Chapter IV

W. B. Yeats's *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse* (1936)
and
Michael Roberts's *The Faber Book of Modern Verse* (1936)

Change has come suddenly, the despair of my friends in the 'nineties part of its preparation. Nature, steel-bound or stone-built in the nineteenth century, became a flux where man drowned or swam; the time had come for some poet to cry 'the flux in my own mind.'

—W. B. Yeats, *Oxford Book of Modern Verse*

For the moment all that the poet could do was to concentrate upon surfaces: in a world in which moral, intellectual and aesthetic values were all uncertain, only sense impressions were certain and could be described exactly.

—Michael Roberts, *Faber Book of Modern Verse*
I

With the exception of Pound's *Profile: An Anthology for MCMXXXIII*, the thirties were not remarkable for any major anthologies. Untermeyer did see some reprints, and Harriet Monroe went on to publish a second edition of *The New Poetry*, but apart from these, there were few significant anthologies. Let us also recall, if only in passing, that 1929 saw I. A. Richards's *Practical Criticism*. Its title indeed masks the real project Richards undertook, with anonymous poems and readers. Today an anthologist might do the same exercise with many poems he would short list for a possible reader. What Richards did was to collect poems and invite "interpretations" of them from readers whom he knew, but those who did not know whose poems they were reading and interpreting. "Anonymity is," as Aaron Jaffe remarks on this exercise, "for Richards, the means of isolating his subject of study: the moment of communication, or lack thereof, between reader and poem" (Jaffe, 26). Neither the New Critics like Brooks and Warren who learnt some tricks of the trade from Richards, nor later anthologists seemed to have sufficiently credited Richards's pioneering work as anthologist *manque*.

The two anthologies of note of the mid-thirties, however, are Yeats's *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse* and Michael Roberts's *The Faber Book of Modern Verse*, both published in 1936, and both saw the academy as their target readership. These were perhaps the first anthologies that sought to print selections, not with any noisy axe to grind, but in accordance with the poetic ideas of the editors themselves. Even Laura Riding and Robert Graves, who detested anthologies for being crassly commercial,
partisan, or planned to an agenda, and therefore either biased or limited, were willing to offer advice to Roberts in making the anthology, as we shall see. *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse* and *The Faber Book of Modern Verse* were the earliest anthologies to record the history of Modernism after it had been recognized as a movement of sorts by itself. They shaped the Modernist canon and fixed the limits of its literary history for generations to come, at least as far as Anglo-American poetry was concerned. This is a claim that can be vindicated even by a cursory survey of some of the well thumbed narrative literary histories that quote them with the respect that is due to any established authority. The editors of the two anthologies were revolutionary in what they included, even in the very poets they chose to begin their anthologies with, but perhaps were less so in what they excluded. The collections mark a time when Modernism had, more or less, achieved its aims and was soon to segue, according to some literary historians, into Postmodernism, commonly dated from World War II which began in the year of their publication. Yeats and Roberts were among the first major anthologists to present a comprehensive view of literary history in a serious manner, ignoring the compulsions of the market. They could do so because they had no movement to popularize, or any readers to win over. They bravely went where no anthologist in the twentieth century until then had been before, ignoring the lazy reader, or the one with preconceived ideas. They could include poets who were united by some common ideas in poetry, and not just by the accident of being born, or having published, around the same time. Of course, the similarities go only so far.
Yeats recognized, as we shall see, that the Faber book was going to rival his anthology not only in the marketplace, but also in ideological terms, since it was going to be a "radical" collection, and he carefully girded himself for what he called "the war of the books" in a letter to Charles Williams of the Oxford Press. The other party to the war was also aware of the challenge, beginning with T. S. Eliot himself who wrote to Roberts in a letter that incidentally reveals the compulsions of publishing such collections, "The existence of these anthologies (Yeats's *Oxford Book* and Ian Parsons's *Progress of Poetry*), makes it desirable that our book should be a bulky one, and I think we are giving very good value for the money. Of course, it will take us a considerable time to get our money back, but we are counting on a long run. Incidentally, I have all confidence that your book will succeed because it will be the best" (Quoted in *TLS* June 1977 728). The two books, in retrospect, seem to anticipate what came to be called the "Anthology Wars" of the sixties and seventies, even in the thirties. For these reasons *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse* and *The Faber Book of Modern Verse*, which, for a considerable time, virtually occupied the field all by themselves and eclipsed Parsons, the third competitor, require the detailed attention I have given them here.

II

"... I have been a maker of anthologies myself," says William Butler Yeats in a letter to his publisher Fisher Unwin (Kelly 460). Written in connection with a request for permission to print some of his poems, the letter shows Yeats at the centre of a
relationship that involved a fellow-anthologist, and his own publisher. Yeats valued the anthology because it provided him with an opportunity to reach out to the reading public though he was not entirely free of some misgivings about it, for, he felt that beyond a point that was difficult to define, it did a poet no good. It is also interesting to speculate if the word "maker" is not the literal translation of the Greek word "vates," a word which also means "poet" or "prophet," which latter capacity Yeats also claimed for the poet. The letter also reveals his concern for Unwin’s financial interests. This 1895 letter, in other words, reflects the pride Yeats felt as an anthologist, and the value he attached to anthologies. Indeed, it might be said without any exaggeration that Yeats was ever an anthologist in being, and that he could never read a poem without adopting an anthologist’s perspective, even from the earliest to the last days of his literary career. For example, writing to Katherine Tynan as early as 1889, he says that his friend, Edwin John Ellis, may not be much of a poet, but "still he will have a small nitch (sic) some day" (Kelley 135). One wonders what else the "nitch" can mean but a place in an anthology. Ellis was to get two-and-a-half pages in the final anthology that Yeats edited in 1936. Again, writing to Charles Williams, in a letter dated October 11, 1935, almost towards the end of his career, he says, "[Richard] Aldington is also a friend of mine, but I have always known that if ever I did an Anthology I would have to reject his work" (Quoted in Jeffares and Cross Ed. 181; emphasis added). It is interesting to speculate whether the upper case "A" with which Yeats spells the anthology here, and in some other places was not, perhaps, an unconscious reflection of his own conception of an ideal anthology, an Idaea, in Plotinus’s terms. When he refers to his Oxford Book of Modern Verse (1936) in his letters to his friends, it is always as the "Anthology." It is as if the anthology were a
goal, an inevitable destination of a poet, and that appearance in it was the distinguishing mark of a great poet. The letter about Aldington to Williams is, again, indicative of Yeats's refusal to compromise his anthological principles for a personal friendship, another measure of the importance this major poet attached to anthologies. Indeed, we might go further and say that Yeats's anthological instincts extended to, or rather were the consequence of, a desire to form groups: "We want to let people know that there is a little school of us" (Kelly 195). They [the people] would know about the school through their anthology, *The Book of Irish Verse* (1895). While even his friends might be excluded, Yeats always includes, or tries to include, those writers who may not have been so kind to him earlier in literary matters. Thus Laura Riding and Robert Graves, in their *Pamphlet Against Anthologies*, had criticized his "Lake Isle of Innisfree" as a typical "anthology piece" designed to fit into any collection, and yet, Yeats held no animosity against them. He had read Riding for *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse*, and had liked her work, acknowledging, in the frankest terms, his early mistaken aversion to it. In his letter to Dorothy Wellesley he writes, "I had rejected her work in some moment of stupidity but when you praised her I reread her in "The Faber Book of Modern Verse" & delighted in her intricate intensity. I have written to her to apologise for my error & to ask leave to quote "Lucrece and Nara," "The Wind Surfers," [and] "The Flowering Urn." She will refuse, as Graves has, but as a matter of honour, I must ask" (Raine Ed. 45). In other words, Yeats saw the anthology as a powerful if personal means of propaganda for literature, and realized that this aim could be accomplished only by collecting the "best," whatever his own attitude towards the writer may have been.
Yeats was in fact an obsessive anthologist all his life for, even while editing the Oxford anthology, he was also compiling *Irish Broadsides*, a collection of ballads, a genre that was dear to him. The point is that for him, the anthology was a valuable means of not only popularising poetry, but was also useful continuing its contemporary development, as we shall see. Not surprisingly, his letters to his friends around this time are full of the broadside project, for it was a collection he had undertaken on his own. As for the Oxford book, his enjoyment in working on it was always emphatically stated: “It has been an excitement reading and selecting modern poets,” an excitement that continued even after the anthology was printed. Writing to Dorothy Wellesley again, he says, 'The Anthology which is being hurriedly reprinted is having an immense sale" (Raine Ed. 118), and yet again he noted with satisfaction, "The Anthology continues to be a best seller" (Raine Ed. 139). The final reference to its sales came later when wrote her, "I think I told you that 15,000 copies of the Anthology were sold in three months" (Raine Ed. 147). As will be seen later, Yeats was insistent in casting the anthology in his own image, or something much like it. Protesting a critic’s baseless allegation that the Oxford anthology was not his own compilation, he wrote to Wellesley, "You chose the two [Rudyard] Kipling poems, my wife made the selections from my own work. All the rest I did" (Raine Ed. 127). In the end, he could legitimately pride himself on the thoroughness with which he read even modern poems to make his selections, later regretting the sole exclusion of Margaret Sackville.

