of the night,

Its open lighted doorway and its windows all alight,

And all my friends were there and made me welcome too;

But I woke in an old ruin that the wind howled through. . . . (*YP* 311)

The difference is that Stephens cleaves to the original, where Yeats creates a fiction and uses the dramatic situation as a point of departure for a poem that comments as much on current events as on Irish history.

What distinguishes Stephens's translations from, for example, Lady Gregory's or Hyde's, and marks them as the work of a younger generation, is the irreverent wit and irony, paired with skillful versification. They seem the work of a poet rather than that of an anthropologist. The voice is reminiscent of Synge's in its grim, realistic humor, which one can see clearly in another of his translations, "The Glass of Beer," in which the speaker curses the barmaid who won't serve him a free drink:[18]

If I asked her master he'd give me a cask a day;

But she, with the beer at hand, not a gill would arrange!

May she marry a ghost and bear him a kitten, and may

The High King of Glory permit her to get the mange. (*OBMV* 220)

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18. Yeats's introduction to Synge's *Poems and Translations* had quoted and praised Synge's short lyric, "The Curse," which is in a similar vein:

Lord, confound this surly sister,
Blight her brow with blotch and blister,
Cramp her larynx, lung, and liver,
In her guts a galling give her.
Let her live to earn her dinners
In Mountjoy with seedy sinners:
Lord, this judgment quickly bring,
And I'm your servant, J. M. Synge. (viii–ix)

By the time that Yeats compiled the *OBMV*, James Joyce (1882–1941) had surpassed his contemporaries Colum and Stephens as the most important Irish writer of his generation, and had achieved fame as the preeminent novelist of literary modernism. He was not renowned for his poetry, but Yeats had first known Joyce as a poet when the young writer read him some of his poems and prose "epiphanies" in 1902. Yeats's earliest surviving letter to Joyce compliments him that his "technique in verse is very much better than the technique of any young Dublin man I have met during my time" (*CL* 15 Nov 1902). In a later letter he tempered his praise, observing, "Perhaps I will make you angry when I say that it is the poetry of a young man, of a young man who is practising his instrument, taking pleasure in the mere handling of the stops" (*CL* 18 Dec 1902). Over the years he on several occasions praised Joyce's *Chamber Music* (1907) to friends. In particular, he called the concluding poem of that book, "I hear an army charging upon the land," a "tecnical & emotional masterpeice" [*sic*] (*CL* #2734, 19 Jul 1915).

For the anthology he chose from Joyce's later work, the 1927 *Pomes Penyeach,* a copy of which he owned in the original edition published by Shakespeare and Company. The book would have been brought to his attention again when Oxford University Press published *The Joyce Book* (1932)*,* an edition of *Pomes* to which Yeats had been invited to contribute or comment, with musical settings by various composers and a prologue by James Stephens (Beach 174).[19] For the *OBMV*, although the letters do not survive, he appears to have corresponded directly with Joyce for permission to anthologize the three

19. Yeats declined, professing to its editor, Herbert Hughes, "great admiration for Joyce's heroic intensity," but noting that his own "subconsciousness" was engaged in another publishing project (*CL* #5449, 21 Feb 1931), and he could not focus on the request.

lyrics, which Joyce granted with no mention of a fee (prompting a later demand for payment from Joyce's publisher, who controlled the rights).

Like the poems of *Chamber Music,* those in *Pomes Penyeach* are short, delicate lyrical meditations; the three selected by Yeats—"A Flower given to my Daughter," "*Tutto è Sciolto*," and "On the Beach at Fontana"—are the melancholy reflections of a father and a man in early mid-life rather than the ardent young man's poems of Joyce's first book. Unlike the work of Colum and most of that by Stephens in the anthology, the selections of Joyce's poems do not evoke Irish folk culture or Revivalist themes.[20] Yet neither are they imitative of Victorian versification, even though Joyce employs the formal *thou, thine, -eth,* and *-est* in two lyrics. They are fresh and delicate, with characteristically Joycean neologisms ("rosefrail," "blueveined," "silverslimed," and "fineboned"); their diction is strongly alliterative and musically evocative of Irish-flavored English without any stagey dialect. The work of a master of ironic prose, they are notable for their lack of irony and their emotional openness.

Yeats does not mention Joyce's poems in his introduction to the *OBMV,* but he does attack poems that employ the realism of modern novels, of which *Ulysses* is the obvious unmentioned exemplar that would have been on the minds of most of his readers in 1936:

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20. The connection would have been easy enough to make by including "Tilly" from *Pomes Penyeach*, which is an almost perfect realistic reply to the romanticism of Colum's "The Drover":

> He travels after a winter sun,
> Urging the cattle along a cold red road,
> Calling to them, a voice they know,
> He drives his beasts above Cabra. (Joyce, *Poems* 51)

> I read few modern novels, but I think I am right in saying that in every novel that has created an intellectual fashion from Huysmans's *La Cathédrale* to Ernest Hemingway's *Farewell to Arms*, the chief character is a mirror. It has sometimes seemed of late years . . . as if the poet could at any moment write a poem by recording the fortuitous scene or thought, perhaps it might be enough to put into some fashionable rhythm—"I am sitting in a chair, there are three dead flies on a corner of the ceiling."
>
> (*OBMV* xxvii–xxviii)

Whereas Yeats praised the realism of Synge's poetry, in which the voice achieved by the poet was an authentic, living one, Synge's Revivalist subject matter immunized it from the charge of being only a mirror to reality in Yeats's eyes. This not so true of Joyce's poetry, early verses of which Yeats at one time criticized for being "thin" in a letter to Joyce (*CL* III, 18 Dec 1902), and which he might well have had in mind when he denigrated the "fortuitous scene or thought" at the center of modern realistic verse.

In the context of the *OBMV,* the last of the three—"On the Beach at Fontana"—is perhaps the most interesting. Dated "Trieste 1914," according to Joyce's usual practice, it thus becomes a kind of war poem in an anthology that dances very deliberately around the Great War at the center of the era it chronicles. The image of a father on the cold beach as night falls, comforting his child while the world goes to hell around them, is extraordinarily evocative:

> Around us fear, descending
>
> Darkness of fear above

And in my heart how deep unending

Ache of love! (*OBMV* 218)

iv. Yeats's Careless Counterpart: Oliver St. John Gogarty

Joyce's novels and other works (including his play *Exiles*, which Yeats rejected for the Abbey Theatre) make much of the artist's sense of separation; the tension between Stephen Dedalus, whose art isolates him from the world, and Leopold Bloom, whose life connects him to it, is at the heart of *Ulysses*. In this respect, the selections from Joyce's poems are wholly in keeping with the tension between separation from and connection to the mainstreams of modern poetry that characterizes Yeats's anthology. Taken together, the Irish writers that Yeats includes embody that tension. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the anthology's stance toward the Great War, which the Irish were both part of and separate from; no poet better exemplifies it than does Joyce's old Martello Tower-mate Oliver St. John Gogarty (1878–1957), immortalized in *Ulysses* as "Buck Mulligan."

Taken out of context and in retrospect, Yeats's decision to spotlight the work of Gogarty in an anthology supposedly representative of the mainstream of modern poetry seems absurd, which helps explain the attitude of the *New York Times* reviewer noted earlier. Gogarty's seventeen lyrics were mostly short, but there were more than by any other poet in the anthology, and the selection occupied eleven pages—nearly as many pages as Yeats gave to T. S. Eliot. Even at the time, it worried the Oxford editors: "You will remark that Mr Gogarty is better than I feared," Charles Williams wrote to Kenneth

Sisam and R. W. Chapman, after reviewing Yeats's selections (1 May 1936), and apparently referring to expressions of concern. Yeats was defensive when early reviewers criticized the decision: "Recent attacks have concentrated on my putting in you & Gogarty," he wrote Dorothy Wellesley, "the last because he sings a brave song & so makes a whinging propaganda look ridiculous" (*CL* #6764, 30 Dec 1936). His reasons for including so much of Gogarty's work are thus worth exploring.

Remember that in 1936, Gogarty had not yet published his gossipy and self-serving memoir, *As I Was Going Down Sackville Street*, nor was it certain that his identity would forever be conflated with Joyce's satirical depiction. He was a close personal friend of Yeats who was partly responsible for getting the elder poet nominated for the Irish Senate, who had braved the dangers of the Irish Civil War with him, and who had performed surgery on Yeats's person. But beyond the friendship, he was a member of the Irish Senate, a respected physician, a public wit, an Abbey Theatre playwright, a founder of Sinn Fein, an athlete, a public figure who had defied IRA gunmen, and a facile classicist whose several books of verse had been followed by a successful *Selected Poems* (1933) that Yeats owned. Notably, from Yeats's point of view, though Gogarty was from a Catholic family, he belonged to the artistic elite, and was a target of the same anti-elitist venom that political opponents in the new Irish state aimed at Yeats and other Protestant literary figures. For Yeats, the polymathic Gogarty came to represent a romantic battle with modern mediocrity.

Yeats asked Gogarty for permission to include his poems with the sort of fulsome praise that made it seem as if he had completely lost his equilibrium: "I think you are perhaps the greatest master of the pure lyric now writing in English," he wrote (qtd. in

Lyons 173). Part of this was, no doubt, defending his own earlier editorial work and judgment. He confided to Harold Macmillan (his and Gogarty's publisher) that he had "selected for the Cuala Press two volumes of [Gogarty's] verse but went over every poem carefully, making him revise them again and again"[21] (*CL* #5955, 18 Oct 1933); as with Rabindranath Tagore, including the poems in the *OBMV* was a way of confirming his own earlier judgment about their importance. But, in a preface to one of the Cuala volumes, Yeats also suggested that for all their author's flaws, something in the poems had found particular resonance with him:

> Oliver Gogarty is a careless writer, often writing first drafts of poems rather than poems but often with animation and beauty. . . . Why am I content to search through so many careless verses for what is excellent? I do not think that it is merely because they are excellent, I think I am not so disinterested; but because he gives me something that I need and at this moment of time. (*Prefaces* 172)

That "something," I would argue, is closely connected to Yeats's discussion of "heroism" among the poets he includes in the anthology. As I have noted, he identified with Wilde and the Rhymers of the 1890s for the heroic "bitter and gay" attitude toward art for its own sake that they adopted in the face of late-Victorian mores. He celebrated the "noble eloquence" of right-wing poets such as William Ernest Henley, William Watson, and Sir Henry Newbolt in the face of liberal opinion—even when that opinion was aligned with Yeats's own political interests. He praised the "glory" of the artists

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21. Frank O'Connor recalled Gogarty joking about Yeats's propensity to revise his friends' work as the two younger men prepared to visit Yeats one evening: "He's writing a few little lyrics for me, and I'd like to see how he's getting on" (qtd. in O'Connor, *My Father's* 104).

drawn to Lady Gregory's Coole during the Irish Literary Revival who resisted attempts by those with more political agendas to co-opt the Irish theatre to those purposes. And, as I will discuss in Chapter V, he reacted angrily against certain war poets for their focus on what he termed unheroic "passive suffering" in the tumult of the First World War.

For Yeats, it was not the Great War that shook the foundations of his world and threatened cultural continuity, as was the case for the literary modernists, but rather the Irish Civil War and its aftermath. He needed to believe in someone like Gogarty, the glib, courageous singer who refused to be dragged down into the mire of Irish politics that Yeats wrote about in his own war poem, "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen." The modern Ireland that Yeats sees in that poem is part of a banal world in which

> Many ingenious lovely things are gone
> That seemed sheer miracle to the multitude,
> Protected from the circle of the moon
> That pitches common things about. (*YP* 210)

The affinity of his outlook with that of Gogarty's poems becomes apparent in the first one that Yeats includes in the *OBMV*, "Portrait with Background." In it, Gogarty links Irish historical legend and modern war in a love lyric. He addresses the golden-haired object of his portrait as "Devorgilla's supremely lovely daughter"; the background here is the legend in which an Irish queen, Devorgilla, abducted by Dermot MacMurrough, the King of Leinster, sets into motion the political events that first bring the Anglo-Norman invaders of King Henry II to Ireland from England.[22] In Gogarty's

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22. Devorgilla was a frequent subject of the revivalists. For instance, Lady Gregory's play, "Devorgilla," produced at the Abbey Theatre in 1907, revolves around the reminiscences of Devorgilla, reflecting on the national disaster wrought by her love.

poem, the Anglo-Normans that the act brought to Ireland were not the simple villains of Irish political propaganda, but carried with them law and "the rhymed, romantic, high line" of culture, and established the Anglo-Irish Ascendency. Here, indeed, we see the man whom James Joyce satirized as the model of Ireland's "gay betrayer" in *Ulysses,* praising the invaders in Sapphic stanzas:

> I would have brought, if I saw a chance of losing
> You, many more — we are living in War-rife time —
> Knights of the air and submarine men cruising,
> Trained through a life-time. . . .

Gogarty thus sides with Yeats's Irish Protestant ancestors, and with the aristocracy of art that modernity has overturned—a modernity governed by the "effrontery / . . . of the men of a few acres / Ruling a country." Gogarty pledges his loyalty to "the edifice of Beauty" that is "founded on Steel," and concludes with a quatrain of praise that Yeats could have written about Maud Gonne:

> Here your long limbs and your golden hair affright men,
> Slaves are their souls, and instinctively they hate them,
> Knowing full well that such charms can but invite men,
> Heroes to mate them. (*OBMV* 175)

The second poem by Gogarty, "Ringsend" (originally entitled "Aphorism"), is one that Yeats said should be a standard for Irish anthologists: "I would be certain of its immortality had it a more learned rhythm and, as it is I have not been able to forget these two years, that Ringsend whore's drunken complaint, that little red lamp before some holy picture, that music at the end" (*Prefaces* 174). Although the poem describes

slumming and was ostensibly written after reading Tolstoy's rejection of bourgeois values in favor of peasant culture, it is also an indirect satire of Yeats's "The Lake Isle of Innisfree." Instead of imagining himself arising and going to Innisfree, the speaker in Gogarty's poem imagines that he "will live in Ringsend / With a red-headed whore" (*OBMV* 176). Instead of cultivating bean-rows and beehives, he will recite his verses by a red light to his mistress after a night on the town; the fragrant rose in the poem grows out of a stinking "stew." Instead of hearing the sound of lake water lapping in the deep heart's core, Gogarty's speaker imagines the sound of the sea—a sea that he yearns for like the debauchery in which he would drown his disillusionment with modern life.

The fifteen other poems by Gogarty include lyrics of both somber classicism and leering nods toward the bawdiness for which he was notorious. Several of the poems strike the same aristocratic note that Yeats did in the poems of *The Tower:* "Marcus Curtius" explores the same sort of connection between violence and great art that Yeats contemplated in "Meditations in Time of Civil War." "The Conquest" offers a love-song praising an aristocratic woman of Anglo-Norman descent. "*Per Iter Tenebricosum*" alludes to Catullus's poem in *Carmina* about the loss of a pet sparrow, and meditates on the inevitability of death. "Verse" celebrates the persistence of great art. "With a Coin from Syracuse," the longest of Gogarty's poems in the anthology, explores the likeness between the speaker's beloved and the imagery of an ancient coin, in eleven stanzas of hexameter. "The Image-Maker" praises the qualities of will that animate an artist who works in stone. "To Death" considers the paradox that death often gives value to life. In "Dedication," Gogarty imagines an ideal audience for his verse (much as Yeats famously did in "The Fisherman"):

> . . . With you
>
> Beauty at best can live,
>
> Beauty that dwells with the rare and few,
>
> Cold and imperative. (*OBMV* 185).

The other poems are more irreverent in spirit, but imbued with the same sense of aristocratic superiority: "After Galen" is a bawdy bit of punning about post-coital languor. "*Non Dolet,*" which alludes to an epigram by Martial,[23] rationalizes about the futility of living too long and fearing death; in Yeats's BBC broadcast on "Modern Poetry," he cited it as an example of how Gogarty had "restored the emotion of heroism to lyric poetry" (*Later* 101). In "O Boys! O Boys!" the speaker laments the fact that no one will believe the wild things that he (or she) has experienced in life (which would be ruined in the telling anyway). "To Petronius Arbiter" salutes an aristocratic Roman voluptuary and holds him up as a model for today. In "Palinode," the poet looks back on his life, and his dedication to whimsy and clever verse, and decides that it's a worthy legacy after all. "To a Boon Companion" praises a drinking partner for his classical qualities. Finally, in "Colophon," the poet prays not to overstay his welcome in the public arena and end up looking like a fool (a prayer that was ultimately not answered).

Yeats wrote that when he first read Gogarty, he "recognised [his] opposite, and was startled and excited" (*Prefaces* 172). Gogarty is not exactly Yeats's opposite—the two men share too much: an aristocratic inclination, a scorn of the mundane, and a delight in the contrast between high and low art—but one can see what Yeats is getting at. Finally, though, what he has, that Gogarty lacks, is the sort of excited Romantic

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23. In *Epigrams* I, xiii, Arria, wife of Paetus, stabs herself and tells her condemned husband, "*Non dolet*" ("It does not hurt").

imagination that believes in something more than classical precedent and duty. Yeats recognized that Gogarty's "carelessness" grew from the fact that he lacked Yeats's own fundamental seriousness about the poet's place in the world. Other than that, they are kindred spirits: "The great Romantics had a sense of duty and could hymn duty upon occasion," Yeats wrote about his friend, "but little sense of a hardship borne and chosen out of pride and joy. . . . [H]eaven knows into what foul weather Oliver Gogarty's Anglo-Irish muse has launched the gayest of its butterflies" (172–74).

v. "Antiquarians and Others": Higgins, Strong, O'Connor, and MacGreevy

Yeats tended to view the Irish poets of the generation after Gogarty's whose interest lay in what Samuel Beckett termed "the breakdown of the object" (*Disjecta* 70)[24] as aligned with a modernism he didn't much like. Consequently he excluded several of the up-and-coming Irish writers of the sort he memorably described in "Under Ben Bulben" as those

> . . . now growing up
> All out of shape from toe to top,
> Their unremembering hearts and heads
> Base-born products of base beds. (*YP* 335)

24. "I propose," Beckett wrote, "as a rough principle of individuation in this essay, the degree in which the younger Irish poets evince awareness of the new thing that has happened, or the old thing that has happened again, namely the breakdown of the object, whether current, historical, mythical or spook."

Beckett, writing a pseudonymous essay in 1934, saw it differently, memorably describing the landscape of Irish poetry in the 1930s as one dominated by "antiquarians and others"; Beckett's point was that many of the writers influenced by Yeats had ended up memorializing old stuff rather than making it new, and thus were something of a dead end. This conflict between Yeats's and Beckett's points of view is a useful place from which to consider the post-war Irish poets that Yeats does include in the anthology.

During Yeats's last years, including those spent compiling and editing the *OBMV*, poet Frederick Robert Higgins (1896–1941) was a frequent companion whom he called his "favorite croney" [*sic*] (*CL* #7616, 15 Nov 1936), and who would cheer up the old man by telling him "dirty stories" (qtd. in Foster, *Arch-Poet* 504). Despite their friendship, and the fact that Higgins came from a Protestant background, Yeats was qualified in his praise. Higgins is not named in the anthology's introduction, and as Yeats was compiling the anthology he told Dorothy Wellesley that Higgins possessed "more poetical genius than his verse has shown as yet" (*CL* #6317, 11 Aug 1935). He was, however, a skilled folk musician, and shared with Yeats an enthusiasm for hearing poetry sung; they worked closely on a series of *Broadsides* for the Cuala Press that paired poems written in the ballad style with basic musical settings,[25] and collaborated in several rowdy public performances of sung poetry in the years after the *OBMV* was published.

Yeats includes six poems by Higgins in the anthology. Two of them, "The Little Clan" and "The Ballad of O'Bruadir," come from *The Dark Breed* (1927), written before he and Yeats became close. Three of the poems, "Father and Son," "The Old Jockey,"

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25. Frank O'Connor memorably described this collaboration as that of two "fatheads" carried away by misguided enthusiasms: "For years the one fathead wrote what he thought were songs, the other fathead fitted them, as he believed, to old Irish airs, and they got a third fathead to take down their nonsense in staff notation" (105).

and "Padraic O'Conaire, Gaelic Storyteller," come from *Arable Holdings,* which he published with Yeats's Cuala Press in 1933. The last, "The Clatter-Bones," was uncollected at the time Yeats anthologized it; it appeared later in the short-lived Higgins's final book of poetry, *The Gap of Brightness* (1940).

The six poems are written with a realistic eye that shows the influence of Synge and Joyce, but their focus is on Revivalist subjects such as Gaelic speakers and characters whose traditional backgrounds make them out of place in the modern world. Indeed, one can see the "antiquarian" element that Beckett mocked in the sentimental regard with which Higgins holds his subjects: the rural boatmen in "The Little Clan" are a vanishing breed, stranded like their hookers (Irish working sailboats) by the receding tide, but in a nod to Yeatsian rhetoric Higgins asserts that they will live on in song just as Troy[26] does. The subject of "The Old Jockey," kept from the horses that define him, can only look on with yearning as teams trot past the window of his retirement home. In "Father and Son," the poet recalls his own old-fashioned father who, though unable to understand him, both disapproved of and loved him. The Gaelic storyteller in "Padraic O'Conaire" is celebrated as an example of "the bardic mind" (*OBMV* 371). As Robert Garratt points out, "Song for the Clatter Bones" echoes late Yeats characters such as Crazy Jane in its bawdy evocation of themes of sex and death (69). Finally, "The Ballad of O'Bruadir" tells the sort of rollicking story that Yeats identified with the folk tradition in other ballads in the *OBMV*.

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26. Keats had written that Homer, in his account of the Trojan War, left "great verse unto a little clan," a line that Yeats often quoted (*CL* III, 389), and repeated in his autobiography with reference to William Blake.

Ten pages of the *OBMV* are devoted to seven translations from the Irish by "Frank O'Connor," the pen name of Michael O'Donovan (1903–1966): "The Old Woman of Beare regrets Lost Youth" is the complaint of a legendary hag. "Autumn" is spoken by an old man protesting the attentions of a younger woman "full of wile." "A Learned Mistress" is a witty Irish curse-poem about a three-cornered love affair. "Prayer for the Speedy End of Three Great Misfortunes" is an angry lamentation about growing old and ungrateful children; it employs a tripartite structure such as the one Yeats would use, in a stripped-down version, in his lyric "Three Things," which he included in the *OBMV*. "The Student" satirizes the spoiled ways of a dilettante scholar. The final two poems, "A Grey Eye weeping" and "Kilcash" are laments about the passing of high medieval Irish culture at the end of the seventeenth century.

A realist in his fiction, O'Connor would nevertheless have been seen by Beckett as one of the antiquarian poets; he wrote little poetry of note after his early work translating old poems, which he revised under Yeats's influence. Like Higgins, O'Connor was the older poet's frequent companion and correspondent in the 1930s, and became closely involved with running the Abbey Theatre, where Higgins forced him out after Yeats's death. Also like Higgins, Yeats's Cuala Press published work of his that found its way into *OBMV*.

O'Connor had learned Irish as a boy, and was from a Catholic background. In the Irish Civil War, he had been on the Republican side, opposite Yeats and Gogarty, and was imprisoned by the forces that favored honoring the independence treaty with England, but his political views became more conciliatory after the Republicans were defeated. While working as a librarian after the war he was encouraged in his writing by

AE, who eventually wrote the introduction to his book of translations for the Cuala Press. O'Connor met Yeats in 1926 during a time in which he was trying to discover his voice as a writer, and the elder poet was excited to have found someone who could translate old poetry in Irish with a modern literary sensibility. Subsequently he became a regular visitor at the literary "evenings at home" that Yeats hosted while in Dublin.

The translations in the anthology come from the 1932 Cuala Press edition of O'Connor's *The Wild Bird's Nest: Poems from the Irish*. Yeats worked closely with O'Connor in revising the translations, writing him, "I have been reading your translation with admiration, & as you said I might, making occasional revisions" (*CL* #5531, 27 Oct 1931). In his memoir, *My Father's Son*, O'Connor recalls that Yeats's "occasional revisions" of the poems included quite specific changes to the wording: "He published two books of my translations from the Irish and re-wrote them in the process" (104). In some cases, O'Connor said, "having supplied some felicitous line of his own, [Yeats] promptly stole it back for one of his original poems" (qtd. in Sherry 295). Critics such as Ruth Sherry have pointed to Yeats's poem "The Curse of Cromwell," which employs the language of one of O'Connor's translations, and it may have been the example of which O'Connor was speaking (294).[27]

O'Connor identified two of the translations, "A Grey Eye Weeping" and "Kilcash," as ones on which Yeats's editorial work was particularly notable. In *My*

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27. One line in "The Curse of Cromwell" reads, "His fathers served their fathers before Christ was crucified" (*YP* 311). This closely echoes O'Connor's translation of Egan O'Rahilly's "Last Lines," published in *Lords & Commons* (1938) by Yeats's Cuala Press. The translation reads, "I shall go after the heroes, ay, into the clay— / My fathers followed theirs before Christ was crucified," a line that O'Connor says Yeats "loved to quote" (*Frank* 399). As with "Kilcash," the Irish original does not refer to the clay or the soil, but merely speaks of a churchyard; the dramatic phrase is the translator's.

Father's Son, he recounted wrangling with Yeats over one of the lines in "A Grey Eye Weeping," a poem in which the Gaelic poet Egan O'Rahilly complains about the loss of patronage following the defeat of the Irish Jacobites in the late 1600s:

> I went one night to Yeats' for dinner and we fought for God knows how long over a single line of an O'Rahilly translation I had done—"Has made me travel to seek you, Valentine Brown." At first I was fascinated by the way he kept trying it out, changing pitch and intonation. . . .
>
> Long before the evening I had tired of the line, and hearing it repeated endlessly in Yeats' monotone I felt it sounded worse.
>
> "It's tautological," I complained. "It should be something like 'Has made me a beggar before you, Valentine Brown,'" and he glared at me as if he had never seen me before.
>
> "No beggars! No beggars!" he roared, and I realized that, like other theatre men I have known, he thought the writer's place was at home. (104)

O'Connor offers only tantalizing clues about the specifics of his collaboration with Yeats. Of "Kilcash," his translation of the lament for the great ruined estate of the Butler family near Tipperary, he comments that it was one of Yeats's "favorite poems" and "there [was] a good deal of his work in it" (*Best* 337). Ultimately the extent of that work can only be speculated about, but there is some compelling evidence in the poem to support O'Connor's assertion.

First, O'Connor's translation omits two of the seven stanzas that appear in the Irish original "Caoine Cill Chais" (Lament for Cash Church). He leaves out the fourth

stanza, in which the poet describes the denuded estate as it might be seen by a hunted stag in the hills above it, and the sixth stanza, which mourns King James II's flight to the continent after his troops were defeated by William of Orange's army at the Battle of the Boyne. In the Irish original, both of the omitted stanzas include proper names and English words that make the poem seem a more topical Jacobite tract. The choice to omit the stanzas is doubtless O'Connor's, but it would be consistent with Yeats's attitude toward older Irish poetry: he is less interested in the political context, and more concerned with discovering the "voice" of the poet and the emblematic nature of the subject.

Second, several lines from O'Connor's translation have the rhythm and violent imagery of Yeats verses that suggest influence or close collaboration. In the first stanza, for example, a literal translation of the poem would describe the dead mistress of the estate as *an deighbhean* ("the gentle-lady"), *a fuair gradam* ("who won distinction (or regard)") and was *meidhir tar mhná* ("most merry of women"); O'Connor's translation praises her as a lady who "shamed all women for grace," a Yeats-like comparative formulation that brings to mind the elder poet's evocations of Maud Gonne's striking beauty.

An even clearer example is the second stanza of the translation, which is greatly changed from the original description of the ruined courts of the great house. O'Connor's version introduces the images of goats wandering in Kilcash's gardens,[28] and removes specific references to "Lady Iveagh" (Margaret Butler) and her bishop that would tie the poem to a specific historical moment. In their place is a more abstract and dramatic description of "The earls, the lady, the people / Beaten into the clay" (*OBMV* 406). Yeats

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28. Similarly, Yeats's "The Curse of Cromwell" concludes with the speaker awakening in a Kilcash-like ruin among "the dogs and horses that understand my talk" (*YP* 312).

uses the line "beaten into the clay" in two of his own poems written during or shortly after the period in which he was editing the *OBMV*: "The Curse of Cromwell," and "Under Ben Bulben." Of the former, he wrote Dorothy Wellesley that his poem "echo[es] . . . old Gaelic ballads friends translate to me." The sentiment expressed in the Irish original, he writes, "is very poignant because it was my own state watching romance & nobility dissapear" [*sic*] (*CL* #6785, 21 Jan 1937).

To the third stanza of the translation, O'Connor contributes a Yeatsian hawk ("Hawk's cry or eagle's call"), where the original Irish text mentions only eagles crying at their nests. And, while the original poem does mention bees making honey on the grounds of Kilcash, a standard pastoral image that Yeats famously evoked in "The Lake Isle of Innisfree," the translation renders it as "the humming of the bees there," which brings to mind Yeats's "bee-loud glade." The fourth stanza of the translation also sounds like early Yeats, describing "a mist there tumbling from branches / Unstirred by night and by day" (*OBMV* 406) that resembles the "peace [that] comes dropping slow, / Dropping from the veils of the morning" (*YP* 35) in Innisfree; the original Irish merely describes fog descending on bare trees, and laments that daylight will not disperse it.

Finally, the most notable theme that "Kilcash" shares with Yeats's poetry, and his concerns in the *OBMV*, is that of the destruction of the aristocratic, heroic world that flourished in the past and its replacement by a banal present-day that only the imagination can transcend. We can see this in O'Connor's final stanza, which adds a prayer "That the great come home again" (*OBMV* 407) not found in the Irish original.

As has been noted, Yeats's own poems in the anthology include several of his lyrics about the aristocrats—artistic and otherwise—associated with Lady Gregory's

estate at Coole, and "Kilcash" allows him to link those poems with a historical and cultural model. For example, the concluding image of "The Curse of Cromwell," in which the speaker dreams of "a great house" inhabited by his friends but awakes with dogs and horses in "an old ruin that the winds howled through" (*YP* 311), brings to mind both the historical Kilcash and Yeats's vision of Coole's ruin after Lady Gregory's death.

Clearly, the younger poet was aware of the themes and language of the older poet, and the influence was manifested in both directions. An example of this is "The Old Woman of Beare regrets Lost Youth," the first of the seven O'Connor translations in the anthology, which brings to mind Yeats's Crazy Jane, who first appeared in poems written after he had begun working with O'Connor. The old woman in O'Connor's translation of the tenth-century original is a character from Irish folklore associated with the "poor old woman" figure that personifies Ireland and with various Celtic deities. In her reminiscences of youth, condemnation of the tawdriness of the present day, and her earthy yearning, the Old Woman of Beare strikes a note that echoes through many of Yeats's poems of the 1930s. She recalls,

> Though I care
> Nothing now to bind my hair;
> I had headgear bright enough
> When the kings for love went bare. (*OBMV* 399)

The dramatic situation, rhythm, and tone are much like Yeats's "Crazy Jane Grown Old Looks at the Dancers":

> God be with the times when I
> Cared not a thraneen for what chanced

So that I had the limbs to try

Such a dance as there was danced . . . (*YP* 264)

Ruth Sherry downplays the question of direct borrowing, finding instead a "coincidence of insight" in work that Yeats and O'Connor were undertaking simultaneously, observing that "certain of Yeats's preoccupations, which become particularly prominent in the poems of the 1930s, have their forerunners in the Irish poetry O'Connor was working on at the same time" (295).

Leonard Arthur George Strong (1896–1958) had an Irish mother and half-Irish father, and often made Ireland the subject of his writing, but by the time of the *OBMV* his reputation as a novelist had eclipsed his early work as a poet. Yeats included three short lyrics from Strong's 1931 *Selected Poems*, which he owned. The two came to know each other while Yeats was living in Oxford, where Strong was an undergraduate after the First World War, and Yeats initially encouraged his verse, complimenting him for "a perfect diction rich and musical when that is your game and yet always natural speech—humour, and yet rhythmical passion" (*CL* #3986, 7 Oct 1921). Later in the decade, however, his enthusiasm for Strong's epigrammatic lyrics seems to have dimmed, as he repeatedly put off requests that he comment on or publish poetry manuscripts from the younger man. Strong, in turn, published a 1932 essay in the form of a "letter" to Yeats that effectively consigned the older man to an earlier era of poetry, and dedicated a 1935 biography of the Irish poet Thomas Moore to him—an honor which both offered Yeats the respect due an elder and subtly suggested that be had outlived his era.

