

1 *To pick up at the turning . . .*

The book began under far different conditions—in the middle 1980s, with the “cold war” a reality and the “specter of communism” (K. Marx) still haunting Europe and the world. These were among the defining circumstances of our time, and while they continued it seemed that the twentieth century as we knew it would never end—that it would outlast its final decade and that the context from which our poems arise would remain, largely, the way it was till then. With the changes of the 1990s came the strange sense of a return to the century’s beginnings: a time dominated by nationalism and ethnic conflict, with totalitarian ideologies still in their early stages and science and technology on the move toward new and ever faster transformations. It was circumstances like these to which the century’s first modernists were responding politically and artistically. The difference then was in their sense that the norms of the culture were—like its politics—open to unprecedented changes, which they accepted exuberantly or recoiled from with equal passion. For most of those represented in these pages, such changes were centered in their work as poets and artists, which brought them to an intuition or prophecy, as William Blake had put it in the century before, that “poetry fetter’d, fetters the human race,” or, by extension, that poetry set free can free or open up the human mind.

The intention of this gathering is to trace the history of that intuition—and its attendant poetry—from *then* to *now*. From its earliest emergence—out of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment and into the seed-bed of a radical romanticism—it reflected a tension between the

growth of totalizing nation-states and repeated declarations of the rights of “man.” In the ensuing conflicts, poets were not only “unacknowledged legislators” in the ideas they projected (Shelley) but transformers of and through the language in which the work was written. What began to take shape, then, was the idea of poetry as an instrument of change—a change that would take place foremost in the poem itself, as a question of language and structure as well as of a related, all-connecting vision. Such a change—deep-seated, not cosmetic—was felt to be a virtual reinvention of poetry, even (for some of its practitioners) of language itself. So Tristan Tzara, as spokesman for post-rational Dada, would quote Descartes as an informing slogan: “I would like to believe there were no other men before me.” And yet, as we will say again and again in these pages, a new past was also being fashioned in the process—many new pasts in fact.

The form of the work we have assembled is that of a synthesizing and global anthology of twentieth-century modernism with an emphasis on those international and national movements that have tried to change the direction of poetry and art as a necessary condition for changing the ways in which we think and act as human beings. While the first volume of the anthology runs (historically) from the beginnings of modernism to the middle 1940s, its emphases come largely from concerns of the later twentieth century as the editors and their contemporaries have experienced them. These emphases include

- an overall sense that what has characterized the century’s poetry has been an exploration of new forms of language, consciousness, and social/biological relationships, both by deliberate experimentation in the present and by reinterpretation of the “entire” human past;
- poetry-art intersections in which conventional boundaries between arts break down, sometimes involving generalized art movements (Futurism, Dada, Surrealism, Fluxus, etc.) led by poets and with a poetics at their center;
- experiments with dream work and altered forms of consciousness (from the outburst of Surrealist dream experiments in the 1920s to the psychedelic experiments of the 1960s, the meditative experiments of the 1970s, and beyond) in which language itself becomes an instrument of vision;
- a return to a concept of poetry as a performative genre, from Futurist and Dada soirées, sound-poems, and simultaneities to the “new orality” and the expanded performances and textsound works of the post–World War II decades;

- language experiments, including the sound poetry and textsound works mentioned above, as well as experiments with visual and typographical forms, attempts to develop a nonsyntactic (abstract) poetry, and explorations of new languages and those sublanguages (dialects, creoles, pidgins, etc.) that had long been at the fringes of accepted literature;
- ethnopoetics and related reassessments of the past and of alternative poetics in the present: a broadening of cultural terrains, directed by the sense of an ancient and continuing subterranean tradition with the poetic impulse at its center: a widespread attack on the dominance in art and life of European “high” culture, leading in the later part of the century to a proliferation of movements stressing exploration and expansion of ethnic and gender as well as class identities;
- an ongoing if shifting connection to related political and social movements (“surrealism at the service of the revolution,” etc.) during what became, heroically and sometimes disastrously, an age of ideologies;
- a sense of excitement and play (“to work in the excitedness of pure being . . . to get back that intensity into the language”—G. Stein) that must be brought across to show the work of the century in all its color and as the poetry “that might be fantastic life” (R. Duncan).