Yeats's involvement with the making of anthologies can be traced to his youthful days at the Rhymers' Club in the early 1890s. The Rhymers had published two
anthologies called *The First Book of the Rhymers' Club* (1892) and *The Second Book of the Rhymers' Club* (1893), solely at Yeats's urging. In a moving reminiscence, he recounted that he wanted to make these anthologies because he desired to have his favorite poems of the Rhymers "in my hand" (Yeats 1966:301). For him, the anthology was invaluable for preservation, an inerasable personal history that touched his own literary life as well as contemporary literatures be they Irish, English or European. However, it might be mentioned here in passing that the editor of the Rhymers Club anthologies was Yeats's friend, George Arthur Greene, who was also included in them.

One cannot read about Yeats's anthological efforts without a sense of *déjà vu* after being familiar with Ezra Pound's more famous and better documented attempts to "resuscitate poetry and the arts." Yeats, for instance, wrote to Katherine Tynan, much as Pound advised his fellow-propagandists, what the broad principles of her forthcoming anthology, *Irish Love Songs* (1892), should be:

> A book such as you are doing should be Irish before all else. People will go to English poetry for "literary poetry" but will look to a book like your collection for a new flavour as of fresh turned mould. . . [E]very poem that shows English influence in any marked way should be rejected. No poetry has a right to live merely because it is good. It must be *the best of its kind* (Kelly 289; Yeats's emphasis).

As the letter suggests, for Yeats, as for Pound, the anthology was something more than a mere literary portmanteau. He was keen that the anthology should be so focused as to
fulfill the expectations aroused in the reader by its title. Yeats’s interest in the anthology needs to be viewed in the context of the renaissance he was trying to bring about in Irish literature much as Pound, again, would later try to do in English letters. It was inevitable that nationalism, as evidenced in the desire to exclude English influences in the quote above, should play a major role in all his literary efforts and for this reason, it merits some attention.

Early in his youth, Yeats was taken up by the idea of an Irish literature which he saw as inevitable to form an Irish consciousness. Ireland was beset by many evils like journalism, says Yeats, but “[c]osmopolitanism was one of the worst. We are not content to dig our own potato patch in peace. We peer over the wall at our neighbour's instead of making our own garden green and beautiful. And yet it is a good garden, and there have been great transactions within it, from the death of Cuchulain to the flight of Michael Dwyer from the burning cabin” (Reynolds 106-107). A feeling of Irishness might well begin with a love for the natural beauty of the country. He praises William Allingham, a contemporary poet because "if he was no national poet, he was at any rate, no thin-blooded cosmopolitan, but loved the hills about him and the land under his feet" (Quoted in Reynolds 15). Again in Letters to the New Island he writes, "Cosmopolitan literature is, at best a poor bubble, though a big one. Creative work has always a fatherland" (Reynolds 74). He adds:

To the greater poets everything they see has its relation to the national life, and through that to the universal and divine life; nothing is an
isolated artistic moment; there is unity everywhere, you can attain only what is near you, your nation, or if you be no traveller, your village and the cobwebs on your walls. You can no more have the greater poetry without a nation than religion without symbols. One can only reach out to the universe with a gloved hand—that glove is one's nation, the only thing one knows a little of (Reynolds 74).

The intellectual, and even the divine, could only be anchored to nationalism, and a poet who did not have this anchorage was adrift, somebody who could end up, by turning inward in the very narrow sense of egoism, as the War poets like Owen did, in a contemptible self-pity. It made little difference to Yeats that this pity encompassed all men who fought in the War. In the Yeatsian view of poetics, these writers could never qualify as what he called the "greater poets," and consequently, had no place in his anthology, except in an indirect way, as writers who had influenced others.

For Yeats himself, with such ideas of nationalism, and unable to escape living in London, the situation appeared truly gloomy. If he were to learn English literature and culture, he would, he says have to give up his "Irish subject-matter, or attempt to found a new tradition. Lacking sufficient recognized precedent, I must needs find out some reason for all I did. I knew almost from the start that to overflow with reasons was to be not quite well-born; and when I hid them, as men hide a disagreeable ancestry; and that there was no help for it seeing that my country was not born at all. I was doomed to imperfect achievement and under a curse, as it were, like some race of birds compelled to
spend the time needed for the making of the nest in argument as to the convenience of moss and twig and lichen" (Yeats 1966 166). His friends like Arthur Symons, Richard le Gallienne and John Davidson were provincial, but curable, whereas he was incurable (Yeats 1966 166). He noticed that his Irish friends had acquired the "‘impurities’ curiosities about politics, about science, about history, about religion; and that we must create once more the pure work" (Yeats 1966 167). Irishness was to be the base of his literary achievement. Remembering the days when he was in his mid-twenties, Yeats very meticulously listed out his nationalist interests:

I had three interests, interest in the form of literature, in a form of philosophy, and belief in nationality. None of these seemed to have anything to do with the other, but gradually my love of literature and my belief in nationality came together. Then for years, I said to myself that these two had nothing to do with my philosophy, but that I had only to be sincere and keep from constraining one by the other, and they would become one interest. Now all these three are, I think, one, or rather all are the discrete expressions of a single conviction. I think that each has behind it my whole character, and has gained thereby, a certain newness—for is not every man’s character peculiar to himself—and that I have become a cultivated man (Quoted in Richard Ellmann 241).
Yet, while Yeats despised politics, he was at best ambiguous in his response to nationalism for its own sake. It is an accepted view that he joined Irish nationalist parties only to pursue his interests in occultism, and Maud Gonne. Above all he disliked the kind of hatred that the Irish patriots spewed out at their colonizers. In "September 1913" he laments the death of "Romantic Ireland" with that of John O'Leary. But he was soon to write what some critics regard as a palinode in "Easter 1916". Nationalism, like any other powerful emotion in life, provided him with the poetic inspiration, and he wrote about both, its noble and ignoble consequences, casting something of a "cold eye" on them. For him, the forging of a great literature was "a greater service to our country than writing that compromises either in the seeming service of a cause" (Quoted in Stead 1964 28).

Irish nationalism had a special appeal. His country, still with a folklore intact, and young at heart, had advantages over England and other European countries which did not. His early efforts at anthologizing and group-forming attempts have their roots in this feeling of nationalism. Literature was to be one of the important forces in shaping it, and anthologies were to play key roles from the very beginning and help in taking both literature and nationalism to the readers. Implicit in Yeats's statements about Celtic nationalism is the idea that the other European nations could rekindle their moribund literatures and nationalist feelings from the Irish fire. An Irish literary renaissance could thus widen into a renaissance in European letters.

Yeats's own first major anthological effort in this direction, A Book of Irish Verse, was published in 1895. It was the first anti-colonial literary effort by a single artist. British colonialism sent into hiding the nationalist identity of the colonised country, and
the editing of such anthologies was aimed at facilitating the return of this feeling of nationalism. The Introduction, even from the excerpts that one can sample, and the selections in this collection, are of considerable significance because they show how early Yeats's literary ideas had crystallized. He was, for example, against what he called the "literary poetry," and "rhetoric", a point he was to repeat even in the *Oxford Book of Modern Verse* (1936). Such regrettable developments occurred in the literatures of old nations like England, but a country like Ireland, with its folklore and culture intact, was better placed to usher in a renaissance in her literature. Yeats too felt a need to draw strength from the land of his origin.

*A Book of Irish Verse* also illustrates his anthological ideals, though he did not, later, stick to all of them strictly. The importance of the Irish collection also lies in the fact that it anticipates the ideas that were to guide him in making the *Oxford Book*:

This book [*The Book of Irish Verse*] is founded upon its editor's likes and dislikes, and everything it contains has given him pleasure. Several names familiar to Irishmen are excluded, and some quite unfamiliar included, and the selection may well be capricious and arbitrary. He might have partly avoided this by giving a little from every eminent writer, whether he liked him or not, but it did not seem possible to make a good book in this way (Quoted in Marcus 99).
The Irish anthology is also important because it shows that Yeats had fixed his canon as far as the Rhymers are concerned. The poems of Dowson and Johnson which were to appear in *The Oxford Book* are already present in the earlier book.

The story of how Yeats came to edit the *Oxford Book of Modern Verse* may be briefly told. The University of Oxford was looking for an editor for its proposed anthology in 1930, and Lascelles Abercrombie, whose work had appeared in Edward Marsh’s *Georgian Poetry*, was persuaded to work on it. After four years of work, in 1934, Abercrombie opted out for personal and professional reasons. The publishers then decided to approach Yeats who was, as we have seen, already an established anthologist. In a surprisingly short time, agreement was reached on most issues, fees included, and Yeats began to read for the anthology with as much pleasure as profit.