Beckett did not specifically comment on Strong, but probably would have included him among the "antiquarian" school of Irish poets of the 1930s. The three

anthologized poems show both Strong's talent for vivid imagery, which Yeats praised as "drawing, little firm strokes as if upon an agate" (*CL* #5015, 20 Aug 1927) and his lack of a consistent approach. The first poem, "Two Generations," resembles a James Joyce lyric tonally, and offers a clever twist on the Yeatsian theme of a younger generation which has declined in nobility and achievement; the ne'er-do-well father who has neglected his work to pursue love and family is upbraided by the example of hard work undertaken by his unimaginative son. The second, "The Old Man at the Crossing," is an ironic pair of tetrameter quatrains written in the dialect of a sentimentalized stage-Irish character out of the Irish Literary Revival by way of Charles Dickens. The third, "The knowledgeable Child," is spoken by a child gifted with second sight who has been ostracized because he can foresee the deaths of others. Strong had corresponded with Yeats about his own dreams and inquired about the system of *A Vision*, but his poem presents the child as a freakish object of pity, and does not suggest much faith in the idea that any sort of deeper truth might be found by exploring occult experience.

Thomas MacGreevy (1893–1967; spelled "McGreevy" in the *OBMV*) was an Irish veteran of trench warfare during the First World War, a translator and art critic for whom Yeats wrote letters of introduction to Pound and Eliot, a cheerful gossip who was close to Yeats's wife George, and a minor modernist poet who also lived for a time in Paris where he became friends with Beckett and Joyce.[29] His work as a critic includes books on T. S. Eliot (1931) and Yeats's brother Jack B. Yeats (1945), and a laudatory review by Beckett was used to introduce his posthumous *Collected Poems* (1971). He was not a prolific poet: Yeats's library included MacGreevy's *Poems* (1934), most of which were written

29. David Wheatley notes that Joyce linked Beckett and MacGreevy—"Slippery Sam and Tomtinker Tim"—in the "Butt and Taff" section of *Finnegans Wake,* 341–42.

prior to 1930, and his study of Eliot. Only two poems by him appear in the anthology, and he is not mentioned in Yeats's introduction. Yet, for a reader of the anthology today, he is among the most intriguing of the later poets that Yeats includes in that he was both a true acolyte of postwar modernism and at the same time deeply committed to the sort of Irish "intellectual nationalism" that interested Yeats.

Beckett's assessment of MacGreevy in "Recent Irish Poetry" differed from the "antiquarians" associated with Yeats in that, for Beckett, MacGreevy seemed less certain about the persistence of the "object": in his poems, "when [something] does happen . . . it is the act and not the object of perception that matters. Mr MacGreevy is an existentialist in verse, the [Edward] Titchener of the modern lyric" (74).[30] Yet at the same time, MacGreevy did not go as far as Beckett wished and deny the object entirely, which is probably why Yeats did not exclude him from the anthology, as he did other younger Irish poets whom Beckett liked. For all his modernism, MacGreevy was a religious believer, and his poetry often engages with questions about heroism and objective beauty that Yeats found lacking in much modernist work.

The two selections in the *OBMV* illustrate this. The first, "Aodh Ruadh O Domhnail," explores the nature of language and communication. It begins with the poet describing the aspirated pronunciation of a Spanish priest he has asked about the grave of the sixteenth-century Irish patriotic martyr O Domnhail. MacGreevy deliberately spells the name using the Irish spelling that shows its aspirated pronunciation, bringing to mind the artificiality of the project to celebrate the dying Irish language in a nation whose

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30. Edward Titchner (1867–1927) was a structural psychologist whose influential work on the elements of consciousness was attacked by critics, who doubted his assertion that consciousness could be studied scientifically as something separable from his own preconceptions (Richards).

inhabitants mostly spoke English. The poet, his English playfully aspirating its "aitches," comments that the priest "Never had heard / The aspirated name" of O Domnhail. He goes on to nod at rhyme with "sought" and "wrought," "gloom" and "tomb," which mostly serve to call attention to the poet's free verse and the subjective construction of language that it represents.

Then, in a dramatic parenthesis, the poem shifts to evoke the all-too-fresh history of modern Ireland's independence fight, an historical "thing" that is more than mere act, and that resists dissolution despite the aspirated aitches:

> Not as at home
> Where heroes, hanged, are buried
> With non-commissioned officers' bored maledictions
> Quickly in the gaol-yard[.]

When MacGreevy's poem finally considers the person to whom the title refers, and the speaker who has searched for O Domnhail's grave in Spain finds it in the memory of the people, it is not the "Aodh Ruadh" of the cultural project, but the "Red Hugh" known to those who have just endured the independence fight and a civil war:

> They brought
> His blackening body
> Here
> To rest
> Princes came
> Walking
> Behind it

And all Valadolid knew

And out to Simancas all knew

Where they buried Red Hugh. (*OBMV* 334–35)

The other MacGreevey selection, "Homage to Jack B. Yeats," was originally entitled "Dysert"[31] and published pseudonymously in Eliot's *New Criterion* in 1926. It describes a gray, painterly landscape with a tower in it[32] that the poet drives past. The first stanza of MacGreevy's poem seems aligned with Yeats's view of the heroic past, a world that

. . . was rich in living,

More reckless, consciously, in strife,

More conscious daring-delicate

In love"

than the modern world. But then MacGreevy questions such a view: The thought occurs to him, based on his own experience,

That the gold years

Of Limerick life

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31. Irish for "deserted place" or "hermitage."

32. Towers feature in many of Jack Yeats's landscape paintings, and MacGreevy, an art critic, may have had a particular painting in mind, but I have not been able to identify it; he changed the title to "Homage to Jack B. Yeats" in 1930, when it was republished. W. B. Yeats's poem, "The Tower," was not written until a year after "Dysert" first appeared, so the tower in it probably does not allude to his iconic dwelling at Ballylee, though of course the poet had lived there since 1919; it is worth noting, though, that the poem's first line begins, "Greyer than the tide below," a phrase that Yeats employed in his 1903 play, *On Baile's Strand.* MacGreevy's poem examines Limerick's history, so the tower in question could be the Dysert Round Tower, in Croom, County Limerick; that tower is landlocked, though, and the poem's reference to a tide below the tower suggests otherwise.

Might be but consecrated

Lie. . . .

In this vision, it is the past that is desert, not the present, and "heroic lives" are merely the product of "brave stupidity" (*OBMV* 335–36). His homage to the painter is the art of the poem, which, like a painting, takes the dead past and makes it live anew in the present.

vi. Oxford Moderns: MacNeice and Day Lewis

Beckett's survey of recent Irish poets does not mention Belfast-born Louis MacNeice (1907–1963) or Leinsterman Cecil Day-Lewis (1904–1972), both of whom he probably thought of as English. Neither was a presence in Dublin, each had a father who was an Irish Anglican clergyman, both were leftist in their politics, and both are more often associated with the poetry of the 1930s of their fellow Oxford leftists, W. H. Auden and Stephen Spender, than with other Irish poets. Day Lewis was raised in England after age two, but thought of himself as Irish (Gelpi 14); MacNeice was schooled in Dorset and lived in England from the time he entered Oxford in 1926 (Davin, "MacNeice"), but grew up in Ireland. Yeats allotted eight-and-a-half pages of the anthology (four poems) to MacNeice's work, and seven pages (eight poems) to Day Lewis. He does not comment on their Irish identity in the anthology's introduction, but instead professes to being impressed by the "concentration of social passion and philosophy" in their work (xlii).

But looking at them in their Irish context helps clarify the way in which Yeats saw the modernity of his own work when compared with the "Ezra, Eliot, Auden school."

At first glance, the poems by MacNeice in the *OBMV*, all of which look at experience from a psychological perspective, do not fit well into the dialectic between antiquarianism and anti-objective modernism, and have little to say about the cultural preoccupations of the Irish Literary Revival. But, as Robert Garratt has argued, MacNeice "could never completely sever himself from his origins" (267), and his poems in the *OBMV* fit into Yeats's view of the Irish experience as a quintessentially modern one. In a foreword to MacNeice's critical study of Yeats, Richard Ellmann observes, "All of the poems [in the *OBMV* by MacNeice] had points of common interest with [Yeats's] own work" (11).

MacNeice met Yeats in 1934 during a tour of Ireland, and later told friends that he had consciously avoided the influence of Yeats's verse during the poet's lifetime (Stallworthy, *Louis* 254). However, his *Poetry of W.B. Yeats* (1941) was one of the first major posthumous studies of Yeats's work, and in it he both criticized and praised the *OBMV*. In the introduction to the anthology, and in his BBC broadcast on "Modern Poetry," Yeats contrasts MacNeice with Auden and Day Lewis, but links all of them to a sense of "social bitterness" learned from the "War poets" (*Later* 95). The four poems he selected, "The Individualist Speaks," "Circe," "Turf-Stacks," and "An Eclogue for Christmas," all share a sympathy for the individual seeking to preserve the self in a harsh modern world, even though Marxist doctrine tends to be suspicious of individualism.

Yeats's introduction describes MacNeice as an "anti-communist [who] . . . contemplates the modern world with even greater horror than the communist Day Lewis"

(xxxviii). Despite MacNeice's own leftist politics, Yeats chose to see him in opposition to the other Oxford moderns. This helps explain the choice of "The Individualist Speaks," where MacNeice seems more interested in a psychological portrait than in political theory: the poet is among the "urchins" playing in an idyllic, clovery valley, where life is a carnival-like "fair" of steam organs, purple lights, and grease paint. In implied contrast to the class-conscious urban Communism of the more doctrinaire leftists, this "individualist" evokes a green landscape of horse-chestnut "candles" (blossoms) and "conkers" (the chestnut-pods used in a traditional childhood game) threatened by the grim inevitability of modern life, and conveys a childlike resolution to "escape, with my dog, on the far side of the Fair" (*OBMV* 419–20).

Similarly, the first stanza of "Turf-Stacks" depicts a speaker besieged by modernity with its railway trains, crowds, and mass-produced thoughts. Unlike Yeats, brooding over occult truths in his tower as the world degenerates around him, the stronghold in MacNeice's poem protects innocence rather than nobility and, like ancient Troy, is doomed. Modern ideas and theories are the threat, not modern ignorance. The poem opens with a quintessentially rural landscape of turf-stacks that nods to the Revialist ideals of an agrarian Ireland. The peasant who lives there, likened to a free-roaming (if empty-headed) horse sheltered by mountains, is contrasted with a modern cosmopolitan in the second stanza, who has no such defenses. Unprotected by ignorance and isolation, his innocence is vulnerable to the dehumanizing Trojan horse of "the theory-vendors, / The little sardine men crammed in a monster toy / Who tilt their aggregate beast against our crumbling Troy." The final stanza resolves the contrast with a cry not of defiance but of defeat, and ends with a savagely Yeatsian vision of the

speaker's dejection giving way to rage as he imagines "blind wantons like the gulls who scream / And rip the edge off any ideal or dream" (*OBMV* 421).

"Circe" mixes two mythological metaphors and considers much the same predicament from the point of view of the narcissistic ego gazing lovestruck at its own (female) image, and made swinish by the glassy reflection. In this case, rather than vague "theorists" who are the enemy, it is modern self-obsession.

A similar sense of duality within the poet is developed at length in the final selection, "An Eclogue for Christmas," in which MacNeice explores the traditional dialogue between country and city using a classical form that Yeats often employed to illustrate his notions of complementary opposites within the self. In the poem, two analogues of the poet—"A" alienated in the city, and "B" alienated in the country—compare anxieties and fruitlessly seek consolation in the Christmas celebration at year's end. Occupying more than six pages of the anthology, the eclogue is among the *OBMV'*s longest poems, at 142 lines, and offers a complex meditation on the nature of modernity that savors of Yeats's "The Second Coming" as well as Eliot's "Prufrock" and *The Waste Land.*

MacNeice's observations in his eclogue seem at first to refute Yeats's poems that celebrate the passing of the landed aristocracy and fret at the onset of a common modernity. For the rural speaker, the landed aristocracy that Yeats fondly laments is as rotten as the Eliot-like urban dystopia that has turned the urban speaker into a sort of Cubist abstraction, divorced from feeling and sensation. The rural speaker scorns the "half-conscious" amusements of privileged women in hunting getup "with terrier and setter who whistle and swank / Over down and plough and Roman road and daisied

bank" (*OBMV* 423). Such pursuits are, he suggests, merely ways of numbing oneself to avoid recognizing the waste land that both rural and urban life have become. He wonders, "What will happen to us when the State takes down the manor wall, / When there is no more private shooting or fishing, when the trees are all cut down"[33] (426)? This is hardly the sort of elegy to lost nobility that Yeats so liked in O'Connor's "Kilcash," and contrasts dramatically with the elegiac attitude that Yeats adopts in "Coole Park, 1929."

Yeats criticized MacNeice, Auden and Day Lewis for having thrown off "the old metaphors, the sensuous tradition of the poets" (*Later* 173). One can only note the irony that the line he cites as an example of this is one of the more "Yeatsian" lines of MacNeice's poem, as well as one that might easily describe the very abstractions that younger poets criticized in Yeats's own work: "High on some mountain shelf / Huddle the pitiless abstractions bald about the neck" (*OBMV* 426).

But for all its skepticism of past glories, MacNeice's poem agrees with Yeats about the grim mediocrity of what comes next. Among the inheritors, "the whore and the buffoon / Will come off best; no dreamers, they cannot lose their dream / And are at least likely to be reinstated in the new régime" (426). Both rural and urban speaker concur that the only thing to be done is to try to immerse themselves in the sensations and experiences of the moment, and the "mad vertigo of being what has been" (422), putting out of mind what comes next, and hoping that such "ephemeral things / Be somehow permanent like the swallow's tangent wings." MacNeice concludes by offering readers a choice: "Goodbye to you, this day remember is Christmas, this morn / They say, interpret

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33. Perhaps this attracted Yeats because it is precisely what was happening to Coole, which Lady Gregory's daughter-in-law Margaret Gough in fact sold in 1927 to the State (the Irish Forestry Commission). The great house was not torn down until 1941, after his death; today, the grounds are a nature preserve (no hunting allowed).

it your own way, Christ is born" (427). The reader is thus invited to choose how to regard the future. It may be seen as the occasion of an exciting new dispensation during the last days of an evil time, the way Yeats sees it in "The Second Coming." Or it may be a moment of rebirth that will lead to the sacrifice of self and individuality, as in the case of Christ, for a higher purpose.

Yeats chose seven poems from C. Day Lewis's 1935 *Collected Poems*, and an eighth, "Come live with me and be my love," from *A Time to Dance and Other Poems* (1935), which he purchased while reading for the anthology. In a letter negotiating for permission to include the latter poem he notes that he intended to include more from the book, but had to cut from Day Lewis's selection when the anthology got too long (*CL* #6458, 23 Nov 1935). "I was very much interested to hear that you are Irish," Yeats wrote in the same letter. The degree to which this Irishness affected his enthusiasm for Day Lewis's work is debatable, but it seems worth noting that he included fifteen pages of work by the two Irishmen, MacNeice and Day Lewis, compared with five pages by their fellow Oxford moderns from England, W. H. Auden and Stephen Spender.

Today, the reputations of Day Lewis, MacNeice, and Spender have largely been eclipsed by that of Auden, but it is worth noting that in the mid-1930s, when Yeats was compiling the anthology, that was not yet the case. Shortly after the *OBMV* was published, Yeats wrote a friend that Auden's "best work had not been published" (*CL* #6871, 19 Mar 1937). Day Lewis, on the other hand, had already published a well-received *Collected Poems*, and his influential 1935 manifesto, *A Hope for Poetry*, had done much to fix the poetic reputations of the four young poets from Oxford; Yeats owned a copy of *A Hope for Poetry*, and his critical writings of the period suggest that he

was aware of its arguments. It would have thus been natural for him to view Day Lewis as an exemplar of a generation. The fact that he was the most doctrinaire leftist of the Auden group—a group that Yeats felt wrote "out of their intellectual beliefs and that is all wrong" (*CL* #6871, 19 Mar 1937)—can only have cemented that impression.

In any event, Day Lewis was clearly on Yeats's mind as he wrapped up the *OBMV*. The anthology's introduction mentions him six times, and Yeats also names him in several essays from the same period, including his 1936 BBC broadcast on "Modern Poetry" and his introduction to Shri Purohit Swami's *The Ten Principal Upanishads*, which Yeats was helping to translate after finishing his initial work on the *OBMV* during early 1936.[34]

Although Yeats professes to "greatly admire" the school of Auden (*OBMV* xxvi), his essays from this period criticize that generation's ideological bent:

> The young English poets reject dream and personal emotion; they have thought out opinions that join them to this or that political party; they employ an intricate psychology, action in character, not as in the ballads character in action, and all consider that they have a right to the same close attention that men pay to the mathematician and the metaphysician. (*Later* 215).

In the *OBMV*, Yeats quips about the theoretical nature of Day Lewis's subject material, comparing it to implicitly purer material that Revivalists were drawing on: "I showed

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34. In the essay, Yeats quotes from Day Lewis's "I've heard them lilting at Loom and Belting," which he selected for the *OBMV*, as an example of the younger generation's theoretical distance from a subject matter rooted in experience. The poem's subject is village laborers during the First World War; Day Lewis's generation wrote about the war, Yeats observed, even though "none were old enough to have served" (*Later* 95).

Lady Gregory a few weeks before her death a book by Day Lewis. 'I prefer', she said, 'those poems translated by Frank O'Connor because they come out of original sin'" (xv).

Yet he cannot have missed the influence of his own work in the poems of Day Lewis. As Bernard O'Donoghue observes, the eight Day Lewis poems in the *OBMV* are "eight . . . of [that poet's] most Yeatsian early pieces." Several of the poems share elements of his imagery and his harsh, dramatic rhetorical stance. For example, in the first poem, "Come up Methuselah" (*OBMV* 409), the speaker explores the very Yeats-like idea of poetic inspiration flowing from a muse that is both of the world and spectral; the poet boasts that it electrifies and immortalizes his verse, putting even the long-lived Patriarchs of the Old Testament to shame.

The next several poems tackle similarly Yeats-like themes from a more skeptical and socially conscious point of view. "Few things can more inflame" evokes the precedent of blind Homer's artistic accomplishment much as many Yeats poems do, but it attacks the "intellectual Quixotes" who argue, as Yeats did in the 1890s, in favor of art for its own sake. It asserts, "Phrase-making, dress-making — / Distinction's hard to find" (411), which resembles Yeats's image in "Adam's Curse" in which the poet describes the "stitching and unstitching" of verse-making (*YP* 78). Yeats's selection contrasts the visionary artist in "Few things can more inflame" with unseeing blindness in the next poem, "Can the Mole Take." There, the poet's vision partakes of both the sensualist's blind immersion in transcendent feeling, and conventional religion's obliviousness to it. For Day Lewis, love inverts the old literary device by which time stops during the act of love; instead, the next selection, "With me my Lover makes," argues that the clock runs and rings only during the moments of love. When love is gone, the lover is outside of

time—a condition that Yeats yearns for in poems such as "Sailing to Byzantium," but which, rather than producing the songs of golden birds for Day Lewis, sounds more like a "hollow alarum / Hammered out on lead" (*OBMV* 412); time is not the enemy of his art.

As Cleanth Brooks has famously suggested, Yeats's "Sailing to Byzantium" explores the tension between "being"—the eternal world of artifice that the old poet yearns for—and "becoming"—the transient nature of life in the world (190); Day Lewis's "Rest from Loving" tackles the same question from a young poet's point of view. In a style that nods to that of Gerard Manley Hopkins, and Hopkins's closing image in "God's Grandeur," the speaker in Day Lewis's poem urges us to embrace the world as it is rather than as it ought to be, to prefer daylight over dawn, spring over winter, transience over eternity:

> Rest from loving and be living.
> Fallen is fallen past retrieving
> The unique flyer dawn's dove
> Arrowing down feathered with fire. (*OBMV* 413)

The last three Day Lewis poems in Yeats's selection are the most overtly leftist, and from Yeats's point of view might well be part of the "blood-dimmed tide" of modernity that drowns the "ceremony of innocence" in his "Second Coming" (*YP* 189). The first, "Tempt me no more" (*OBMV* 413), employs the vocabulary of Communist political speech—an appeal to "comrades," images of armed struggle, sickles, and collective song. This is the sort of poem Yeats referred to in his introduction when he argued that for the Auden group, "communism is their *Deus ex Machina*, their Santa Claus, their happy ending, but speaking as a poet I prefer tragedy to tragi-comedy"

(xxxviii). Yeats criticized "I've heard them lilting at Loom and Belting" (414) as an example of "overwhelming social bitterness"; though not explicitly so, it is tonally the most Irish of the Day Lewis selections, with its alliterative evocation of rural village life during the First World War in which the men of the community have gone off to fight a capitalistic war they do not believe in, leaving the women who once sang at their looms alienated and silent. The final selection, "Come live with me and be my Love" is a Marxist reimagining of the famous Christopher Marlowe love song; in it, the tide of economic injustice drowns romantic illusions by the "sour canals" of an urban dystopia (415).

vii. "Our" Anthology

The one Irish poet whose selection in the *OBMV* matches Gogarty's for length is, not surprisingly, William Butler Yeats himself. In response to his editors' request that he include a generous amount of his own work, he published fourteen poems: "After Long Silence," "Three Things," "Lullaby," "Symbols," an excerpt from "Vacillation," "Sailing to Byzantium," "The Rose-Tree," "On a Political Prisoner," "In Memory of Eva Gore-Booth and Con Markiewitz," "To a Friend whose Work has come to Nothing," "An Irish Airman foresees his Death," "Coole Park, 1929," "Coole and Ballylee, 1931," and "From Oedipus at Colonus."

The essential question to resolve is whether Yeats is responsible for choosing those poems himself. He claimed to have delegated the selection to his wife, George. To

be sure, he had final approval of his own work in the anthology, but he also made a point of disclaiming the selection to Dorothy Wellesley: "You chose those two Kipling poems, my wife made the selections from my own work. All the rest I did" (*CL* #6763, 23 Dec 1936). Yeats's disclaimer could be a pose, but it is consistent with a statement he made more than three decades earlier in a letter to George Russell, about another anthology, in which he wrote, "Now I have a very great objection to making a selection from my own poems. I don't think an author should authoritatively take out certain poems and give them a sort of special imprimatur" (*CL* III 492). And I would contend that a reading of the poems themselves supports the idea that the selection is probably George Yeats's rather than her husband's.

Mrs. Yeats's biographer, Anne Saddlemeyer, suggests that the anthology offered the couple a chance to work together on an intellectual project at a time when Yeats's declining health and sexual frustrations had made his wife feel more like a caregiver than a spouse. Saddlemeyer documents the extensive work Mrs. Yeats did as reader, coordinator, typist, and copy-editor as the poet made his selections for the anthology, and notes the proprietary interest she took in the project: "He and George continued work on 'our' anthology; George selected the poems from his own work, a list Willy approved of with the exception of 'Three Things' which he insisted be included" (490).

Although Yeats's biographer R. F. Foster is more dubious about this than Saddlemeyer (*Arch-Poet* 559), George Yeats, as Margaret Mills Harper has observed, typically sought to efface her role in collaborations with her husband,[35] downplaying her own contributions, most notably her work as a medium in the sessions of automatic

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35. Her secret name as Yeats's protégé in the Order of the Golden Dawn, Harper notes, was *Nemo Sciat*—a Latin phrase that translates as "let no one know" (106).

writing during the first decade of their marriage. Despite this self-effacement, a reading of the poems in the *OBMV* suggests an agenda that differs from Yeats's own.

The selection is not a representative collection of his best-known work; it omits not only the popular early anthology-pieces hoped for by the Oxford editors, such as "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" and "The Fiddler of Dooney," but several later poems, such as "Easter, 1916," "The Second Coming," and "Among School Children," that were well known by 1935 and were included in the rival *Faber Book of Modern Verse*. Instead, it points in a more personal direction. George Yeats appears to have used the opportunity given to her to present a poetic "portrait" of her husband.

In a 1931 letter to Thomas MacGreevy, George Yeats said of her husband's poetry, "there's nothing in his verse worth preserving but the personal" (qtd. in Harper 339). This perhaps explains why the selection in the *OBMV*, though reasonably representative of his later work, focuses not on the intricacies of Yeats's esoteric philosophy, or his interest in myth and folktale, or his politics, or even his latest ideas and enthusiasms, but mostly offers a glimpse of different sides of his personality—particularly his friendships (including those with women[36]), his struggles with belief, his disquiet at growing old, and the hidden ("antithetical") parts of him that George Yeats knew better than anyone.

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36. Notably absent are any poems that directly address Maud or Iseult Gonne, neither of whom George much liked; "After Long Silence" refers only obliquely to "other lovers" who are "estranged" (80); "Lullaby" alludes to several myths and legends (Helen, Leda, Tristram) that other poems by Yeats associated with Maud Gonne, but it does not seem specific to her.

The selection looks to have been made from Yeats's 1933 *Collected Poems,* although there are some minor textual variations;[37] letters to other would-be anthologists reveal that Yeats generally did not approve requests to reprint poems that had not yet appeared in book form, which helps explain why none of the verses he was writing in the mid-1930s were included in the *OBMV*. Of the fourteen poems, none predates 1911, when Yeats first met the eighteen-year-old George (then Georgie Hyde-Lees), and became a mentor to her mystical studies. The earliest, "To a Friend whose Work has come to Nothing," dates from 1913. The latest, "From 'Vacillation,'" was finished in early 1932. The poems are thus all work written while she knew him.

Half of the poems concern friendships of long standing that predate his relationship with George, seen from his mature perspective: "After Long Silence" addresses Olivia Shakespear, who was Yeats's onetime lover and a friend of George's mother Nelly Tucker, and thus indirectly was responsible for George's introduction to Yeats. Two poems, "On a Political Prisoner" and "In Memory of Eva Gore-Booth and Con Markiewitz," recall the aristocratic Gore-Booth sisters that Yeats first met as a young man in County Sligo, and who grew to be prominent political and social radicals before their deaths in the 1920s. In all three poems the poet looks back on a time before he and his friends were subjected to the disintegrations and disillusionments of age: "young / We loved each other and were ignorant" he writes in "After Long Silence" (*OBMV* 80). As noted earlier, four poems concern Lady Gregory and her household: "To a Friend Whose Work Has Come to Nothing," "An Irish Airman Foresees His Death," "Coole Park, 1929," and "Coole Park and Ballylee, 1931." These all celebrate the

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37. The most notable is "Sailing to Byzantium, which is presented in the *OBMV* without the numbered stanzas that Yeats used in all other printed versions of it.

aristocracy of art and lament the fading Anglo-Irish Ascendancy culture that Lady Gregory embodied. But one can also read them on the personal level that George Yeats mentioned, and see them as elegies for friends and times gone by.

Three compressed and suggestive poems evoke the passions of the aging poet, expressed through the songs of characters and through enigmatic symbols. Two of them, "Lullaby" and "Three Things," are from the uninhibited song sequence that Yeats wrote after an illness in 1929, which the Cuala Press published in 1932 as *Words for Music Perhaps*.[38] In both, the poet imaginatively inhabits the sexual point of view of a woman: "Three Things" uses what Helen Vendler calls a "hybrid" ballad structure (129), in which a dead woman's bones sing longingly for the child at her breast, the man at her side, and the giving and taking of pleasure.[39] "Lullaby," which Yeats appears to have modeled on a Frank O'Connor translation,[40] is sung by a mother to a child at her breast, but not about childish things. It suggests some of the themes and images that Yeats explores at greater length in "Among School Children," but unlike that poem it is the utterance of a female persona, rather than the autobiographical "smiling public man" readily identified with the poet himself. Its singer summons up images of post-coital love from the tales of Paris and Helen, Tristram and Isolde, and Leda and Zeus. The third poem, "Symbols," was written

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38. A third poem from the sequence, "After Long Silence," is also in the *OBMV*. "Three Things," "Lullaby," and "After Long Silence" appear in that order in Yeats's *Collected Poems*, but are printed out of sequence, and without sequence numbers, in the *OBMV*.

39. An illustrated version of "Three Things" was published as a stand-alone limited edition in 1929.

40. In the headnote to "Grania," in *Kings, Lords and Commons*, O'Connor writes that "Grania sings Diarmuid to sleep with memories of the great lovers of Irish history," and that it "is the basis for [Yeats's] beautiful 'Lullaby,' which he wrote after reading my first version of the poem" (49).

in 1927 and appeared in 1933 in *The Winding Stair and Other Poems*.[41] It presents three sets of emblematic antitheses whose meanings are personal to the poet: a blind man in a watch tower, a sword carried by a jester, and the sexually charged image of a steel blade encased by beautiful fabric.

As many commentators on Yeats have remarked, creativity is inextricably linked with sexuality in his mature work. Harper has explored the nature of his collaboration with George Yeats on the "system" in those terms, and I would argue that Mrs. Yeats picked these three poems to represent the "antithetical" side that she saw so often in her husband—the part of him that grew bawdier, earthier, and more sexually obsessed even as his body grew older, weaker, and less able to respond to the demands of his imagination. The *OBMV* itself, undertaken at a time when he was obsessed with sexual rejuvenation, young women, and new experiences, is a product of Yeats's well-documented late frenzy of creativity.

The selection also includes part of "Vacillation," Yeat's complex meditative sequence on joy and religious ecstasy that provides a glimpse of the spiritual conflicts within the man. The excerpt omits the first seven parts of the poem, which develop various images of what he described as "an arguement [*sic*] that has gone on in my head for years" (*CL* #5556, 3 Jan 1932), and includes only the concluding eighth part, in which

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41. The stand-alone edition of *The Winding Stair* also included "In Memory of Eva Gore-Booth and Con Markiewicz," "Coole Park, 1929," "Coole and Ballylee, 1931," and "Vacillation"; *Collected Poems* adds the poems from *Words for Music Perhaps* under the same heading.

he imagines debating with the late English theologian of Catholic modernism, Baron Friedrich von Hügel.[42]

As Yeats's autobiography describes it, he rejected his father's Victorian agnosticism back in the 1870s but never allowed himself to accept orthodox faith, despite a strong will to believe. In "Vacillation," he accepts the accounts of Catholic saints and miracles; if ever he were to subscribe to orthodox Christianity, the poem suggests, it would be of the sort professed by von Hügel, whose attempts to reconcile those tenets of the church's mystical teachings with modern intellectual inquiry were part of a modernist theological movement that was condemned as heretical in the 1907 papal encyclicals *Lamentabili* and *Pascendi gregi* (Wilson 341). Yeats admits that his "heart might find relief / Did I become a Christian man and choose for my belief / What seems most welcome in the tomb" (*OBMV* 82). Yet for him even the doctrine of the modern heretic is too limiting. As Yeats understands his own system, his actions are predestined according to the structures of history, and he finds the "relief" offered by Christian doctrines of salvation and free will to be unconvincing. It is in the vacillation itself, the transaction between being and becoming, between honeycomb and lion,[43] that he will seek his joy. He thus bids von Hügel goodbye, sending an Irish blessing after him.

Two poems that were taken from his 1928 volume, *The Tower,* explore Yeats's attitude toward old age: "Sailing to Byzantium," one of his most famous poems, and "From 'Oedipus at Colonus,'" an excerpt from a translation of Sophocles's play that

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42. Yeats's home library included von Hügel's two-volume book, *The Mystical Element of Religion as Studied in Saint Catherine of Genoa and Her Friends.*

43. Yeats poses the riddle of Samson (Judges 14:14), the answer to which—"love"—vacillates between lion and honeycomb. It is both sweeter than honey and stronger than the lion, and is ultimately the thing that does Samson in.

Yeats used to conclude his poem sequence, "A Man Young and Old." Unlike the personae who sing the songs of *Words for Music Perhaps*, "Sailing to Byzantium" invites an autobiographical reading in which the poet finds himself caught between the impulses of creativity and procreativity, unable either to fully escape as a mature artist into a timeless world of artifice or to participate in daily life in the way he did when he was young. "From 'Oedipus at Colonus'" offers a quite different reaction: rather than longing for the unattainable, it preaches pragmatism and accepting second-best. "Cease to remember the delights of youth, travel-wearied aged man," advises its Greek chorus (*OBMV* 90); they will only make one desire to die. However disappointing it may seem, the poet is still alive, which, if not better than nothing, is at least better than dying.