It has been our hope throughout that we could accomplish all of these ends without turning the selection of authors into the projection of a new canon of famous names—rather, to have the anthology serve a more useful function, as a mapping of the possibilities that have come down to us by the century’s turning.

Finally, it should be clear that we have not been looking for any more certainty regarding form or content than what the work itself allows us. In that sense we’ve welcomed the problematic, even the contradictory, into the poetry brought together here. Thus, if an awareness of the “new,” say, seems central to these projects, it is often balanced, sometimes overbalanced, by an obsession with the old and the ancient. This represents a problematic and an issue, as do polarities of high and low (in language, in diction), of symbolism and realism, lyric exuberance and “objective” precision, hermetic condensations and epic expansions, minimalism and maximalism, verses and proses, sacred and secular, maleness and femaleness. While the predilection of the work is to push things to their limits, even those limits (and that predilection) may be called into question—as in the Dada poet’s turning on the Dada work: “The true Dadas are against Dada.” Or put another way: at the core of every true “modernism” is the germ of a *postmodernism*.

2 *Of what makes a history and what it is . . .*

It is the persistence of such issues (political and cultural as much as formal) that makes a history of the “modern” and the “avant-garde.” For the better part of two centuries, the western world and then the world in general have been witness to a revolution of the word that is simultaneously a revolution of the mind and (consistently or not) a revolution in the (political, material, and social) world itself. Much of that is already implicit in nineteenth-century romanticism, but it is modernism (at least the experimental modernism projected in these pages) that takes it all the way—through a sometimes unrestrained attempt to change both word and thought. On the simplest level, the Romantic poet carries along a still traditional, if increasingly shaky, image of the poem, with its formal structure or poetic “line”—as in that side of William Blake that writes (but noticeably minus all punctuation)

Mock on Mock on Voltaire Rousseau
Mock on Mock on tis all in vain
You throw the sand against the wind
And the wind blows it back again

while the emergent new poet (Blake again) blasts the line apart, casts off “the bondage of Rhyming” and “Monotonous Cadence” to produce “a variety in every line, both of cadences and number of syllables.” Thus:

To cast off Bacon, Locke & Newton from Albions covering
To take off his filthy garments, & clothe him with Imagination
To cast aside from Poetry, all that is not Inspiration
That it no longer shall dare to mock with the aspersion of Madness
Cast on the Inspired, by the tame high finisher of paltry Blots,
Indefinite or paltry Rhymes: or paltry Harmonies.

The difference here is what Rimbaud, writing in the final quarter of the nineteenth century, will call us to: “The invention of the unknown demands new forms,” or, again along those lines, “One must be absolutely modern.”

The story of the modernism that characterized the twentieth century goes back at least to the start of the nineteenth, to Blake or to Hölderlin—poets who took traditional verse to its limits (of form, of content, of form *through* content), then stepped across into unprecedented “freedom.” With Baudelaire, another key figure, the old verse was more persistent, however much he was (in Rimbaud’s view) the first *voyant* or “seer,” and was, with Novalis or with Edgar Poe in his extraordinary *Eureka*, an

early master of the (so-called) prose poem—a form that Lautréamont and Rimbaud, somewhat later, brought to a first fulfillment. In their positioning between old and new, most of the nineteenth-century forerunners resembled Emily Dickinson, whose recognizable metric was accompanied by a revolutionary sense of off- or near-rhyme and by the use of hyphens/dashes to call her own set rhythms into question. Only with Whitman do we see the work turning irreversibly to free or open rhythms (and to the realization of Wordsworth's earlier prophecy of a demotic poetry written in "the language really spoken by men")—equaled, in a sometimes more radical and quirky way, by the sprung rhythms and soundscapes ("in-stress") of Gerard Manley Hopkins. Often unrecognized, unpublished, or scorned in their own time, these would become the major forerunners for the century ahead. And with them as a master innovator was Stéphane Mallarmé, whose extraordinary *Coup de dès* of 1897 both finished the nineteenth century's fade-out into an overly aestheticized Symbolism and marked the beginning of the twentieth's relentless transformations.