The *Oxford Book*, which Yeats edited in his last years, shows his poetic thought in its final development. He was very particular about the historical aspects of the anthology, rejecting the year nineteen hundred (which was the terminal year of Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch’s 1900 collection, *The Oxford Book of English Verse 1215-1900*), as arbitrary, and asked his publisher for permission to start with the years around the death of Tennyson. This date served two purposes: firstly it enabled him to begin with Gerard Manley Hopkins and include his friends from the Rhymers’ Club, like Earnest Dowson, for example, and as he put it “some others who belong to the Modern Movement though they died before 1900” (Quoted in Jeffares and Cross Ed. 176). Secondly, he seems to have thought about literary history in terms of personages rather than in the passage of
years. Apparently, even while he recognized Tennyson as a major poet, he regarded him as symbolic of all the less commendable aspects of literature that Victorianism stood for, if we consider his repeated attacks on this poet. But an equally important reason was Yeats's cyclical view of the arts that paralleled nature's patterns, a view which he explained in an illuminating essay, "The Autumn of the Body" (1898):

I see, indeed, in the arts of every country those faint colours and faint outlines and faint energies which many call 'the decadence' and which I, because I believe that the arts lie dreaming of things to come, prefer to call the autumn of the body... Its importance is the greater because it comes to us at the moment when we are beginning to be interested in many things which positive science, the interpreter of exterior law, has always denied: communion of mind with mind in thought and without words, foreknowledge in dreams and in visions, and the coming among us of the dead, and much else. We are, it may be, at the crowning crisis of the world, at the moment when man is about to ascend, with the wealth that he has been so long gathering upon his shoulders, the stairway he has been descending from the first days (Yeats 1961 192).

It was this crisis as described by de Sola Pinto in his book, *Crisis in English Poetry 1880-1940*, that most important poets of the time were trying to face and portray in their works. More clearly than anyone else, Yeats saw in the eighteen nineties, called the 'decadent'
years, the beginnings of what came to be regarded as Modernism. This insight was to launch in *The Oxford Book* a unique chronology, carefully developed in the Introduction which remains a remarkable contribution to literary history even as it provides a valuable insight into the history of readership. With Tennyson at the terminal point, Yeats's literary history is consequently, more comprehensive and continuous than that recorded by many others who tended to see Modernism as a spontaneous development that occurred *sui generis*.

Yeats's Introduction began with a survey of the poets he proposed to include, with an emphasis on comprehensiveness. They were arranged chronologically. In a brilliant coup against the newspaper reading public that he hated so much, he began the anthology with Walter Pater's "purple passage" which the editor rewrote in *vers libre*. It is for such interesting innovations that *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse* can be regarded as a map of Yeats's poetic and its origins. Many of the important issues that engaged him in his career as a poet can be seen expressed here in a compendious manner, either directly or indirectly. As the final collection of a major writer who helped mould Modernism, and was in turn considerably influenced by it, the anthology presents a unique vantage point to study the movement and the evolution of this poet's own ideas. Pater's "Mona Lisa," placed at the beginning of *The Oxford Book*, affords the reader a portal through which the anthology and Yeats's mind may be entered. For the anthologist's purpose, the passage in Pater is perfectly suitable since it presented the confluence of the past and the modern and was a timeless piece on an immortal painting. As mentioned earlier, the ordinary reading public had forgotten Pater, and Yeats quoting a friend says, "no newspaper has
given him an obituary notice” (Yeats 1936 viii). And so he began the anthology with this prose piece rewritten in vers libre as if to see reborn in the public mind the author of The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry (1873). The "Mona Lisa" embodied in itself all that Yeats wished a poem to be. It can even be said that some of his most important ideas were derived from Pater, with Matthew Arnold too playing an important role.

Yeats saw in Pater's lines an “active virtue” that he regarded as the sine qua non of any great poem. This idea of "active virtue" Yeats took from Pater and, modified it for his own purposes and according to his own ideas. Talking of Wordsworth in his Preface, Pater says that his work has much that might be forgotten. He continues:

But scattered up and down it, sometimes fusing and transforming entire compositions, like the Stanzas on Resolution and Independence or the Ode on the Recollections of Childhood, sometimes, as if at random, depositing a fine crystal here or there, in a matter it does not wholly search through and transmute, we trace the action of his unique, incommunicable faculty, that strange, mystical sense of a life in natural things, and of man's life as part of nature, drawing strength and colour and character from local influences, from the hills and streams, and from natural sights and sounds. Well! that is the virtue, the active principle in Wordsworth's poetry; and then the function of the critic of Wordsworth is to follow up that active principle, to disengage it, to mark the degree in which it penetrates his verse (Pater 1873 250).
The "Mona Lisa" is one such "fine crystal" that Yeats spotted and printed. Claiming the privilege of an editor, he plucked "the foreign feathers" of Oscar Wilde's Ballad of Reading Gaol. As an anthologist and critic, he set about marking the works in which the "active" principle/virtue penetrated the verses of the poets he chose. While Yeats did not speak about nature as much as Wordsworth did, his dislike of London and longing for the kind of idyllic settings of Innisfree made him akin to the Romantic poet in some ways. But the idea of an "active virtue" becomes a major element in his own poetry and poetics, liberating him from current issues of no importance, and the sentimental. Yeats's "active virtue" was far different from what Pater saw in Wordsworth. It was a deeply embedded on a poet's character and it made tragedy a joy, and the poet himself/herself more than a mere recorder of what fate doled out. The image would be matched by the mask. Such a mask da Vinci wore, according to Pater's analysis:

He (da Vinci) trifles with his genius, and crowds all his chief work into a few tormented years of later life; yet he is so possessed of his genius that he passes through the most tragic events, overwhelming his country and friends, like one who comes across them by chance on some secret errand (Pater 78).

We can see in Pater's description of da Vinci the same aristocratic disdain of the masses that Yeats had. The Renaissance man had in him "blood and guts" that Yeats alone possessed from among the Tragic Generation. And like Yeats, da Vinci too packed a great deal of creativity into his old age. The themes he chose were timeless as Matthew
Arnold would have recommended, and da Vinci’s painting encompasses the past, the present and the future. The next few lines of Pater, after Yeats’s excerpt, summarise this:

The fancy of a perpetual life, sweeping together ten thousand experiences, is an old one; and modern philosophy has conceived the idea of humanity as wrought upon by, and summing up in itself, all modes of thought and life. Certainly Lady Lisa might stand as the embodiment of the old fancy, the symbol of the modern idea. (Pater 78)

In spite of all his sufferings, the painter too cast a "cold eye" on his subjects, as Yeats would have done. No wonder Yeats began the anthology with Pater's lines.

The "Mona Lisa," exemplifies one of the most important tenets of Modernism: that poetry and prose are only graduated versions of each other; and that there is no basic difference between them, an article of faith with the Imagists too. The poem also bore witness to the close relationship between the visual arts and poetry. Attributing to the lines a revolutionary significance, Yeats saw the poem anticipate a whole philosophy in which the individual was reduced to the flux that Pound describes in his Cantos. It was amazingly prescient. It summed up the fifteenth century, which, according to Pater, had a two-fold movement introducing the Renaissance and the "modern spirit" that introduced realism, and an appeal to experience along with a return to antiquity and nature (Pater 86). Modernism too was doing the same things in the twentieth century. The "Mona Lisa" was a fine blend of all these features. In printing the poem at the very beginning, Yeats may have hoped to awaken in the reader that literary sense which Voltaire, "with his
clear, fresh writings" had aroused in Rousseau (Pater 86). The poem was revolutionary also because, in dissolving all the corruption that tradition had suffered, it suggested an ideal of a life every moment of which was intensely lived, as "a pure gem-like flame" (Yeats 1936 ix). This way of life replaced the idea of moral earnestness that characterized much of Victorian poetry. Since "all accepted him for master" as Yeats says (1936 ix), it was appropriate that Pater's poem should head the anthology.

Pater's "Mona Lisa," embodied, in keeping with the Renaissance spirit, the holistic development of man, in a few lines.. Pater's lines were easily turned into vers libre by Yeats showing their inherent poetic form that conformed to Modernist ideas. The poem was a landmark thematically, since it showed where the earlier age ended and the modern began. The "voyage within" was achieved by the fine analysis of the psychology, "the inward world of thought and feeling, the whirlpool" (Pater 187) of da Vinci's sitter. Here, the flux is even more rapid, the fire even more intense, than it was in the outward physical experience. She was a private individual and a timeless representative of humanity at the same time. By placing Pater's poem at the beginning of the anthology, Yeats emphasised the Modernist shift from the Victorian obsessions with nature, didacticism, poetic diction, and "scientific and moral discursiveness" (Yeats 1936 ix) to a concern with life. Taking Pater's advice to live life in a "pure, gem-like flame," contemporary poets like the Rhymers took to wine, and some of them ended up as suicides. For them, life had become a ritual, and for a while there were some conversions to Catholicism. The poets withdrew into an ivory tower, away from political and social concerns. There appeared among them a new conception of Matthew Arnold's
"diminished" view of poetry. But before that, Victorianism was to take its last stand in Rudyard Kipling and William Watson.