In Yeats's introduction, he speaks of Irish writers in the first person plural, but only one of the selection of his poems, "The Rose Tree," addresses the Irish political question directly. Of the others, six touch on Irish themes and subject matter, but generally focus on Yeats's own identification with the vanishing aristocratic culture of Coole and the artistic aristocracy of the Literary Revival. In "On a Political Prisoner" (written in 1919), which appears directly after "The Rose Tree" in both *Collected Poems* and the *OBMV*, the focus is more on the effects of nationalism on Con Markiewitz than on the merits of her cause. Yeats looks back at her "before her mind / Became a bitter, an abstract thing," before she became a radical, "Her thought some popular enmity: / Blind and leader of the blind" (*OBMV* 85). The implied comparison is with Yeats himself, who, for all his interest in "intellectual nationalism," ultimately retreated from the sort of active rebellion endorsed by Maud Gonne, Markiewitz, and Padraic Pearse once the fighting broke out.

Only one of his poems in the *OBMV,* Yeats's ballad "The Rose Tree," takes an overtly patriotic stance, and even it essentially "explains" the voice of Pearse that we hear in Lady Gregory's translations: a prophetic, heroic voice. Yeats had scorned and disliked Pearse personally, but in poems beginning with "Easter 1916," written shortly after the Rising, to "The Statues," written a few months before Yeats's death, he chose to portray Pearse as somehow touched by the heroic mood that made him transcend the prosaic schoolmaster and rabble-rouser whom Yeats had known. In "The Rose Tree," he imagines the soon-to-be-martyred Pearse and James Connolly discussing what it will take to return Irish nationalism to flower after it has been withered by the hot air of political debate in London that blows "across the bitter sea" to Ireland (*OBMV* 84); as A. N. Jeffares points out, the poem evokes an old street ballad, "Ireland's Liberty Tree" (*New Commentary* 194), in which the tree of liberty is watered by tears of the brave, and adds to it traditional religious symbolism that associates the rose with the blood of Christ's sacrifice. In the poem, Pearse, who had argued for the necessity of blood sacrifice for the independence movement, says that "There's nothing but our own red blood / Can make a right Rose Tree" (*OBMV* 84). That harsh vision comes across as both appalling and stirring, akin to the "terrible beauty" that Yeats wrote about in the more personal "Easter 1916."

By 1935 and 1936, while Yeats was compiling the anthology, the immediate passions of the Easter Rising and the Irish Civil War were beginning to fade. Ireland was independent, if still part of the Commonwealth, and his days as a senator in the Irish government were behind him. The anthology offered him a chance to see the whole sweep of Ireland's movement into the modern era. Where the desolation of the First

World War served to divide the sensibilities of the literary Modernists from those of the Georgian and Edwardian poets, for Yeats the Irish Civil War marked the point at which his own focus shifted from building an idealized modern literary culture in Ireland to a reaction against the actual modern Ireland that emerged out of independence and civil war. The anthology traces the consciousness of Irish writers as it moves from the Victorian antiquarianism of Rolleston, to his own work with the Literary Revival, to the immediate fruits of that work in the poetry of Joyce and Stephens. In Oliver Gogarty's poems he could see the ideal and real Ireland in conflict. In those who came after Gogarty, he could see the consequences of Ireland's entry into a modern world.

V.

Georgians and War Poets

By the time Yeats started editing the Oxford anthology in 1935, the poets who had begun their careers shortly before the outbreak of the First World War constituted the heart of the English poetic establishment. It was no accident that Lascelles Abercrombie had been Oxford University Press's first choice to edit the volume; only Abercrombie's unwillingness to make hard choices among his Georgian-era contemporaries led the Press to turn to Yeats, an outside eminence who could better afford to make enemies. Yet by the mid-1930s, it was clear that the center of gravity in English poetry had shifted to work influenced by modernism and leftist politics. One of the issues that Yeats faced in editing the *OBMV* was how much it should reflect the work of the old poetic establishment, and how much it should explore more radical work, such as that by writers in the circle of W. H. Auden and C. Day Lewis.

Today, the term "Georgian" is rarely used by literary historians, and is mostly employed as a vague catch-all for non-modernist work during the years 1910–1936, when George V was the incumbent of King Edward's Chair. More specifically, it is applied to the poets whose work was featured in the six *Georgian Poetry* anthologies edited by Edward Marsh and published by Harold Monro during the years 1914–1922 ("Georgian" 221). But even by the mid-1930s, when Yeats was compiling the *OBMV,* the term was somewhat problematic. As Robert Ross chronicles in *The Georgian Revolt: Rise and Fall of a Poetic Ideal, w*hat seemed to be a dynamic and coherent movement as the war was breaking out soon lost focus, especially as modernist poetry came into vogue.

From a twenty-first century perspective, the label no longer carries much meaning: it is more useful to refer to several groups such as the Dymock Group and the "War Poets" that were part of the larger movement. So perhaps it is not surprising that although there are many Georgian-era poets in the anthology, Yeats's selection of their work sometimes seems perfunctory. Many are represented by only one or two poems, and some of these poems are popular or humorous. Few have proven to be of enduring interest. Compared to Yeats's treatment of Victorian, Edwardian, and Irish writers, which offers some distinct clues toward his sense of the modern, his discussion of Georgian-era writers is far less impassioned, as if a nod to conventional taste. Indeed, where the Georgians are concerned, the anthology is mainly remembered for what is not in it—the best-known work of Georgian war poets, whose evocations of "passive suffering" (*OBMV* xxxiv) he notoriously dismissed as unworthy of inclusion.

i. Men of Letters

Only a few of the poems in Yeats's anthology might be considered "light verse"; he seems to have preferred folk ballads and poems inspired by them, some of which are rowdy and ironic. But he also includes a sprinkling of outright humorous poems as well, most of which are by Georgian-era writers who were not really part of the Georgian "movement," and might typically be described as popular men of letters rather than professional poets aiming at a more exclusively literary audience. Harold Monro and Sir John Collings Squire published or edited well-known anthologies. Hilaire Belloc and

G. K. Chesterton were Catholics better known for their novels, journalism, criticism, and history; Belloc in particular was popular as a result of his early books of children's poems and light verse, rather than his more serious poetry or the controversialism of his late career. In general, these writers tended to be conservative, skeptical of new developments in modern poetry, and inclined to make fun of things they did not like.

Yeats allotted seven pages to G. K. Chesterton (1874–1936), anthologizing two of his best-known poems, "The Rolling English Road" and "Lepanto." In 1937, Yeats told a correspondent, "as I can recollect I only met him socially twice, once at a Club dinner and once for tea at a country house. So much of my life has always been spent in Ireland that I know comparitively [*sic*] little of the English celebrities" (*CL* #6822, 24 Feb 1937). This rather disingenuously distances him from Chesterton, when in fact Chesterton had sometimes attended his "Monday evenings" at home in the early 1900s, and the two had corresponded during the final years of the First World War, when Yeats assiduously courted Chesterton as a famous conservative foil in a public debate staged at the Abbey Theatre intended to raise political consciousness at a time in which Irish press freedom was limited after the Easter Rising (*CL* #7032, 2 Aug 1937).

The respect was mutual. Chesterton had written about Yeats on several occasions, praising his early style in *All Things Considered* (1908), criticizing him in "Mr. Yeats and Popularity" (1912), and then playfully satirizing the poet in his 1914 novel, *The Flying Inn*, where one of the Irish characters remarks, of a cheese, "It's a heroic, a fighting cheese. 'Cheese of all Cheeses, Cheeses of all the world,' as my compatriot, Mr. Yeats, says to the something-or-other of Battle" (267). Yeats probably would have had his attention called to that quip about his early poem "The Rose of Battle," and thus would

have first encountered "The Rolling English Road," which appears a couple of pages later in the same chapter of *The Flying Inn*.

The two poems by Chesterton embody prewar English bluster. In its bluff, alliterative ballad meter, "The Rolling English Road" pays comic tribute to the character of "the rolling English drunkard," as embodied in the nation's winding roads, and playfully explores some of the same questions of battle, love, faith, and self-sacrifice that Yeats's early mystic verse had asked of lovelorn Celtic warriors its a finely pitched pentameter. Like "The Rolling English Road," the other Chesterton poem, "Lepanto," had often been anthologized; it first appeared in periodical form in 1911, and was collected as part of Chesterton's *Poems* in 1915. Unabashedly heroic in tone, it celebrates the Mediterranean naval victory of Catholic forces over the Ottoman Turks in 1571; it anticipated popular patriotic poems written during World War I that portrayed a clash of civilizations, but unlike those it did not celebrate national military might, thus making it more acceptable to Yeats. Its closing lines imagine the novelist Miguel de Cervantes, who fought in the battle and for whom Chesterton imagines it was a source for *Don Quixote*. In 1936, when Yeats anthologized the poem, it would have been hard to avoid contrasting it to the work of the war poets that he so disliked.

Only one short poem by Chesterton's friend, Hilaire Belloc (1870–1953), appears in the anthology, the playful "Tarantella" (1920). It offers a giddy whirling cacophony of internal rhymes and assonance that recollects a time of rowdy folk dances in the Pyrenees, presumably encountered during the poet's journeys through France and Catholic Spain before the war. Belloc contrasts this with a somber concluding stanza that

revisits the mountains, presumably after the war, in which the color and noise are gone, and the deserted halls echo solemnly in the aftermath of an unspecified calamity.

Another popular writer was A. E. Coppard (1878–1957), whose specialty was short stories and whose *Collected Poems* (1928) Yeats owned. The three short lyrics by Coppard, "Mendacity," "The Apostate," and "Epitaph," are light, sing-song verses, without much depth or complexity to them, that rely on witty rhymes and superficial irony for effect.

Yeats had consulted the successful anthologist and editor Sir John Collings Squire about the *OBMV* in 1935, and Squire offered to proofread the book for him (*CL* #6224, 10 Apr 1935). Yeats later explained including Squire's "Ballade of the Poetic Life" (the only poem by Squire in the anthology), telling his editor Charles Williams that he "owed certain obligations" (*CL* #6415, 24 Oct 1935)—probably a reference to the many poems by Yeats that Squire had bought and published in *The London Mercury* over the years. The "Ballade," published in 1932 in *A Face in the Candlelight and Other Poems*, wryly explores the vanity of the poet's wish to create art in the face of a modern culture that uses the name of John Keats to advertise porridge. It echoes the sentiments of Yeats's "Adam's Curse," which compared the work of the poet to that of "the bankers, schoolmasters, and clergymen / The martyrs call the world" (*YP* 78):

> The fat men go about the streets,
>
> The politicians play their game,
>
> The prudent bishops sound retreats
>
> And think the martyrs much to blame;
>
> Honour and love are halt and lame

And Greed and Power are deified,

The wild are harnessed by the tame;

For this the poets lived and died. (*OBMV* 232) [1]

Yeats and his wife were fond of cats, and he was also fond of several humorous poems about cats by Harold Monro (1879–1932), a central figure in the London poetic scene as proprietor of the Poetry Bookshop in Bloomsbury and publisher of Edwin Marsh's *Georgian Poetry* series. For lectures in the late 1910s and early 1920s, he wrote Monro several times asking for copies of "your own Cat & dog poems" (*CL* #3432, 2 May 1918), some of which had appeared in *Georgian Poetry*. Among the six poems that he clipped from his copy of Monro's posthumous *Collected Poems* (1933) were the impressionistic "Milk for the Cat" and "Cat's Meat," along with "Hearthstone," which memorably portrays a sleeping dog. All three poems are funny and light in texture, although they revolve around a core of realism about the essential difficulty of life. Yeats contrasts these three fondly observed early poems by Monro with three more somber poems written late in the poet's career, when he was declining into illness and alcoholism: "Bitter Sanctuary" and selections from "Midnight Lamentation"[2] and "Natural History."

Chesterton, Belloc, Squire, and Monro were part of the vanishing breed that John Gross chronicled in *The Rise and Fall of the Man of Letters,* men whose main object was "the role of literature in public life" (xiv). For those (like Chesterton and Belloc) who

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1. Squire's poem in fact echoes Yeats's own "September 1913," in which the poet observes, "For this that all that blood was shed, / For this Edward Fitzgerald died . . ." (*YP* 107). Squire's ironic use of the same phrasing would not have been lost on Yeats.

2. Yeats omitted stanzas four through six of the original poem, with the permission of Monro's literary executor.

first began writing in late Victorian and Edwardian England, the changes brought on by the First World War and the rise of literary modernism were something to joke about and scoff at. For later writers like Monro, who saw the popular audience for literature turning toward mass entertainments and the literary audience looking toward the stylistic innovations of the modernists, a note of despair creeps into their late work as they find themselves increasingly irrelevant. Yeats's samples of their work certainly answered his editors' request that he include "popular" poetry, but one senses from the selections that he was well aware that the popular audience was drying up. Unlike the Georgian poets in Marsh's anthologies, who tried to write an old sort of poetry in a modern idiom, in his own verse he would tackle the thematic preoccupations of the modernists by boldly challenging and questioning them, ironically creating a quintessentially modern reaction to the century's rapid change.

ii. Abercrombie, Gibson, and the Dymock Group

In his letters and critical writings, Yeats mostly overlooks the prewar writers Lascelles Abercrombie, Rupert Brooke, John Drinkwater, Wilfrid W. Gibson, and Edward Thomas, a group now known as the Dymock Poets after the Gloucestershire town in which they met and wrote before the war. In 1936, when he edited the *OBMV*, the Dymock poets were not yet recognized as a coherent group, but were instead associated with the larger generation of writers published in Marsh's *Georgian Poetry* anthologies; Marsh introduced the series with the note that he had observed that English

poets were bringing out work of "a new strength and beauty" that he found indicative of a "new Georgian period" that he suspected might "take rank in due time with the several great poetic ages of the past" (Marsh iii). Brooke, in particular, was known for sonnets written in the first months of the war, first published in the journal *New Numbers* that the group edited, and was often associated with the so-called war poets even though his early death made his experience different from those who wrote firsthand of trench warfare.

Robert Ross has suggested that many of the Dymock writers should be regarded as literary "centrists" who "who tolerated the old matter but sought the new manner" (47). This helps explain why Yeats's only real comment about the period is the faint praise of a generalized platitude:

> I think England has had more good poets from 1900 to the present day than during any period of the same length since the early seventeenth century. There are no predominant figures, no Browning, no Tennyson, no Swinburne, but more than I have found room for have written two, three, or half a dozen lyrics that may be permanent. (*OBMV* xvi)

Among the Dymock group, Lascelles Abercrombie (1881–1938) was given the most space in the anthology: Abercrombie is represented by four poems over eight-and-a-half pages. Three of Abercrombie's poems, "Hope and Despair," "The Fear," and "Mary and the Bramble," date from the prewar period; only the latter was written during the Dymock years. The fourth, "The Stream's Song," dates from the 1920s. Wilfrid Gibson (1878–1962) was represented by four poems over two-and-a-half pages, all of which

were poems published after his time in Dymock. Two poems and two pages were allotted to John Drinkwater (1882–1937). Yeats chose one poem each from Brooke and Thomas.[3]

Abercrombie's two early poems, from his initial book of poetry, *Interludes and Poems* (1908), are short, Thomas Hardy-like meditations on Victorian philosophical questions. "Hope and Despair" wrestles with the question of whether religious doubt is an essential component of faith, with the poet siding with the illogical feeling of comfort he finds in the existence of hope. "The Fear" considers a post-Darwinian universe in which the dragon footprints of primitive story have been transformed into the dinosaur footprints of modern-day science, a thought that leads the poet to wonder if his own inchoate feelings about childhood will be explained away by modern psychology. Both offer a cheerful alternative to the pessimism of Hardy poems on related subjects, but lack Hardy's philosophical rigor.

The sunny (and probably deliberate) dreadfulness of "The Stream's Song" and "Mary and the Bramble" may help explain why Yeats included so little work by the Dymock poets. Seen from today, what made the school distinct was its attempt to shake off Victorian poetic conventions and find a new voice and attitude before the war; its failure lay in the poets' inability to find an appropriately modern subject matter. Comparing "The Stream's Song" to Yeats's "Easter 1916" is instructive: the image of rocks in a stream is central to both, but Abercrombie's use of it seems trivial. In his poem, the personified laughing stream cheerfully wears away at the boulders (which

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3. The most notable twentieth-century poet associated with the group, Robert Frost, is not included in the *OBMV* at all. Frost and Yeats make for interesting comparisons, but Yeats appears to have stuck to his principle and ruled out Frost because he seen primarily as an American poet, despite his years early years in Dymock and work with Abercrombie and Thomas there.

Abercrombie giddily rhymes with "shoulders"), praising them for offering the resistance by which it creates its delight. For Yeats, the image of a similar stone troubles "the living stream" (*YP* 183), becoming an emblem of the hard, monomaniacal fanaticism of the Irish Easter rebels, both beautiful and frightening to the poet as they are transformed from players in a "casual comedy" of everyday life into heroic martyrs of the new nation. Abercrombie resists taking the subject of wearing down what seems permanent very seriously; the result is lightweight, not merely light.

At 182 lines, "Mary and the Bramble" is among the anthology's longest poems, and its subject mixes mock-epic farcicality with a heavy dose of religious symbolism and imagery—the innocent young heroine brings to mind the Virgin Mary, the bramble suggests the crown of thorns, the torn fabric of her clothes alludes to the rending of the Temple's curtain in Mark's Gospel, and so forth. Its ludicrous conceit teases conventional Victorian sentimentality and propriety, and the overwrought language consciously clashes with the simple narrative of a heedless pubescent girl blundering into a bramble branch and getting her nipple caught on the thorns:

> Now in her vision'd walk beside a brake
> Is Mary passing, wherein brambles make
> A tangled malice, grown to such a riddle
> That any grimness crouching in the middle
> Were not espied. Bewildered was the place,
> Like a brain full of folly and disgrace;
> And with its thorny toils it seemed to be
> A naughty heart devising cruelty. (*OBMV* 207)

The tongue-in-cheek style here more resembles Pope's *Rape of the Lock* than anything in Yeats's canon: although some of his epigrams and short verses sometimes employ heavy-handed irony, they tend to be gnomic rather than didactic; there is no real equivalent to Abercrombie's extended philosophical burlesque. But the actual argument resembles that of poems (notably "Leda and the Swan") in which Yeats explores the idea of divinity or mystical understanding imposing itself on innocence and begetting the human tragedy. Here, rather than a bird, it is a thorn that does the violating, and rather than pagan myths the poem alludes to the Angel Gabriel (and his "fiery flower'd wand") and the Virgin Mary of the Christian Incarnation. The bramble, which represents the "Spirit of Life" (*OBMV* 206), scars Mary in an annunciation of both the pain and the blessings of what it means to be human: "'Hail, Mary, that dost look / Delightful to the Lord; I bid thee know / That answering God's own love thy womb shall throe'" (*OBMV* 211).

Although Yeats had little to do with Abercrombie, he corresponded frequently about theatrical matters with John Drinkwater in the prewar years, when Drinkwater was managing and acting in a small repertory company in Birmingham that performed several Abbey Theatre plays. His home library included several of Drinkwater's books that had been inscribed to him; however, his candid opinion of Drinkwater's poetry was dismissive: "You were right & not I about Drinkwater," he wrote Lady Gregory. "[H]is producing is as bad as his poetry & for the same reason. It is full of a second hand idealism that serves no purpose but to stand between him & all real observation & mastery" (*CL* #2133, 6 Apr 1913). He nevertheless included two of Drinkwater's poems

in the *OBMV*: the much-anthologized "Moonlit Apples" (1917) and "Who Were Before Me" (1922).

"Moonlit Apples," which describes a painterly scene in a barn loft lit by silvery moonlight through the skylight, conveys the sort of prewar "idyll of Dream England" that the Dymock poets became known for (Street 11); it presents an image one might expect to find in poems by Frost, who lived near Dymock until homesickness and the outbreak of war led him to return to America. Stylistically, though, its cloudy, dreamy atmosphere brings to mind the language of Yeats's early work in *The Wind Among the Reeds*, such as "The Song of Wandering Aengus" with its famous penultimate image of the "silver apples of the moon" (*YP* 55). In "Who were before me," the poet meditates on a cemetery whose stones memorialize his ancestors. Yeats's own interest in images of graves and ancestors extends from his earliest work, and poems such as "The Hosting of the Sidhe," to later poems such as "In Memory of Alfred Pollexfen" (which closely resembles Drinkwater's poem), to the gravestone he imagines for himself in "Under Ben Bulben" in *Last Poems.* Other poems on this theme in the *OBMV* range from Rolleston's "Clonmacnoise" and York Powell's "The Pretty Maid" in the 1890s to the youngest poet in the anthology, George Barker, whose 1934 "The Leaping Laughers" describes "the fallen / Stooping over stones, over their / Own bones" (*OBMV* 437).

Yeats's frequent confidante during his work on the anthology, Dorothy Wellesley, urged him to include poems by Edward Thomas (1878–1917) and objected to his condemnation of the war poets with whom Thomas was associated (Wellesley 29). However, the single poem by Thomas that Yeats included, "If I Should Ever by Chance," is not a war poem but a sonnet written during the poet's prewar time at Dymock; it offers

a playful bouquet of rural names and flowers as a bequest to his elder daughter. Similarly, Yeats ignored the famous war verses of Rupert Brooke (1887–1915), and included only Brooke's sonnet "Clouds," in which the poet admires the sky and imagines clouds to be the spirits of the dead, watching over the living "In wise majestic melancholy train" (*OBMV* 260).[4] As Samuel Hynes suggests, in some senses Brooke was "not a war poet at all" in that the bulk of his work was written before the war, and even his famous war sonnets were more about the prewar idea of England's duty in the noble cause than the dehumanizing reality described by the poets who spent time in the trenches (*War* 300). This would seem to be Yeats's reading of both Brooke and Thomas: in both cases he chose sonnets that embodied their authors' aesthetic response to countryside and landscape in a post-Victorian, prewar idiom, instead of better-known poems that focused that vision on the fighting itself.

One of the four Wilfrid Gibson poems, his much-anthologized "Breakfast" (1914), does offer a vision of trench warfare, with soldiers eating, conversing, and dying as the shells fly about them. But Gibson's poor eyesight had prevented him from enlisting early in the war, so he had never been to the front himself; although the poem imagines the sudden death of ordinary troops with Gibson's characteristic compassion for the common man (Currey, par 5), it lacks the shell-shocked horror of poems by eyewitnesses such as Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, and Robert Graves that Yeats so disliked. Gibson's focus is on the troops' Britishness, as they bet on the outcome of soccer

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4. According to the list he submitted to Oxford University Press (Table 1), Yeats initially intended to include two additional poems by Brooke. The titles are not known. He had written Ezra Pound that "the war (which was to give us all better morals & better art) has produced nothing besides much clotted ejaculation & Kiplinglike facility—no that might sound like criticism—but has permitted one or two good sonnets by Brooke" (*CL* #3679, 26 Nov 1919).

matches back home and hide from the "shells . . . screeching overhead" (*OBMV* 172). Like the poems by Brooke and Thomas, it is essentially written from a prewar mindset, and thus has more in common with a poem like Thomas Hardy's Boer War lyric "Drummer Hodge" of more than a decade earlier, which remarks on an innocent Wessex youth dying on strange battlefields in an imperial war.

The other three Gibson poems that Yeats chose suggest that he thought Gibson belonged with the English poets whom he describes in his introduction as "celebrators of the country-side or of the life of ships" (*OBMV* xvi). "Old Skinflint," from Gibson's 1918 *Hill-Tracks*, is a grim ditty sung by the son of a country criminal hanged for his misdeeds; it offers a sympathetic portrait of the psychological legacy the ne'er-do-well father has handed down to his son. "Luck" and "The Parrot" come from Gibson's 1925 collection, *I Heard a Sailor*. The first is spoken by an impoverished sailor, reflecting stoically on the course of a long, "lucky" life; the second is the reflection of a sailor's long-suffering widow, moved against her will to tears when her late husband's parrot repeats the curses his master taught him.

All four Gibson poems share a mix of realism and balladic lyricism, and are spoken by ordinary soldiers, sailors, and country folk ennobled by a cheerful fatalism in the face of life's trials. Yeats was dismissive of realism for its own sake, but had attempted much the same thing in his sequence, "Words for Music Perhaps," where he imagined earthy characters such as Crazy Jane and Tom the Lunatic who could embody and express some of the interpenetrating oppositions that Yeats's imaginative system suggested to him. In the introduction, he described his own attraction to such characters: "a man so many years old, fixed to some one place, known to friends and enemies, full of

mortal frailty, expressing all things not made mysterious by nature with impatient clarity" (xxxvii).

iii. The Georgian Mainstream

In *On the Boiler*, Yeats's posthumous fulmination against the coarseness of the modern world, he identifies the years immediately preceding the First World War as a time in which "the English urban mind was turning against culture as Arnold defined it, the knowledge of the best that is said and thought in the world, and seeking to substitute contemporary thought merely because contemporary. It began with a distaste for romantic subject-matter. Presently would come a desire for a contemporary urban style" (*Early* 246). He says this with specific reference to the work of James Elroy Flecker (1884–1915), who is among the Edwardian and early Georgian poets included in the *OBMV*, but it is a useful comment to keep in mind when considering the mainstream of Georgian-era poets that Yeats represents in the anthology. His tastes in Georgian poetry tended to favor verse that looked back to simpler times or folk themes, or to the Georgian-era "philosophical" poetry such as that by Edith Sitwell, Dorothy Wellesley, and W. J. Turner discussed in Chapter VI.

In the same essay, Yeats criticized Flecker's late play, *Hassan* (1922), which the Abbey Theatre had revived for a short, unsuccessful run in 1936 as he was editing the *OBMV*. But he included three selections from Flecker's lyric work in the anthology: "Santorin," "The Old Ships," and the prologue to "The Golden Journey to Samarkand."

All three evoke the legacy of Mediterranean civilization, as seen from the point of view of a much more prosaic modern world. Yeats praised "Santorin" on several occasions, calling it "almost the most moving and romantic of modern lyrics" (*Early* 246); in it, a modern mariner on the Aegean encounters a ghostly "sea lady" searching for her lost love, Alexander the Great. In "The Old Ships," the poet imagines seeing Odysseus's vessel among the old ships plying the sea near Cyprus. But perhaps the most interesting choice is the third, which in certain ways anticipates Yeats's "Sailing to Byzantium," written a decade later. In it, the poet longs to escape with the silk road caravans to the fabulous Samarkand, where await the statues and bones of antiquity:

> And now they wait and whiten peaceably,
>
> Those conquerors, those poets, those so fair:
>
> They know time comes, not only you and I,
>
> But the whole world shall whiten, here or there . . . . (*OBMV* 228)

Another sort of romantic escape clearly appealed to him as well. Yeats, who enjoyed "wild west" novels in his later years, appears to have admired the idea of the vagabond lifestyles led in their late-Victorian youth by John Masefield and W. H. Davies (whom he calls "the tramp Davis" (*CL* #5347, 7 May 1930)); "Why did not Providence having given us our gift of expression and allowed us a few years to practise [*sic*] it in make us all cowboys?" he asked Masefield (*CL* #5459, 19 Mar 1931). In the *OBMV* he associates the two poets with "celebrators of the country-side or of the life of ships" (xvi),

and limits his selections to their early lyrical work, ignoring later, often more ambitious poetry that they wrote during the Georgian period.[5]

Indeed, based on Yeats's selection, one might conclude that John Masefield (1878–1967) wrote only sea lyrics and ballads. The selection is limited to verse from the early 1900s, before Masefield turned to longer narrative poems such as *The Everlasting Mercy* (1911) and *Reynard the Fox* (1919), which were his most highly praised and commercially successful work.[6] These include "Sea Change," "A Valediction (Liverpool Docks)," "Trade Winds," and "Port of Many Ships," from *Salt-Water Ballads* (1902); as well as "Cargoes" and "Port of Holy Peter," from *Ballads* (1903). Unlike the imperial condescension of Kipling's martial ballads and the poems of naval glory by Henry Newbolt, Masefield's poems focus sympathetically on the working life of merchant sailors not unlike those who sailed for Yeats's admired seafaring grandfather, William Pollexfen. Where Masefield's later work sometimes reflected a more brutal social and sexual realism, and the influence of J. M. Synge, the early ballads romanticized the simple ways of the seafarer, and fit neatly into Yeats's argument about folk-inspired poetry as an honest reaction to Victorian moralizing.

Masefield had been something of a disciple of Yeats during the years of his sea ballads, but their friendship became more formal and literary after Masefield married an Irish woman whom Yeats disliked: "I find him surrounded with such a crew of female

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5. Davies, in particular, was strongly represented in Marsh's *Georgian Poetry* anthologies.

6. Although Masefield could legitimately be considered either an Edwardian or a Georgian, his greatest success came during the Georgian period. He began his long tenure as Poet Laureate in 1930, during the reign of George V, and was the king's favorite poet (Binding 3), despite the fact that he thought of himself as a Victorian (Gervais par. 10).

political economists & emotional journalists—forced on him by his wife I suppose. His friends are no longer the people who know & have taste" (*CL* #2155, 3 May 1913), Yeats wrote. He had criticized *The Everlasting Mercy* as "a rough vivid story without the beauty of his best work" (*CL* #1789, 26 Dec 1911), but it would have been difficult to excerpt in any event. The *OBMV* selections look back on the time when the two were intimate friends, a time that Yeats recalled in a 1930 letter congratulating Masefield on the laureateship; the honor, he said, would ensure that "those poems you read & sang to me in Woburn Buildings be recognised for the classics that they are" (*CL* #5351, 25 May 1930).

The anthologized poems by W. H. Davies (1871–1940) share something of the picturesque simplicity that Yeats liked in the early work of Masefield. He several times professed great admiration for Davies's work, and after hearing from Harold Monro that Davies had commented on his own early poems, replied that "I would like to have known what so excellent a poet cared for in my later work" (*CL* #4183, 8 Oct 1922). Ironically, Yeats remained ignorant of Davies's later work, and while compiling his reading list for the *OBMV* asked his bookseller if Davies had written anything after 1915 (*CL* #6267, 26 Jun 1935). All of the selections in the *OBMV,* which include "Joy and Pleasure," "Truly Great," "Money," "Leisure," "The Sluggard," "The Best Friend," and "School's out," come from Davies's 1916 *Collected Poems*, which Yeats owned.

Davies's poems, typically in rhythmic tetrameter, have much of the same lyricism as certain of Yeats's and beg to be sung. But he ties up his subjects much more neatly, making his poems more self-contained and his conclusions more pat. A poem such as the much-anthologized "Leisure," for instance, asks a question of the sort that might be

found in a Yeats poem: "What is this life if, full of care, / We have not time to stand and stare" (*OBMV* 131). Significantly, though, Davies does not punctuate it with a question mark: it is a statement, a rhetorical question that answers itself. In contrast, a Yeats poem such as "[Why Should Not Old Men be Mad?]," from *On the Boiler,* opens with a question that seems rhetorical, but it soon becomes clear that the question is one that Yeats proposes to answer with evidence. The world is unfair, and disappoints hope, which old men learn through bitter experience: "And when they know what old books tell, / And that no better can be had, / Know why an old man should be mad" (*YP* 592).

Davies was proposed by Yeats as an alternative to Walter de la Mare (1873–1956) in the new series of *A Broadside* that his friend Dorothy Wellesley was editing for him with the Cuala Press (*CL* #6931, 14 May 1937), which suggests that he found similar things to like in the two poets' work. Yeats had also included a poem by de la Mare in his rowdy BBC broadcast, "In the Poet's Pub," of that year. In both cases, he saw the poems as ideal for singing or reading aloud rhythmically, which helps explain the selections in the *OBMV,* with its strong emphasis on forms of the ballad and of folk poetry. Five of the six pieces are from de la Mare's *Poems, 1901 to 1918*, which Yeats owned, and with the exception of the sixth poem, the poet's much-anthologized 1912 ballad, "The Listeners," are for the most part strongly rhymed quadrameter or hexameter.