It is with Mallarmé, then, that our view as such begins. In the works that followed his, barrier after barrier began to crumble, clearing the way for the discovery of new forms, the exploration of new behaviors, and the opening of new possibilities. Early in the twentieth century this expressed itself in movements (some tightly organized, some hardly so) across the arts, as well as in the work of individual poets, acting off a new permission to write a poetry freshly invented—reinvented—in each succeeding poem. The first decade of the century was already filled with this new breed of creative innovator—in poetry as in the other arts. Stein, Apollinaire, Cendrars, Reverdy, Jacob among the Cubists of Paris are examples of poet-experimentalists interacting with other experimentalists. This interaction accounts also for the visual edge in Apollinaire, the politically verbal edge in Picasso's collages (always present, heretofore overlooked). Elsewhere too the push against boundaries and restrictive definitions of poetry and language can be felt: Dario's *Modernismo*; Huidobro's self-generated Creationism; Pessoa's multiple names (personae, "others"); Rilke's breakthrough into angelic visions (prodded in part by the emergence of Expressionism and rediscovery of Hölderlin as forerunner); Pound's declarations favoring a new poetic image (or, later on, the image set in motion).

The movements of those first two decades functioned also as collaborative *vortices* (Pound's term), bringing together many individualities in a common push toward a new dispensation, aimed at a drastic change of poem and mind. Of those movements Futurism was the first and the first to have a poetry and a poetics at its center. Based in Italy, it was paralleled by Expressionism in Germany, the other Futurism in Russia and central

Europe, Vorticism in the English-speaking world, the various new isms coming out of Paris, with a culmination (circa World War I) in Dada, which was also the first (*postmodern*) turning against movements and against modernism as such. The highly individuated poets working within these movements included Marinetti, Trakl, Benn, Khlebnikov, Mayakovsky, Pound, and Tzara, along with boundary-breaking artist-poets such as Arp, Kandinsky, Klee, and Schwitters.

This energy—first sighted in a time of war and revolution—continued into the century's third decade and beyond, as in what Clayton Eshleman has described as the banner year of 1922. That year saw the publication not only of Eliot's *Waste Land* and Joyce's *Ulysses*, but also of Rilke's completed *Duino Elegies* and Vallejo's incredibly knotty, thwarted *Trilce*. It was the decade too of the birth of Surrealism (1924), led by poets like Breton, Soupault, Aragon, P  ret, Eluard, and Desnos, and culminating in Artaud, a poet-artist who turned against it with unprecedented inner violence. In its central focus on the "dreamwork" (S. Freud) and in its call for a strategy of moral and artistic transgression that it only (very) partially began to realize, Surrealism has colored a major area of post-Surrealist writing. At the same time it was countered, largely from the American side (for which, see the "Objectivists," below), by a push toward a poetry that would focus on the luminous detail and would allow thereby a re-perception of the here and now—the familiar world from which (Charles Olson later wrote) we were the most *estranged*. A result—in Pound, Zukofsky, others—was to set history alongside myth and dream as areas of mind and practice to be newly rediscovered.

Along with these developments in the Americas (both North and South), other new modernisms were erupting both in and out of the narrow European nexus—not as a worn-out clash of old and new ("the ancients and the moderns") but as a demand for freedom from the tyranny of the canonic past and, increasingly, from that of a degraded present (including in some cases a gelled and ism-ed version of modernism itself). What all of these modernisms had in common—at least in the freshness of their opening stances—was an urge to decalcify the old literatures, to strip them of their high-cultural gangle and return—or advance—them to a demotic ideal. The immense labors of this project were offset by the sheer and actual pleasures of the necessarily transgressive and liberating moves such work required—in both the purely literary arena and the wider social and political world.