Then at the beginning of the twentieth century, the Paterian way of life was given a short shrift. The Victorian artificiality was replaced by self-conscious imitations of folk songs, of which Ireland had the best living tradition in Western Europe. But folk song only lent a superficial simplicity and charm to the works. The only exceptions were A.E. Housman, Thomas Hardy with his objectivity that Yeats associated with the Aesthetes, and John Synge who brought a kind of "masculinity" to Irish verse by his harsh "disillusionment" (Yeats 1936 xiii). For Yeats, Irish literature appeared to be the silver lining to an otherwise dark cloud that hung over English letters. This was possible due to a simple public life which was also exciting. With a wonderful insight, Yeats remarks that there were no major poets in English from 1900 to 1936, to match the Victorian age in its Brownings and Tennysons. Then came writers who, though not innovators themselves, used themes from the past to depict modern issues. Among these, according to Yeats, were Laurance Binyon, T. Sturge Moore, Sir Walter de la Mare, and the Sitwells. Their leader was Robert Bridges with his innovations in cadences that expressed new impulses, and made commonplaces unforgettable. Theirs was a descent from Virgil, and not from Homer. The point is that they were more literary than rooted in life and Yeats displayed at best an ambiguous attitude towards them.

The modern "voyage inward" began in earnest, according to Yeats, with Edith Sitwell who used her own innovations in metrics to reflect a dream world. All modern
writers were obsessed with "essential form" (Yeats 1936 xx) that rejected the superficial and the relatively more transient, and aimed at depicting the more permanent. In humans, this was the skeleton as expressed in Eliot's lines "No contact possible to flesh/Allayed the fever of the bone" (Yeats 1936 xix). Exactly the same focus on "essential form" could be found in the painting of the time. Yeats was recording the Zeitgeist of the age. Perhaps in a world always in a flux, the artists were searching for something that was a little more permanent. For Yeats, the Victorians failed because they were unaware of this flux which began in the seventeenth century when man was rendered passive by a Cartesian view of a nature that was mechanized. This theme, already foreshadowed so prophetically in Pater's poem, was to occupy most of the Modernist writers. The first poet for Yeats to raise the issue of the flux was Walter James Turner.

The enshrining of Pater at the beginning of the anthology was a masterstroke of literary historical implications and suggestions. Many poets who wrote in the eighteen nineties lived and wrote on the Paterian principle of a life lived in a "pure, gem-like flame," though it was insufficient as a motive for life as well as poetry. The conversions to Catholicism, the drinking of absinthe and the suicides that beset these writers could be understood partly in this context. They lacked what Yeats's contemporary, John Davidson, called 'blood and guts' which, admittedly, Yeats had (Yeats 1966 318). In Pater, Yeats saw one of the two main trends that literature in the twentieth century was to take, which, in modern psychology came to be known as introversion and extroversion. Pater's "Mona Lisa" passage was the epitome of introversion, and hence it had for Yeats a revolutionary significance (Yeats 1936 xxx). Her "trafficking" with people from every
class of life symbolised the "voyage out" and thus the poem gathered in itself the two main tendencies in modern poetry. It also foreshadowed the philosophy and flux that were to be two of the main burdens of the works of modern writers like Walter J. Turner and Ezra Pound. Da Vinci's Mona Lisa echoed an immortal and recurring idea and was the painter's version of Shakespeare's Dark Lady, whose "private reality" and artistic significance Pater caught perfectly in his passage (Yeats 1936 xxx). It was no mere coincidence that Yeats, who was striving for a renaissance in Irish letters all his life, should start his own anthology with a poetic meditation from a book on the Renaissance. Pater's piece was invaluable in that the writers who followed him had not revolutionized their own poetry so thoroughly, and therefore, it looked forward into the future.

The next poet, Wilfrid Scaven Blunt, wrote some excellent love poetry, but his anti-imperialist verse did not rise to the same level (Pinto 24). Yeats could print only some selections from his love sonnets addressed to 'Esther,' and a didactic poem. It might strike the reader as surprising that Yeats did not include Blunt's anti-imperialist verse at all. Perhaps it struck him as being full of rhetoric and archaisms such as "thou" and "shalt" which were used liberally in a poem like "The Canon of Aughrim," regarded by Sola Pinto as one of his more successful poems on the subject. It might also be suggested that the verse, while being full of feeling and inspiration, fails to achieve an "active virtue" since it merely portrays the suffering of the colonised nations, and the guilt of the coloniser. It is one more example of a painful as opposed to a tragic experience that does not yield any "ecstasy," making the poems unsuccessful. Finally, if his attitude toward the colonizer, England, is considered, Yeats was not without fair play
and was always willing to give her a chance to redeem herself, as he put it in "Easter 1916": "For England may yet keep faith/For all that is done and said" (Jeffares 95).

Though Yeats acknowledged his affinity, paradoxically, with William Earnest Henley, the champion of the British Empire, and Blunt, the anti-colonialist, he says that he did not feel their influence because of his Irish inheritance (Yeats 1936 xv-xvi).

Noting with approval the arrival of realism through Thomas Hardy, Yeats nevertheless makes a selection from the poet that effectively confines Hardy's unremitting pessimism and his conception of an inexorable fate that broods over a humanity forgotten by God, into some literary historical limbo as far as the *Oxford Book of Modern Verse* is concerned. Three of the four short poems "Weathers," "Snow in the Suburbs", and "Former Beauties" that represent Hardy in the anthology are in the folk tradition and "The Night of Trafalgar" sounds like a ballad again. It is selections like these that laid the anthology open to charges of arbitrariness that Yeats had frankly admitted to when making *A Book of Irish Verse*.

The Rhymers merited their inclusion in the anthology because they too signalled a revolt against everything "Victorian". Their place in literary history was assured also because they played, says Sola Pinto, an important role in the education of a great poet, namely, Yeats himself. But this role was largely a negative one in spite of the love with which he helped anthologise them. Yeats elaborates:
They [the Rhymers] had taught me that violent energy, which is like a fire of straw, consumes in a few minutes the nervous vitality, and is useless in the arts. Our fire must burn slowly, and we must constantly turn away to think, constantly analyse what we have done, to be content even to have little life outside our work, to show perhaps, to other men as little as the watch-mender shows, his magnifying glass caught in his screwed-up eye. Only then do we learn to conserve our vitality, to keep our mind under control and to make our technique sufficiently flexible for expression of the emotions of life as they arise (Yeats 1966 318).

They were also to teach him, as Yeats acknowledged here and in a poem called the "Grey Rock", an uncompromising commitment to poetry, a profound contempt for the middle class readers, and material pleasures. For, pressure from the masses to write down to them was a phenomenon that occurred early in their lives. While Yeats did desire to reflect "the emotions of life as they arise," (Yeats 1961 300) he did not like to have anything to do with the merely political. The Rhymers steered clear of Trafalgar Square, the place of violent public demonstrations, and withdrew to the Cheshire Cheese (Yeats 1936 xi). Even more importantly, the Rhymers, with a "heroic ecstasy" (Raine Ed. 7) were free of any desire to moralise, something that Yeats abhorred as fatal to poetry. Among those who had this "ecstasy" was Ernest Dowson whose lines Yeats quoted from memory repeatedly: "Wine and women and song/To us they belong/To us the bitter and the gay." An interesting tendency that Yeats consistently displayed, especially with regard to the Rhymers, was his untiring references to them, and the generalization of a
few individual stories to portray them as the "tragic generation." They were described as such because, as Yeats told Ernest Rhys later, "One begins to think of the Rhymers' as those who sang of wine and women..." (Quoted in Kelly 307n). Some of them, like Rhys himself, outlived Yeats—the "tragic generation" was not so unmitigatedly tragic after all. The efforts of the Rhymers and their contemporaries were directed at Victorianism and all that it stood for, best symbolized for Yeats in Tennyson, whom he accused of having a "passionless sentiment" (Yeats 1961 352). The age desired a classicism of its own, with Catullus as its ideal with some influence of Jacobean and French masters like Paul Verlaine and Charles Baudelaire.