De la Mare's poetry often resembles certain early works by Yeats, such as "The Stolen Child," that explore faerie lore and Irish legend; the poems are anything but realistic, seeming to exist in a timeless, dreamlike world of exotic tales and mysterious settings. Although de la Mare was often anthologized in the *Georgian Poetry* series, he was also well known for his poems and anthologies for children, and several of the

selections, notably "Winter" and "The Silver Penny," convey the sense of innocent wonder and story that characterize good children's poetry. "The Listeners" and "The Echo" are darker and more gothic, reminiscent perhaps of Edgar Allan Poe, offering a glimpse at only an enigmatic corner of a narrative rather than the whole story. "The Scribe" is the most conventional and predictable of the six, both in its rhymes and in its image of God's will working through the poet's pen. Perhaps the most interesting is "All that's Past," which Yeats's introduction likens to Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Christabel* and *Kubla Khan*; it is strongly alliterative and reminiscent of Thomas Hardy's poems in its careful three-part structure—the woods, the streams, and the humans that dream of them:

> Very old are the woods;
>
> And the buds that break
>
> Out of the brier's boughs,
>
> When March winds wake,
>
> So old with their beauty are —
>
> Oh, no man knows
>
> Through what wild centuries
>
> Roves back the rose. (*OBMV* 160)

Yeats has little to say in his letters or critical writings about Ralph Hodgson (1871–1962), another poet sometimes found in the *Georgian Poetry* books, but he initially intended to include two lengthy poems of Hodgson's in the anthology: "The Bull" and "The Song of Honour." Both come from Hodgson's *Poems* (1917). Hodgson'd publisher, Macmillan, complained that this was a disproportionately large selection from

a small body of work, and Yeats dropped his request for the second poem, despite having received permission directly from the author. Even so, "The Bull" is among the longer poems in the *OBMV*; at 180 lines, its sympathetic portrayal of the life and career of a wild African bull occupies six-and-a-half pages. Hodgson was a well-known illustrator who worked with Jack Yeats (Harding par. 2), and who turned to poetry late in his career; T.S. Eliot wrote light verse about him in "Five Finger Exercises," and wanted him to illustrate *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats* (Harding par. 6). Indeed, though not light verse, "The Bull" has a fanciful feel to it not unlike the work of Masefield, de la Mare, and Davies. Readers of Yeats might find his selection notable in its depiction of the bull "slouching in the undergrowth" (*OBMV* 151) more than a decade before the Irish poet's own rough beast slouched memorably toward Bethlehem in "The Second Coming."

Frances Cornford (1886–1960) was not included in the *Georgian Poetry* anthologies,[7] but she was friends with Rupert Brooke; her poetry shares with many of the Georgians an interest in rural England, and a disquiet with the modern urban landscape. Yeats selected four short poems by her, including her much-anthologized early triolet, "To a Fat Lady seen from a Train" (from *Poems*, 1910), "A Glimpse" (from *Different Days*, 1928), plus "London Despair" and "Near an old Prison" (from *Mountains and Molehills*, 1935). All share a basic structure: a closely observed meditation on a scene or an idea, followed by a concluding two-line observation or question that marks the specific issue as part of a more general problem for the poet. In "A Glimpse," for example, she offers an impressionistic description of the landscape of Cambridge, seeing

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7. Marsh's *Georgian Poetry* was mostly an all-male affair; the only exception, included in the final 1922 edition of the series, was Victoria Sackville-West, whose work in the *OBMV* I discuss in Chapter VI.

in it something eternal, "The same since I was born, the same to be / When all my children's children grow old men" (*OBMV* 256).

The one poem in the *OBMV* by Gordon Bottomley (1874-1948) and the three by John Freeman (1880–1929) share a similar longing for a simpler (even if more ignorant) time. Bottomley's 1907 poem "To Iron-Founders and Others" (from *Chambers of Imagery,* 1912) condemns the dark satanic mills that "poison England at her roots" and "force the birds to wing too high / Where . . . unnatural vapours creep" (*OBMV* 162); he wishfully offers a vision of grass and greenery that will endure the pollution, and overgrow the ruins of human industry. Freeman's verses (from 1930's *Last Poems* and 1928's *Collected Poems*), depict such inchoate longing more psychologically: "Asylum" describes an abandoned house, overgrown with moss and lichen, that awaits "wise men" [who] here should find / Asylum from the thought and fear of Death" (*OBMV* 201). "To end her Fear" diagnoses the terror that the unknown and old age hold for a woman of the poet's acquaintance, and wishes for her a future sheltered from such cares. "The Hounds" presents a Yeats-like scene in which a dog howls in the night, and is answered by the howl of the "unneighboured and uncomforted cold sea" (*OBMV* 202), which the living animal finds strangely reassuring.

Yeats, to be sure, was no admirer of industrial blight or the complications of modern life, but it is notable that nature is typically a much more indifferent force in his work and does not evoke a sentimental affection. His sympathy is with human defiance in the face of such indifference, with the Irish ruins rather than the nature that overgrows them. In the poems about Coole Park that he included in the *OBMV,* for example, he does not welcome the prospect of wilderness obliterating the cultured grounds of Lady

Gregory's estate once her spirit no longer animates it; the estate represents the best of human achievement. Rather than finding comfort in the primitive howl of the sea, the poet in "To a Child Dancing in the Wind" is struck by the beauty of the child's ignorant defiance of what life holds in store, as embodied by "The monstrous crying of wind" (*YP* 121).

Among the last of the Georgians to receive attention from Yeats was the Welsh writer Richard Hughes (1900–1976), whose work caught his eye before he fastened upon other writers who better answered his call for a different sort of modern poetry that could rival the work of the literary modernists. "I have found the most excitement in your work, in that of Elinor Wylie, in that of Richard Hughes," he wrote Dorothy Wellesley as he was beginning his reading for the anthology. "Richard Hughes has something of your modernity and intensity of style, but his subject matter like that of Elinor Wylie is not rich" (*CL* #6317, 11 Aug 1935). Hughes had appeared in the final *Georgian Poetry* anthology in 1922. The fighting of the First World War ended before he saw action, but he belonged to the war generation, and his literary sensibility was suffused with a consciousness of its toll on his friends and classmates (Savage 605).

Yeats's selections come from Hughes's 1926 *Confessio Juvenis: Collected Poems*. They include a generous eight poems, which occupy seven pages of the anthology; a ninth poem, "The Singing Furies," was omitted after Yeats negotiated with Hughes and his publisher over permission fees. Yeats thought of Hughes primarily as a dramatist,[8] although by the 1930s Hughes had stopped publishing new poetry and drama

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8. Hughes had submitted a play to the Abbey Theatre that Yeats rejected because it lacked an Irish theme (*CL* #4115, Apr 1922). But he was impressed by it and sent it to Lady Gregory for her reaction (*CL* #4126, 18 May 1922).

and was better known for his popular 1929 novel, *A High Wind in Jamaica*. Lacking recent work from the poet, by 1936 it would have been clear to Yeats that Hughes could not be held up as a productive alternative to modernism; in his introduction to the anthology, he excuses his omission of a substantive discussion of Hughes's work by explaining that Hughes as "stands between two or more schools and might have confused the story" that he was telling about the development of modern poetry (*OBMV* xli).

What he meant by this can perhaps be inferred from the eight poems: a writer who, like the modernists, looks at a postwar Britain in which the old order is suspect, yet who, like the Georgians, nevertheless longs to find there some sort of religious or spiritual revelation. In praising his "intensity of style," Yeats was perhaps referring to realistic descriptions such as the one in "Sermon" that portrays a fleshy, mumbling minister in whose words the poet strains to hear a holy message, despite the apparent indifference of his scattered audience. This faith that such a truth can still be discovered, if only the poet listens hard enough, illustrates the "heroic" modern attitude that Yeats praises elsewhere in the anthology. All of the poems offer variations on this search for meaning: In "Felo de se" (which translates as "felon of himself" and refers to the legal status of suicides), the speaker imagines that death holds no certainty, and thus resolves to face uncertainties while alive instead. In "Old Cat Care," the speaker banishes worry from his cottage as he would put out the cat, and continues searching for happiness. "Glaucopis" tells the story of a man irrationally haunted by his accidental killing of an owl, a bird of ill omen. "The Walking Road" views life as a path along which "God sits like milestones" (*OBMV* 391). "The Image" describes a deceased body, imagining it as a work of a mysterious Creator's art, and wondering where the spirit that once animated it

has fled to. In "Winter," the poet describes an old gaffer who, like the animals around him, struggles to endure the elements, his spirit a mysterious thing.

The final poem by Hughes, "The Ruin," offers the most instructive comparison to Yeats's own work. In it, the poet describes a moldering ruin much like the deserted Irish estate in the Frank O'Connor translation of "Kilcash" elsewhere in the *OBMV*, and Yeats's own half-ruined tower, Thoor Ballylee, memorably described in "Meditations in Time of Civil War." As in both poems, the author imagines the ruin when it was inhabited, and like Yeats he wonders whether any ghosts linger from those days. But the answer comes quickly to him: "No: for the dead and senseless walls have long forgotten / What passionate hearts beneath the grass lie rotten." This is, after all, what a realistic, modern person would conclude. Yet it is not the conclusion of the poem. Just as Yeats's mystical and imaginative system gives structure and meaning to the tower that he inhabits, incredibly, the poet's imagination breathes life into the ruin:

> Only from roofs and chimneys pleasantly sliding
> tumbles the rain in the early hours:
> Patters its thousand feet on the flowers,
> Cools its small grey feet in the grasses. (*OBMV* 393)

iv. Omitting Wilfred Owen

Among the poets who wrote about their time fighting in the First World War, the most notable in the *OBMV* was the one not included: Wilfred Owen (1893–1918).[9] The anthology came to be notorious for Yeats's scorn of Owen, who was seen for much of the twentieth century as the most distinctive poetic voice among the generation of writers who experienced the First World War. Although the war had been over for more than sixteen years by the time Yeats began work on the *OBMV*, a spate of late-1920s survivors' memoirs by Robert Graves and others was still fresh in the public mind. Edmund Blunden had edited an extremely successful collected edition of Owen's poetry in 1931, which had broadened the audience that his work had found after Edith Sitwell and Siegfried Sassoon introduced it in a short 1921 collection; the poems were particularly championed by the left-leaning young poets of the 1930s, such as Stephen Spender, C. Day Lewis, and W. H. Auden, of whom Yeats mostly disapproved.

Yeats was not swayed by the popularity, telling a correspondent that he considered Owen "unworthy of the poets' corner of a country newspaper. . . . He is all blood, dirt & sucked sugar stick" (*CL* #6759, 21 Dec 1936). Both leftist reviewers such as Spender and establishment conservatives such as his editor at Oxford, Charles Williams, questioned his decision to leave Owen out. Indeed, the omission of Owen is often the only thing that modern readers remember about the anthology; consequently, no study of it would be complete without an attempt to put Yeats's editorial stance in context.

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9. Also missing was Isaac Rosenberg, whose omission did not stir up the outcry that Owen's did. Yeats's letters show that he ordered copies of Rosenberg's books while reading for the anthology, but he apparently did not retain the books for his home library, as represented in Wayne Chapman's short-title catalog.

As I have suggested, the period of armed conflict in Ireland between the Easter Rising of 1916 and the Civil War of 1922 was more important to Yeats as a moment of transition to a distinctively modern point of view than was the First World War, and he was already skeptical of a war so closely tied to English patriotic identity. Even so, it would be hard to deny that the larger conflict lies not only at the chronological center of the *OBMV,*[10] but also at the center of the literary concerns the anthology is reacting to. Poets of the period were clearly thinking about the war, writing about it, or pointedly not writing about it.

Yeats ostensibly sought to put war out of his mind while compiling it, writing in his introduction that "it is best to forget its suffering as we do the discomfort of fever, remembering our comfort at midnight when our temperature fell, or as we forget the worst moments of more painful disease" (xxxv). This seems like wishful thinking. But there was something peculiar to the work of Owen and other combatants, particularly those poems to which James Campbell has given the oxymoronic term "trench lyrics" (204), that especially irked Yeats.

Yeats's skepticism about the war, and war poetry in general, was apparent early. In a letter to the Abbey Theatre's Lennox Robinson during the first week of hostilities, he seemed more concerned with the war's effect on business and Irish politics: "Neitaze [*sic*] was fond of foretelling wars for the possession of the earth that were to restore the tragic mind, & banish the mass mind which he hated. We may find we have an audience

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10. Originally, Oxford University Press had intended the anthology to span the years 1900–1935, which would have put 1918 at the chronological center of the period. Yeats expanded the scope of the anthology to include Hopkins and the poets of the 1890s, but even so the dates bracketed by the book's subtitle, 1892–1935, cover twenty-four years before the war, and twenty-one years after it began.

for [Lady Gregory's 1905 play] 'Kinkora' [*sic*] to begin with, as in Ireland we want both war & peace, a war to unite us all" (*CL* #2499, 5 Aug 1914).[11] Later, he showed his own ambivalence, writing to a friend, "the fact that everybody in England talks war has out of sheer exasperation made it easy to concentrate. In Ireland the war seems further away & we talk war from sense of duty" (*CL* #2519, 4 Oct 1915). He cautioned Katharine Tynan, then collecting a volume of her verses in tribute to the troops, that "[m]ost poets on that theme are overpowered by the subject & lose themselves & one can only write out of one's self" (*CL* #2828, 12 Dec 1915). After the war ended, he wrote Ezra Pound that he was planning a lecture on contemporary poetry that left out war verse:

> I shall point out that the war (which was to give us all better morals & better art) has produced nothing besides much clotted ejaculation & Kiplinglike facility — no that might sound like criticism — but has permitted one or two good sonnets by Brooke & a charming poem by Grenfell (not a masterpiece) which might have been written anywhere & at any time. (*CL* #3679, 23 Nov 1919)

Yet his objection to the work of the war poets, and Owen in particular, was not merely to the clotted and Kiplingesque, but to what he saw as a wrongheaded approach that he described with the notorious phrase, "passive suffering." The subjects of Owen's war poems were typically caught between conflicting duties and loyalties, able only to endure the consequences of their superiors' orders, to inflict brutal suffering and to have it inflicted upon them. For Yeats, desperately in search of potency in his last years, evocations of impotency held little appeal.

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11. He was soon disabused of this notion, and subsequent letters during 1914–1918 were full of complaints about how the war had hurt Abbey fundraising.

Defending his decision to Dorothy Wellesley after early reviews by Spender and others criticized the omission, Yeats called Owen's much-anthologized poem, "Strange Meeting," "clumsy" and "discordant" (*CL* #6762, 23 Dec 1936), a reference probably to the poet's characteristic use of words and syllables that promised an obvious rhyme, then changed the vowel sound to frustrate the expectation (e.g., *laughed/left*; *-told/-tilled*). But, in the context of Yeats's expressed interest in a "heroic" response to modern life elsewhere in the *OBMV*, what really seems to have irked him about Owen's work was its appeal to "pity," as when the dead soldier of the poet's vision in "Strange Meeting" laments the fact that the living will never hear his report of the experience of war:

> For of my glee might many men have laughed
> And of my weeping something had been left,
> Which must die now. I mean the truth untold,
> The pity of war, the pity war distilled. (Owen 1)

This brings to mind Owen's fragmentary preface to his poems, in which he claimed that his verses were

> not about heroes. English Poetry is not yet fit to speak of them. Nor is it about deeds or lands, nor anything about glory, honour, dominion or power,
>
> except War.
>
> Above all, this book is not concerned with Poetry.
> The subject of it is War, and the pity of War.
> The Poetry is in the pity. (Owen ix)

Yeats's conception of the poet's task in the modern age was diametrically opposed to this. He saw the poetry *in the poetry*—art reflecting a human impulse to make one's mark through deeds, lands, glory, honor, dominion, and power (in a modern world which questioned the value of such things) as the very thing that paradoxically established a basis for heroism. It was on those terms that he justified his disdain for "passive suffering" to Wellesley:

> You say that we must not hate. You are right but we may, & sometimes must, be indignant & speak it. Hate is a kind of "passive suffering" but indignation is a kind of joy. "When I am told that somebody is my brother protestant" said Swift "I remember that the rat is a fellow creature," that seems to me a joyous saying. We that are joyous need not be afraid to denounce. . . . You say we must love. Yes but love is not pity. It does not desire to change its object. It is a form of the eternal contemplation of what is. (*CL* #6762, 23 Dec 1936)

In other words, Yeats saw the trench poets' emphasis on pity for their comrades as a variety of Victorian condescension rather than truly sympathetic identification with the spirit of human suffering. Pity thus became a didactic instrument by which the writer sought to manipulate and change that which it regarded, rather than an exploration of its subjects' inherent dignity. Such pity absolved the soldiers of both their greatness and their bitterness, antithetical qualities that Yeats pondered in his own "Meditations in Time of Civil War." In the introduction to the *OBMV*, he is careful not to denigrate the valor and service of the war poets, but admits a "distaste" for many of their poems because the writers "felt bound . . . to plead the suffering of their men. In poems . . .

written in the first person, they made that suffering their own. I have rejected these poems for the same reason that made Arnold withdraw his *Empedocles on Etna* from circulation; passive suffering is not a theme for poetry" (xxxiv).

The reference is to Arnold's 1853 preface to his poems, in which the poet explained that he had intended to present Empedocles as an analog to a modern type: "one of the last of the Greek religious philosophers . . . having survived his fellows, living on into a time when the habits of Greek thought had begun fast to change, character to dwindle, the influence of the Sophists to prevail" (Arnold 1). Arnold goes on to excuse his excision on the grounds that his poem's protagonist may have been philosophically justifiable, but came across as "morbid" and "monotonous"[12]: "no poetical enjoyment can be found . . . [from situations in which] the suffering finds no vent in action; in which a continuous state of mental distress is prolonged, unrelieved by incident, hope, or resistance . . ." (3–4). Arnold, at least, had recognized the degree to which his own Victorian prejudices had turned the subject of his poem into an exercise in didactic rhetoric; Owen, from Yeats's point of view, lacked such self-awareness. This, when combined with the grit of Owen's depictions of trench warfare, fused for Yeats the faults of Victorian sententiousness with the faults of modern realism, both of which the *OBMV*'s introduction criticizes at length.

Finally, Yeats's hostility to Owen's poetry has to be connected to the political aversion he felt toward the young leftist poets coming into vogue in the early 1930s. This was a time when fears of another European war had begun stirring up pacifist sentiment

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12. Ironically, one of Yeats's criticisms of the Victorians had to do with their tendency to moralize about poetry, just as Arnold is doing about his poem's "morbid" nature. Here, though, such moralizing suits the purpose of Yeats's argument.

in England and Yeats was toying with notions of backing the posturing of Ireland's para-Fascist "blueshirts" (Foster, *Arch-Poet* 474). From the beginning of the project, he had seen his job as an anthologist to include justifying his reasons for disliking the "Ezra, Eliot, Auden school"; although Pound and Eliot could hardly be considered leftists, Auden was another story. Yeats's introduction to the anthology consequently links war poetry to the leftist poetry of the 1930s, of which he is only slightly less critical: "Much of the war poetry was pacifist, revolutionary; it was easier to look at suffering if you had somebody to blame for it, or some remedy in mind. Many of these poets [of the 1930s, influenced by the trench poets] have called themselves communists, though I find in their work no trace of the recognized communist philosophy and the practicing communist rejects them" (xxxvii). Their social passion, in his eyes, is not heroic. In fact, it is part of the modern question rather than part of the answer.

v. The "Yeatsian Brocken Spectre": War Poets in a Postwar Anthology

In his BBC "Modern Poetry" broadcast, delivered as his anthology was arriving in bookstores, Yeats admitted that "established things were shaken by the Great War. All civilised men had believed in progress, in a warless future, in always-increasing wealth, but now influential young men began to wonder if anything could last or if anything were worth fighting for" (*Essays* 94–5). In the anthology, he represents this transformation with some short selections from poets such as Julian Grenfell, who anticipates a noble conflict in "Into Battle," and the scholar and essayist Vivian de Sola Pinto, whose

postwar "At Piccadilly Circus" shows the artificial, urban world the soldiers returned to. Grenfell was killed in the early fighting; Pinto was wounded and sent home.

Naturally, the "war poets" did not limit their work to trench lyrics, and in many cases Yeats chose examples of their work that strayed from the topic of the war. Although Yeats certainly invited criticism for omitting poets such as Owen and Rosenberg, the general perception that he deliberately excised all war poetry from the *OBMV* is unfounded: Poets whose reputations rested largely on their war poetry were often unwilling to let Yeats use their well-known work, fearing both the influence of the Yeats/Oxford combination, and being once again pigeonholed as war poets.

Memoranda in the Oxford University Press archives show that Yeats sought permission from Robert Graves for four of his poems; neither the archives nor Yeats's letters identify which ones he requested, or if they included any of the trench poetry from which Graves had begun to distance himself by the 1930s (Peschmann 3). Yeats, who had been friends with the poet's father, was certainly familiar with the whole range of Grave's published poetry: his home library included three volumes of verse, covering the years 1914–1933 (Chapman, "W.B. Yeats").

In any case, Graves huffily refused permission, citing the well-known pamphlet he and Laura Riding had written that denounced anthologies in general,[13] and objecting

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13. Despite his scruples, Graves had been regularly anthologized in the popular *Georgian Poetry* series, nor did those principles prevent him from contributing a substantial selection of work to the *Faber Book of Modern Verse*. His refusal to Yeats included a long rationalization of his reasons, including the Faber editor's willingness to let him to pick his own work and add notes to the introduction (Finneran, *Letters* 580). Graves repeatedly denounced Yeats and his poetry over the course of his career; his biographer suggests that one factor may have been the fact that Yeats had been a favorite of the poet's much-resented Irish father, A. P. Graves, and that the younger, English-born

specifically to the poems Yeats wanted: "[I]t seems to me, from the four poems you ask to use, that you are correspondingly creating an enlarged Yeats anthology—a sort of Yeatsian Brocken Spectre"[14] (qtd. in Finneran, *Letters* 580). Later, as the final manuscript was being typeset, Yeats struck up a correspondence with Riding, who relented and offered certain conditions by which she and Graves might grant permission. This time it was Yeats's turn to refuse: "I dont [*sic*] want Graves" (*CL* #6542, 26 Apr 1936), Yeats wrote Dorothy Wellesley. He was more interested in Riding's poems, but would not agree to her insistence that she decide which of them to include, writing, "I am a despotic man, trying to impose my will upon the times (an anthology one instrument) not co-operative" (*CL* #6541, 26 Apr 1936).[15]

The literary journalist Edward Shanks (1892–1953), like his friend and fellow veteran Graves, refused Yeats's request to be included in the anthology. Unlike Graves, his poems were included anyway. Shanks's publisher, Macmillan, had granted permission to include the four poems, but Shanks wrote the Oxford University Press in

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Graves had grown to hate Yeats's work on that account—particularly "The Lake Isle of Innisfree," which the elder Graves loved to recite (Seymour 147).

14. *Brocken spectre* refers to the looming, ghostly shadow of oneself, surrounded by prismatic colors, sometimes seen on the clouds below when one stands on a mountaintop above them. The implication is that Yeats was merely admiring his own haloed shadow.

15. A month later, Yeats flirtatiously refused Riding's suggestion that he include instead work by her friend James Reeves, whose work she and Graves had also succeeded in placing in the *Faber Book of Modern* Verse: "Too reasonable, too truthful. We poets should be good liars, remembering always that the Muses are women & prefer the embrace of gay warty lads" (*CL* #6563, 26 May 1936). This offended Riding, who, on the occasion of Yeats's death, circulated a private epigram she had written subsequent to their negotiations:

> Having with Irish art described the gates,
> The lock, the opening how, the woman within,
> You need not prove possession, Liar Yeats,
> To those who like a gay report of sin[.] (qtd. in Friedman 280)

alarm after seeing an early review copy. According to correspondence in the Press's archives, Shanks claimed to have sent his refusal to Yeats the previous winter. But the refusal was lost or mislaid, and by November 1936, books with Shanks's poems in them were rolling off the presses. Yeats, home from Majorca by this time, wrote his editor, explaining that he hadn't heard from Shanks, so had approached Shanks's publisher and received permission; he included a copy of the publisher's letter and blamed the mix-up on the Spanish mail system.

The selections were all from Shanks's 1916 *Poems*, many of which touched on their author's short stint serving in the army before he was invalided out in 1915 prior to seeing combat. By the 1930s, with literary modernism on the ascent, the Georgian manner of Shanks's war poems seemed dated to their author, and he sought to change his style to reflect the work of the modernists (Wormald par. 2). He explained his refusal to Oxford's editors, saying he had "decided that, in view of the importance necessarily attaching to a selection edited by Mr. Yeats, it would be better for me to be absent instead of being represented by very early verses of which I had an extremely low opinion" (19 Nov 1936). In a later letter, he added, "Mr Yeats is entitled to his opinion that these are the best of my poems but I am entitled to object to being made to seem to agree with him" (25 Nov 1936).

Shanks may also have sensed that Yeats's purposes in selecting from his verse were motivated by something less than simple admiration. He understandably contended that the aim of such an anthology should be to represent his best work; Yeats, however, was trying to be representative not of the whole body of Shanks's work, but only that work written at a certain moment. Yeats noted in his introduction to the anthology certain

poets of the period were "beset by what Rossetti called 'the soulless self-reflections of man's skill'; the more vivid his nature, the greater his boredom . . ." (xviii). He seems to have had writers such as Shanks in mind: as Yeats told Pound, the poems represented that quality of Georgian poetry that demonstrated "mere facility" (*CL* #3679, 26 Nov 1919); they lacked both the modernist anxiety that Pound and T. S. Eliot would explore, and the anti-modern fury that Yeats favored.

His appraisal in 1936 appears not to have changed much: he was ready to drop Shanks over the permissions problem. A follow-up telegram to the Press read, "JUST GOT YOUR WIRE AM GLAD TO LOSE SHANKS" (*CL* #6729, 27 Nov 1936). Shanks was ultimately convinced to withdraw his objections, and the matter was resolved.

Two of the poems depict the fading belief in a benevolent modernity that Yeats described in his BBC broadcast. Shanks's "Sleeping Heroes" does not describe the coming of the modern age explicitly, but it certainly implies it in its depiction of a cold, rainy dawn. Legendary and heroic European figures such as Barbarossa the corsair, King Arthur, and Charlemagne awaken from their timeless slumbers, at the onset of what can only be a key moment of modern European history—the war, presumably—and then decide to go back to sleep. Yeats had dealt with a similar theme in his early poem "The Wanderings of Oisin"; it concluded with a romantic shout (Oisin's defiance of St. Patrick upon awakening to an unheroic world) rather than the ironic shrug that Shanks's poem evokes. Another poem, "Drilling in Russell Square," similarly suggests the fading of the old, romantic world; the speaker, drilling with troops soon to go to the front, finds himself lost in a dream of quaint old Europe, mistakenly imagining that his service will be that of lancers and nineteenth-century infantry. The poet senses that the war will not

be heroic, even if he does not fully envision the actuality of bloody modern trench combat.

The other two selections are excerpted from Shanks's sequence, "The Winter Soldier," and depict the fatalistic *esprit de corps* of soldiers before battle. "Going in to Dinner" is a rowdy march, sung by soldiers as they prepare for war and wait for their evening's rations, far from the front lines. "'High Germany,'" which Shanks had originally entitled "To be Sung to the Tune of High Germany," refers to an eighteenth-century folk ballad about soldiers marching off to the Seven Years' War—perhaps the closest Europe came to a "world war" before the twentieth century. It had originally opened Shanks's sequence, and captured the naïve patriotic spirit of August 1914; this time, soldiers marched "to the merry wars / In Low Germany" (*OBMV* 332). The sense in the original ballad, which was popular in Ireland, of soldiers marching off to a war in which they had no real stake,[16] would have interested Yeats both in its use of the ballad form and because of his skepticism about the war.

Shanks was not wrong to be wary of inclusion. For a reader in 1936, the prewar wrong-headedness of the two poems must have been striking. Had Yeats been more sympathetic to Shanks' point of view, he could have chosen instead the concluding poem from the sequence, in which the invalided poet imagines his comrades going into battle without him and coming back transformed by a shared experience that he must miss: "Then in that new-born world, unfriendly and estranged, / I shall be quite alone, I shall be

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16. In one version of the folk ballad, a soldier tries to convince his pregnant lover to follow him to the "merry" wars. She replies,

> O cursed were the cruel wars that ever they should rise!
> And out of merry England pressed many a lad likewise;
> They pressed young Harry from me, likewise my brothers three,
> And sent them to the cruel wars in High Germany. (Stone 112)

left unchanged" (Shanks 37). Such a sense of alienation, in the hands of later literary modernists who never saw combat, would become part of a much more complex reaction to the war. But Shanks was more representative of doomed patriotic sentiment, the heir to Kipling and Newbolt; in the *OBMV,* he becomes the poet whom Yeats chooses to represent as the Georgian writer at war.

With Owen and Isaac Rosenberg omitted, and Graves refusing to cooperate, Siegfried Sassoon (1886–1967) stands as the most famous of the "war poets" to be found in Yeats's anthology. Yet it would be hard to identify him as such from the poems that Yeats chose: the selections all come from Sassoon's determinedly post-war volume, *The Heart's Journey* (1927). None of the realistic trench lyrics made famous in Edward Marsh's *Georgian Poetry* anthologies during the years of the conflict, such as "To Any Dead Officer" or "Counter-Attack," are included. Instead, Yeats's version of Sassoon is the author of poems such as "When I'm Alone" and "The Power and the Glory" that offer delicate postwar reflections on faith and heroism in solitude, after the great and terrible moments are over with.

Yeats had found Sassoon's wartime lyrics unimpressive,[17] but was more complimentary when Sassoon sent him the privately printed *Lingual Exercises for Advanced Vocabularians* (1925),[18] which included several poems that would later appear

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17. In a 1919 letter to Ezra Pound, Yeats noted that he'd just skimmed war-era books by Sassoon and Edward Shanks: "Shanks mere facility Sassoon little better so far as my glance goes but should be better—all the war poetry I have seen of late is the same kind of thing—honest or dishonest fun" (*CL* #3679, 23 Nov 1919).

18. A version of "When I'm Alone" was included along with "Grandeur of Ghosts" in the limited edition. Yeats's library included a signed copy of the volume, along with a 1935 reprint of *The Heart's Journey* (O'Shea, *Descriptive*), which included the other two poems that he selected for the *OBMV*.

in *The Heart's Journey* and *Satirical Poems* (1926). One of these was "Grandeur of Ghosts," which Yeats included in the *OBMV*: "I thank you for your little book with its delicate rhythms & its complex irony," Yeats wrote the poet. "I think you have greatly improved on your war work, though lacking so popular a theme may not be praised for it. Your 'Grandeur of Ghosts' is itself grand in its exact modern fashion" (*CL* #4720, 5 May 1925).

The ghosts in the poem are not spirits in the sense that Yeats usually employed the term, but the lyric resembles several of his poems in its use of the specters of dead writers as a point of comparison with the debased nature of modern-day life:

> They have spoken lightly of my deathless friends,
>
> (Lamps for my gloom, hands guiding where I stumble,)
>
> Quoting, for shallow conversational ends,
>
> What Shelley shrilled, what Blake once wildly muttered. . . . (*OBMV* 258)

The "exact modern fashion" is Yeats's way of noting Sassoon's emotional restraint, careful technique, attention to Hardy-esque realistic detail,[19] and his caution about moving from such details to larger, more Romantic notions. Where Sassoon is content merely to compare the stature of the high Romantic poets to petty modern gossips, for instance, a Yeats poem such as "Blood and the Moon" sees a vast pattern that makes past poetic wisdom and present-day power incompatible; he compares it to the modern world he lives in, "this pragmatical, preposterous pig of a world":

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19. Sassoon also sent a copy of *Lingual Exercises* to Hardy, to whom he had dedicated his first book of war poetry, *The Old Huntsman*. He visited Hardy at home on several occasions in the late 1910s and early 1920s. Yeats, commenting on a Sassoon poem about a visit to Blenheim Palace, offered further faint praise about the younger man's use of realistic detail: "my own memory of a lunch at Blenheim proves how close you can keep to the fact and yet . . . reuse it also" (*CL* #4720, 5 May 1925).

For wisdom is the property of the dead,

A something incompatible with life; and power,

Like everything that has the stain of blood,

A property of the living . . . . (*YP* 242)

The nearest thing to a "war poem" among the four lyrics selected by Yeats is the sonnet, "On Passing the New Menin Gate," which Sassoon wrote after visiting a memorial at a site along the Ypres Salient in 1927. But compared trench poems by Sassoon that focused their realistic detail on the immediate experience of modern warfare, here Sassoon's interest is not the fighting itself but postwar amnesia. His subject is thus not the "pity" that Yeats so despised in Wilfred Owen's poems but rather the way in which society has neatly obscured the horror of the experience in "a pile of peace-complacent stone" (*OBMV* 259). Such a subject would have been marginally more congenial to Yeats, several of whose poems about the Irish 1916 Easter Rising explored the way that posterity looked back on the casualties of war and revolution. For Yeats, in a poem such as "Easter 1916," the point is how the unheroic lives and actions of ordinary people he has joked about and passed on the street become transformed, after their death, by forces beyond human control or understanding. Sassoon does not condemn myth-making per se, but his nameless comrades of the muddy trenches remain nameless in their graves; he notices that they are simply used as empty symbols by perpetrators of the same human folly that sent them to a pointless war in the first place. Yeats had very little sympathy for anonymous masses of men, which he saw as part of the problem of modernity; Sassoon, who had seen mass casualties firsthand, found it harder to put the actual human suffering out of mind.