Although the concepts of the artistic and political avant-gardes that were to mark this century had been thought out and defined in the previous one, and despite earlier comminglings or disaffiliations, it was from

the late 1920s on that the poetic avant-gardes began to link their fates more closely or more publicly with movements of social and cultural liberation, or tried to forge alliances—often disastrous—with both the (political) left and right. The poets and artists wanted change—a change that would affect not only their art but the world in which that art took shape. Their perceived enemies were the lukewarm pseudo-democracies (the Weimar Republic in Germany, the Third Republic in France), considered decadent, ineffective, repressive, and opposed to any deep-rooted changes. The iconoclastic radicalism of the avant-garde would do away with them at any price. That price—especially where art’s autonomy and dream of liberation were all too lightly cast aside—turned out to be catastrophic: a choice, far too often, between totalitarianisms of the left and right. When Hitler came to power in 1933, Italian fascism had already been in place for a decade and Stalin’s empire was a lethal caricature of the revolutionary dream of 1917, while in France left and right were battling in the streets. The choice for the avant-garde was not always easy, and Georges Bataille, as witness to that time, speaks of a “fascist temptation” (along with other, likely more familiar ones of the repressive left) that he and many of the avant-garde writers had to contend with—in as well as around themselves. Politically the poets engaged themselves or were forced to engage with the total state, to which they both submitted and offered up resistance. (Among the murdered in those years were Lorca, Desnos, Jacob, Wen Yiduo, Radnóti, Mandelstam, while other poets such as Hikmet, Akhmatova, Schwitters, Blaga, Sachs, Neruda, and Brecht suffered prison, censorship, or exile.) While some parts of the social fabric began to alter, the culture wars in question were fought, as always, on uneven terms. Whatever the artistic or social breakthroughs, the poets’ impact on the larger society was still limited, or waited for a later decade to be felt.

Or thus, at least, would run a Euro-centered narrative of the first part of this century. From a wider perspective, however, the decomposition of the nineteenth-century dream of progress and worldwide power (European) in the mid-twentieth-century cataclysm of war (also, predominantly, European) marked the beginning of a liberation from the previous century’s colonialisms. Viewed on such a global scale, it is now possible to see *Négritude*—a surge in the 1930s of young African and Caribbean writers influenced by Surrealism—as the culminating movement of the modernist half of the twentieth century, with Aimé Césaire as its clearly dominant practitioner. In that sense, one can consider the period that follows as a developing response to the decentered/decentering universe of postcolonial reality. The scene, as played out in our second volume, will not so

much abandon Europe as shift attention from there to the United States (itself a mix of cultures and identities) and to a range of third-world centers barely represented in the present pages. Nothing will be complete, of course, but the openings—the openness—prefigured here will define the practice of a growing number of poets from throughout the world. In the process, the African and Asian masks looted by nineteenth-century colonialism—masks which set ablaze the imaginations of Picasso and Apollinaire, of Tzara and Dérain, in pre-World War I Paris—will have started their long trek home.

3 *A poetics in advance of a poetics . . .*

The history of twentieth-century poetry is as rich and varied as that of the century's painting and sculpture, its music and theater, but the academic strategy has been to cover up that richness. Imagine—now—a history of modern art that left out abstract painting or collage or Cubism or Surrealism or Dada, and you have a sense of what the literary histories (in America for certain) look like to those of us who know that similar moves and movements exist in poetry and that many of the earlier movements in the arts—but Futurism, Dada, and Surrealism in particular—were essentially the work of poets. It is this realization—so obvious and so deliberately concealed—that the first of our two volumes is intended to express.

A characteristic of modern art (and poetry) so defined (but this carries into the “postmodern” as well) has been the questioning of art itself as a discrete and bounded category. Some such radical questioning of art and its boundaries defines our sense of an “avant-garde” and of some form of “deconstruction” as a strategy for coping with the inherited (authoritative) past. (Both of the terms in quotes are themselves now under question—the result of two centuries of abuse in the former case, of two decades in the latter; or as David Antin puts it elsewhere: “When I hear the word ‘deconstruction,’ I reach for my pillow.”) In an essay on Robert Wilson’s “theater of images,” Robert Stearns writes (in a configuration we would share with him): “The avant-garde might be characterized as those creators who do not take their environment and its traditions at face value. They separate and view its elements and realign them according to their own needs.”

