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EDITED BY **RICHARD CRONIN**,
**ALISON CHAPMAN AND
ANTONY H. HARRISON**

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Anthologies and the Making of the Poetic Canon

Natalie M. Houston

In recent years, many critical debates about the teaching and study of literature have focused on the development, maintenance or revision of the literary canon. Our contemporary debates, which have occurred both within specialized academic sub-fields and in the larger realm of public discussion about literature and culture, are one mark of our continued connection to Victorian debates about the function of literature in modern industrial society. During the Victorian period, increasing public literacy, new publishing technologies and changes in the educational system focused public attention on the value of literature and the formation of a canon of important works. Literary anthologies, whether designed for use as textbooks or for the general reader, are an especially important mechanism of canon formation, as they present a selection of literary texts to a wide audience and thereby contribute to those readers' understanding of literary history. Nineteenth-century poetry anthologies offer extensive information that we can use to investigate the history of literary taste, the cultural functions of poetry, and the histories of reading throughout the Victorian period. In this chapter, I first discuss the history of canon formation and Victorian reading practices and their relationship to literary anthologies. I then survey the important types of anthologies published throughout the period and suggest some methodological issues in analysing their contributions to shaping the Victorian canon.

Defining the Canon

The word 'canon' was originally used to designate rule, measure or authority, and many subsequent uses of the term similarly invoke notions of restrictive authority, as when literary critics speak of the need to 'teach the canon' or to 'expand the canon' or to 'dispense with the canon'. In actuality, there is not (and there has never been) only one literary canon. Simply put, a canon is a list or group of texts that describes certain boundaries to literary knowledge or expression. Alastair Fowler describes six major kinds of canons: the *potential* canon would theoretically contain all works of written and oral literature; the *accessible* canon, in contrast, would consist of those works readers would actually come into contact with. Different criteria further narrow the accessible canon to produce *selective*

canons. Some of these include the *official* canons produced by mechanisms of patronage, education or censorship; the *critical* canons evidenced in trends in literary scholarship; and the *personal* canon of any individual reader's tastes and knowledge (1979: 98). Wendell Harris further categorizes some additional selective canons, including the *pedagogical* canon of specific works that are frequently taught and a *diachronic* canon, which consists of works that remain in critical or teaching canons over long periods of time (1991: 112–13). Such categories are useful in describing the many different canons that may be circulating within a specific culture during a particular historical period. Readers of different social and economic positions will have different means of accessing literary works, and different educational and social experiences will undoubtedly affect the value and interpretation an individual reader attaches to a particular work.

Recent theorists of canon formation have begun to investigate how historical changes in literary taste intersect with larger structures of social and economic power. Pierre Bourdieu (1984) offers the concept of 'cultural capital' to describe how, within a given socio-economic setting, the knowledge of certain literary texts (or art, music and so forth) is necessary in order to achieve a certain level of social power. Just as the structures and movement of economic capital can be used to describe social competition and stratification, Bourdieu suggests that certain kinds of cultural knowledge also participate in (and construct) similar hierarchies. Bourdieu's elaborate study of twentieth-century French society in *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* points to some of the ways that cultural knowledge is obtained and enhanced: through direct experience (reading a poem), through education (learning how to read the poem; learning which poems are valued by scholars), through popular culture (hearing references to a poem), and through secondary or tertiary contacts (reading a book review, study guide or other text about the poem). The work of Bourdieu and other scholars on nineteenth-century texts suggests that similar mechanisms were at work within Victorian culture, although of course these must be carefully specified and analysed in relation to that historical period.

John Guillory, in *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation*, draws on Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital in order to investigate the mechanisms by which cultural value is attached to literary works: 'Canonicity is not a property of the work itself but of its transmission, its relation to other works in a collocation of works' (1993: 55). To understand how our current Victorian canon was constituted, we have to examine the various mechanisms that have constructed our notion of 'Victorian literature'. Guillory emphasizes that the institution of the school and its syllabuses, course plans and curricula are the primary means by which cultural value is produced, and suggests that understanding 'what historical forms of cultural capital are embodied in *literary* texts . . . will of course entail recognizing the historicity of the category of literature itself, the recognition that its history cannot be dissociated from the history of the school' (1993: 60). However, in order to excavate how Victorian writers and readers might have constituted a canon of literary works, we must also examine other nineteenth-century mechanisms that were equally important in constructing readers' understanding of what constituted 'literature', what defined 'good literature', and why and how these texts should be preserved, studied, enjoyed and valued.