Yeats was more enthusiastic about Sassoon's friend and fellow veteran Robert Nichols (1893–1944). Nichols had introduced Sassoon's *Counter-Attack and Other Poems* (1918), and was also celebrated for his own war poetry, written after a short stint in combat, though by the 1930s he had mostly lost his audience and was no longer publishing lyric poetry. In a letter about the anthology in October 1935, Yeats complimented Nichols, saying, "you are the only man who can represent the war" (*CL* #6381). Despite this, among the nine poems by Nichols in the *OBMV*, none ended up being directly about the war.

Edward O'Shea has noted that Yeats marked for inclusion nine of Nichols's war-era poems in his copy of the poet's 1917 *Ardours and Endurances*. He clipped all of these from the book to paste into a manuscript, which O'Shea said "usually indicate[ed] an advanced state in Yeats's selecting process" (*Yeats* 80). After the two corresponded, though, Yeats informed his editors that he had revised his selection (*CL* #6448, 15 Nov 1935). The poems dropped were all war poems,[20] although several of these may have been among the four additional poems by Nichols that Yeats was prepared to reintroduce as substitutes for Edward Shanks's war poems after the latter complained about his work's inclusion (Mulgan). The early part of Yeats's correspondence with Nichols about the poems is not available,[21] and the missing letters appear to have concerned the war

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20. The electronic edition of Yeats's unpublished letters includes excerpts in which Yeats compliments Nichols's war verses: "I am putting neither [Charles Hamilton] Sorley nor Wilfred Owen into my book, though my Publisher says the last will 'be regretted by old and young.'. . . I state in my preface that I consider all war poetry bad except yours. The war was in your imagination, it was on their nerves . . ." (*CL* #6417, 24 Oct 1935).

21. This may be because, as Nichols's biographers note, by 1936 the cash-strapped Nichols was trying to raise money by selling letters from Yeats (Charlton 226).

poems. In one surviving letter, despite grudgingly granting permission to include the poems in question, Nichols explained his ambivalence to Yeats, which apparently convinced the anthologist to leave them out:

> Now, as you say, I don't "dislike" the early war poems. Nonetheless I'd rather be represented by something else. Or if some war poems of mine are to be included I'd prefer *Battery Moving Up* to *The Last Morning* as crisis of the war poems. *Battery Moving Up* is the poem I like best of my war poems. Its sense is all the sense I came to about the war & in which I shall rest. . . . Nonetheless if you prefer to print the war poems & will state why in your preface,[22] it is not for me to cavil. (Finneran, *Letters* 581)

Some of Nichols's war poems are realistic evocations of bullets, blasts, and body-parts flying as he and his comrades advance across No-Man's-Land, but the war lyrics that Yeats initially wanted to use were more Romantic, describing moments before the soldiers went over the top and after the guns stopped firing. Instead of realistic gore, a poem such as "The Last Morning"[23] concludes with exalted sentiments and a lack of observed detail more in keeping with Yeats's notions of heroism than the antiheroic horror depicted by Owen, or Graves, or even Sassoon.

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22. The discussion of Nichols's war poetry was not included in the final version of his introduction.

23. An editorial note to the fragment included in the unpublished letters adds that Yeats originally asked to use "The Last Morning," from Nichols's *Ardours and Endurances* (*CL* #6417, 24 Oct 1935). Edward O'Shea identifies two other war-themed poems by Nichols that were originally requested but not included: "In the Grass: Halt by the Roadside," and "Nearer," both from *Ardours and Endurances* (*Yeats* 71). After negotiating with Nichols, Yeats later wrote to Oxford's Charles Williams explaining that his selection had changed, but that the two poets had agreed to "a group of poems which pleases me without greatly displeasing him" (*CL* #6448, 15 Nov 1935).

With the war poems removed, the others that Yeats ended up using were deliberately shaped to create an effect: "I have arranged the poems as a kind of drama of the soul, with the gay whimsical end," he wrote (*CL* #6381, Oct 1935). In another letter, he noted that "first comes the D'Annunzio poem with its sea landscape, then comes a magnificent series of sonnets to Aurelia, then a short lyric followed by more sea poems which are also love poems, winding up with Don Juan's address to the sunset" (*CL* #6404, c. 20 Oct 1935).

The selection includes the long lyric "To D'Annunzio: Lines from the Sea," four "Sonnets to Aurelia" (inspired by Nichols's brief affair with heiress Nancy Cunard), the short lyric "Aurelia," two sections from Nichols's four-part "The Flower of Flame," and "Don Juan's Address to the Sunset," which was excerpted from his unpublished drama, *Don Juan Tenorio.* Seven of the nine are taken from Nichols's 1920 compilation, *Aurelia, and Other Poems*, which Yeats owned. Four of these come from among Nichols's twenty-seven "Sonnets to Aurelia" (sonnets iii, v, xvi, and xix in the sequence), which are untitled in the anthology.[24] The "drama of the soul" that Yeats describes thus begins with blindness and ends with vision: in the first poem, the poet strains to see the horizon through obscuring storm and waves at sea, imagining and envying the Italian poet and swashbuckling proto-fascist political leader Gabriele d'Annunzio. In the last, another great man, Don Juan, gazes at the sunset on a clear day, and imagines his spirit soaring like a crane, looking down on land and sea alike, and beyond the horizon, finally becoming like the evening star glimmering above the world in the last light. In between

24. This differed from Yeats's practice with other sequences of untitled poems in the *OBMV*, for which he typically used the first line as a title. The first Nichols sonnet is titled "From 'Sonnets to Aurelia,'" and, although all four are numbered as discrete poems in the anthology's contents (nos. 297–300), the other three are left untitled.

are a series of love lyrics in which the poet moves from the consolation of love to the despair of parting.

Yeats owned an edition in the "Benn's Augustan Books of Poetry" series that selected from Nichols's work (1930), including the poem about d'Annunzio, which Nichols wrote in 1921. It was composed while on a ship in the Adriatic shortly after the collapse of an Italian nationalist revolt in Fiume (now Rijeka, Croatia) led by d'Annunzio, who briefly directed the rebel city-state as its *duce*, defying the postwar treaty that parceled out parts the Austro-Hungarian Empire. After the revolt was put down by the Italian government, Nichols wrote a friend, d'Annunzio was "reputed at that time . . . to be wandering on the shore of the Adriatic a broken man" (Charlton 117).

The poem has much in it that Yeats would have found compelling: the parallels between d'Annunzio's revolt in Fiume and the 1916 Easter Rising in Ireland are inescapable, and although by 1935 the brutality of Mussolini and Hitler was becoming apparent, d'Annunzio still represented an attractive Nietzschean vision of the artist as superman, operating heroically in the political arena. The speaker in Nichols's poem envies d'Annunzio his belief and clarity of purpose:

> And we, to whom no certain faith is given
> With which in desperate act to gauge our worth,
> Or, having faith, are granted not of heaven
> Fierce hours to bear its crown or cross on earth, [. . .]
> We envy you. (*OBMV* 338)

Yeats expresses much the same sort of envy in his great sequence, "Meditations in Time of Civil War," as he moves toward his conclusion in the final poem: "I turn away

and shut the door, and on the stair / Wonder how many times I could have proved my worth / In something that all others understand or share." The difference, of course, is that Nichols's praise of d'Annunzio expresses an unqualified desire for faith, and to find in himself the same sort of heroic passion that he sees in his hero. Yeats is more circumspect, recognizing the dark side of such ambition: "But O! ambitious heart, had such a proof drawn forth / A company of friends, a conscience set at ease, / It had but made us pine the more . . ." (*YP* 210).

The Shakespearian sonnets to Aurelia, and the poem to her, are written in the tradition of sonnet sequences that chronicle a poet's passion for his beloved. In Nichols's case, although the love affair is consummated, the poems are about the indifference and failure that follows. For instance, in the third of the anthologized sonnets, "But piteous things we are—when I am gone," the poet seems to long for the sort of ecstatic vision that Yeats found in a poem on much the same subject, "When You Are Old." As in Yeats's poem, the poet reflects on the loss of beauty and love, and wishes his beloved could look back on a time when the lovers were younger. But unlike Yeats's enraptured speaker, whose elderly beloved, he hopes, will recall "how love fled / . . . And hid his face amid a crowd of stars" (*YP* 37), the speaker in Nichols's poem will go unremembered by an indifferent lover whose mind is failing with age:

> Among the mothlike shadows you will mark
>
> Two that most irk you, that with gesture human
>
> Yet play out passion heedless of the dark:
>
> A desperate man and a distracted woman,

And you mayhap will vaguely puzzle, "Who

Is she? and he? why do they what they do?" (*OBMV* 340)

Still, Nichols's take on the postwar problem of a world in which the heroic ideal perished with the men in the trenches was clearly more attractive to Yeats than that of the better-known war poets who wallowed in realism. We can see this in the "gay whimsical end" he chose with the selection from Nichols's *Don Juan Tenorio*,[25] in which the speaker (presumably Don Juan,[26] in a graveyard as he is about to be dragged to hell by the ghostly father of one of his conquests), celebrates the joy and beauty of life in the moment, the flowers and scents of evening, and the light of the sunset; he imagines his spirit gazing beyond the horizon from the heavens. Rather than being pulled down by the mundane business of failed love and failing flesh, or, for that matter, the circumstances of the war poems that Yeats originally intended to include, Nichols finds something transcendent to celebrate.

The 1931 edition of *The Poems of Wilfred Owen* edited by Edmund Blunden (1896–1974) has been credited by many scholars with bringing the full range Owen's war verse to the attention of younger poets such as W. H. Auden and Stephen Spender, who found its sympathy for suffering soldiers compatible with a left-leaning modernist poetic. Blunden's own verse never had as much of an impact, although war experiences were a

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25. I am unable to identify Yeats's source for "Don Juan's Address to the Sunset." *Don Juan Tenorio* itself was never published, but Nichols circulated the lyric widely in manuscript, and may have urged it on Yeats as the two were negotiating. The composer E. J. Moeran had published sheet music for a "Nocturne" in 1934 that used these lyrics. Interestingly, Moeran had also set at least one of Yeats's poems to music.

26. Yeats unsuccessfully urged Nichols to change the title for the *OBMV* to omit the reference to Don Juan, which brought "an alien association" (*CL* #6404, c. 20 Oct 1935) to the sequence. This suggests that he was more interested in the expressions of transcendence and vision than allusion to the Don Juan story.

major focus. His war poems lacked the sort of dramatic, wrenching realism of Owen. For Blunden, war's horrors typically serve as the background after the fighting for exquisite reflections on rural life reminiscent of Thomas Hardy, where traditional ways linger among the people even as the world changes around them. In this, Blunden's work seems quintessentially Georgian—the expression of post-war disillusionment in a contemporary idiom, eschewing the urban settings and stylistic experimentation of the modernists in favor of traditional forms and rural subjects.

Yeats included a representative six pages of Blunden's work in the *OBMV*. All were selected from *Poems of Edmund Blunden, 1914–1930*; of those, two deal with the war directly: "In Festubert" (1916), which opens the sequence, and "Report on Experience" (1929), which closes it. In between are four lyrics that offer wry looks at rural life: "Forefathers" concerns the legacies of earlier generations, a theme that runs through several other poems Yeats selected for the anthology. Blunden's poem explores the way in which the humanity of his dimly remembered forefathers has been lost, since no tales, letters, or gravestones mark their lives. "Almswomen" offers a portrait of two elderly paupers who live together, delighting in the moment, defying the passing years with their garden, and hoping that death will carry them off at the same moment. "Mole Catcher" describes a kindly aging trapper who sets snares for moles, and is in a sense himself snared by his provincialism, and by the parish church where he happily hangs by the bell-cords to rings changes. "The Survival" contemplates the very Yeatsian subject of fallen towers, once raised by mastery and ambition, which form the pavement underfoot for a new generation.

Only the title of "In Festubert" gives it away as a war poem: the reference is to the site of a costly 1915 British battle in support of the French Artois Offensive. In the poem, the poet finds himself alienated even from his nightmares and visions, as he stares at empty roads and frozen fields, presumably those of the battleground seen in winter after the previous spring's fighting. He mourns his loss of innocence and concludes the poem wishing that the seer's crystal through which this Yeats-like vision presents itself would shatter and grant him relief from his dark premonitions: "Splinter, crystal, splinter and burst; / And sear no more with second sight" (*OBMV* 362).

"Report on Experience" echoes the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes, commenting on the way in which the illusions of youth give way to recognition of the grimness of existence as we age—a theme that Yeats often touches on. The second stanza addresses the subject of religious justifications for the war in this context:

> I have seen a green country, useful to the race,
> Knocked silly with guns and mines, its villages vanished,
> Even the last rat and last kestrel banished—
> God bless us all, this was peculiar grace.

The third stanza describes a woman reminiscent of Yeats's Crazy Jane, beaten down by the passing of time and life, though without the latter's inspired truth-telling. The concluding stanza drives home the poet's mixed sense of faith and doubt about the inscrutability of divine purpose: "These disillusions are His curious proving / That He love humanity and will go on loving; / Over there are faith, life, virtue in the sun" (*OBMV* 367).

Yeats's introduction argues that his selection of "The End of a War," by Herbert Read (1893–1968), serves as an adequate substitute for the trench poetry that he omits. If one counts its lengthy prose "argument," Read's is the longest single poem in the *OBMV*, filling sixteen-and-a-half pages. Even so, Yeats says little about it in his introduction, choosing instead to briefly discuss another long philosophical poem by Read, "Mutations of the Phoenix," of which he includes a short excerpt (*OBMV* xxxi–xxxii). Read certainly qualifies as a war poet, having served in the trenches, but "The End of a War" was not published until 1933, some fifteen years after the armistice. And, although it is framed by a prose narrative about a senseless ambush and an atrocity on the last day of fighting, and a disclaimer about the factuality of the incident, it hardly satisfied the objections of critics of the anthology: the poem is essentially a philosophical meditation on war and religion rather than a realistic dramatic portrayal of combat and the raw suffering of the troops.

Part I of the three-part poem is in the voice of an imprisoned German officer who has, by offering disinformation, lured advancing Allied forces into an ambush on the war's last day. The officer, whom the Allied soldiers bayonet when they learn of his perfidy, sees himself as something of a Nietzchean superman purified in the fire of conflict, and justifies his stratagem as an example of the "Mind [that] triumphs over flesh / ordering the body's action in direst danger" (*OBMV* 349) in service of the fatherland. Despite some second thoughts at the memory of a friend whom he finds praying in an empty church, the officer assures himself that God is created by men through their actions, and that his fealty to the ideas he has fought for redeems him.

Part II is a dialogue between body and soul, a device that Yeats used frequently. In this case, the voices belong to a Frenchwoman whom the English had found murdered

and mutilated, after the retreating Germans left the town in which the ambush was set. She was apparently killed trying to get intelligence from the retreating troops, having given herself over to a patriotic and religious frenzy for the motherland: "Those who die for a cause die comforted and coy; / believing their cause God's cause they die for joy" (*OBMV* 354), she concludes. In contrast to the German's godless philosophy, she represents a self-sacrificing religious Romanticism. But she is just as dead as he, and her Romanticism has gotten her killed just before the war's end.

Part III is narrated by an English officer who wakes from sleep on Armistice Day, having witnessed the German's ambush and seen the dead woman's body the previous day, and who realizes that against the odds he has survived the war. His is, appropriately enough for an Englishman familiar with the Anglican *via media*, a "middle way"—neither wholly convinced by religion nor wholly skeptical of it. He lives on to carry out his unpleasant duties, unlike a friend whose Romantic suicide he recalls, and unlike the German who died smiling grimly at the game he had played. As he hears the joyous celebration outside, he finds, for all his doubt, he is unable to get out of his mind the notion that the meek shall inherit the earth:

> To that end worship God, join the voices
> heard by these waking ears. God is love:
> in his will the meek heart rejoices
> doubting till the final grace a dove
> from Heaven descends and wakes the mind
> in light above the light of human kind
> in light celestial

infinite and still

eternal

bright (*OBMV* 360)

Read worked closely with T. S. Eliot on *The Criterion* after the war. Stylistically, the poem shares much with certain of Eliot's dramatized philosophical monologues, and shows a consciousness of "The Waste Land," with its multilingual cacophony of voices. Yet it is less hermetically guarded in its argument than most of Eliot's work of the period; one can see how Yeats would find it compelling. In his brief discussion of Read's "Mutations of the Phoenix," Yeats praises that poem's sense of finite consciousness arising from a dimly perceived divine infinite (*OBMV* xxxi).

Much the same could be said of Read's attempt to put the war into context in "The End of a War"—we are, he suggests, neither the products of human will nor of a divine plan, but rather parts of a terrible pattern of which we become dimly aware even as we bring it about. The poet finds a certain joy in this recognition. None of the actors in Read's drama is passive: their suffering is deliberately undertaken, and is even heroic from a certain point of view. At the poem's conclusion, the surviving English officer soldiers on, doing his duty, preparing to bury the dead, yet for all his horror at what has transpired he is somehow able to live in the moment and tap into that bitter gaiety that Yeats considered to be the properly heroic response to the challenges of modern life.

vi. Exotics, Mystics, and the East

Sprinkled amongst the work of the Georgian poets in the *OBMV* is a grab-bag of odd poems and translations from that era that caught Yeats's interest. Some of these were by friends or acquaintances, some by writers whom he knew by reputation in other contexts. Some simply touched on what he saw as quintessentially modern themes.

Manmohan Ghose (1869–1924) had been an acquaintance during the time of the Rhymers' Club, when Ghose was living in England after attending Oxford, and was a longtime friend and correspondent of Yeats's friend Lawrence Binyon. Binyon wrote an introduction to Ghose's posthumously published *Songs of Love and Death* (1926), and Ghose's posthumous editor cites a note from Yeats saying he was much moved by the account of Ghose's life, as well as by the poetry (Ghose iv). Yeats later recalled Ghose as one of only two Indians to have "written well in English"[27] (*CL* #5937, 9 Sep 1933) and anthologized the love lyric, "Who is it talks of Ebony," from *Songs of Love and Death.*

It is not clear where Yeats found "The Sailor," the only poem he included by Sylvia Townsend Warner (1893–1978); it was published in the poet's first book, *The Espalier* (1925). There is no record of Yeats having corresponded with Warner, or written about her. The poem's depiction of a sailor lying to his lover about the dangers and attractions of life at sea recalls the part of Yeats's 1917 poem about his seafaring Pollexfen ancestors, "In Memory of Alfred Pollexfen," in which he notes the absence of "Sailor John" (his wandering uncle John Pollexfen):

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27. Despite his admiration for Ghose's skill with English verse, Yeats was more interested in the ideas of the Indian poets whose work he had edited. He included seven poems in English by Rabindranath Tagore, and three by Shri Purohit Swami in the anthology. The other Indian writer he refers to in the letter, Toru Dutt, was not a poet.

But where is laid the sailor John

That so many lands had known,

Quiet lands or unquiet seas

Where the Indians trade or Japanese?

He never found his rest ashore,

Moping for one voyage more.

Where have they laid the sailor John? (*YP* 157)

Geoffrey Scott (1884–1929) was better known as an architect and biographer than as a poet, but his work had received some attention in the 1920s and early ’30s: two of the four short poems Yeats chose for the *OBMV* had appeared in popular contemporary anthologies by Sir John Squire and Harold Monro’s widow Alida Klemantaski. All of the *OBMV* selections appear in Scott’s *Poems,* which were published posthumously in 1931: an excerpt from the longer poem, “The Skaian Gate,” and the short lyrics, “What was Solomon’s Mind?” “All our Joy is enough,” and “Frutta di Mare.” Scott had been part of the trendy and aristocratic literary and social circle that included Dorothy Wellesley and Victoria Sackville-West in the 1920s, which also would have interested Yeats.

It is easy to see why Yeats would like Scott’s four poems, and find them an attractive alternative to the postwar verse of the Soldier Poets, the experimental modernists, and the young writers in Auden’s circle. They are hardly exercises in social realism, nor do they explore the gritty details of modern life. Instead, they are infused with the same mystical worship of artifice that Yeats wrote about in poems such as “Sailing to Byzantium.” Their subjects are artifacts of human culture. All exist in a timeless, boundless eternity of the poet’s imagining; they speak of the endurance of art,

the nature of wisdom, human insignificance, and hidden truths. In "Frutta di Mare," for example, Scott employs the image of a sea shell—an image Yeats had memorably employed in poems such as *The Wanderings of Oisin* and "Adam's Curse"; for Scott, it is an object "flung / Up from the ancient sea" that busy people overlook and ignore, but whose "song" tells of "The key to all your wonder, / The answers of the deep" (*OBMV* 231–2), and perhaps recalls the image of pilgrim-scallop badges in Sir Walter Raleigh's "His Pilgrimage."

Yeats wrote in his introduction to the *OBMV* that he had searched for examples of "religious poetry" by recent poets, and found two poems by the expatriate American William Force Stead (1884–1967), "How Infinite are Thy Ways" and "I closed my Eyes To-day and saw." Stead was a Church of England clergyman[28] and minor poet who became friends with Yeats when both lived in Oxford in the early 1920s. George Mills Harper notes that Stead sought to convince Yeats to join him in journeying to Rome and converting to Catholicism in the early 1930s, but that Yeats, while sympathetic to the religious ritual,[29] could not make peace with Catholic dogma (21). They shared an interest in visions and dreams, and Yeats obliged the younger poet by reading and criticizing his work on various occasions during the 1920s (13). Indeed, Yeats took the liberty of revising "How Infinite are Thy Ways," suggesting that Stead invert two lines to

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28. Stead was chaplain at Worcester College Oxford, in which capacity he baptized T. S. Eliot in 1927, on the occasion of Eliot's conversion to Christianity.

29. It is not clear how seriously Yeats took the invitation, but worth noting that Harper documents the fact that that the exchange took place in March 1931; Yeats included in the *OBMV* a fragment of his important late poem, "Vacillation," written ten months later, in which he debates the notion of accepting Catholic doctrine, imagining a dialogue with Catholic theologian Baron Friedrich von Hügel.

change the sound (*CL* #6331, Sep 1935), a suggestion that Stead accepted for the version published in the *OBMV*.

Both poems are typically Georgian in their use of traditional meters and in the way that Stead anchors them in specific rural details, but both have the visionary quality that attracted Yeats. "How Infinite are Thy Ways" begins with a description of the poet listening as night comes to a village, hearing the voices of crickets and dogs and farm-animals, and wondering about the nature of God. Then, hearing a girl's voice in the dark, the poet finds himself sharing with her and the village around them a sense that all are part of a transcendent divinity. The other poem, a fevered landscape that combines the sort of elements that are usually found in late Van Gogh paintings—swirling skies and sunflowers—conveys an unsettling vision of imminent doom and the end of days, rather like that found in the ending of Yeats's "Second Coming."

Yeats devoted twelve pages in the anthology to three substantial Georgian-era translations from the Chinese. "The Temple," which occupies nine pages, was from a ninth-century poem by Tang Dynasty poet Bai Juyi (Po Chü-i) translated by Arthur Waley (1889–1966); "English Girl," which occupies a page, was from an anonymous nineteenth-century poem translated by Edward Powys Mathers (1892–1939). The third, was Ezra Pound's "The River-merchant's Wife: A Letter," which I discuss in Chapter VI. Yeats's interest in the other two translations must be seen in light of his work with Pound on Chinese and Japanese, among other projects undertaken while the two poets shared winter lodgings at Stone Cottage in Sussex during the years 1913–1916. As James Longenbach has noted, Yeats was greatly impressed by the vigorous *vers libre* of

Pound's *Cathay* (116), and was himself fascinated by the sensibility revealed in the Japanese and Chinese verse and drama that they read together (44).

Just as Yeats's selections from the 1890s included translations by Arthur Symons and others to illustrate the importance of French Symbolist verse to the avant-garde English writers of the period, his inclusion of the Chinese translations testifies to Pound's influence. Neither Waley's nor Mathers's work has real strength as poetry on its own terms. Hugh Kenner has argued persuasively that Waley's translations are pedantic, despite their attempt to use the accents of sprung rhythm as a way of representing the effect of Chinese ideograms: "Other translators of Chinese, marveling at Pound's translucency but deploring his want of scholarship, have supposed themselves to have learned his lesson when they have kept the syntax simple and the line-length irregular, and have composed nothing it is possible to remember" (209). Their inclusion by Yeats is a nod to the Imagist aesthetic, otherwise largely slighted in the anthology.

But both Mathers and Waley were skilled linguists who published widely in the 1920s and 1930s; Waley was the more accomplished scholar, and his expertise in Chinese was acknowledged by Pound (who nevertheless expressed exasperation at the "bungling English and defective rhythm" (Pound 87) of his verse. Mathers was more of a journeyman,[30] and his translations were often secondhand, taken from French sources, but he too was connected to Pound: the copy of Mathers's work in Yeats's library includes an inscription by the author to Pound, thanking him for his influence in getting some of the translations published in *The Little Review* (O'Shea, *Descriptive* 171). His

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30. Mathers, in addition to publishing translations out of languages as varied as Chinese, French, and Kashmiri, supported himself in the guise of "Torquemada," setting crossword puzzles for *The Observer* (Baron 161).

poem appeared in *Coloured Stars* (1919). Waley's appeared in *The Temple and Other Poems* (1923).

Sacheverell Sitwell (1897–1988), the younger brother of Edith Sitwell, may have belonged to the Georgian generation, but his subject matter tended to be more aristocratic and focused on high culture. Yeats included only one of his poems—a long one. "Agamemnon's Tomb" is the longest sustained nondramatic lyric in the anthology, occupying ten pages, and is written in a five-stress accentual meter that Yeats likened to Hopkins's "sprung rhythm." (Its actual rhythmic effect is far more regular than that encountered in Hopkins's work, sometimes approaching the feel of Yeats's own blank verse.)

In Yeats's introduction, the direct discussion of Sachaverell Sitwell is brief: the mention of sprung verse technique; a generalization about the poet's interest in "changes of colour, or historical phase,[31] in Greece, Crete, India"; and a brief assessment of the long poem, which Yeats says "describes our horror at the presence and circumstance of death and rises to great intensity" (*OBMV* xvii). It precedes a more complex discussion of skeleton imagery in the work of modern poets, among whom Yeats particularly notes Edith Sitwell, T. S. Eliot, and Elinor Wylie. Sachaverell Sitwell is compared to them as one who has chosen to "escape to the classics" (xviii), but clearly "Agamemnon's Tomb," with its lengthy meditation on death and bones, also begs to be considered in the light of Yeats's argument about the modern fascination with the grave.

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31. This would have been of particular interest to Yeats, who had constructed an entire symbolic "system" based on historical phases. Other poems touching on the Trojan War are scattered through the anthology. Yeats himself had written notable lyrics such as "No Second Troy" and "Leda and the Swan" that addressed the subjects of the Homeric epics; the cuckoldry of Agamemnon's brother, Menelaus, is the subject of the only poem included by Richard Church (1893–1972), "On Hearing the First Cuckoo."

The poem, published in Sitwell's 1933 *Canons of Giant Art*, appears to have been written with a consciousness of scripture about the "valley of dry bones" (Ezekiel 37:1–14) and the imagery of Eliot's work of a decade earlier—particularly the first part of *The Waste Land*: "The Burial of the Dead," and the 1917 "Whispers of Immortality," which Yeats included in the *OBMV*.[32] It describes two visits to the excavations at Mycenae, a site that Heinrich Schliemann had claimed included the tomb of the legendary king Agamemnon. The poem begins with a meditation on the nature of tombs and the horror that their desiccated persistence holds for the living; the poet imagines the living soul as its light is extinguished, as it realizes that only bones will remain, and as it shrinks away to nothing, leaving the living world.

In the abstract, Sitwell suggests that the tomb would force us to confront the idea of death as something final, rather than as a metaphysical state of transition. But as he actually visits the tomb he finds himself seeing it as a work of art that somehow defies the death it seeks to contain: "If this was death, then death was poetry" (*OBMV* 382). Just as Yeats finds honey-bees building in the walls of his tower in "The Stare's Nest by my Window," Sitwell hears the hum of bees that have nested in the tomb. While the tomb may contain the nothing that is death, he concludes, it is a construct of art. In the art of the tomb, and of Homer's stories, Agamemnon thus lives on despite the finality of the grave.

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32. Some of the parallels with Eliot's influential poem appear fairly direct—dogs digging up the dead, the fear found in grains of dust, the dryness under the rock: Eliot's poem is, arguably, written from the point of view of the Mycenaean-era seer Tiresias, perhaps from his tomb, as he foresees the coming of the postwar "waste land" that Eliot knew in the City of London in 1919. The speaker's voice in "Whispers of Immortality" similarly arises from the dry bones of a tomb.

Finally, in addition to the poets mentioned in this chapter, no overview of the Georgian element in the *OBMV* would be complete without a discussion of the work of Sitwell's sister Edith, the poet and music critic W. J. Turner, or Victoria Sackville-West. Turner and Sackville-West were published in the *Georgian Poetry* series, and all feature prominently in the *OBMV*. But I would argue that in the case of those three poets, and a fourth, Yeats's friend Dorothy Wellesley, Yeats saw something that distinguished them from their contemporaries. Much of his introduction of the *OBMV* is devoted to explaining what that was, and why he saw in their work a quality that he preferred to their modernist contemporaries and to the new generation of writers inspired by the modernists.

VI.

In the Parish of Rich Women: Yeats and the Moderns

W. H. Auden's ironic elegy on the occasion of Yeats's death famously tweaked the poet for being "silly like us," giving the example of his vanity in playing the role of priest to the "parish of rich women" as one of the human flaws that the poetry would outlive (*Collected* 249). In what may have been their only face-to-face meeting, the priest in 1935 imperiously summoned the twenty-eight-year-old schoolteacher/poet to an audience at a London lunch during the time that Yeats was reading for the *OBMV* and consulting with cutting-edge dramatists about plans to stage some of his plays (Foster, *Arch-Poet* 516). It was shortly after this that Yeats was introduced to Dorothy Wellesley, poet and Duchess of Wellington, whose elegant estate at Penns-on-the-Rocks in Sussex soon became the center of the "parish." That friendship with Wellesley, which featured prominently in the last years of his life and was sometimes remarked upon in literary circles during the period in which he was editing the *OBMV*, was doubtless part of what Auden had in mind.

But if younger modern poets such as Auden found Yeats's politics abhorrent and eccentricities risible in his last years, the introduction to the *OBMV* makes it clear that he was no less critical of them. Indeed, his professed reasons for taking on the anthology in the first place had to do with the question he asked his friend Olivia Shakespear: "how far do I like the Ezra, Elliot [*sic*], Auden school & if I do not why not?" (*CL* #6191, 28 Feb 1935). In the introduction's stinging assessment of Ezra Pound's work, Yeats suggests that although he admires the passion of many of the moderns, the answer is that he likes

them about as far as he can throw them: "[Pound] has great influence, more perhaps than any contemporary except Eliot, [and] is probably the source of that lack of form and consequent obscurity which is the main defect of Auden, Day Lewis, and their school" (*OBMV* xxv-vi).

For all of the introduction's seeming circumspection, it attacks the legacy of the great modernists, Eliot and Pound, which by 1936 was obvious to most informed readers. Yeats likens Eliot to Alexander Pope, calling him a satirist at heart, a man whose intellect and cold facility does not strive for the "great manner" of English poetry. Pound, by the same token, is a brilliant but deranged failure, whose inspired subject—the rapid change and flattening effect of modern culture—never quite holds together in the poet's work due to a want of sustained artistic design and coherent philosophy. Yeats thus contends that many younger writers of Auden's generation, influenced by such flawed models and by the passivity of war poetry, are consequently on the wrong track.

While carefully couching his dissatisfaction with the direction of current poetry in terms of generational differences and his Irish heritage, Yeats makes it clear that he is himself more interested in the work done by idiosyncratic Georgian-era poets such as W. J. Turner, Edith Sitwell, and Dorothy Wellesley, and he highlights some younger writers in whose work he sees productive new directions. His introduction ultimately suggests the need for an imaginative new modern poetry—one that is heroic and that embraces tradition rather than holding it at an ironic distance. In retrospect, the introduction becomes a sort of sermon (with the anthology as its text), like that of an erudite parish priest arguing for the existence of the Trinity in an increasingly agnostic

and materialistic modern England. It was a sermon that few poets of the newer generation were prepared to pay much attention to.

i. Negotiating with Ezra Pound

Yeats initially planned to include thirteen selections by his friend Ezra Pound (1885–1972), and was clearly furious when he wrote to Pound at Rapallo, complaining that the permissions fees demanded exceeded his budget:

> There is only one man in the English language as expensive as you[1] and I am going to reduce him to one poem. I have only a limited amount of money for permissions and have to pay both English and American copyright out of this sum. I can spend twenty pounds on poems from you. What can I have for that? I should like to use Canto XVII and anything else from my selection you can throw in. I have personally never got more than two guineas for a poem on either side of the water. It is clear that I shall have to raise my charge. (*CL* #6440, 12 Nov 1935)

What he ended up getting from an unsympathetic Pound was one translation, "The River Merchant's Wife: A Letter," one Canto, "Canto XVII," and one extract, Part VI of "Homage to Sextus Propertius"—an obviously thin selection, the cost of which Yeats complained about in the introduction to the anthology. He avoided a fee for a substantial

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1. The reference is to Kipling. Actually, Yeats ultimately published two comparatively obscure poems by Kipling, paying £30 nevertheless (Saddlemeyer, *W. B. Yeats* 433).

excerpt from a fourth poem, "The Return," by including it as part of the critical discussion in his introduction.