This description (while devoid as yet of social/revolutionary purpose) is general enough to include the great range of strategies and stances in experimental poetry and art. Since nothing around us is (ideally) taken for granted and the conclusion or intention of the work (again ideally) arises or emerges from the work itself, the work by definition is experimental,

its outcome unknown, its process crucial. Such experiments/redefinitions/reconstructions may work with and on structures, ideologies (contexts and contents), materials and technologies, or (in any instance) combinations of all of the above. From our shared perspective as poets of a certain place and time, we see the coming together of these possibilities as (still) the great opportunity of art and poetry as these cross into a new millennium. We would go so far as to suggest that the experiments of the twentieth-century avant-gardes can be viewed as prolegomena to the realized workings of the century to come.

While the basis for most of these new poetics has been a drive toward social—even spiritual—transformation, the experimental moves on their structural/compositional side have involved a range of procedures that bring out the opaque materiality of language as a medium, as against a “romantic” view of language as purely a transparent window toward an ideal reality beyond itself. These have included developments (from Mallarmé and Marinetti on) in visual, typographic, and concrete poetry; in primarily English-language experiments (from Pound and Williams to Charles Olson and beyond) with what Olson called “projective verse” and Robert Duncan composition-by-field; in systematic chance operations (Duchamp and Arp the early prompters, Mac Low and Cage the leading latter-day practitioners); in variations, foremost, of montage and collage throughout the century. Along with such quasi-formalist moves, more strictly ideological/ideational experiments permeated Dada and Surrealism during and after World War I; Negritude (broadly defined) by the start of World War II; Beat and Beat-related poetry in the 1950s and 1960s; Situationist street poetics in the 1960s; and aspects of feminism and other liberationist movements over the last three decades. Equally extreme but often less recognized experiments involved the materials and media of poetry—from the return to poetry as an art of live performance to the creation of a new electronic poetry (textsound, *poésie sonore*, etc.) grounded in its Futurist beginnings, the rudiments of a computer poetry (leading to recent hypertext and cyberpunk experiments), and the beginnings (toward the other end of the technological spectrum) of a poetry without sound in the culture of the deaf. And along with these there have been persistent thrusts to raise demotic, colloquial, common speech as the language of a new poetry and culture. Taking many different forms and challenging many longstanding prejudices and language barriers, these thrusts mark a key point at which language experiments and politics meet.

This rich array of explorations represents a much larger field of experiment and change than has been brought forward, say, in recent controversies about “the death of the author” or “non-referential writing” and simi-

lar textual/intertextual modes of conceiving writing and the world. The field is still larger in that the old rules and basic definitions within each art have increasingly and deliberately been set aside or reversed. The imageless (nonrepresentational) art which characterized the American and European midcentury has been matched (in deed if not in prominence) by a wordless poetry: the *Lautgedichte* of Hugo Ball (early) or the *poésie sonore* of Henri Chopin (late). Other moves from within language have included those as obvious as the development of a *free* verse (an act, as the phrase implies, of liberation) and the *parole in libertà* (free words) of Marinetti; experiments in the prose poem and the aphorism, with their questioning of the boundaries between prose and poetry; nonsyntactic, antisyntactic and “totally syntactic” poetry from Gertrude Stein to the Language Poets of the 1980s; and a poetry of elementary forms—letters and numbers—that works with reduced alphabets (Otto Nebel in the 1920s) or extended ones (Isidore Isou in the 1950s), or that reads numbers as words (Kurt Schwitters) or words as numbers (neo-gematria and beyond).