The exception of Yeats as the only major poet of the times did not prevent the age from reflecting a 'crepuscular' atmosphere. Writers like Oscar Wilde produced a poetry that was lost under a patina of what Yeats, in the Introduction, calls the "artificial, trivial, arbitrary" and which needed to be rescued by editorial authority (Yeats 1936 vii). Henley's poems were mostly "rhetorical," so that very few of them were worth preserving, and Yeats excluded his 'hospital' poems because they did not "arise out of [their] own rhythm" and yet, this English poet started a new trend of realism in describing everyday life, a feature that according to Yeats, was created for the masses and was "their peculiar delight" (Yeats 1936 vii). The "crepuscular" spirit, identified with Victorianism, was soon to be exorcized also by the introduction of foreign influences such as that of the French. Following Verlaine's advice to "wring the neck of rhetoric" (Yeats 1936 ix), the public began to reject everything that was associated with the age of Victoria. "The human voice," says Yeats "can only become louder by becoming less articulate, by
discovering some new musical sort of roar or scream" (Yeats 1936 ix). For this, poetry should become declamatory, a point Pound, Yeats's friend and editor, would have agreed with wholly. Yeats, we might remember, was a regular and popular reader of poetry at the Rhymers' Club and the Poetry Society. Victorianism remained in a vestigial form, however, in the works of Rudyard Kipling and Sir William Watson. The former was insulated from the changes, in Yeats's view, by his stay in India. "He (Kipling) settled among the natives and never returned," wrote Sola Pinto (Pinto 31), echoing Yeats. Watson, whom few literary historians praise, found some generous words in Yeats who remembered many pages of his poetry as he edited The Oxford Book. Earlier, Yeats was not so generous to him, writing in a review that all Watson could produce was a "a fire that will not warm our hearths, but gives a thin flame, good to read by for a little, when wearied by some more potent influence" (Kelly 218n). Though condemned as "rhetorical" by the followers of Verlaine, Yeats admired many of his verses, seeing in them some Miltonic and classical features (Yeats 1936 xii). In the end, Watson did not figure in the anthology only because his executors did not permit it. The anthology was the occasion for Yeats to look back and carry out a literary historical reassessment that included some very personal associations.

Like his contemporaries who would be labelled the "Modernists" Yeats showed an early awareness of the value of schools and groups, and planned the Introduction to the Oxford Book along these lines. He began, after Pater, Hardy and a few others, with the Rhymers and closed with the Auden group, by any standards a comprehensive view of the literary history of the age. Those writers, including himself, who fell between
different schools, he barely mentioned at the end of the Introduction, or left them undiscussed. He gave, what seems in retrospect, an exaggerated importance to Dorothy Wellesley and underplayed the significance of T.S. Eliot and Pound.

III

It is well known that every anthology, by its selections and omissions, is an act of criticism. As in the case of *A Book of Irish Verse*, Yeats intended to make the Oxford book a very personal anthology. While some of his exclusions can be explained as being based on his taste, the absence of a group of poets whose importance is rated at a no mean level by every critic and anthologist, needs a careful study of Yeats's poetics and other literary ideas.

Chronologically, the first to be excluded was John Davidson. Like Yeats, Davidson thought of the poetic inspiration as a fire, and very early, the fire died out in him. "The fires are out and I must hammer the cold iron," he told Yeats, who expected his suicide. But Yeats's own judgment was harsher: "With enough passion to make a great poet, through meeting no man of culture in early life, he lacked intellectual receptivity, and, anarchic and indefinite, lacked pose and gesture, and now no verse of his clings to my memory." It would not be out of place here to remember that for Yeats, "culture" as he understood it, rose from nationalism, a personal philosophy and literature. Even in the Rhymers' Club days he was never considered the equal of either Johnson or Dowson. We recall that Yeats could find some poems of William Watson fresh in his
mind years after reading them. This was his touchstone of a great poem. Davidson was
doomed to be dropped from the anthology. However, he told Dorothy Wellesley that
Davidson had to be excluded because there was "too much matter" already (Quoted in
Jaffares and Cross Ed. 180). The list of other individual poets that he excluded is equally
interesting. Notable are Dylan Thomas, Richard Aldington, Robert Graves (who refused
permission), Ford Maddox Hueffer, T.E.Hulme (because he was "the mere leader of a
movement" (Quoted Jeffares and Cross Ed. 181), Charles Doughty (whom Yeats could
bear only in prose), and A. C. Swinburne.

But probably the greatest controversy was aroused by the absence of the Trench
Poets such as Wilfred Owen and Alun Lewis. Rupert Brooke is represented by one poem
that does not refer to war directly though it does use military imagery. Charles Williams,
an editor of the Oxford University Press at its London office, in a letter to Yeats asked for
the inclusion of Owen because "he will be expected, both by old and young" (Quoted in
Jeffares and Cross Ed. 75). The exclusion of these poets, because of their themes that
portrayed their mere pathos as victims of war, Yeats himself knew, would cause some
controversy. Probably it is because of this that he dedicated an entire section in the
anthology to explain himself. Even as he acknowledges their courage and sacrifice, he
could hardly restrain his sense of contempt for their work. "[P]assive suffering is not a
theme for poetry," he declared bluntly. Matthew Arnold, in his "Preface to First Edition
of Poems" (1853) "omitted" his *Empedocles on Etna* for the same reason. The poetry of
the Trench Poets, Yeats added, came to be inspired and written merely because "some
blunderer has driven his car to the wrong side of the road—that is all” (Yeats 1936 xxxiv).

Yeats's reasons for these exclusions were complex and elaborate and were repeatedly expounded at various places, in his prose, poetry and other writings. Thus, in his "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen," he says:

The night can sweat with terror as before
We pieced our thoughts into philosophy,
And planned to bring the world under a rule,
Who are but weasels fighting in a hole

(Jeffares Ed. 121).

For Yeats, everything had to be bent to the service of civilization and could not remain a vague, undigested experience. In his talk on the BBC on “Modern Poetry,” Yeats complained that these poets were "too near their subject-matter to do, as I think, work of permanent importance . . ." (Yeats 1966 500). Writing to Dorothy Wellesley in December 1936, he could not hold back his contempt for the War Poets:

When I excluded Wilfred Owen, whom I consider unworthy of a poets’ corner of a country newspaper, I did not know I was excluding a revered sandwich-board Man of the revolution & that some body has put his worst & most famous poem in a glass-case in the British Museum--however if I
had known it I would have excluded him just the same. He is all blood, dirt & sucked sugar stick (look at the selection in Faber's Anthology—he calls poets 'bards' a girl a 'maid' and talks about 'Titanic wars'). There is every excuse for him, but none for those who like him (Raine Ed. 113).

It is worthwhile to examine Yeats's debt to Matthew Arnold in evolving his poetic. The idea about passive suffering being unsuitable for poetry, and the development of an idea over time to make it truly worthy of putting it in the form of a poem, find echoes in Arnold's Preface for the 1853 poems.

It might be mentioned here in passing that the Trench poets were also, in Yeats's view, guilty of what he calls "cosmopolitanism" since they rejected nationalist ideals and spoke for soldiers of all nations from a humanitarian perspective. We remember Yeats, praising John Millington Synge, say, "He was the man that we needed, because he was the only man I have ever known incapable of a political thought or a humanitarian purpose" (Yeats 1966 567). With their pity-centered themes, the War poets would have appeared weak and unheroic to Yeats and consequently failed to rise to the level of artists: "There are indeed certain men whose art is less the like an opposing virtue than a compensation for some accident of health or circumstance" (Ellmann and Feidelson Ed. 757). For him the works of the Trench Poets were "passive . . . an obsession of the nerves." They lacked the mask because they wrote in the first person, and "made the suffering their own" (Yeats 1936 xxxiv). Yeats was pretty sure that of the impossibility of any great poetry resulting from such subjects. War was an unavoidable fever that
should be forgotten immediately after it is over. It could be seen even in a comic light, as the soldiers in the anecdote Florence Farr narrated to Yeats did. She had heard these soldiers laugh at the death of an unpopular officer who, whirling around when hit by a bullet, had his own intestines wrapped about him. For Yeats, comedy was cathartic as well. These ideas, in their criticism of the poetic diction Owen uses, also show how much Yeats had imbibed of the Modernist ideas: words were nearer to the soul than life itself. He agreed to include (his wife had chosen his poems) his own "An Irish Airman Foresees His Death" presumably because it was reflective of thoughts "pieced ... into a philosophy." The Great War was represented by Herbert Read's long poem "The End of a War," written seven years later, after the experience had become somewhat distant in time and, a philosophical perspective developed that "made it a part of the mind" (Yeats 1936 xxxv). In such an education, T. S. Eliot played a significant role, and yet, Yeats's choices of this major Modernist poet, while including some characteristically representative poems, leave out some very important works such as "Prufrock" and The Waste Land. Instead, Eliot’s shorter poems, such as "The Hippopotamus" and "The Journey of the Magi," that have become regular anthology-pieces, are printed. In the Introduction, Yeats was severely critical of Eliot who was for him, more of a satirist than a poet (Yeats 1936 xxii). We recall that for Yeats, a satirist was quite a negative kind of person. In his talk on "Modern Poetry," in 1936, the year of the publication of Oxford anthology, he described Lionel Johnson as 'never a satirist, being too courteous, too just, for that distortion" (Yeats 1961 492). Thus Eliot was out of the mainstream of English poetry. Very rarely did he write in the tradition, "the great manner," of Shakespeare and the translators of the Bible (Yeats 1936 xxii). Yet, Yeats made some surprising inclusions
such as Eliot's "The Hollow Men", which could hardly be an example of "active virtue."
Perhaps he saw in the poem a language that was close to ordinary speech. (One
remembers that the line "Headpiece filled with straw" was Mrs. Eliot's favourite in her
quarrels with her husband). It was an intellectualized suffering, a suffering that was
"pieced . . . into a philosophy" as his theory demanded. In an interesting coincidence that
occurs in an essay in Mythologies, written in 1917, he recollects a line, "a hollow image
of fulfilled desire", that he had read thirty years earlier in a prose allegory. He goes on,
"All happy art seems to me that hollow image, but when its lineaments express also the
poverty or the exasperation that set its maker to the work, we call it tragic art" (Yeats
1961 329). If the hollow images were associated in his mind with humans, we may,
perhaps, see in this recollection and comment, the reason for Yeats's apparent
contradiction of his own poetic criterion in including the "Hollow Men". It may be that
for him the poem caught the "exasperation". He further justifies its inclusion in the
Introduction (Yeats 1936 xxii), attributing to the poem a "rhythmical animation" that
saves it from being merely passive. However, in the context of Eliot's centrality in
Modernism, it is striking that he barely managed to make it over the threshold, but Owen
and his fellow War poets were left out in the cold. Yet, Yeats conceded that the Trench
Poets were not entirely without effect, for, "their sense of tragedy, their modernity, have
passed into young influential poets of today: Auden, Spender, MacNeice, Day Lewis, and
others" (Yeats 1961 500).