Despite their ostensible friendship, these two poets whose work had helped give birth to literary modernism during their wintertime collaborations at Stone Cottage in Sussex in 1913–1916 had been on divergent paths ever since. As early as 1919, Pound had scoffed at Yeats's ideas about the symbolism of the phases of the moon as "very very bug-house" (qtd. in Foster, *Arch-Poet* 157), and disavowed his own studies of the occult of only a few years earlier (Longenbach 93). By 1934, the year before Yeats began working on the *OBMV*, Pound had no sympathy left for the older poet. He railed about politics when the Yeatses visited him in Italy, and, asked for a reaction to Yeats's *King of the Great Clock Tower*, responded with "a single word, 'Putrid'" (qtd. in Foster, *Arch-Poet* 501). That meeting was their last, Yeats's biographer notes, and for all intents and purposes it marked an end to the friendship.[2]

For the most part, the *OBMV* pointedly ignores Imagism as a movement. It includes no work by Richard Aldington or H. D., much less anything by Amy Lowell, even though Imagism and Vorticism were the focus of Pound's energies during the early part of his collaboration with Yeats, and proved influential to later modernists. The anthology's introduction includes most of "The Return," written in 1912, when Pound still saw Yeats as both a model to build on and a project to improve. The poem offers a considered rejection of Yeatsian mystical exaltation. As Hugh Kenner writes, it "is about

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2. Yeats paid Pound back less bluntly, if no less damningly, in his introduction. He suggests that Pound has been "carried beyond reason." The work "is constantly interrupted, broken, twisted into nothing by its direct opposite, nervous obsession, nightmare, stammering confusion; he is an economist, poet, politician, raging at malignants with inexplicable characters and motives, grotesque figures out of a child's book of beasts" (*OBMV* xxv).

the mode of divine apparitions in poetry," and presents a modern world in which the old spooks have lost their spark—part of the flattening of time, space, literature, and myth that would come to be characteristic of Pound's mature verse (190). Yeats is unimpressed, commenting about the poem, "Even where the style is sustained throughout one gets an impression . . . that he has not got all the wine into the bowl, that he is a brilliant improvisator translating at sight from an unknown Greek masterpiece" (*OMBV* xxvi)

Yeats wrote his editor that he was friends with Aldington, but had long known he would leave him out of any anthology he compiled. In the same letter, he said, "I have known [H. D.] for many years, known her and admired her, and it was a real distress to me in looking at her work after ten or fifteen years to find it empty, mere style" (*CL* #6415, 24 Oct 1935). This is much the same criticism he offered of Pound: "more style than form" (*OBMV* xxv), and could be taken as Yeats's overall critique of Imagism. His main nod to the movement is the inclusion of "The River-Merchant's Wife: A Letter," Pound's famous translation from the Chinese of Li Po by way of Ernest Fenollosa's notebooks, which embodied many of the practices of the Imagist manifestos that sought to free poetic language from traditional structures in favor of direct treatment of the object. Yet what makes the poem compelling is the way that the Imagist principles work in concert with the structure and inherent form of a letter. Pound's brilliant style can consequently allow the images to resonate and suggest associations, while the epistolary structure and psychological narrative of the original give it satisfying shape.

"Homage to Sextus Propertius" likewise takes its shape from an assortment of classical Latin elegies by Propertius. The 1917 poem presents a sort of anthology itself,

comprising pieces that have been selected, reassembled and reinterpreted by Pound in *vers libre*, and crafted into a distinctively modern idiom that gives immediacy and clarity to a voice from ages ago, speaking at a time when old structures and certainties were being overturned. In Part VI, which Yeats included in the *OBMV*, the speaker contemplates his mortality, exploring the Yeatsian notion of the opposing qualities that make up the human self in the figures of the Roman general, Gaius Marius, and his opponent, King Jugurtha of Algiers, "Moving naked over Acheron / Upon the one raft, victor and conquered together, / . . . one tangle of shadows" (*OBMV* 242). Propertius then prescribes the form of his own epitaph, defying death much as Yeats would later do in "Under Ben Bulben":

"He who is now vacant dust
"Was once the slave of one passion:"
Give that much inscription
"Death why tardily come?" (*OBMV* 243)

The selection from "Homage to Sextus Propertius" ends with an image, "small bones," of the sort that Yeats had commented on in his introduction as a particularly modern symbol. In connection with the modern work of the American poet Elinor Wylie, Eliot, and Dorothy Wellesley, he wrote, "we have found it more and more difficult to separate ourselves from the dead when we commit them to the grave; the bones are not dead but accursed, accursed because unchanging. . . . Perhaps in this new, profound poetry, the symbol itself is contradictory, horror of life, horror of death" (*OBMV* xxi). In Pound's poem, and more notably in *The Cantos*, this flattening of the experience of life and death becomes characteristic. Yeats's comment seems a useful gloss to his reading of

"Homage," and it is worth noting that his own poem in the anthology, "Three Things," employs a similar image, that of bones crying out to the living.

Before their break, Yeats had written Pound, regarding *A Draft of the Cantos 17–27,* "I doubt however that I shall ever see the picture that all these bits of mosaic compose into. I find remarkable lines & passages & must be content" (*CL* #5161, 23 Sep 1928). *The Cantos* does away with the defined structures that gave shape to the shorter poems, and presents an epic series of objects seemingly structured only by a subjective consciousness. Yeats's introduction attempts to describe Pound's overarching intent for the sequence, which the two men had discussed on several occasions, but it is clear that he remains unable to get much beyond the surfaces of the poem, and says as much:

> Like other readers I discover at present merely exquisite or grotesque fragments. He hopes to give the impression that all is living, that there are no edges, no convexities, nothing to check the flow; but can such a poem have a mathematical structure? Can impressions that are in part visual, in part metrical, be related like the notes of a symphony; has the author been carried beyond reason by a theoretical conception? His belief in his own conception is so great that since the appearance of the first Canto I have tried to suspend judgement. (*OBMV* xxiv-v)

Yeats introduces his discussion of Pound by proclaiming that the theme of Pound's *Cantos*, and the poet's work that came before it, is "flux." He illustrates this with a Canto that follows the sun's movement over the course of a day, from "the first pale clear of the heaven" to "Sunset like the grasshopper flying (*OBMV* 243–247). In between, the poet's consciousness cycles through a series of mythological and Renaissance scenes

as through a wall of paintings in a gallery, where the waves do not move, the porpoises do not tear a gong-tormented sea, and the stone trees do not wave in the breeze. It is an appropriate vehicle through which to approach the poetry of postwar modernism, the urban world that works such as *The Waste Land* and *Ulysses* portray in contrasting ways as it emerges from the First World War, just as Canto XVII emerges from the darkness at the gates of hell and the war imagery that dominate Canto XVI. A timeless new day is dawning, a day of light and clear water, in which, like the lilacs of *The Waste Land*, a reborn Dionysian god emerges from the destruction that preceded it into an eternal now. Yet for Yeats the lack of any "mathematical structure" to shape such flux, and the poet's demand that we simply flow with the poem's consciousness through its associations, proves deeply unsatisfying despite the many beauties revealed therein.

Seen from Yeats's point of view, Pound remains frozen where he was when they worked together during the winters at Stone Cottage. Their joint project, to reform the style of modern poetry, was a success. Pound perfected the imagistic technique and freshly observed attention to language that broke poetic diction free from the old Victorian and Edwardian style and convention that Yeats had battled in the 1890s and early 1900s. His mistake, from Yeats's point of view, lay in trying to make the style into the substance. Lacking a coherent imaginative or philosophical structure, such as the one Yeats found in his "system," Pound was ultimately unable to control himself or his work, and *The Cantos* gyred out of control, becoming essentially subjective expressions of a

technique, the overall meaning and coherence of which was ultimately incomprehensible to anyone other than Pound himself.[3]

ii. T. S. Eliot, Satirist

Compared to his dismissal of Ezra Pound, Yeats offered a more equivocal assessment of T. S. Eliot (1888–1965). As with Pound, Yeats attributed most of Eliot's influence to his style rather than his themes or poetic philosophy. But during the whole process of reading for and editing the *OBMV* his letters show that he was acutely aware of trespassing on ground—the landscape of avant-garde poetry—that Eliot had staked out as a literary editor. In a sense, Eliot was already busy collecting an authoritative "anthology" of modern poetry in his work at Faber, where his list increasingly included most of the important new English poets of the day.[4]

Yeats was also acutely aware of the rival *Faber Book of Modern Verse,* edited under Eliot's auspices by Michael Roberts. He himself was working on an essay on one of the *Upanishads* for Eliot's magazine, *The Criterion,* during the period. He solicitously discussed the *OBMV* with Eliot on several occasions in 1935, included new writers such

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3. Even that is arguable. Many readers have suggested that the lines of Canto CXVI are an admission that the project ultimately failed: "And I am not a demigod, / I cannot make it cohere" (795).

4. The list even included Yeats, who had published "Three Things" in 1929 as part of Faber's *Ariel Poems* series of pamphlets. In fact, Yeats's first instinct to promote Dorothy Wellesley, after compiling a book-length selection of her poems, was to submit it to Eliot at Faber, which he described as "sending the wooden horse to Troy" (*CL* #6403, 20 Oct 1935).

as George Barker whom Eliot recommended, and just prior to publication was careful to reassure Eliot of the untruth of a comment in *The Observer* that the *OBMV* "preferred MacNeice & Auden to you" (*CL* #6704 , 9 Nov 1936). Even so, and despite the fact that the thirteen-page selection was a comparatively broad-ranging sample, Eliot can not have been terribly happy about what he found in the introduction, in which Yeats professes to see him as "a satirist rather than a poet" (*OBMV* xxii).

That assessment, which seems wrongheaded today, suggests that Yeats clung to a common view of Eliot that the literary establishment held prior to publication of *The Waste Land*; his somber, religiously orthodox late work, including *Murder in the Cathedral* and the *Four Quartets,* was only beginning to appear in 1936, when the *OBMV* (and Eliot's *Collected Poems 1909–1935*) was published. By Eliot's own admission in 1921, the poet was "considered by the ordinary newspaper critic as a wit or a satirist" (qtd. in Ricks 5). In an influential 1921 essay on Dryden, Eliot anticipated the charge, and his own disagreements with Yeats, commenting that "[t]he connotations of 'satire' and of 'wit' . . . may be only prejudices of nineteenth-century taste" (174), and "what is left of the nineteenth under the name of the twentieth . . . century" (173). Even so, Yeats was no ordinary newspaper critic, and his assertion that Eliot resembled Alexander Pope, "working without apparent imagination" (*OBMV* xxi) must have rankled.

A recent biographer argues convincingly that Eliot's work differs from traditional satire in that it focuses not on the realistically observed hypocrisy of contemporary society so much as on "a 'phantasmal' world of lust, filth, boredom, and malice on which he gazes in fascinated horror" (Gordon 175). What Yeats identifies as satire could more accurately be ascribed to Eliot's vision of the anonymous, dehumanizing aspect of

modern urban life: "Eliot has produced his great effect upon his generation because he has described men and women that get out of bed or into it from mere habit; in describing this life that has lost heart his own art seems grey, cold, dry" (*OBMV* xxi). What he identifies as stylistic monotony in Eliot's metrical design actually reflects an ear attuned to the ironies and banalities of twentieth-century music-hall tunes and advertising doggerel rather than the rhythms of Shelley and Coleridge.

A clue to what lies at the heart of his criticism of Eliot can be found where he likens Eliot's work to that of the painter Edouard Manet: "even to-day Manet gives me an incomplete pleasure" (xxii). In a 1910 essay, "The Tragic Theatre," Yeats laments the passing of the great tradition of the French academy, which Manet abandoned in favor of a more realistic focus on the particular rather than the universal. For Yeats, that sort of modern particularity was the mark of comic rather than tragic art. He was unable to generalize from such particularity to his own situation: "I found no desirable place, no man I could have wished to be, no woman I could have loved, no Golden Age, no lure for secret hope, no adventure with myself for theme out of that endless tale I told myself all day long" (*Essays* 242). This is, in essence, an extension of his critique of the absence of the tragic and heroic in the work of the realists and the war poets: Eliot's poems are uttered by a speaker who, as in the case of Prufrock, succumbs to the waves of modern life, rather than fighting them, as Yeats's Irish hero Cuchulain did.

He is more sympathetic to later work written by Eliot after his religious conversion, including *Murder in the Cathedral*, which created a theatrical sensation just as Yeats was talking with trendy London dramaturges about bringing certain of his own literary dramas back to the stage along with those by Auden and Eliot. Even so, the lack

of affect in Eliot's style undercuts Yeats's appreciation of even genuine religious feeling: "there is little self-surrender in his personal relation to God and the soul," he observes. His introduction quotes a passage from *Murder in the Cathedral* that illustrates what he sees as "a religion like that of some great statesman, a pity not less poignant because it tempers the prayer book with the results of mathematical philosophy" (*OBMV* xxiii).

Yeats's anthology proper includes nothing from the most influential of all modernist poems, *The Waste Land,* although the introduction does discuss it and includes a quatrain illustrating "monotony of accent" (xxi). While arguably it might have been practical for the *OBMV* to have included all of *The Waste Land* (at 436 lines it would have been not much longer than Binyon's "Tristram's End," which occupies sixteen pages of the anthology), Eliot's then-standard charge for permissions of £2 per page would have forced Yeats to pay over £32 for the single poem, far exceeding the £20 limit he set himself in the cases of expensive poets such as Pound. Rather than "Prufrock" and *The Waste Land*, he chooses to represent Eliot with seven[5] shorter, lesser poems on similar themes. The early poems include "Preludes," and several quatrain poems of the 1910s: "The Hippopotamus," "Whispers of Immortality," and "Sweeney among the Nightingales." The middle and late work includes "The Hollow Men" and "Journey of the Magi" from the 1920s, and the first chorus from his 1934 drama, *The Rock*: *A Pageant Play*.

In his BBC "Modern Poetry" broadcast, Yeats cites "Preludes" as an example of the style that made Eliot "the most revolutionary man in poetry during my life-time. . . ." In Eliot's revolutionary manner, "[p]oetry must resemble prose, and both must accept the

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5. Eliot's four "Preludes," which were written separately over several years, are numbered as a single poem.

vocabulary of their time; nor must there be any special subject-matter. Tristram and Isoult were not a more suitable theme than Paddington Railway Station. The past had deceived us: let us accept the worthless present" (*Later* 95).

Even so, the selections from Eliot are particularly intriguing because Yeats has chosen poems that resonate with certain themes of his own work. In "Preludes," for instance, Eliot imagines a woman in her room who has "heard the sparrows in the gutters" (*OBMV* 279), much as the speaker in Yeats's early poem "The Sorrow of Love" hears "the quarrel of sparrows in the eaves"[6] (*VP* 119). But where the noisy birds outside the window of Yeats's speaker give way to a vision of an idealized woman who makes the ordinary stuff of urban life into the material of heroic song, Eliot employs the image as an example of the tawdry urban reality that his speaker inhabits each day.

Another good comparison is the appeal of conventional religion, the subject of Yeats's "Vacillation," the final section of which he includes in the *OBMV*. For Yeats, the problem is one of dogma rather than divinity. He testifies to moments of genuine spiritual revelation, yet admits that attempts to reconcile such feelings with Christian doctrine always fail the test of post-Enlightenment rational argument, leaving the poet vacillating between belief and skepticism. Such vacillation is also apparent in Eliot's whimsical "Hippopotamus," which various critics have read as criticism of the Roman Catholic Church, the Church of England, and even Eliot's ancestral New England Congregationalism. A better way of reading it might be simply to picture the poem's speaker as a preacher in the pulpit, taking as his text the epigraph (from St. Paul's Epistle to the Colossians) that recommends the apostle's Good News to the church at Laodicea.

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6. This was revised by Yeats to read, "The brawling of a sparrow in the eaves," but Eliot would have encountered it in its original form.

The absurdity of the speaker's rhetorical figure, which contrasts the "True Church" with a hippopotamus, illustrates nothing so much as the irrationality of religion in a modern world in which "Flesh and blood is weak and frail, / Susceptible to nervous shock" (*OBMV* 281). And yet, for all the ridiculousness of a True Church that remains earthbound, "Wrapt in the old miasmal mist" (282), the speaker is onto something: there remains something in human spiritual longing that soars, like the preposterous vision of the risen hippo, transcending all the dogma.

The other two quatrain poems by Eliot, "Whispers of Immortality" and "Sweeney Among the Nightingales," illustrate the nightmarish quality of some of his early and middle work, including *The Waste Land*, and the "life that has lost heart" (xxi) that Yeats found so problematic. Both poems are voyeuristic, seen from the point of view of a bloodless, faceless onlooker. In "Whispers," this anonymous second-person speaker gazes from the aridity of the grave in horror at the pulchritude of the jaguar-like Grishkin, even envisioning himself as a fearful monkey stalked by her. In "Sweeney" the voyeur is actually a character in the poem, a "silent man in mocha brown" watching from near the window, whose dreams are haunted by the image of the grotesque Sweeney and the cosmopolitan man-eaters that he entertains.

For all their misogyny and anti-Semitism, Yeats would have found in both poems imagery that resonated with his own work. As noted earlier, "Whispers" shares with Yeats's "Three Things" the conceit of giving voice to dry bones: Where Eliot's speaker regards the living with loathing, Yeats's bone speaks with longing. Both feel "[t]he

anguish of the skeleton [*sic*]"[7] (xix) that Yeats identifies in his introduction as a quintessentially modern ache. The fever dream of "Sweeney among the Nightingales" is dominated by another typically Yeatsian image, the moon, which insistently peers through the window with the man in brown. The moon's point of view permits the poem to conclude with an omniscient flourish of rhetoric, in what Yeats calls the "great manner" of English poetry (uncharacteristically so for Eliot, he suggests). There, the "liquid siftings" of the nightingales stain the shroud of Agamemnon much as passing dogs defile the priceless things that Yeats writes of in the concluding poem of his *Responsibilities* (*YP* 127).

Yeats's introduction praises the style of "The Hollow Men" (1925) compared with Eliot's earlier work, an improvement he attributes to its use of short lines. He may also have found it to be less skeptical in its conclusions about spiritual longing. The poem, which marks a turn in Eliot's verse toward religious orthodoxy, moves from a Joseph Conrad-like horror at the length and emptiness of life toward belief, concluding with the speaker hesitantly reciting the doxology of the Lord's Prayer even as his world ends. It shares the conceit of speaker who sees himself as a sort of effigy with Yeats's "Among School Children," a poem from about the same period. Like that poem, it ends with a dance—or at least the tune of a children's dance—as its singers circle around a cactus in a modern valley of dry bones, longing for a reanimating spark. In "Among School Children," it is Yeats's "comfortable old scarecrow" (*YP* 220) rather than the school children whose spirit dances in the company of a distinguished set of other old

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7. Yeats's introduction misquotes Eliot, combining two lines from "Whispers of Immortality": "He knew the anguish of the marrow / The ague of the skeleton" (*OBMV* 282).

guys[8]—Plato, Aristotle, and Pythagoras—who have found transcendent patterns and order in their imaginative investigations of chaotic human existence.

The final two selections by Eliot, "Journey of the Magi" and "From 'The Rock,'" present many contrasts and parallels with Yeats's cyclic theories of history that would have intrigued him. Eliot's subject in the first poem was one that Yeats had explicitly considered in his own 1914 poem, "The Magi," which was written before he codified his system, but that anticipates some of the ideas of cyclic incarnation that would flesh it out. For the speaker in Eliot's poem, who returns from his journey (presumably to Bethlehem) to a world in which the old dispensation is no longer satisfactory, the Birth has brought a premonition of the Crucifixion and a longing for the apocalypse that will end the cycles that Yeats sees as eternal. The chorus from *The Rock*, a pageant play about the coming of English Christianity, explores the cyclical nature of history and the complementary oppositions of the Christian paradox. But unlike the poems by Yeats that it resembles, such as "Leda and the Swan" and "The Second Coming," Eliot's chorus is one in which the banality of the world increasingly distances us from the otherworldly design, despite all the signs that we have been given, and the only hope is that of Salvation:

> Where is the Life we have lost in living?
>
> Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?
>
> Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?

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8. Eliot's parenthetic epigraph to the poem, "(A Penny for the Old Guy)," alludes to the English children's tradition of begging pennies for Guy Fawkes Night fireworks by going door to door with an effigy that is later burned as part of the celebration. Yeats's poem describes the pagan philosophers as "Old clothes upon old sticks to scare a bird" (*YP* 221).

The cycles of Heaven in twenty centuries

Bring us farther from God and near to the Dust. (*OBMV* 290)

iii. The Aristocracy of Art in a Banal Age

Yeats included six pages and six poems by D. H. Lawrence (1885–1930), whose novels he had praised as bringing back to literature the "passion as Shakespeare understood it"—a passion that had gone missing during "the error of the last 30 years" (*CL* #5781, 18 Nov 1932). Lawrence the poet had been among those trumpeted by Marsh's *Georgian Poetry* anthologies, but Yeats, somewhat surprisingly, does not discuss the verse in his introduction. Based on the evidence of the *OBMV* selections, a reader might infer that the "error" that he saw appears to have been manifestations of literary realism that grew out of Victorian agnosticism and rationality. Lawrence's novels, while full of realistic detail, put forward an ideology of natural love, unreason, and the unconscious that offered an alternative to the unromantic rationality and social leveling that Yeats saw among modernity's most troublesome legacies.[9]

Yeats owned a 1933 single-volume edition of Lawrence's two-volume 1928 *Collected Poems,* which does not include Lawrence's *Pansies* or other work from the final years of his life. Of the six poems, most are early, except for the first selection,

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9. Samuel Hynes argues that Lawrence was generally thought of at the time less as a stylistic innovator than someone who sought to live out an ideology that challenged convention. He "remained through the 'thirties an heroic figure, tragic but wise in his understanding of the English sickness, a rebel and a protester. . . . His influence as a writer was not great in the 'thirties, but Lawrence the Ideologue was as influential as Eliot . . ." (*Auden* 95).

"Work," which was first published in *The Dial* in 1929 and appeared in *Pansies*. The poem asserts that work must "absorb you" "like an absorbing game," then moves to a Walt Whitman-like meditation in which Lawrence likens the act of work to the natural flowering of a plant "like slender trees putting forth leaves, a long white web of living leaf" (*OBMV* 235). This, of course, brings to mind the ending of Yeats's "Among School Children," in which "Labour is blossoming or dancing where / The body is not bruised to pleasure soul . . . " (*YP* 221), and where a chestnut tree becomes the image of a totality that includes blossom, root, and everything in between.

The other Lawrence poems, "Hymn to Priapus," "Twilight," "Suburbs on a Hazy Day," "Sorrow," and "In Trouble and Shame," are likewise infused with a sense of the poet's transcendence. The speaker drifts through the landscape of his life with a feeling that the realistic details that the poems describe are somehow only the outward manifestations of a more profound reality. In "Hymn to Priapus," for instance, he both mourns a dead lover and the passion that the two had known, and yet marvels at the animal desire that still stirs in him as he dances with a "ripe, slack country lass" at a Christmas party. "How is it I grin then, and chuckle / Over despair?" he wonders (*OBMV* 237–8). This unseemly desire calls to mind many of the characters that Yeats created in his later poetry—earthy, lusty old souls, like Crazy Jane, who celebrate both the loss and carnality of life while conscious of its absurdity. It also fits in with the conception that Yeats outlines in the anthology's introduction of the "bitter gaiety" that was the heroic reaction to modern reality. This attitude is exemplified in the final selection, "In Trouble and Shame," where Lawrence's speaker sounds much like Yeats in "Sailing to Byzantium," who wished that he could leave his aging body behind and be gathered "Into

the artifice of eternity" (*OBMV* 83): "Then I would turn round, / And seeing my cast-off body lying like lumber, / I would laugh with joy" (*OBMV* 240).

Yeats appears to have been uninterested in Lawrence's poetic technique, which many critics have argued is often clumsy, and does not comment on it in his critical writing or letters. But philosophically, Lawrence and Yeats hold sympathetic visions about aristocracy and creativity. The concept of a "natural aristocracy" by which certain people are born naturally elevated above the crowd informs much of Lawrence's verse, as well as his fiction and prose nonfiction. Yeats seems to have recognized an outlook that harmonized with his own neo-Romantic attraction to social aristocracy and aristocrats, even though there was nothing inherently superior about them as people; what attracted him to aristocrats was their embodiment of the best of a culture even if, as he notes in "Ancestral Houses," the descendant of a noble family might well prove to be "a mouse" (*YP* 204).

Yeats's aristocratic bias helps explain why he devoted eighteen pages of the anthology to the work of Edith Sitwell (1887–1964), the most allotted to any writer in the *OBMV*. In his "Modern Poetry" broadcast, he praised her work extravagantly: "Her language is the traditional language of literature, but twisted, torn, complicated, jerked here and there by strained resemblances, unnatural contacts, forced upon it by terror or by some violence beating in her blood, some primitive obsession that civilisation can no longer exorcise. I find her obscure, exasperating, delightful" (*Later* 96). The well-born Sitwell's poetry also clearly fits in with the story he is spinning about the development of a modern sensibility—he had told a correspondent that she was an example of the way in which "we have returned of late to the mood of the nineties" (*CL* #5131, 23 Jun 1928).

She thus represents for him the avant-garde spirit of the Rhymers freed of the stylistic nineteenth-century baggage, and like Dorothy Wellesley embodies for him the expression of an elevated artistic vision in a time when the banality of mass culture and the leveling of political socialism seemed to be moving young writers in a different direction.

To be sure, the length of Yeats's selection from Sitwell is not a completely accurate gauge of his judgment about her relative importance: one of the practical reasons that he could include so much was that she waved all permissions fees (*CL* #6153, 13 Dec 1936), so his choice was not limited by his budget in the way it had been in the cases of Eliot and Pound. But he clearly liked the work, publicly praising its visionary qualities despite private reservations about her technique[10]:

> Nature appears before us in a hashish-eater's dream. This dream is double; in its first half, through separated metaphor, through mythology, she creates, amid crowds and scenery that suggest the Russian Ballet and Aubrey Beardsley's final phase, a perpetual metamorphosis that seems an elegant, artificial childhood; in the other half, driven by a necessity of contrast, a nightmare vision like that of Webster, of the emblems of mortality. (*OBMV* xix)

Here, then, we see him celebrating several qualities that he sought to realize in his own work: interpenetrating oppositions presented with deliberate artifice that are structured by

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10. His introduction notes that Sitwell "has transformed with her metrical virtuosity traditional metres reborn not to be read but spoken" (xix). In a letter to Lady Ottoline Morrell, however, he admitted,

> I may have seemed to over-praise Edith Sitwell, her point of view, her vision is so describable . . . as well as fascinating that one forgets the rest. Her tecnique [*sic*] is that of an amateur but even if I wanted to analyse it everybody would be bored. By intensity of vision she surmounts this abominable technique. (*CL* #6683, 26 Oct 1936).

myth and embodied by resonant images such as the bones burning with longing that he liked in Eliot's "Intimations of Immortality" (to which the reference to Webster nods). Yeats's introduction essentially offers Sitwell as an alternative to Eliot. Unlike Eliot, as Yeats would read him, Sitwell does not hold her nightmare vision at an ironic distance, but instead gives herself over to it.

His selection of Sitwell's work includes six pieces from her 1930 *Collected Poems*, several of which are excerpts of long works. He wrote Dorothy Wellesley that he found it difficult to choose from Sitwell's work because "poem is so dependent upon poem. It is like cutting a piece out of a tapestry" (8). The first selection is from Sitwell's long cycle, *The Sleeping Beauty* (1924). Sitwell had rewritten sections of a 1915 poem, "The Mother," as a long poem, "The Hambone and the Heart," for her 1927 volume *Rustic Elegies*; Yeats excerpted the revised version for the anthology. Only three poems are included in their entirety: "Lament for Edward Blastock," "Colonel Fantock," and "Ass-Face." The final selection is an excerpt from "Gold Coast Customs," a long 1929 poem that William York Tindall has called "Edith Sitwell's *Waste Land*, footnotes and all" (qtd. in Cevasco 69).

In "From 'The Sleeping Beauty,'" on the one hand she evokes a fairytale aristocratic world of prewar England that the speaker of the poem dreams back to under a malevolent enchantment—a world of wooded estates, castles, gardens, and hunting for sport. On the other hand it nods to Tchaikovsky's famous ballet of the same name, which had been restaged in a controversial modern style in 1921 by Sergei Diaghliev; likewise, many of the themes of the first section suggest modernist poetic touchstones from "The Burial of the Dead" in Eliot's *The Waste Land*—a drowned sailor, a girl's childhood

memories, clairvoyance and curses. "Colonel Fantock" similarly paints a thinly disguised self-portrait of the three Sitwell siblings growing up in an environment of landed privilege, listening to the fanciful stories of the old soldier hired as their tutor, and then realizing, with a shock, the harsher reality that the childish fancies disguised.

Yet where Eliot's postwar waste land offers a bleak landscape of shattered images and fragmented voices that emphasized the unreality of old cultural constructs overthrown by the modern era, Sitwell's poems offer a more romantic and affectionate vision of what was lost, and a way forward that might not require the poet to resign herself to the worst of modernity. Rather than hopelessly renouncing the old order, or foolishly seeking to restore it, it effectively apotheosizes it as myth, making it in memory something rich and strange that can inform the living poet's journey forward. Yeats's decision to include his two poems about Lady Gregory's Coole in the *OBMV* similarly suggests that he contended that an essential element in "modern verse" was the way in which it dealt with the loss of the old aristocratic hierarchies of art and culture; in Edith Sitwell he had found a writer who was closely tied to the great traditions of the old aristocratic order and yet at the same time was open to the advanced formal ideas of the modernists.

Like Yeats, the speaker in Sitwell's poems often puts on the mask of the visionary. In "Ass-Face," which was one of the short experiments in rhythm and sound from *Façade* (1922) that helped make her reputation as an avant-garde writer, the poet spins out a hallucinatory comic parable. In it, as I read the poem, the speaker has a vision of a Harlequin-like divine fool from the *commedia dell'arte,*[11] "drunk on the [asses'] milk

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11. The traditional "fool's cap" worn by Harlequin represented a donkey's ears and tail.

of the stars" and staggering "From heaven's saloons and golden bars."[12] Ass-face creatively pisses into existence a thread that weaves a golden "gown / For Columbine" in a meteorological tumult that the bourgeois citizens below ("beavers building Babel") mistake for thunder ("Cain and Abel / Fighting") in the heavens. They think the subsequent precipitation to be rain, but the wild, creative celestial jest will in fact "spoil their houses of white lace" (*OBMV* 274–5).

Yeats read the poem differently, but with no less of a sense of its visionary character, when he introduced Sitwell in his "Modern Poetry" broadcast:

> I think I like [Edith Sitwell] best when she seems a child, terrified and delighted by the story it is inventing. . . . I prefer to think of Ass-face as a personality invented by some child at a nursery window after dark. The starry heavens are the lighted bars and saloons of public houses, and the descending light is asses' milk which makes Ass-face drunk. But this light is thought of the next moment as bright threads floating down in spirals to make a dress for Columbine, and the next moment after that as milk squirting on the sands of the sea—one thinks of the glittering foam—a sea which brays like an ass, and is covered because it is a rough sea by an ass's hide. Along the shore there are trees, and under these trees beavers are building Babel, and these beavers think that the noise Ass-face makes in his drunkenness is Cain and Abel fighting. Then somehow as the vision

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12. Perhaps also an allusion to Rossetti's "The Blessed Damozel," who

> . . . leaned out
> From the gold bar of Heaven
> Her blue grave eyes wee deeper than the depth
> Of waters stilled at even . . . . (3)

> ends the starlight has turned into the houses that the beavers are building. But their Babel and their houses are like white lace, and we are told that Ass-face will spoil them all. (*Later* 96–7)

Even so, he argues that the importance of her poetry lies in its frenzied invention informed by the structures of high art: "Her language is the traditional language of literature, but twisted, torn, complicated, jerked here and there by strained resemblances, unnatural contacts, forced upon it by terror or by some violence beating in her blood, some primitive obsession that civilisation can no longer exorcise" (96). In "The Lament of Edward Blastock" and "From 'The Hambone and the Heart,'" this obsession explores the same sort of inchoate longing in the bones of the dead that he explored in "Three Things"—the first considering the nature of the sibling bond, the second considering the child's bond with its mother. In "Gold Coast Customs," the poet broadens her vision to consider the bond of conqueror to conquered, taking in the entire culture, rather than just the family. As Gyllian Phillips convincingly argues, the poem considers the modern colonial impulse as a way of seeing the moral corruption of contemporary society. In a letter to Wyndham Lewis, who had satirized the Sitwells in *The Apes of God*, Yeats defended her as a sort of modern-day Jonathan Swift:

> When I read her Gold Coast Customs a year ago, I felt, as on first reading The Apes of God, that something absent from all literature for a generation was back again, and in a form rare in the literature of all generations, passion enobled by intensity, by endurance, by wisdom. We had it in one man once. He lies in St. Patrick's now under the greatest epitaph in history. (*CL* 5371, 7 Aug 1930).