Similarly, the boundaries between the arts have been dissolving, opening an age of blended media (“intermedia”) and hybrid forms of poetry and art. Distinctions between word and picture, action and text, have broken down. Definitions of high and low art have fallen away: the primitive chant and the pop song have become part of the poet’s arsenal, new instruments at our disposal. The language of everyday speech collides with or expels the exalted language of an older poetry—like the art (of painters, sculptors) that seeks to break the boundaries between itself and everyday life, to reenter the mundane world or to elevate the mundane into art. At the same time that some poets have reclaimed prophetic and visionary functions (the most expansive claim of all), they or their contemporaries have been altering the physical nature and location of the poem: new shapes of books (the Cendrars/Delaunay *Prose of the Trans-Siberian* a prime early example); new materials to print on (metal, acetate, film and video); poetry as sculpture in the early works of Kurt Schwitters (*Merzbau*, etc.) or the later ones of Ian Hamilton Finlay (for which, see Volume Two); the poetry reading and performance, moving poetry off the page and into the cabaret, the theater, the lecture hall, the gallery, the coffee shop, the loft, the prison, and the street. Writes Michael Davidson of a postmodernism that extends one thrust of the modern presented in these pages: “The boundary to what is possible in writing is a fiction created by and within writing. Only when the boundary is recognized as moveable can it become a regenerative element in art, rather than an obstacle to its growth.”

The twentieth century may be known by its push against the boundaries. Where once the definitions were apparent and the frame known, we have now come into the open, have taken up a stance outside the walls. The most interesting works of poetry and art are those that question their own shapes and forms, and by implication the shapes and forms of whatever preceded them. But it is possible for one to become a master of poetry (or even a doctor of poetry) and still be ignorant of all this. (It may even not be possible to do so without that kind of ignorance!)

It is our intention in this book to bring that much to light.

4 *A gathering of poems for the millennium . . .*

We find ourselves, then, at the turning of a new century and a new millennium. It is only natural, living where we do, that we should be seeing a number of assessments and reassessments of those activities that were associated with “modernism” in our various arts and sciences. With regard to twentieth-century poetry, a new look has been long overdue. In the American instance, views of “modern poetry” established by midcentury have largely continued to the present and, as they entered the standard anthologies and literary histories, have tended to play down the more revolutionary aspects of modernism in favor of the recognition of a handful of “major” figures, many of whom are celebrated precisely for their antiexperimental and antirevolutionary positions or for their adherence to a relatively conventional view of poetic traditions and formal possibilities. This has been the case in spite of the radicalization of a large body of American poetry over the last several decades—an event that has been too often ignored or treated as an aberration, its continuity from earlier movements (both European and American) rarely shown. Although contemporary avant-garde poets recognize the absurdity of these historical denials, the shapers of literary history have seldom used the emphases of more recent or more innovative poets (projective verse notation, concrete poetry, intermedia and performance, chance and systems poetry, new experiments with dream and vision, antisymbolist strategies, etc.) to reappraise the work of poets from earlier in the century. As of the present writing, the gap between the published picture and the private exceptions to that picture has continued to grow.

If that much is the fault of those who remain hostile to the basic avant-garde gestures, an equally absurd limitation comes too often from the side of the avant-gardes themselves—in particular from many of us associated with the so-called “New American Poetry” and its offshoots in the latter part of the twentieth century. Since the 1950s and the pre-Vietnam notion

of an “American century” (but still present after the Cold War), there has been a frequent rejection of an international view with regard to the presentation and publication of contemporary poetry. As a result no *general* anthology of any consequence has appeared during that period that incorporates both radical American and European work—to say nothing of Asian, African, etc. (Exceptions would be anthologies with a specific thematic or formal focus, most significantly those on concrete poetry and, more recently, sound poetry, whose significant practitioners are largely European or Latin American.) In addition, we know of no post-sixties anthology that incorporates both the early and later avant-gardes on an international basis, and certainly none that does so with an awareness of the avant-garde’s roots and antecedents or of its relation to radical social and political movements at different points in time. The result has been an incompleteness we are attempting to reverse.