Yeats thought that the need of the hour was a "heroic discipline" (Raine Ed. 7).
His dissent with some major Modernist poets did not end with the War Poets, but
continued to indict the poets named above because they “look for strength in Marxian Socialism, or in Major Douglas; they want marching feet. The lasting expression of our time is not this obvious choice but in a sense of something steel-like and cold within the will, something passionate and cold” (Wellesley 8; Yeats's emphasis). The emphasis on the word "look" suggests a passivity since they "lacked marching feet" (to mean also poetic rhythms) to get them anywhere. He had a Modernism of his own, that, while it was far from looking for what seemed to him to be simplistic solutions to ephemeral problems, required the poets to be anchored in a heroic commitment to those impulses which build civilizations and were free from the "sensual music" that caused one to "neglect/Monuments of unaging intellect" (Meyer Ed. 873)

Amidst all the criticism that Yeats invited by his unyielding insistence on excluding the War poets, it is possible to find something to commend in it. Seamus Heaney puts it concisely when he says that Yeats faced the consequences of his beliefs for, "his poetry was not just a matter of printed books making their way on a world of literate readers and critics; it was rather the fine flower of his efforts to live as forthrightly as he could in a world of illiterates and politicians" (Heaney 100). But the final word is Yeats's own when he stresses the commitment and duty of a writer:

A poet is by the very nature of things a man who lives with entire sincerity, or rather, the better his poetry, the more sincere his life. His life is an experiment in living and those who come after him have a right to know it. Above all, it is necessary that lyric poet's life be known, that we
should understand that his poetry is no rootless flower but the speech of a
man; that it is no little thing to achieve anything in art, to stand alone
perhaps for many years, to go a path no other man has gone, to accept
one's own thought when the thought of others has the authority of the
world behind it . . . to give one's own life as well as one's words (which
are so much nearer to the soul) to the criticism of the world (Quoted in
Heaney 100-101)

The *Oxford Book of Modern Verse* is a demonstration of these heroic ideas which could
also include tragedy whose definition is coloured by Yeats's own personality and life.

IV

Tragedy, for Yeats, became worthy of poetry only when it had been carefully
processed in the intellect, and that took time. Reminiscing in *Autobiographies* he says, "I
. . . being in the intemperance of youth, denied, as publicly as possible, merit to all but a
few ballads translated from Gaelic writers, or written out of a personal and generally
tragic experience" (Yeats 205). He soon outgrew the intemperance to develop a more
elaborate view. In *The Trembling of the Veil*, he writes:

... I am persuaded that our intellects at twenty contain all the truths we
shall ever find, but as yet we do not know truths that belong to us from
opinions caught up in casual irritation or momentary fantasy. As life goes on we discover that certain thoughts sustain us in defeat, or give us victory whether over ourselves or others, and it is these thoughts, tested by passion, that we call convictions. Among subjective men (in all those, that is, who must spin a web out of their own bowels) the victory is an intellectual daily re-creation of all that exterior fate snatches away, and so that fate's antithesis; while what I have called the 'Mask' is an emotional antithesis to all that comes out of their internal nature. *We begin to live when we have conceived life as a tragedy*” (189; Italics added).

Yeats contrasted this fusion of intellect and passion in tragedy to a mere sentimental response to what an "exterior fate" threw in the path of humans. In his cyclical conceptions of life such as in the phases of the moon, the two halves of the circle could be taken to stand for opposing forces. Richard Ellmann, explaining Yeats's gyres, writes, "... Yeats divided the self into two sets of symbolic opposites, Will and Mask, Creative Mind and Body of Fate. These may be roughly translated as Imagination and Image of what we wish to become, and Intellect and the Environment" (Ellmann 160). In some writers, whom Yeats calls the "supreme masters of tragedy," "the whole contest is brought into the circle of their beauty." He carefully elaborates this idea:

Such masters—Villon and Dante, let us say—would not, when they speak through their art, change their luck; yet they are mirrored in all their suffering of desire. The two halves of their nature are so completely joined that they seem to labour for their objects, and yet desire whatever happens, being at the
same instant predestinate and free, creation's very self. We gaze at such men in awe, because we gaze not at a work of art, but at the recreation of the man through that art, the birth of a new species of man, and it may seem that our hairs of our heads stand up, because that birth, that re-creation, is from terror (Yeats 1966 273).

This was what he meant by the term "Unity of Being" which he compared to "a perfectly proportioned body" in which everything was interconnected. His father had compared this to a musical instrument which could not be struck in one part without striking another. The intellect cannot be unaffected when the emotions are aroused. Yeats viewed tragedy as an "ecstasy," (Yeats 1961 471) for, as he says in the Introduction to The Oxford Book, "the Greek Chorus danced." In even more detail we find him saying:

There is a relation between discipline and the theatrical sense. If we cannot imagine ourselves as different from what we are and assume that second self, we cannot impose a discipline upon ourselves, though we may accept one from others. Active virtue as distinguished from the passive acceptance of a current code is therefore theatrical, consciously dramatic, the wearing of a mask. It is the condition of arduous full life (Yeats 1961 469).

In the Trench Poets, Yeats could not see the "Will" and the "Mask" unite. What they had was a mere sentimentality which Owen called "the pity," of which his poems were full to
Yeats completely excluded the Americans on the advice of T. S. Eliot who had said, “[D]on’t attempt to make your selection of American poets representative, you can’t (sic) have the necessary knowledge and will be unjust; put in three or four that you like” (quoted in Jeffares and Cross Ed. 181). Eventually, he included only Pound and Eliot, both expatriate Americans, one of whom he knew intimately, and both of whom had spent a significant part of their lives in England. We may note in passing that for all the association and advice that Pound, in his younger days gave Yeats, the latter was impatient with him in selecting works for the anthology. In fact Yeats came very close clubbing him with Tennyson, accusing him of being a “passionless American professor” (Raine). In all his inclusions and exclusions, we find Yeats’s principles at work. The
anthology capture a great poet's poetics in action even as it offers us a memorable collection.

Even before *The Oxford Book* was published, Faber brought out Michael Roberts's *Faber Book of Modern Verse* (1936), and Yeats knew that he was up against a formidable competitor. He wrote to Charles Williams, one of Oxford's editors, "I hear that Faber and Faber are bringing out an anthology and as the entire contents seem to be approved by Laura Riding we are apparently in for a war of the books" (Quoted in Jeffares and Cross Ed. 181-2). The anthology wars began much earlier than the sixties. Both the anthologies were aimed at similar audiences of which students in schools and universities were important sections. Yeats was considerate enough to omit a poem or two of his to suit these readers. As he wrote to Williams, "I enclose a poem which please return. I did not put it in the Anthology as I thought it would exclude the book from school libraries and for all I know you are counting on that public" (Quoted in Jeffares and Cross Ed. 181-2). While Yeats made the selections on his own except for Kipling and his own work, he took Eliot's advice for omitting the Americans. Roberts, it appears, relied considerably on Laura Riding, who, with Robert Graves, had co-authored *A Pamphlet Against Anthologies* (1927). Though Yeats was attracted by Riding's poetry after reading her in the Faber anthology, he could not print her as she laid down elaborate conditions that he could not accept (Raine Ed. 186).
The Faber Book, like Yeats's Oxford Book, has rightly been described as one of the most influential anthologies of modern times. It is interesting to compare the two collections and the story of poetry they tell. At many points, the editors are in complete agreement and at others, they could not have differed more. Together, they offer the reader some insight into the way literary history is made. It is interesting that both editors viewed Modernism as a post-Georgian Poetry phenomenon. As pointed out earlier, Yeats punned on Marsh's name and, after excepting Housman from the anthologies, described "everything" else as being "marsh." Roberts too, in his early notes proposed to call it Anthology of Post-Georgian Poetry (Smith 25). Following is a brief history of the making of The Faber Book of Modern Verse.