Yeats's partiality to avant-garde aristocrats perhaps helps explain why he was so ready to champion other members of the "parish of rich women" who were ultimately less substantial poets than Sitwell, notably Victoria Sackville-West (1892–1962) and Dorothy Wellesley (1889–1956). Early on in the process of reading for the anthology, he wrote enthusiastically to Wellesley, who soon became a close friend and frequent correspondent, about the work of her former lover, Victoria Sackville-West, which she had recommended to him, and that of Richard Hughes, another writer with an aristocratic pedigree. Neither ended up being given the kind of attention that Yeats lavished on Sitwell's and Wellesley's work, but it was not because he didn't give them serious consideration.

As R. F. Foster has noted, Yeats was fascinated by the lesbian sexuality of Wellesley; he was equally excited by her literary recommendations of poets and novelists of the 1920s and '30s[13] (notably Virginia Woolf and Aldous Huxley) and thus seems very much to have wanted to like Sackville-West's work. Sackville-West had been the only woman whose work was included in the *Georgian Poetry* series, and belonged to the same progressive set as Wellesley. Ultimately, though, Yeats ignored her more typically Georgian-themed work, such as her very successful modern georgic, *The Land,* which was dedicated to Wellesley. He chose only two lyrics from Sackville-West's 1933 *Collected Poems*, "The Greater Cats" and "On the Lake," writing Wellesley that after changing his mind about her importance several times he finally found her work "facile & imitative."

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13. Wellesley was well connected among the avant-garde Bloomsbury writers. She had published several volumes of her own poems with the Woolfs at the Hogarth Press, provided financial backing and served as a poetry series editor for them, and had edited Hogarth's *A Broadcast Anthology of Modern Poetry* (1930).

"The Greater Cats" suggests the sort of "masculine" sexual quality he liked in Wellesley's verse but mostly did not find in Sackville-West's, with the speaker of the poem longing to put aside her rational understanding of mortality and human relationships and be ruled only by the sort of fierce passion she finds in African jungle cats. "On the Lake" is a dreamier look at the rational and irrational in relation to one another—Yeats described it in the same letter as "the mind . . . about to wake" (*CL* #6335, 8 Sept 1935)—that in its image of a starry sky reflected on the surface of deep water brings to mind his own explorations of liminality between interpenetrating realities.

He offered *OBMV* readers a much more considered look at Dorothy Wellesley's poetry. Encountering the work itself for the first time, after reading Yeats's introduction to it in the anthology and other critical writings, can be profoundly disappointing: one feels let down as much by Yeats as by Wellesley. In many ways, the reaction is much like that which someone who loves Yeats's wildly imaginative verse might have on first turning from the poet's lyrics or dramas to the intricacies of *A Vision,* his attempt to systematize the underlying symbolic structures that he and his wife explored in their occult collaboration.

In both cases, Yeats's literary imagination was engaged by the creative work of women who had also engaged his sexual imagination, even if such muses ultimately proved less compelling to others than what they inspired in the poet. Although sympathetic critics such as Margaret Mills Harper have eloquently defended the conscious artistic contributions of "Nemo the Interpreter" to her husband's mystical system, neither transcriptions of George Yeats's automatic writings and other work as a medium nor even the poet's codification of it in *A Vision* hold much inherent interest

when stripped from the context of the poetry they inspired. The same is true for Wellesley's poetry: few would read it today had it not so interested Yeats.

He was certainly aware of Wellesley's limitations. Essays in the anthology and elsewhere acknowledge certain flaws in her work, calling it "at times facile and clumsy" (*OBMV* xxxiii) and "laboured," and likening it to "good prose" (*Prefaces* 182–3), which is rarely a glowing commendation for poetry. In the letters and poems that they exchanged during the last several years of his life, he sometimes noted stylistic lapses and regularly sought to revise lines he found infelicitous. But the prominence he gives her in the introduction, along with his eight substantial selections (which occupy a full fifteen pages of the book—two more even than T. S. Eliot), cannot be written off as the product of mere log-rolling for a friend or deference to her status as Duchess of Wellington. He had clearly convinced himself that his obsessive interest in her was merited by the poems.

Yeats condescended to see Wellesley as someone possessed of a sort of unconscious genius who wrote out of "innocent, natural happiness" (*CL* #6257, 17 Jun 1935). Her poems, as he saw them, reflected an instinctive and truthful response to modern thought rather that a studied intellectual answer of the sort he attributed to some of her male contemporaries: "unlike Turner or Read she need not prove or define, that was all done before she began to write and think" (*OBMV* xxxii). Rather than choosing to criticize her for a lack of philosophical or metrical rigor, he emphasized the "naturalness" in her style and subject matter:

> We must remain natural, writing of those things that belong to our civilisation, that are always with us, yet give point and accent from our own research. I was delighted to find a writer who explored the

> picturesque among flowers, fishes, shells, serpents, trees, horses, or for its sake returned to the imaginations of her childhood. (*Prefaces* 183)

What seemed to excite him most about her person and her work, though, was the quality that he called "boyishness" or "the masculine element." Here was a woman whose social position was so unassailable that she needed not validate herself by affecting the pose of flirtatious, ladylike cultural sophistication he encountered in so many of the literary women he knew (particularly the rich ones who patronized his theatrical enterprises). It was not the novelty of homosexuality, but rather the fact that her status meant she had less use for the complex masks of identity required of Yeats's own generation, such as those adopted by "Michael Field" or Oscar Wilde. Just as he contended that she had no need to "prove or define" her literary identity, so with her sexual identity: "What makes your work so good is the masculine element amid so much feminine charm," he wrote her. "[Y]our lines have the magnificent swing of your boyish body. I wish I could be a girl of nineteen for certain hours that I might feel it even more acutely (*CL* #6759, 21 Dec 1936).

This "masculine element" manifests itself in Wellesley's attitude toward such traditionally feminine subjects as motherhood, which her poems address with a certain brutality. As an illustration of the modern "horror of life, horror of death," Yeats's introduction quotes without attribution three lines from Wellesley's "Matrix" that describe childbirth as a kind of rejection: "The small bones built in the womb / The womb that loathed the bones / And cast out the soul" (*OBMV* xxi). Here, the mother is not the traditional life-giver who generates continuity and comfort in an unfeeling world and offers welcome and nurture to the child, but rather someone who embodies the

mysterious forces that father forth the individual from the universal and create identity. Connection with a transcendent state like that which Yeats characterized as "the brute blood of the air" in "Leda and the Swan"—where a masculine spirit literally rapes a traditional feminine body—thus ends with the soul's separation from the comforting unity of being that precedes conception and follows death.

Wellesley's "Fire," which she subtitled "An Incantation" (Yeats omitted the subtitle in the *OBMV*), was one of the few previously unpublished poems[14] he included in the anthology. It is a collection of loosely connected irregular stanzas that explore variations on this same theme. In it, with vaguely articulated nods to the philosophy of Heraclitus and echoes of childhood nursery rhymes, fire becomes an emblem for the living soul, burning itself out in the course of a life and moving toward equilibrium with the other elements. In this it resembles the holy fire Yeats yearns for in "Sailing to Byzantium," where he imagines the impurities of the aging body burned away to leave only a spirit that can know of the aesthetic eternity that Byzantium represents.

"Horses" is more coherent, and Yeats praised it for its "modern and precise" vocabulary. In it, Wellesley's aristocratic knowledge of the equestrian world serves her well as she considers how the many specialized, domesticated breeds of horses, from Suffolk Punch to Barb, partake of the essential nature of the animal. But it is sometimes an awkward mix of exalted, poetic language and prosy passages. Yeats sought to make a virtue of this. Of the lines that describe "the wild grey asses fleet / With stripe from head

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14. "Fire" did appear in Wellesley's 1936 *Selected Poems*, edited and introduced by Yeats, which was published just prior to the *OBMV,* so it is not, strictly speaking, "previously unpublished." But he selected it for the Oxford anthology from a manuscript before editing *Selected Poems*. Aside from "Fire," and some lyrics by Margot Ruddock that he chose from her unpublished work, his usual practice was to use poems that had been published in books.

to tail, and moderate ears" (*OBMV* 314–5), he observes, "No poet of my generation would have written 'moderate' exactly there; a long period closes, the ear, expecting some poetic word, is checked, delighted to be so checked, by the precision of good prose" (*Prefaces* 183). Given the context of the whole poem, though, it seems more of a lapse than a deliberate change of rhythm.

Wellesley's "masculine" vision, in which the poet strives to see from the point of view of the creature that seeks wholeness rather the mothering source of that creation (a vision that Yeats's introduction identifies with the image of bones yearning for reintegration into an overarching unity), is apparent in "Asian Desert" and "Matrix." In the former, the poet describes a skeletal mountain landscape in which the earth explicitly becomes "her," the archetypal mother who has sent forth her children from herself. The speaker sees her hills as bones—exposed by decay but beautiful nonetheless. From the latter, Yeats chose brief excerpts from two of the poem's twenty-one sections; both excerpts offer images of the archetypal human desire to return to the earth-mother. The original version of "Matrix" that appears in *Poems of Ten Years* is a long, repetitive meditation on this image of human life as the issue of an unfeeling earth-mother, the aridity of which becomes a source of dread and alienation. The womb is the matrix (this Latin word for womb literally derives from *mater*) which forms the body and then casts it out along with a soul that longs to return to its place of inception; for Wellesley, the only possible return is in death, where the dust of the body reunites with the dust of the earthy mother-spirit that formed it. Only in one of Yeats's selections from Wellesley, "The Buried Child," does the speaker's point of view coincide with that of the mother, as she mourns a child who has died and who is haunted by its ghost.

Margaret Mills Harper, examining Yeats's collaboration with his wife on his symbolic "system," has argued for the importance of recognizing Yeats's "live belief in extra-material reality" (48) in understanding his attitude toward the truth of mystical writings. I would argue that one of the things that attracted him to Wellesley's poems was this same openness to belief despite his skepticism of religious dogma.

Wellesley's essential mysticism is particularly evident in three of the poems in the *OBMV* that deal overtly with Christian imagery: "Fishing" and "From 'Lenin'" (which Yeats says "go amusingly together" (*CL* #6370, 1 Oct 1935)), and "The Morning after." Unlike "Fire," "Matrix," and "Asian Desert," which explore a vaguely pagan sense of transcendence, "Fishing" looks squarely at Christian gospels that depict Jesus among the fishermen of Galilee.[15] It does so, however, from the point of view of the fish (for whom the sea is a kind of road) rather than the men, as the poet imagines what might have been like to become part of the miracles:

> For up that road went the feet of the Messiah,
>
> Out of the horizon walked He,
>
> Slim between the fishing smacks glancing not aside,
>
> Gentle in His going, borne slightly on the tide,
>
> Preaching gravely as He went to the groups of gaping fishes,
>
> In the waters of Galilee. (*OBMV* 320)

The fish, like "the small bones built in the womb" in "Matrix," have a separate identity, yet feel the miraculous pull back toward the source of their creation. Similarly, the

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15. Wellesley's poem conflates the Twelve Disciples with the Four Evangelists, imagining that the gospel writers were present for the miracles that were revealed to the fishermen in the company of Jesus on the Sea of Galilee.

excerpt from "Lenin," which Yeats edited severely,[16] considers the body of the Russian leader in its tomb, where it has been exhibited as a sort of religious artifact of the atheistic Soviet state. The poet, seeing Russians cry out with emotion as they view the body, finds herself imagining the first disciples of Christ venerating his crucified form, feeling the same impossible yearning for unity. In this it resembles Yeats's "Among School Children," where the poet likens a mother's devotion to her living child to the reverence of nuns for sacred images of the Christ Child—both mere shadows of transcendent "Presences."

iv. The School of Turner

Yeats concludes his introduction to the *OBMV* by identifying his own point of view with Edwardian-era Irish outsiders such as John Millington Synge and James Stephens, as well as English Edwardians such as Sturge Moore and "Michael Field." But he adds a rather disingenuous claim that he "would, but for a failure of talent have been in [the school] of [W. J.] Turner and Dorothy Wellesley" (xlii). Not only does this seem like false modesty, but the two poets were hardly a "school," and did not even know each other until Yeats brought them together; the "school" was one that Yeats sought to create with the *OBMV*. In his letters, he had likened Wellesley's work to his own and to that of

16. In addition to omitting Wellesley's discursive introduction and conclusion in favor of the more concrete middle section, Yeats changed a key line of the poem. In Wellesley's original, the poet looks at Lenin's embalmed hands and observes, "Much writing these delicate hands have done" (Wellesley, *Poems* 101). Yeats changed this to a much harder and more political observation, "Many warrants these delicate hands have signed" (*OBMV* 321), a revision that Wellesley retained in subsequent versions of the poem.

Turner, recommending that she read "Thursday," from Turner's *Seven Days of the Sun*: "It is your own philosophy. All that exists created by ~~human~~ desire, everything therefore a symbol of conscious supernatural power" (*CL* #6380, 8 Oct 1935). In turn, to Turner, he wrote, of *The Seven Days of the Sun*, "It seems my own [work] purified & exalted" (*CL* #6339, 15 Sep 1935). In another letter, he characterized Turner as "almost the only writer in England with whose general philosophical position I am in sympathy" (*CL* #6850, 10 Mar 1937).

The poetry of W. J. Turner (1889–1946) is in many ways more interesting and coherent than that of Wellesley, though he has rarely been given the kind of attention Yeats thought he deserved. He was an Australian music critic and literary journalist who moved to England prior to the war's outbreak, and his poetry had been prominently published in the middle volumes of the *Georgian Poetry* series edited by Edward Marsh. His early work addressed rural subjects typical of Georgian work, but added a dreamy mysticism suggestive of early Yeats and Walter de la Mare (Hausermann, "W. J. Turner" 3). He refused to be included in the final volume of the Georgian series, however, having grown disenchanted with what he saw as the movement's stagnation[17] compared to more interesting work by early modernists. When Yeats discovered Turner's work, while reading for the *OBMV*, he saw a writer with a modern awareness of poetic tradition who was not essentially ironic about transcendent themes, as were the modernists, yet who was also of the modern world and spoke its language: "At his best he competes with Eliot in precision. . . . I think of him as the first poet to read a

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17. Robert Ross pegs Turner as a "neo-Georgian"—a writer who did not share the essential attitudes of the first writers published in Marsh's Georgian anthologies, and to some extent betrayed and diffused the aims of the "Georgian revolt."

mathematical equation, a musical score, a book of verse, with equal understanding" (*OBMV* xxx). The seventeen-page selection devoted to Turner is among the largest of the book, and the introduction makes it clear that Yeats saw him as a writer who, like Wellesley, recognized the active agency he required of poetry. Better yet, as a critic, Turner could defend traditional choices on modern intellectual grounds without seeming a mere sentimentalist or antiquarian.

Of the twelve selections of Turner's verse, perhaps the one that best illustrates what Yeats saw in his work is the last, "Hymn to her Unknown," from Turner's 1936 collection, *Songs and Incantations.* If one were to fuse a Yeats poem about Maud Gonne with early or middle work by T. S. Eliot, one might end up with something like it. It begins with the conventional literary pose, adopted by Shakespeare and other sonneteers, in which the singer despairs of being able to rival God's creation, and then proceeds to describe that creation: a beautiful woman, of the sort idealized by Yeats. In Turner's poem she is, however, a woman identifiably of the twentieth century, rather than some remote poetic neverland: she is having tea at the Piccadilly Circus department store Swan and Edgar's on "the twenty-fourth of August nineteen thirty-four," along with her five-year-old son and an older woman:

> She had none of the mannerisms of the suburbs,
> No affectations, a low clear speech, good manners,
> Hair thick and undyed.
>
> She knew that she was beautiful and exceedingly attractive,
> Every line of her dress showed it;

She was cool and determined and laughed heartily,

A wide mouth with magnificent teeth. (307)

This is a novelistic description by a writer who has read James Joyce. Here Turner gives us essentially the same realistic London as that inhabited a decade and a half earlier by Eliot's lonely typist and carbuncular house agent's clerk during their assignation in Part III of *The Waste Land*, an episode that Yeats's introduction cited as an example of Eliot's "monotony of accent" and "grey middle tint" (xxi–xxii). Yet the woman's beauty stirs the poet to complain about his inability to properly depict her—a poetic move recalling that of Eliot in "Prufrock," where the speaker, seeking to express what he does not have words for, laments that it is impossible to say exactly what he means. But as Turner's speaker gets wound up over his plight, the language begins to leave behind its modern rationality and the ironic distance of a modern novelist, moving from the gray tones to brilliant color:

She never showed a sign that she saw me

But I knew and she knew that I knew —

Our eyes fleeting past, never meeting directly

Like that vernal twinkling of butterflies

To which Coleridge compared Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*.

A phrase such as "vernal twinkling" belongs to verse, not realistic prose. The poet here incorporates both modern irony and awareness of literary artifice, with a nod again to Shakespeare, and to the Romantics, then proceeds to the spontaneous overflow of Romantic emotion and high poetic diction:

Mating with her were itself a separation!

Only our bodies fusing in a flame of crystal

Burning in an infinite empyrean

Until all the blue of the limitless heaven were drunken

In one globe of united perfection

Like a bubble that is all the oceans of the world ascending

To the fire that is the fire of fires, transcending

The love of God, the love of God, the love of God— (*OBMV* 308)

Finally, collecting himself, the poet moves from this over-the-top frenzy to a beautifully described realistic concluding image, a coral reef seen through transparent water, and a highly poetic literary simile to the blossoming footprint of Venus in Shakespeare's poem. Like the coral seen through water, the poet sees through the superficial banality of teatime at Piccadilly Circus to the transcendent beauty of creation.

One can understand why Yeats liked the poem: it is mischievous and ingenuous at the same time—a modern writer poking fun at the traditional plight of the love-struck poet and yet taking the essential emotion and the moment of poetic vision seriously. For all its worldly wisdom and modern skepticism, the poem admits of an inexpressible ideal to which the poet aspires. Much as Yeats, in his poem "Vacillation," finds himself recalling a moment in a dreary London café when he suddenly felt himself blazing with divine energy, blessed and able to bless, Turner here honestly despairs at the beauty he sees but cannot adequately describe.

Yeats did not revise "Hymn to her Unknown," reprinting it as Turner had written it, but neither did he comment on it. The same cannot be said of "From 'The Seven Days

of the Sun,'" which he discussed at length in the introduction, and in other letters and critical writings. Much has been made of Yeats's dramatic cuts and re-ordering of Oscar Wilde's *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* in the anthology. But, in fact, he edited Turner's long poem far more drastically, albeit with the author's permission. *The Seven Days of the Sun: A Dramatic Poem*, published in a limited edition in 1925, was structured around a week's calendar, beginning with Monday and ending with Sunday. Each day was divided into sections. Yeats changes it from a sequential "dramatic poem" into an nondramatic series of lyrical reflections built around Turner's "Thursday"; he simply chooses sections according to his own sense of the poem, and reassembles nine of them without reference to their original placement in the "week" or their original order within each "day." The extent to which he scrambles the original order of the poem is apparent in Table 2, which matches the numbering and order that he assigned in the *OBMV* with Turner's original placement.

In the introduction, and in his "Modern Poetry" broadcast for the BBC, Yeats attributes to Turner an attitude that today we might call "postmodern"—an awareness of the artificiality of our constructs of meaning, and the extent to which those meanings depend on one another as opposed to any sort of definite "reality." He contends that where modernists such as Ezra Pound had turned toward hard objects and artifacts around which the flux of perception swirled, making nature into "a flux where man drowned or

Table 2

How Yeats re-ordered Turner's "From 'The Seven Days of the Sun'" in the *OBMV*

OBMV order	Original placement in *The Seven Days of the Sun*
(i)	Thursday, Part IV
(ii)	Wednesday, Part VII
(iii)	Tuesday, Part VI
(iv)	Friday, Part I, except lines 26–36 (omitted)
(v)	Tuesday, Part I
(vi)	Thursday, Part III
(vii)	Thursday, Part II
(viii)	Thursday, Part V
(ix)	Thursday, Part I

swam[,] . . . the moment had come for some poet to cry 'the flux is in my own mind.' . . . It was Turner who raised that cry, to gain upon the instant a control of plastic material, a power of emotional construction, Pound has always lacked" (*OBMV* xxviii). In other words, Yeats reads Turner as identifying the extent to which modern "realism" was as subjective a construct as the symbolism of Yeats's generation. "From 'The Seven Days of the Sun,'" as reassembled by Yeats, becomes Turner's attempt to square this realization with a neo-Romantic sense of transcendent truth that gives it the lie.

At the heart of Turner's poem, as reassembled by Yeats, lies a meditation on Shakespeare's characters: "Did Rosalind, Cleopatra and Miranda / Satisfy Shakespeare? / Or the Dark Lady of the Sonnets?" The three dramatic characters are constructs of

Shakespeare's imagination, created from whole cloth, Turner suggests. But, so is the "real" character whom we know as the Dark Lady: she may have been based on an actual person, but the version of her that we know, through the sonnets, is no less an act of Shakespeare's (and our own) imagination than are the dramatic characters: "I assure you she is no more real than Rosalind" (*OBMV* 300), Turner says.

Yet, there is an important difference between the two kinds of characters that Turner sees: only in the subjective "complete confusion" of past, present, and future that a person navigates as the so-called reality of his daily life can he actually beget a daughter of his own "Dark Lady." In other words, only when he accepts the flawed construct that is his reality and fully lives in it can the human biological process take place that gives form to a new person—to another confusion of past, present, and future that can create its own realities. Yeats explores the seeming paradox in the *OBMV* introduction:

> [O]ne theme perplexes Turner, whether in comedy, dialogue, poem. Somewhere in the middle of it all [Da Vinci's sitter] had a private reality like that of the Dark Lady among the women Shakespeare had imagined, but because that private soul is always behind our knowledge, though always hidden it must be the sole source of pain, stupefaction, evil. (xxx–xxxi)

The inference here is that pain, stupefaction, and evil—what might be called artifacts of "sin" in a religious context—are the inevitable indexes of human separation from the eternal. They are, in Yeats's view, the consequences of being human, and at the same time the very things that a hero actively fights to overcome, if futilely, in great art. Or, as

he wondered in "Meditations in Time of Civil War," "What if those things the greatest of mankind / Consider most to magnify, or to bless, / But take our greatness with our bitterness?" (*YP* 205).

Several of Turner's anthologized poems share a focus on the passing of time, and the way in which the fluid experience of the moment is betrayed by the fact that it seems frozen, as if preserved in crystal, once it is part of the past. These include "A Love-song," "The Dancer, "In Time Like Glass," "The Navigators," and "Men fade like Rocks," all from *In Time Like Glass* (1921). The notion of time past as something fixed, like the images on Keats's urn, is not characteristically Yeatsian, but it is compatible with his concept of a changeless aesthetic eternity from which the living world gets its patterns. Turner's early poem, "Romance" (1916), written while he was a soldier serving on the home front during the First World War, describes a childhood in which the tragedies of the living world becomes "fleeting dreams" compared with the exotic, eternal sunshine of the imagination. In "Tragic Love," published two decades later, the speaker plays with the traditional convention of the poem's ability to record love for all eternity, but admits that even so it falls short, and can only hope to reflect "some pure lustre" (*OBMV* 297) of the reality.

Yeats substantively edited "Epithalamion," "Reflection," and "The Word Made Flesh?" cutting sections and inverting words and lines to make them more like his own work. For example, "Reflection" considers the topic that Yeats describes in his discussion of Wellesley as the difference between the mirror and the lamp (*OBMV* xxxiii). Turner meditates on the difference between reflected light and self-generated light, and laments how so often the latter fades. He links this to the image, so frequent in Yeats's work, of

the way in which sunlight illuminates moons, likening the sunlight to the animating light of the soul. Originally, his conclusion merely noted this quality:

> Undying fires removing far
>
> Their unseen presence show,
>
> Leaving their brightness on dead moons
>
> As heavenly suns do. (*Songs* 8)

Yeats's revision makes the last line read, "As suns less heavenly do" (*OBMV* 298), a transposition that changes the meaning from a straightforward simile to one that compares the ordinary kind of light generated by suns with that heavenly light generated by the animating spirit of creation.

In "Epithalamion," the changes consist of deletions rather than revisions. The poem was originally entitled "Epithalamion for a Modern Wedding" in Turner's *The Dark Wind* (1918). In addition to changing the title to make the observations less topical, Yeats cut the opening stanza, an italicized pledge of devotion in the bridegroom's voice, and the concluding four stanzas, in which the poem's speaker moralizes about what he has learned of marriage. The cuts emphasize the poem's distinction between the everyday affection of human relationships and the strange, otherworldly frenzy of love that seems unrelated to them. Many of Yeats's own poems, such as "The Moods," explore the ways in which passion descends on ordinary life as if from another realm.

Yeats also heavily revised "The Word Made Flesh?" which Turner had published in *Songs and Incantations* (1936). In one letter, he tells Wellesley that Turner has asked him to condense it, and confesses that it is a poem that "rends my heart," quoting several lines:

> Terrible is the agony of an old man
>
> The agony of incommunicable power
>
> Holding its potency that is like a rocket
>
> that is full of stars. (*CL* #6592, 25 Jun 1936)

Obviously this sentiment resonates with many of Yeats's own poems about wild old wicked men. He says in the same letter that his revision is aimed at "detaching [certain lines] from vague rhetoric." In the process, though, he also removes most of Turner's specific allusions to the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer, along with references to hell, Satan, and fallen archangels that give the poem a much more specifically Christian character.

Having revised the poem, and reconsidered his choices of Turner's work, he decided to include it and three other poems in the anthology:[18]

> I found myself dissatisfied with my selection from your work. I came to the conclusion that the reason is that I finish with a rather long quotation describing hell from your "Jack and Jill", and that this is too remote on theme from the rest. I find that the selections from an author are far more powerful if they all support each other. I wonder if you would let me give that poem about the love of the old in you[r] last [b]ook with the cuts I suggested, or else, if you don't want to give authority to those cuts, to give a series of selections from that poem with dots where I leave anything out. I may want to give one or two other poems also from that book, which

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18. Yeats's decision to make the change came late, when the book was in galleys. He added four poems, "The Word Made Flesh?" "Hymn to Her Unknown," "Tragic Love," and "Reflection"; he cut "Giraffe and Tree," "The Sea Carves Innumerable Shells," and "The Fall," all from Turner's 1934 book, *Jack and Jill* (Hauserman, "W. B. Yeats" 237).

> reminds me that you gave me a copy and then carried it off for the sake of some suggestions I had made in the margin. May I have it again? (*CL* #6613, 13 Jul 1936)

Ultimately, the version that Yeats published is a poem that in its argument much resembles "Sailing to Byzantium," in which the aging poet longs to resign from the sensual world of the young in favor of "the artifice of eternity." Turner's conclusion is much the same:

> This is the everlasting youth of an old man
>
> For whom there is no illusion.
>
> This it is to be excluded from the bliss
>
> Of the men and women that He made in His image;
>
> But his children are the children of the spirit,
>
> Sweeter and fairer are they than the children of the flesh
>
> But they are born solitary
>
> And agony is their making-kiss. (*OBMV* 306–7)[19]

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19. By way of comparison, Turner's original version concludes:

> 'Tis the everlasting youth of an old man
> For whom there is no illusion.
> Or else she be so far off that if he fly that height unscalable
> He shall topple
> Into the abyss.
>
> This it is to be excluded from the bliss
> Of the angels of God
> And of the men and women that He made in His image;
> The joy of making images in the image of his maker is not his
> But his children are the children of the spirit,
> Sweeter and fairer are they than the children of the flesh
> But they are born solitary
> And agony is their making-kiss. (*Songs* 53)

v. Voices from the Margins

As we have seen, the writers whose work Yeats most embraced in the *OBMV* mostly belonged to the Edwardian and Georgian generations, whether they were actually part of the Georgian "movement" or not; Yeats's selections from the work of Turner, Wellesley, Edith Sitwell and Oliver St. John Gogarty mostly belong to the late 1910s and 1920s. As we will see, the writers that he reacted most strongly against were mostly younger leftist poets whose work was being published in the 1930s, particularly those in the *New Signatures* and *New Country* anthologies edited by Michael Roberts,[20] who looked back for inspiration to Eliot, Pound, and the War Poets.

Consequently, reading the anthology, one has the odd sense that Yeats, unable to find writers of W. H. Auden's generation whose work could be set against Auden's, turned instead to writers such as Turner and the Sitwells who had, to borrow T. S. Eliot's line, already seen the moment of their greatness flicker. While he does include some writers of the 1930s that he likes, they illustrate an odd collection of his enthusiasms for poets on the margins rather than any sort of coherent "school" that he can set against the young leftists.

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20. Although Yeats's home library did not include a copy of *New Signatures* (1932), it was among the books that he had requested to see in preparation for his selection for the *OMBV* (*CL* #6267, 26 Jun 1935).

The Scottish poet Christopher Murray Grieve, who wrote under the pen name "Hugh MacDiarmid" (1892–1978), is a good example.[21] MacDiarmid is an interesting writer with a long and varied career, someone who in his own way sought to do for modern Scotland what Yeats did for modern Irish literature; yet during his lifetime he never succeeded in establishing a viable political or a literary movement. Yeats's selection includes two early poems in lowland Scots dialect by MacDiarmid, "Parley of Beasts" (from *Selected Poems* (1934)) and "O Wha's been here afore me, Lass" (a short excerpt from MacDairmid's long, fascinating 1926 modernist poem in dialect, *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*). The other two poems are "Cattle Show" and "The Skeleton of the Future (At Lenin's Tomb),"[22] both from *Stony Limits and Other Poems* (1934), which abandon the dialect.

MacDiarmid became acquainted with Yeats for a period in the late 1920s, and the latter was sympathetic to his Scottish literary nationalism despite being at odds with MacDiarmid's leftist political views. In the introduction to the anthology, Yeats quotes "Wha's been here" (which makes a somewhat bawdy allusion to St. Joseph's imagined

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21. Yeats was never able to spell the name consistently. It appears in the *OBMV* as both "M'Diarmid" and "McDiarmid," but Yeats also spelled it "MacDiarmuid" and "Mac Diarmid" in letters.

22. In the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* Roderick Watson notes that MacDiarmid was notorious, in later years, for plugging in verbatim texts from sources without acknowledging them (par. 34). His short poem, originally published in *Stony Limits and Other Poems* (1934), which Yeats owned, does this with a passage from a 1932 book by engineer Walter Arnold Rukeyser, *Working for the Soviets,* which describes the tomb: "it is a perfect blending of red granite and black diorite, with the blue of the labradorite crystals gleaming like precious stones in the light reflected from the snow" (277). MacDiarmid's poem, in its entirety, reads as follows:

> Red granite and black diorite, with the blue
> Of the labradorite crystals gleaming like precious stones
> In the light reflected from the snow; and behind them
> The eternal lightning of Lenin's bones. (*OBMV* 325)

reaction to news of the approaching Virgin Birth) to suggest that the modernist poets are arriving late at a party that actually started with Walter Pater.

Yeats included a single poem by another Scottish poet, Edward Davison (1898–1970) that was less specifically Scottish in character than MacDairmid's work. Davison, who served in naval intelligence during the war, was a critic and journalist with *The Guardian* whose poetry had been published in several of the Georgian-era anthologies. By 1936 his lack of success in the U.K. had led him to emigrate to the United States,[23] where he taught English Literature at the University of Colorado. The poem, "In This Dark House," from *Harvest of Youth* (1926), revolves around an image that occurs in a number of Yeats's selections for the anthology, particularly in poems of the countryside or those with Irish settings—that of an abandoned or ruined house. In Davison's poem, it becomes an image for the body, inhabited by a transcendent spirit that looks forward to the release of death.