By contrast, the present gathering takes the twentieth century as its basic time frame, though we begin the century as such with Mallarmé’s *Coup de dès* of 1897 and will end our second volume in a similar manner, a few years short of the millennium. Following an overture that traces the beginnings of twentieth-century modernism to some of its forerunners (both poetic and ethnopoetic) in the nineteenth century, our opening volume is set between the latter 1890s and 1945, marked by the period designation “fin de siècle” at its start and by the African and Caribbean movement “Negritude” (the last great “movement” of that golden age of literary movements) toward its end. The movements in fact make up a major feature of the first volume’s contents, with Negritude preceded by Futurism (largely Italian and Russian), Expressionism (largely German), Dada (international), Surrealism (French and international), and the “Objectivists” (largely American). Along with these movement sections, we have composed three larger, loosely chronological “galleries” of individual poets, without a stress on particular affinities or interconnections between those represented. The galleries are set up like pictures at an exhibition, the order of presentation proceeding by birthdates of the poets, resulting in a number of chance juxtapositions that resemble a kind of modernist collage. We conclude the book with a section called “A Book of Origins”: a brief survey of ethnopoetic and historical discoveries and sources from different times and cultures, as they have emerged in both parts of this century, to transform our ideas of poetry in ways as fundamental as those initiated by our greatest innovators. Finally, we have kept the discourse moving by reprinting manifestos and other documents that are themselves a form of literary art, even of poetry, and we have added “commentaries” for the movements and for the individual poets in the galleries and the sections of “forerunners” and “origins.”

A few further things should be said about our selection procedures, all implicit in the enterprise itself. Our intention from the start has been to show a (literal) *world* of possibilities and to do so within the confines of a large but necessarily finite work. As a result we have had to go beyond a quantitative strategy, to indicate scope or range by the way in which works are positioned and by what we can say, as commentators, about their importance then and now. It should be clear too that for all of our avant-garde emphasis, we have tried not to be restricted by a superficial avant-gardism but to allow the inclusion of all works that we feel significantly test the limits of poetry, both from a structural and an experiential point of view. On its down side, the attempt to be global has meant that we could rarely show the work of specific poets in depth, and that with rare but very deliberate exceptions we could not present key “long poems” in their entirety. In a few notable instances, the economics of republication have forced the elimination of work to which we can only refer (if at all) by way of commentary.

The attempt to make a *global* anthology is a challenge in itself to a whole series of cultural hegemonies and an act of decentering of a kind that we find emerging in modernism and inching toward fulfillment in the present (“postmodern”) aftermath. Here again the finite structure of the book has made it impossible to represent “all” nations and “all” languages—assuming we would have the intention or temerity to do so. Held back by a paucity of good translations and by limits on our own abilities to know and to judge, we have again proceeded (by commentary and placement) to show how the work of the early twentieth century begins to encourage new acts of experiment and discovery across the widest range of human cultures. (An alternative procedure in constructing an anthology of experimental writings—to concentrate on European and Euro-American modernisms to the exclusion of all others—would have been to distort what we take to have been, finally, one of modernism’s central issues.) As an indication of the book’s openings, we have taken some particular care to represent a number of key third-world beginnings and to position Negritude—along with the “Objectivist” line of Williams, Pound, and Zukofsky—as our culminating modern movement. In much the same way we have tried to foreground the work of early women innovators, both known and relatively unknown, while recognizing the historical and ideological circumstances that mitigated against their greater participation in the initial avant-garde projects. If we have set the groundwork here, then all of these directions will be carried to fulfillment in our second volume.

Yet for all the structuring and inclusiveness on the part of the editors, the book (like all such summaries) remains a partial view of what was

done. We present it with the clear understanding that what has been omitted may, in other contexts, have as much value and interest as what has been included. There are undoubtedly areas of twentieth-century poetry that we have not explored sufficiently or that may always be beyond our ability to grasp and understand. And for all of the book's internationalism, we recognize that its focus is likely *too* American, not because this has been an "American century" but because our own limitations (as well as our strengths) have made America the place from which our viewing starts. The reader may accordingly wish to approach the book, with its division into galleries and movements, as the equivalent of an ample but necessarily delimited museum, with a display of art that suggests, always, more than it can actually reveal. Such an open-ended approach, our Dada forebears wisely told us, is also part of any modernism still worth consideration in the millennium to come.

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