It began with T. S. Eliot almost casually mentioning the possibility of the anthology to Roberts who had already achieved renown as the editor of New Signatures (1932) and New Country (1933) that introduced some young poets like W.H. Auden, Stephen Spender, Cecil Day Lewis and Charles Madge. "My firm (Faber)," Eliot wrote, "has conceived idea that there is room for another anthology of modern verse and we were wondering whether you would consider editing a collection for us" (Smith 725). Roberts wanted to edit an anthology that would serve "some useful purpose" and hinted at a radical anthology that would need an editor with a very "thick skin" (Smith 725). As Janet Adam Smith, author of the TLS article mentioned above recounts, the anthology for Roberts had to "define the modern movement in a way that was not just chronological but a question of sensibility and technique" (Smith 725). In Roberts's own words, it was to be "a collection of poetry which is alive today, not as an illustration to literary history"
(Smith 725). In a letter to Eliot, he goes on, "... the anthology as I see it ... is bound to have a noticeable effect on public taste, it will be the standard book of this kind for ten or twelve years" (Smith 727). His claim was to prove rather modest with hindsight.

Roberts was an editor who refused to compromise with the compulsions and wishes of his publishers, and his letter insisting on the inclusion of the Waste Land even won an admiring reply from Eliot. Penciled on Roberts's letter was Eliot's tentative suggestion of the title of the anthology, "F. Bk. of Modern Verse?" (Smith 727), a name that was to set a trend at Faber's. But in the anthology itself, it was the editor who had his way where choice of the poets was involved. He was equally good at designing the pages. As Smith reminisces, "Richard de la Mare told the protesting printer that 'most of the editor's corrections improve the appearance of the book so much that they should be effected'" (Smith 728). As for the Introduction to the anthology, Eliot was clearly pleased, and was unusually generous in praise: "I find your Introduction very interesting indeed, and it represents, as it should, a newer point of view than my own" (Smith 728).

Modernist poetry anthologies fall into two broad categories: the anthology which is aimed at an elite readership, a readership that has some knowledge of modern poetry, and is not antipathetic to it; and the other kind of anthology assumes that the reader is either ignorant of poetry, and even hostile to it, and needs to be taught that poetry can be useful as well as delightful. The editor of the earlier kind of anthology is also an elitist and has profound scorn for the ordinary reader who does not want to take any trouble to understand it. To this category belong editors, many of them poets themselves, like Yeats
and Pound. The editor of the second category betrays a desire to reach out to the ordinary reader and justify the ways of modern poetry to him/her, and is by far, the more numerous. This category includes professional editors like Louis Untermeyer and poet-editors like Harriet Monroe and Michael Roberts. Both kinds of editors are the transmitters and recorders and have some role also as the makers of literary history, especially when the more influential ones, with the differences and similarities that follow.

It is no exaggeration to say that elucidating the history of modern poetry is one of the important tasks that the two editors, Roberts, and to much lesser extent, Yeats, chose to address. Faced with a new kind of poetic that made increasing and difficult demands on the readers who were already antipathetic to poetry, the anthologists took upon themselves to explain its origins and themes with an aim to show that this poetry was not, after all, as isolated and 'difficult' as it was alleged to be. Both editors adopted the chronological method of arranging the poems. What makes the anthologies interesting as records of literary history is the choice of poets and poems.

Roberts’s first inclusion, Gerard Manley Hopkins's *The Wreck of the Deutschland*, too anticipated a poetry that made the "voyage within," revealing a psychological turmoil that was far ahead of his times. He too was a revolutionary writer even though he used metrics that Milton had popularised in *Samson Agonistes*. Hopkins was a Victorian whose works were published when Modernism was reaching its peak, in 1918. His editor Robert Bridges had to wait for twenty-nine years after the poet’s death to
feel confident that the public was ready for the poems. Ten more years were to pass before his readers could appreciate him. Even Yeats found him difficult to read when he was editing the Oxford anthology.

Hopkins was a nature poet, but he is better known for his intense religious works. One of his most moving poems, "Felix Randall," describes the suffering of one of his parishioners, reflecting some social commitment. In another poem, "That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire and of the Comfort of the Resurrection," he talks of the "endless flux of nature and human life as transformed by the Resurrection" (Bergonzi 15). While Roberts includes this poem, it is surprising that Yeats omits it, since the poem has flux has its theme, a theme to which he assigns a centrality that marks the modern in poetry. Perhaps the author of "The Magi" and "The Second Coming" was not so convinced by Christianity as an all-encompassing way of life as it had been for Hopkins.

The importance Roberts gave to Hopkins can be seen in the number of pages he allotted to him: twenty-two with thirteen poems, compared to Eliot, who got twenty seven pages with only five poems, and a mere sixteen pages with just eight poems were given to Yeats. This suggests that for Roberts, Hopkins was a more important Modernist poet than either Yeats or Eliot, at least if the number of poems and pages are used as yardsticks. It may be that Eliot's own reluctance to include too many of his poems was a reason for the relatively smaller number of works and pages.
Roberts perhaps found Hopkins more innovative than either poet, his criterion for his inclusions, and he attributes precisely this ability to Hopkins's poetry. The Victorian could work on the reader's mind in a subterranean fashion, something that Eliot too would aim to do later. What Hopkins expressed for the reader in this way was "the tension and disorder he found in himself (Roberts 4). But the reading public could accept Hopkins decades after his publication because the problems that he faced and described were ahead of his time. Or his thought was understood only by a few or it was so intricate that only a small group of elite readers could follow it. Yet, Hopkins claimed that the sprung rhythm he used is "of common speech and of written prose, when rhythm is perceived in them" (Quoted Cunningham 856). There seems to be an apparent contradiction in Roberts's argument when he says that a poet, far in advance of his time cannot be understood, but a poet like Pope or Eliot, who discussed only the problems peculiar to their days, and are no longer relevant for the present or the future, can still be enjoyed even if the reader does not directly experience them (Roberts 6). Perhaps it is the hindsight that history provides that makes this comprehension possible.

The very name of the "modern" involves a break with the past, and most editors were anxious to define it against the Victorian age, especially all that was considered "prepense and artificial" (Yeats 1936 xiii) in it only to end up with "a facile charm and a too soft simplicity" (Yeats 1936 xiii). Roberts too records this change quoting Ezra Pound in his Introduction:
At a particular date in a particular room, two authors, neither engaged in picking the other’s pocket, decided that the dilution of vers libre, Amygism, Lee Masterism, general floppiness had gone too far and that some counter-current must be set going. Parallel situation centuries ago in China. Remedy prescribed *Emaux at Camées* (or the Bay State Hymn Book). Rhyme and regular strophes.

Results: Poems in Mr. Eliot's second volume, not contained in his first *Prufrock* (Egoist, 1917), also *H. S. Mauberly* (Quoted in Roberts 1936 17).

At least in recording some of the most significant moments in literary history, the anthologists could be amazingly objective and in perfect accord, if only we go by these two examples.

The Faber anthology is given more to taxonomy than the Oxford collection. Roberts classifies the poets on the basis of their European and 'English' "sensibilities" (Roberts 8). The former were influenced by some Continental writers, while the latter looked to William Langland, John Skelton, and Charles Doughty as well as William Blake, Percy Bysshe Shelley and Edward Lear. However Roberts was careful to suggest that the two classes were not exclusive and represented "moods of poetry rather than two kinds of poet" (Roberts 8).

In tracing the themes and issues that engage modern poetry, both editors agreed generally in going back to the seventeenth century when the changes that required the
modern response began to happen. Roberts mentioned Donne as the first poet to record these changes (Roberts 1936 5), while Yeats looked at man become "passive before a mechanized nature" (Yeats 1936 xxvii) at about the same time. As an alternative view, he thought that Henri Stendhal had started the trend in modern literature when he described a masterpiece as a "mirror dawdling down a lane." The tendency was towards what Hopkins called "Parnassian poetry" in which a poet could write automatically on current themes, fancies and fashions that may appeal to him: "I am sitting in a chair there are three dead flies on a corner of the ceiling" (Bergonzi 124).

Both Roberts as well as Yeats were poets, and both took a great deal of advice from other poets in editing their respective anthologies, providing a unique synthesis of views on poetry and poetics of the times. Yeats was modern without being a Modernist and his anthology can appear both intimate and objective at once. The anthologies are reflective of their editors' personalities as individuals and as poets. Appearing at a time when Modernism was already established, the collections are both a consolidation and an assessment of the achievements of the movement. The prestige of the two great publishing houses meant that there were to be considerable consequences for the canon through the anthologies, both within and outside the classroom.