Although the South African poet Roy Campbell (1901–1957) shares with MacDiarmid a consciousness of the shadow of the Empire that makes his home culture and background seem provincial, his politics are at the opposite end of the ideological spectrum. It was Campbell who memorably coined the epithet "MacSpaunday" to satirize the leftist poets Louis MacNeice, Stephen Spender, W. H. Auden, and C. Day Lewis, of whom he disapproved. Campbell's reputation was on the rise in the mid-1930s, before he became notorious for his support of Franco during the Spanish Civil War; Yeats would have found much to like in the formal qualities, political leanings, provincial self-

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23. In a letter to Oxford University Press, Yeats noted that he had found Davison's poem in an anthology, and had been unable to contact him for permission, despite having written to several publishers (*CL* #6653, 22 Sep 1936). All had lost track of the writer's whereabouts. Davison was the father of the American poet Peter Davison.

consciousness, and agrarian sympathies of Campbell's work. The four poems that he included, "The Serf," "The Zulu Girl," "The Sisters," and "Autumn," were all taken from *Poems* (1932), which Yeats owned, and show Campbell at his most lyrical and least polemical.

All four poems suggest the influence of Yeats in their meter and form, and especially in their diction. For example, "The Sisters," which describes two spirited girls who go riding along the chilly seashore before the gray dawn, employs not only the early Yeats palette, but that most characteristic of late Yeats images, the gyre: "Far out on the grey silence of the flood / They watch the dawn in smouldering gyres expand / Beyond them" (*OBMV* 395). Like many of Yeats's poems that suggest a coming apocalypse, "The Zulu Girl" foreshadows the coming storm that Campbell sees (a race war rather than a monstrous Second Coming) in the image of a Zulu Madonna nursing her child:

> Her body looms above him like a hill
> Within whose shade a village lies at rest,
> Or the first cloud so terrible and still
> That bears the coming harvest in its breast. (394)

Yeats also included two poems by Campbell's fellow South African, and former editorial collaborator, the novelist William Plomer (1903–1973). Plomer and Campbell had been co-editors in 1925 of a famously progressive magazine, *Voorslag*, that had scandalized South African literary society by arguing for racial mixing and by attacking provincial pieties. Though their attitudes toward racism might seem patronizing by today's standards and suspect in light of Campbell's later interest in fascism, the two writers looked seriously at African culture, and it is not difficult to find connections with

Yeats's own attacks on the prejudices against the Irish "race" that he encountered as a young man in England. Plomer's "The Scorpion," dominated by the image of a African woman's body washing up along the banks of a flooded river, offers a harsh look at the degradation of natives under British imperial rule. The other poem, "A Levantine," offers an interesting counterpoint to Yeats's idealization of medieval Byzantium, depicting a corrupt old denizen of the twentieth-century Levant, "With Socrates as ancestor, / And rich Byzantium in his veins" who scorns the idealistic modern imperialists and "has no principles at all" (*OBMV* 408-9).

During the years immediately before he began work on the *OBMV,* Yeats worked on several book projects with another colonial, the expatriate Indian guru Shankar Gajanan Purohit, who published in English under the name of Shri Purohit Swami (1882–1941).[24] Yeats's biographer notes that he had been introduced by Thomas Sturge Moore, who was helping him translate his autobiography, and who intrigued Yeats by feeding him chapters of the unfinished book that touched on Yeats's interests in "the magical in the everyday." Yeats eventually supplanted Moore as the Swami's main English collaborator and literary patron (Foster, *Arch-Poet* 461–2). The Swami accompanied Yeats to Majorca for the winter of 1935–36, where the poet was helping him "English" the *Ten Principal Upanishads*, and was with him in early 1936 as the final manuscript of the anthology was sent off to Oxford.

Not surprisingly, given their close collaboration, three of the Swami's translations from Hindu and Urdu made it into the *OBMV*: "I know that I am a Great Sinner," "Shall I

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24. *Shri/Sri* and *Swami* are essentially honorific titles. *Shri Purohit Swami* roughly translates as "Mr. Purohit, the Guru." Yeats and Oxford's editors list him in the index as if "Swami" were his family name; Yeats refers to him in correspondence and conversation as "Swami" or "The Swami."

do this?" and "A Miracle indeed." All three lyrics are essentially mystical prayers that illustrate an exotic attitude toward the divine, and Yeats admits that he has no idea of their literary worth in their original tongues (*Later* 135). Their only prior publication in book form had been in Yeats's 1932 "Introduction to *An Indian Monk,*" in which the poet had polished the guru's verse as part of his introduction to the Swami's spiritual autobiography. Unlike the Indian writers Rabindranath Tagore and Manmohan Ghose, also included in the anthology, Yeats's interest in the Swami was primarily as a expert in and living practitioner of Hindu mysticism rather than as an English verse-writer, but he considered him "a minstrel and story-teller [from a land] where all popular literature is religion" (*Later* 135).

The Swami was still with Yeats in Majorca when the poet's dealings with his unstable young disciple Margot Ruddock Collis (1907–1951) came to a crisis. Ruddock, in response to tough letters by Yeats about her recent poetry, traveled to Majorca and showed up on his doorstep in the midst of a full-fledged psychotic breakdown, during which she tried to drown herself in the sea but lost her nerve, and subsequently jumped from the window of an upper-storey room in Barcelona, in which she had been locked, and broke her knee. Yeats's sexual excitement over Ruddock in 1934 and 1935, and interest in the raw, Romantic emotion of her undisciplined, Emily Dickinson-like lyrics,[25] had contributed to the late frenzy of creativity that led him to undertake the *OBMV* in the first place. By 1936 his aspirational ardor for her had cooled, and he had begun to realize that she had crossed the line between inspired sensitivity and actual insanity. But, trusting the impulse that had first brought her to his attention, he continued to encourage her. He

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25. Yeats likened them to a different Emily, ascribing to them "something of Emily Brontë's intensity" (*Prefaces* 187).

selected seven of her hitherto unpublished poems for the anthology, allotting slightly over three pages to them, and after her breakdown he helped arrange for her work to be published by J. M. Dent as *The Lemon Tree* (1937), for which he wrote an introduction.

"I like you too much to be a good judge," Yeats admitted to Ruddock as he was considering her unpublished work for the anthology. "I think you are good now, you certainly will be [better] in a short time, but I must not deceive myself or you" (*CL* #6292, 13 Jul 1935). In the poems that he selected—"The Child Compassion," "Spirit, Silken Thread," "Take Away," "I take thee Life," "O Holy Water," "Love Song," and "Autumn, crystal Eye"—one can see the sort of spiritual intensity that he hoped would develop in young writers as an alternative to the social activism of the 1930s:

> O holy water
>
> Love, I learn
>
> I may not take thee
>
> Though I burn. (*OBMV* 418)

Yeats would later say of such verses, "Here in broken sentences, in ejaculations, in fragments of all kinds was a power of expression of spiritual suffering unique in her generation" (*Prefaces* 187). He found her insanity moving and inspiring, if sometimes inconvenient to deal with. In publishing her, he was letting her "finish the dance," as he later described in a poem about her, "Sweet Dancer":

> If strange men come from the house
>
> To lead her away, do not say
>
> That she is happy being crazy;

> Lead them gently astray;
>
> Let her finish her dance. . . . (*YP* 302)

Last among the younger poets in the grab-bag that Yeats included as a contrast to the "Auden Generation" was one whom Yeats singled out for particular praise: George Barker (1913–1991). In both private letters and the introduction to the anthology he offers Barker as an example of a writer who employed "traditional metres" of the Georgians (*OBMV* xli) and the "rhythmical invention" (*CL* #6335, 8 Sep 1935) of Hopkins, but was free of the social preoccupation with "passive suffering" that other 1930s writers had learned from the war poets.

Barker, a protégé of Eliot's (who recommended him to Yeats), was the youngest of the poets anthologized in the *OBMV*. He had begun publishing so recently that his work was not included in the *New Signatures* and *New Country* anthologies of 1932 and 1933, in which younger English poets such as Auden, Spender, Day Lewis and MacNeice figured prominently. A 1947 assessment of Barker by David Daiches suggests why Barker might have been seen by Yeats as an answer to the poets of Auden's generation:

> While Auden and others faced the crumbling world of the 1930's by devising a poetic diagnosis in which both a rhetorical and a prophetic purpose was implicit, Barker quietly identified himself with the crumbling parts and produced a poetry that was at once lyrical and tragic. . . . He is not, as so many of his contemporaries in 1935 were, a poet speaking to a generation about itself: he is all those aspects of that generation that are worth speaking to or about. His poetry is dramatic rather than didactic, lyrical rather than rhetorical, tragic rather than revolutionary. (336)

The praiseworthy qualities here are ones that Yeats endorsed in the *OBMV* introduction and elsewhere; the others (didacticism, rhetoric, and revolutionary inclinations) are qualities Yeats associates with the Victorians and social realists.

Yeats selected four lyrics from Barker's 1935 *Poems*: "The Wraith-friend," "The leaping Laughers," "The Crystal," and "He comes among." He approved of them despite their formal similarity to Hopkins's work, the idiosyncrasy of which he associated with Victorianism as "a last development of poetical diction" (*OBMV* xxxix). Here, without the drag of Hopkins's religious orthodoxy (and the personal animosity Yeats felt toward him), Hopkins's influence has helped Barker do something that feels new to Yeats. Indeed, in placing his discussion of Hopkins and sprung rhythm at the end of his introduction to the *OBMV*, where chronologically a discussion of Barker would belong, Yeats actually encourages the anthology reader to make a connection between Hopkins and Barker, and to recognize that the influence of Hopkins on younger writers was not wholly problematical.

Given Yeats's dislike of Hopkins and his criticism of Eliot, it might seem surprising to encounter a poem such as "The Wraith-friend" that seems a melding of the two writers. Its opening lines, "Following forbidden streets / Towards unreal retreats," strongly evokes Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" ("Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets, / The muttering retreats . . . ") and *The Waste Land* ("Unreal City / Under the brown fog of a winter dawn"); the speaker of Barker's poem seems to embody the fog that curls through the first part of "Prufrock" and the end of "The Burial of the Dead." At the same time, its concluding stanza, with its ringing alliteration and

assonance, its verbs that act as nouns,[26] and its imagery of whirling birds and vast skies, begins in a way that could just as easily come from a Hopkins poem:

> Thou to wings those dark limbs
>
> Spread, and that deep breast climbs
>
> Eagerly the heights of the skies, or
>
> Of the earliest lark's soar,
>
> Until brushing against cold heaven
>
> Like bluebirds in storms, even
>
> Then that known flesh must fall. (*OBMV* 436)

Ultimately, however, "The Wraith-friend" eschews both Eliot's ironic despair and Hopkins's ecstatic orthodoxy, and suggests the bitter gaiety that Yeats finds characteristic of the best modern writing. Barker may have been a Catholic, with an Irish mother, but while the imagery of his poem evokes images of crucifixion, its conclusion argues for a much vaguer and more mystical sort of transcendence than orthodox Christian dogma contemplates—the sort of questioning faith that inhabits so many of Yeats's own poems. The wraith-friend is neither yellow fog nor Holy Ghost, but a miraculous spirit imprisoned behind human ribs. In seeking to fly free from its prison, it yearns with the same sort of passion that the speaker of Yeats's "Sailing to Byzantium" feels as he yearns for the holy fire of an aesthetic eternity.

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26. Compare, for instance, "the earliest lark's soar" with the line in Hopkins's "The Windhover" in which the speaker marvels at the hovering bird: "the achieve of; the mastery of the thing" (30).

vi. The Poets of *New Signatures* and *New Country*

Although *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse* sold extremely well after its publication, and continued to sell well for years, several other contemporary anthologies of the 1930s—three of them edited by Michael Roberts (1902–1948)—arguably had more of an impact on modern poetry. As I have noted, Roberts's *Faber Book of Modern Verse* (1936) more fully reflected the leading edge of early twentieth-century writing, particularly the poetry of international literary modernism, and was a commercial success as well. But two other anthologies edited by Roberts and published by the Hogarth Press—*New Signatures* (1932) and *New Country* (1933)—defined a particular generation of English writers. Although the two Hogarth anthologies did not sell on the scale of the Oxford or Faber books, both of which were aimed at popular audiences, they were extremely influential in literary circles. Yeats, who frequented such circles, certainly felt their influence, and appears to have found it necessary to respond in the *OBMV*.

The tone that Roberts set in the introductions to the two anthologies was unabashedly political—particularly that in *New Country*, which included both prose and poetry. It was published after Adolph Hitler became Chancellor of Germany, and its introduction stood as a defiant English shout from the left. If many of the poets included in the anthologies, notably W. H. Auden, were inconsistent leftists and hardly doctrinaire Communists, the overall effect was nevertheless, as Samuel Hynes has said, "explicitly revolutionary" ("Michael" 438). In a sense, Roberts's anthologies created an identifiable movement where before there had existed only poets of slight acquaintance and similar attitudes.

Yeats's introduction to the *OBMV* effectively endorses Roberts's formulation, but frames it in terms of Yeats's suspicion of passive suffering as an adequate basis for art. "Day Lewis, Madge, MacNeice, are modern through the character of their intellectual passion," he writes:

> [C]ommunism is their *Deus ex Machina,* their Santa Claus, their happy ending. . . . Indeed I know of no school where the poets so closely resemble each other. Spender has said that the poetry of belief must supersede that of personality, and it is perhaps a belief shared that has created their intensity, their resemblance; but this belief is not political. (xxxvi-xxxviii).

Yeats included two of Roberts's own poems, "Les Planches-en-Montagnes" and "Midnight," both from *These Our Matins* (1930). Roberts was an avid mountain climber, and the first poem appears at first to be a Georgian-style celebration of natural beauty in a French alpine village. But elements of the modern world soon intrude into the picture—buzzing electric wires, concrete, the spray of water from a spillway—and the poem becomes an anxious image of nature channeled and displaced by technology. Similarly, in "Midnight," the speaker seems at first merely to be admiring the stars through his window, but the poem soon shifts to reveal his panic and paranoia as the light in the night sky is overwhelmed by the darkness of his mind. Unlike the Georgians, Roberts finds no comfort in the simple beauties of nature; as Yeats suggests, his poems are permeated with a longing for things that will not change.

New Signatures also included work by the socialist Julian Bell (1908–1937), who would end up dying in Spain in the battle against Franco's Nationalists. Despite Bell's

views, his poetry was typically not so politically charged as that of many of the other poets in *New Signatures.* His death in the service of the leftist cause was, of course, unforeseeable when Yeats included one of Bell's poems, "The Redshanks," in the *OBMV.* At the time he would have viewed Bell as a young writer with strong links to the Bloomsbury group (he was the son of Clive and Vanessa Bell, older brother of Quentin Bell, and nephew of Virginia Woolf), who had published a well-regarded collection, *Winter Movement* (1930), that Roberts said equaled Auden's *Poems* as "the outstanding achievement of the younger men in 1930. . . . Mr. Bell infuses a new vigor into English pastoral poetry by the use of rhythms and dynamic imagery caught from Gerard Manley Hopkins. Consequently he can make poetry [of rural imagery] where the Edwardians made dull verse" (278). While "The Redshanks," which likens a bird's flight to that of the spirit, does treat a subject one might expect to find in a Hopkins poem (and employs Hopkins-like chiming rhymes such as *wring*/*wing*), its overall feel is more that of a Thomas Hardy lyric, while its vision of a sailing, transparent dream-self seems positively Yeatsian.[27]

Yeats may have had in mind someone like William Empson (1906–1984), whose work also appeared in *New Signatures*, when he told Margot Ruddock that a major purpose of his work on the anthology was to "understand for the sake of my *Cambridge*[28]

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27. Yeats would never have described the transparent dreamer as "gaseous," an unfortunate use by Bell of modern technical vocabulary in an essentially mystical poem.

28. It is not clear if this warrants a "*sic.*" Yeats made the substitution on several occasions, and may have done so advisedly, as a deliberate witticism alluding to *New Signatures*. The more political writers of that volume, like Spender and Day Lewis, were associated with Oxford, and Yeats may have been symbolically setting Cambridge against Oxford. Empson, who actually *was* a Cambridge man, was clearly less interested

Book of Modern Verse the Auden, Eliot school[.] I do not mean to give it a great deal of space, but must define my objections to it, and I cannot know this till I see clearly what quality it has [that has] made it delight young Cambridge and young Oxford" (*CL* #6189, 25 Feb 1935).

The one poem by Empson in the *OBMV*, "Arachne," certainly seems more spiritual than revolutionary. It employs as a metaphor the scientific account of surface tension to posit human existence as a sort of metaphysical bubble—a bubble created by the "molecular" bonds between people like the film separating empty spaces a bubble comprises. The poem itself is a witty—and even subtly bawdy—love verse, in a formal terza rima stanza often employed by Yeats. The speaker, a sort of water spider living on the bubble, as such creatures do, cannot survive without his female counterpart, and is bonded to her much as molecules bond. His bubble will collapse if Arachne, following the frequent practice of female spiders, causes her mate to "die" (both in a physical and a sexual sense); the speaker leers a warning to her not to cause his death too soon.

Another Cambridge writer, Charles Madge (1912–1996), was younger than most of the poets in *New Signatures,* and did not appear in that volume, but was included in Roberts's *New Country.* Madge's first book of poems did not appear until after the *OBMV* was published, but the two verses selected, "The Times" and "Solar Creation," were in *Poems of Tomorrow: An Anthology of Contemporary Verse*, *Chosen from* The Listener (1935), which Yeats owned. In his introduction, Yeats affects a pose of puzzlement about his inability to differentiate between the leftist poets: "I cannot tell whether the poet is communist or anti-communist. On which side is Madge?" (xxxviii).

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in revolutionary politics than many of the other writers that Roberts included in *New Signatures.*

The poems he chooses show both sides: "The Times" offers a revolutionary's rhetoric, warning the world that war is brewing (or "war is eating" (434), as Madge puts it). "Solar Creation," on the other hand, is an intricately rhymed lyric that tackles questions more metaphysical than political. Is there, it asks, nothing new under the sun, as Ecclesiastes suggests? Are we merely like illusions projected in a motion picture?

Reading the *OBMV's* introduction might lead a reader to expect that the standard-bearers of the so-called Auden Group would be represented by a substantial selection of their work, if only to show what Yeats disapproved of. In fact, though, he seems to have preferred not to let their work speak for itself, excusing himself in one letter by claiming, "Most of the 'moderns'—Auden, Spender, etc. seem thin beside the more sensuous work of the 'romantics'" (*CL* #6614, 14 Jul 1936). The anthology includes only two poems by Spender, and lists three[29] by Auden—a decision on Yeats's part that doubtless contributed to Auden's well-known 1939 quip, in *Partisan Review,* that the *OBMV* was "the most deplorable volume ever issued under the imprint of that highly respected firm which has done so much for the cause of poetry in this country, the Clarendon Press" (Auden, *English* 390).[30] Indeed, the choice of poems suggests that Yeats felt

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29. It actually includes four Auden poems, but one was not listed in the indexes, as I note below.

30. This quotation from Auden's essay, "The Public v. the Late Mr. William Butler Yeats," is often cited out of context as an example of his supposed antipathy to Yeats. More probably, Auden was deliberately using the Yeats technique of an argument between differing points of view held by the same author—in this case embodied as a prosecutor versus a defense attorney arguing to the court of public opinion. The accusation is the prosecutor's, but the other side suggests some mitigating factors, concluding that "just men will always recognize [Yeats] as a master" (393). The prosecution's argument represented the idealistic views Auden had held earlier in the 1930s; his more mature outlook included both admiration and censure—and the sympathy evident in the poem.

disappointed, if anything, by the showing of those whom he had supposed to be brash young challengers. He commented to a correspondent, "I admire Auden more than I said in the Anthology. (His best work has not been published)" (*CL* #6871, 19 Mar 1937).

Yeats's argument, as noted earlier, was that the poets of *New Signatures* and *New Country* were, despite their professed modernism and Marxist skepticism of metaphysics, longing for a unified theory that would serve as their "Santa Claus," and as such he suggested that they lacked any sort of high ground from which they could criticize the mysticism of the "last Romantics" without philosophical hypocrisy. Nor was he above belittling them. After Stephen Spender wrote a blistering review of the anthology in *The Daily Worker,* Yeats assured Dorothy Wellesley, whom the review had singled out for criticism, that their "hatred" was, "to use a phrase of Balfour's intemperate youth, 'a fermentation of their desire to lick your boo[t]s' . . . & because I have left out Wilfred Owen who seems to me a bad poet though a good letter writer" (*CL* #6764, 30 Dec 1936).[31]

This helps explain why the two poems by Stephen Spender (1909–1995) read as if they are the product of someone who has been studying Freud rather than marching for Marx and Lenin, which Yeats might at least have admired abstractly. As Ian Hamilton has suggested, "Auden, whose first book had appeared in 1930, was hailed as his generation's satirist and prophet. Spender's role was to provide soulfulness and passion"

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31. Yeats was probably confusing Lord Arthur Balfour with topical characters in novelist W. H. Mallock's *The Old Order Changes*. In the novel, one such character, Josiah Foreman, comments of another, "the desire of a Mr. Japhet Snapper to rob the gentlemen of their position is simply a fermentation of his desire to lick their shoes" (165). According to Rintoul's *Dictionary of Real People and Places in Fiction* (89), Mallock's Mr. Foreman was a caricature of the socialist Henry Mayers Hyndman (1842–1921), and Mr. Snapper represented the Liberal politician Joseph Chamberlain (1836–1914).

(78): the poems Yeats picked are analytical and quietly confessional. Both poems—"The Shapes of Death" and "An 'I' can never be Great Man," from *Poems* (1933)—seem more interested in how our psychology motivates our behavior than how economic forces do.

The title of the first poem hints at a world of ghosts and spirits, such as Yeats might have endorsed, but the ghosts that Spender sees are the poorly understood subconscious compulsions that drive the neurotic toward an unsatisfactory goal that blinds him to the comfort to be found in the "now" of honest human interactions. The second poem similarly suggests that the "I"—the ego—will never live up to its own vision of itself, and that what would truly satisfy a person is the death of the ego found in passionate relationship to another person. This is hardly the sort of conclusion that would answer for the speaker in Yeats's "Meditations in Time of Civil War," where the poet resigns himself to "the abstract joy" of studious meditation despite the demands of an "ambitious heart" (*YP* 210) that Spender might call a dissatisfied "I."

At the time of the *OBMV*'s 1936 publication, W. H. Auden (1907–1973) still contended that the poet's voice could make a difference in the world, and was about to try to put the idea to the test as an ambulance driver for the Republicans in the Spanish Civil War—an experience that biographies suggest profoundly disillusioned him. By the time of his famous 1939 elegy for Yeats, he was not quite the revolutionary that Michael Roberts had praised in *New Country*. As Auden put it, in his posthumous "trial" of Yeats in the pages of the Trotskyite *Partisan Review*, "The case for the prosecution rests on the fallacious belief that art ever makes anything happen, whereas the honest truth, gentlemen, is that, if not a poem had been written, not a picture painted, not a bar of music composed, the history of man would be materially unchanged" (*English* 393). The

lyrics in the *OBMV*, all selected from the second edition of Auden's *Poems* (1933), belong to that phase of his career when he was seen as the most important new voice on the literary left, and someone who believed that poetry *could* make things happen.

That is essentially the issue in question in "The Silly Fool" (untitled in *Poems,* and later entitled "Happy Ending" in Auden's *Collected Poems*), which was written in 1929 after his tumultuous stay in Weimar Germany (Page 34), and which affects a nursery rhyme-like simplicity.[32] In life, it observes, the fool often triumphs over the bully, the younger son proves to be a man of unsuspected parts, and the bastard proves fashionable—observations that all lead the poet to the question about whether deeds make the man after all, or whether love is the proper measure:

> Simple to prove
> That deeds indeed
> In life succeed
> But love in love
> And tales in tales
> Where no one fails. (*OBMV* 431)

Rather than being irrelevant to deeds, the "but" makes love and literature alternatives to them. This equivalence illustrates the essential "passivity" that Yeats objected to in the War Poets and the writers influenced by them, and to which he opposed the heroic idea.

"It's no use raising a Shout" (which Auden later excised from the *Collected Poems*), was written about the same time as "The Silly Fool," and develops a similar

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32. An Auden letter from the late 1920s explained that he was "writing a text book on Psychology in doggerel verses" (qtd. in Carpenter 92). This lyric may have developed out of that idea.

idea, as seen from Yeats's point of view: the speaker of the poem essentially throws up his hands at the futility of caring about things such as love, and sexual excitement, and happy endings. Auden's refrain asks if there is any point to soldiering on: "But what does it mean? What are we going to do?" (*OBMV* 428). The implication is that there is nothing to be done, however much the speaker longs for it. In his introduction, Yeats explains his reading of such poems: "If I understand aright this difficult art the contemplation of suffering has compelled [Auden and his compatriots] to seek beyond the flux something unchanging, inviolate, that country where no ghost haunts, no beloved lures because it has neither past nor future" (xxxix). To illustrate this, Yeats's introduction quotes lines from a third Auden poemr, "This Lunar Beauty," which also appears in the anthology proper.

The fourth selection from Auden's work, this Loved One,"[33] was composed in Berlin as a response to one of his friend Christopher Isherwood's brief infatuations with young German men. Due to what Yeats called "very bad slip" (*CL* #6839, 3 Mar 1937), not noticed until the book had gone through several printings in both the U.S. and the U.K., "This Loved One" was appended onto "This Lunar Beauty," and its title heading and number were omitted from both the anthology and the indexes.[34] It both celebrates an ongoing love affair and looks back with regret at previous relationships, now relegated to

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33. The poem continued without separation after the last stanza, appearing to be part of that poem and creating an awkward change in stanza logic and subject matter that doubtless puzzled many anthology readers who did not otherwise know the poem. Later U.K. printings of the *OBMV* corrected the error, but it remained uncorrected in U.S. printings.

34. Later revisions to the poem's canonical form by Auden make the *OBMV* version slightly variant.

the past and fading memory, and laments the way in which the immediacy of those loves, each with its own histories and circumstances, has been lost because of the immediacy of the present love.

In one sense, Yeats's "slip" can be understood, because "This Lunar Beauty" explores a related subject—the impossibility of holding on to innocence. Written at a time when Auden was a schoolmaster to fresh-faced adolescent boys (a sexual temptation he seems to have resisted), it marvels that the young moon-faced students are blank slates, with no history, and puzzles over the contradiction that to become romantically involved with any of them would introduce just such a history, and write on the blank slate. Given Yeats's interest in the moon's phases, he would perhaps have been intrigued by Auden's notion of "lunar beauty"—something temporary, changing, and cold.

Yeats's own notions of the moon were rather more complex, with the emphasis on the way the moon's phases represented eternal conditions. In that sense, he might have appreciated Auden's point, that a change of face—or phase—meant far more than just a person becoming different. It meant becoming a whole new person, with a whole new history. And, from Yeats's point of view, the fact that Auden longed for much the sort of unchanging aesthetic condition that he himself had written about in poems such as "Sailing to Byzantium," must have made the younger poet's shrug particularly disheartening.

Conclusion: Pardoned for Writing Well

In 1948, nine years after making Yeats appear risible in his elegy on the older poet's death, and after putting him on trial in the pages of *The Partisan Review*, W. H. Auden more or less admitted that he had himself been an unjust judge. He set out to correct the record in an essay in *The Kenyon Review*, "Yeats as an Example." In it, without mentioning the earlier poem and essay, Auden soberly accords Yeats the status of "major poet."[35] He admits to the many memorable poems, explores the ways in which he contends Yeats has changed the practice of poetry for those who followed him, and excuses his earlier irreverence by suggesting that a young poet (and the clear implication is that he means himself),

> begins [his career] . . . with an excessive admiration for one or more of the mature poets of his time. But, as he grows older, he becomes more and more conscious of belonging to a different generation faced with problems that his heroes cannot help him to solve, and his former hero-worship, as in other spheres of life, is all too apt to turn into an equally excessive hostility and contempt. (187)

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35. In "The Public v. the Late Mr. William Butler Yeats" (1939), by contrast, Auden's "counsel for the prosecution" reviewed the criteria by which Yeats might qualify as a "great poet":

> To deserve such an epithet, a poet is commonly required to convince us of these things: firstly a gift of a very high order for memorable language, secondly a profound understanding of the age in which he lived, and thirdly a working knowledge of and sympathetic attitude towards the most progressive thought of his time.
>
> Did the deceased possess these? I am afraid, gentlemen, that the answer is, no. (*English* 392)

In the seventy-five years since its publication, hostility and contempt have more or less been the standard critical reaction to *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse: 1892–1935*. The main reason for this, quite frankly, was the word "modern" in its title—a word that appears to have produced in readers an expectation that it means the poetry inspired by literary modernism. After all, such poetry dominated the twentieth century, even if its first important works only began appearing about halfway through the period that the anthology covered. Readers of the 1940s and 1950s opened the book's covers and found their parents' revolt against their grandparents rather than the revolt they themselves felt part of. And, indeed, Yeats's book represents the modernist movement most inadequately. It is really an anthology of late Victorian, Edwardian, and Georgian-era Poetry, with Gerard Manley Hopkins and Walter Pater hanging untidily off one end and the modernists and Thirties poets hanging off the other.

But Auden's essay draws a distinction about Yeats that may help the reader to put it in context, and even justify the word "modern" in its title. He suggests that Yeats's poetry, and by extension the account of contemporary poetry that Yeats gives in the *OBMV*, can best be seen as a kind of reaction:

> Yeats's generation grew up in a world where the great conflict was between the Religion of Reason and the Religion of Imagination, objective truth and subjective truth, the Universal and the Individual.
>
> Further, Reason, Science, the general, seemed to be winning and Imagination, Art, and the individual on the defensive. . . .Thus, if we find Yeats adopting a cosmology apparently on purely aesthetic grounds, i.e., not because it is true but because it is interesting; or Joyce attempting to

> convert the whole of existence into words; or even a dialectician like Shaw, after the most brilliant and devastating criticism of the pretensions of scientists, spoiling his case by being a crank and espousing Lamarckism, we must see their reactions, I think, if we are to understand them, in terms of a polemical situation in which they accepted—they probably could do nothing else—the antithesis between reason and imagination which the natural sciences of their time forced upon them, only reversing, with the excessive violence of men defending a narrow place against superior numbers, the value signs on each side. (189–190)

Auden's essay asks us to consider Yeats as an example. And, in a sense, that is what Yeats is doing as well in presenting *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse:* offering himself and his poetic career for our consideration. His introduction, rather than a scholarly outline of the development of modern poetry, is a kind of testimony about his own struggle to be modern—his "table of values," as he put it (*CL* #6541, 26 Apr 1936). "Yeats, like us, was faced with the modern problem," Auden wrote,

> i.e., of living in a society in which men are no longer supported by tradition without being aware of it, and in which, therefore, every individual who wishes to bring order and coherence into the stream of sensations, emotions, and ideas entering his consciousness, from without and within, is forced to do deliberately for himself what in previous ages had been done for him by family, custom, church, and state, namely the choice of the principles and presuppositions in terms of which he can make sense of his experience. (190–191)

He believed in what he had to, even if it seemed silly to some, Auden argues. In accepting our plight, in a world that seemed bereft of meaning, of having to make it up as he goes along "as a working condition and [facing] its consequences, he is an example to all who come after him. That is one reason why he may be called a major poet" (192).

By the time Auden reconsidered Yeats, he himself was regularly attending an Episcopal church in New York, and revising or banishing from the canon of his poetry much of his own early work. He would have better understood that Yeats's impulse to look for modern poetry amongst the decadents, the neo-Romantics, the mystics, the exotics, and the Georgian pastoralists was what one might expect of a man born not long after the Huxley-versus-Wilberforce debates on Darwinism. Yeats had seen the nature of the world altered in his lifetime—someone who grew up writing by candlelight, and who, about a year before he died, turned down an invitation by the BBC to appear on national television (*CL* #7116, 14 Nov 1937). His life and his poetry documented a kind of search. That search—that faith, really, despite his skepticism of religious orthodoxy—is what he talks about so idiosyncratically in his introduction as the "modern" heroic attitude of bitter gaiety. It is the quality that makes his vision of the rough beast slouching toward Bethlehem both fearsome and thrilling, even if does not accord with the latest science. Ultimately, in this strange, unsuitable, modern anthology, it is his gift to his readers of himself, and what he found most compelling as manifested in the work of contemporaries who had been searching too.

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