With an assurance that few editors can have, Yeats claimed to be comprehensive in collecting all the good poets from within a few years of the death of Tennyson to the most recent. Roberts was less confident and was at pains to disillusion the reader of any ideas of his anthology being all-inclusive. But the exclusions were very carefully planned
to position the anthology so as to make a unique contribution to modern poetry—to make it a collection that looked to the future prophetically, instead of merely purveying poems to the expectations of a readership. Thus Roberts says, "I have included only poems which seem to me to add to the resources of poetry, to be likely to influence the future development of poetry and language, and to please me for reasons neither personal nor idiosyncratic" (Roberts 1936:2). The arbitrariness in his selections he acknowledges later is not only limited but also inevitable, given the very nature of anthologizing. Roberts admits in his Introduction that many of the poems he included were not controversial at the time he was editing the book, and controversy was not valuable in itself. On the contrary, he began with Gerard Manley Hopkins, a pioneering trend in anthologies, though the poet was already a part of the canon, and had some significant similarities with his contemporaries and predecessors. It seems that like Yeats, Roberts too was looking for a bridge that linked the old and the new. They both selected poets who mainly lived and wrote in the nineteenth century. A Victorian who wrote poetry anticipating the modern style, and was published after Roberts's earliest selection, 1910, Hopkins was to become a major influence in English letters. "The Wreck of the Deutschland" is arguably the most difficult poem in the Faber anthology, a sort of "dragon at the gate." Perhaps the comprehension of this poem is the shibboleth that admits a modern reader to the circle.

But Roberts saw in the Victorian many features that would influence later writers. Speaking of Hopkins, he put his finger on a fundamental point in his own and modern poetic: Hopkins had an intensity that Charles Doughty (also rejected by Yeats) lacked. For Yeats, Hopkins was 'difficult' to read and needed a lot of effort to comprehend. The
Oxford Book, beginning with Pater's immortal lines, captured the "inner voyage," one of the two main themes in modern poetry, and Hopkins who fled from "God to God," exemplified the "voyage out." The Faber editor felt perhaps, that with the passage of time and the repeated efforts of the readers, the "dragon" could eventually be tamed. The exclusions in both anthologies were equally interesting. While Yeats ignored the Trench Poets, Roberts excluded all "mystical poems," calling them 'poetical,' a term he used to describe the attempts to evoke a mystical state of mind by the use of symbols (Roberts 1936 2). For him the word 'poetic' by contrast, defined "a special concentration of sensuous impression, idea, evocation or phrase" (Roberts 1936 2). In sum, while Yeats wanted to change an existing canon in part, and consolidate it insofar as it agreed with his own, Roberts was generally seeking to lay the foundation for a canon that may be described as future—oriented even as he, too, tried to consolidate the one that seemed to come into being at the time of editing the collection.

Roberts is more objective in his selection criteria than Yeats since he shows a greater willingness to accept the influences of the poets' own manifestos and principles. We can go further and claim that Roberts's anthology is in tandem with the collections edited by those poets now known as Modernists, such as Ezra Pound and the editors of Some Imagist Poets (1915, 1916 and 1917). Thus, Roberts records the liberation of the poet from poetic diction and Victorian poetic themes when he writes, "Good poetry is more likely to be written about subjects which are, to the writer, more important, than about unimportant subjects, because only on subjects of personal importance to himself does he feel the need for that accuracy of speech which itself lessens the tensions which it
describes. Deliberately to imitate a style arising from one poet's crisis would be absurd, but something similar is bound to appear when a crisis of a general kind arouses a personal conflict in many poets " (Roberts 4). We remember Eliot's confession that The Waste Land was the result of one man's personal grouse against the world. Again Roberts says, "Words do something more than call up ideas and emotions out of lumber-room: they call them up, but they never replace them exactly where they were" (Roberts 5).

This is reminiscent again of Pound's emphasis on the need to keep words meaningful, and his comparison of his images to the factor \( x \) in mathematics with its changing values in opposition to the Symbolists' use of their symbols in fixed values, much like counters, and therefore very limiting and confining for poetry of their kind (Pound 1930). Indeed it appears that Roberts projects a Poundian view of poetry and its functions. For example, if his contemporaries could not understand Hopkins, it was because he wrote of problems that they did not perceive until much later. This matches the idea of Pound that poets are the antennae of the race.

It is significant that Yeats and Roberts were concerned with literary terminology, using very carefully defined terms in tracing trends in literature, and in a poet's own growth. Thus, for example, Roberts and Yeats used words such as 'rhetoric,' 'satire' and 'science' with unusual precision. For Yeats, rhetoric denoted an obsession with poetic diction and following Verlaine's advice, proceeded to "wring its neck." For Roberts, rhetoric had to do with effectiveness of speech and the attempts to improve it, and carried no pejorative connotations (Roberts 6). Nor was the word 'satire' as bad for Roberts as it was for Yeats. Satire was better than indignation, reflecting a desire to correct. For Yeats,
it was a quite simply a "distortion." For both editors, science had a negative
connotation— for Yeats, it destroyed his belief in the supernatural and religion, and for
Roberts, science was bad because it devalued the individual and reduced him to a
machine.

Modern poetry, as perceived by the two editors, in part subscribed to a
conservative attitude when it surveyed social changes. It bemoaned the loss of tradition
and its values. Roberts examined this trend summing it up with a quotation from Yeats’s
"The Second Coming":

Turning and turning in the widening gyre,
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity
(Jeffares) Ed. 98-99).

Yeats too surveyed a similar situation and quoted exactly the same lines adding an
interesting confession:
Doubtless because fragments broke into ever smaller fragments we saw one another in a light of bitter comedy, and in the arts, where now one technical element reigned and now another, generation hated generation, and accomplished beauty was snatched away when it had most engaged our affections. One thing I did not foresee, not having the courage of my own thought: the growing murderousness of the world (Yeats 1961:192).

Yeats then proceeded to quote the lines from "The Second Coming" that Roberts quoted, as mentioned above. The point is that the poets of the early decades of the twentieth century were more daring than Yeats was in the eighties of the nineteenth century in facing reality. Literature was coming to terms with life. Apparently for Yeats, this traumatic experience, of tradition decaying, the centre being unable to hold, was no less than a war, and he could not countenance those who fled it. This throws more light on his exclusion of the Trench Poets who, for Roberts, were central.

Roberts notes a shift in the focus of critics from an obsession with 'decadence' to a concern with form. The 'decadence' was discussed in the second decade of the twentieth century while the concern with the issue of form went back to the middle of the first decade. In tracing these trends, Roberts was narrowing down on an issue that engaged the minds of all the Modernist poets. It was a major subject of the Prefaces the poet-editors affixed to Some Imagist Poets (1915, 1916 and 1917). Echoing them, Roberts explains the organic relationship between form and content. As the Imagist poets put it, "In poetry, a new cadence means a new idea" (SIP 1915 vii).
For Roberts, the most important aim of poetry is to realize the potential that is present in language, to stretch it to new limits. It is not the poet's duty to exhort or instruct, which might actually deflect him or her from the true objective (Roberts 3). It is not even to be intelligible to ordinary reader— that time will take care of. Hopkins is a case in point. From being an "obscure" poet initially, he became a part of the canon (Roberts 3). For this editor, "primarily poetry is an exploration of the possibilities of language" (Roberts 3). Even Eliot and Pound "may feel more acutely the inter-relation of culture and politics, but, nevertheless they would agree with Mr. Auden that 'poetry is not concerned with telling people what to do, but with extending our knowledge of good and evil, perhaps making the necessity for action more urgent and its nature more clear, but only leading us to the point where it is possible for us to make a rational and moral choice'" (Roberts 11). This was the "diminished poetry" that Arnold talked about in his Preface to *Poems* (1853).

The readers addressed in the two anthologies were strikingly different and were illustrative of the personalities of the editors. For Yeats, the 'difficulty' of modern poetry was limited to a few poets like Eliot, and was the result of the special conditions in their lives, not say their own peculiarities. For Roberts, the same problem was of greater significance because he also had in mind the ordinary middle class, academically trained reader, whom Yeats despised and ignored. The result was that the younger editor spent more time explaining the reasons for the 'difficulty' and showing the reader how to get over it. Roberts was generous to the War Poets and the *Faber Book of Modern Verse* was crucial in their canonisation. One critic at least accepts that the exclusion of these poets
from the *Oxford Book of Modern Verse* and its imitations "probably increased the time Owen spent in obscurity" and consequently "he did not appear in some anthologies until the 1950s, his work was not taught in schools and most literary histories said little about the war poets, or treated them as a special case, outside the mainstream" (Merryn Williams 49). It is surprising that this critic does not consider the counter-balancing role that Roberts's anthology surely played at least in part. The point is that the two anthologies, with their contrastive styles and selections, poetics and politics, offer the reader a variety of poetry, and a critical insight that is unique.

With the history of the making of these two anthologies now available, we can see that both editors and publishers were aware of the others and the books were bound to be responses to each other, at least as much as they could mutually anticipate. It Yeats repeatedly delighted in the success of his sales, Eliot was confident that the Faber book was the "best" in the area, a sentiment echoed by Roberts's wife, Janet Adam Smith who found the book "flourishing" even in the late seventies. As the quotations above have shown, the books still command a respect that shows no sign of flagging.