A key figure for Victorian and contemporary debates about the value of literature is Matthew Arnold, whose work in educational reform promoted the adoption of literary anthologies in schools and whose critical essays, like 'The Study of Poetry', proposed that literature did have something to offer readers in the modern age: 'we have to turn to poetry to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us' (1973: 161). Arnold takes up the question of how readers should value particular poems: 'A poet or a poem may count to us historically, they may count to us on grounds personal to ourselves, and they may count to us really' (1973: 163). Famously, Arnold suggested that one should 'have always in one's mind lines and expressions of the great masters, and . . . apply them as a touchstone to other poetry' (1973: 168). Although this passage is often seen as the epitome of Victorian criticism, Arnold first published this essay as the general introduction to T. H. Ward's anthology *The English Poets* (1880), the first late Victorian anthology to offer readers an historical framework for understanding nineteenth-century poetry. Jonah Siegel (1999) suggests that Arnold's claims about the value of literature and the need for ever-greater selectivity act as a kind of defence against the broad scope of the very anthology his essay introduces.

Discussion about the value of literature became an integral part of the Victorian cultural climate because the rapid growth of the publishing industry during the first half of the century radically altered the Victorian intellectual and literary landscape. Many journals and newspapers included ample reviews and debates about literary topics. Less explicit debates about literary canons can also be found in the material history of the Victorian period, in the publishing practices which shaped many readers' encounters with poetry – the contents, organization, design and intent of the numerous poetry anthologies published throughout the period.

Victorian Reading Practices

During the Napoleonic wars, the importing of rags from France to make paper was curtailed, which combined with increased demand to cause a steep rise in the cost of paper. Lee Erickson suggests that the rise in the cost of books 'generally encouraged poetry at the expense of prose' during the first two decades of the nineteenth century because of its condensed expression (1996: 20). However, technological advancements soon paved the way for the dominance of the novel in the Victorian literary marketplace. The Fourdrinier continuous paper-making machine began to be used by 1807, which reduced the cost of paper-making considerably. Because machine-made paper was of more consistent quality, it reduced printing costs and waste as well, and by the mid-1820s was widely used in England. Printing technology, which had remained fairly stable since Gutenberg's introduction of movable pieces of type, changed in the early nineteenth century with the development of stereotype printing, in which a plaster cast would be made of an entire page of set type, and then used to produce metal plates that would be used in the printing press. Stereotype technology meant that multiple exact copies of a text could be printed at the same time on different presses, and also reduced the costs of maintaining multiple

sets of type. These and other technological developments dramatically decreased the cost of publishing periodicals and books of all kinds after 1820.

One of the most visible effects of this decrease was the growth of periodicals and newspapers between 1820 and 1840 (Altick 1957: 318–47). These journals transformed Victorian reading and publishing in several different ways. Although the journals were largely divided along class lines, they opened new possibilities for communication and participation in the public sphere for the middle class and, with the growth of penny papers, for the working classes. Newspapers and journals created a large market for topical essays and reviews, which brought contemporary issues and debates to a wide audience and also, in the case of literary reviewing, created interest in and knowledge of new poems and novels.

The growth and diversification of the reading public throughout the Victorian period was met by a matching growth and specialization in literary publishing. Although general interest anthologies were popular, numerous poetry collections were tailored to specific types of readers and designed to appeal to certain interests or tastes. Trends in nineteenth-century anthology publishing can provide information about how publishers and editors viewed the reading public, as well as their expectations about how poetry was valued by its readers. Statistics regarding the readership of any particular anthology are difficult to obtain, in part because poetry collections were often shared among members of a household, so that for each copy purchased, anywhere from one to twenty persons might have access to it. Although many Victorian anthologies were published in numerous editions, ascertaining the exact size of each can also be difficult. Publishers would frequently print a small first edition in order to see how well the collection sold. Given the generally poor market in publishing poetry, an anthology which sold out more than two editions, even if each consisted of only 2,000 copies, could be considered fairly successful. Without a doubt, Francis Turner Palgrave's *The Golden Treasury* (1861) was one of the most successful Victorian anthologies, selling 9,000 copies in the first five months of publication and over 50,000 more in subsequent years. Other popular anthologies included Charles Mackay's *A Thousand and One Gems of English Poetry* (1867), Palgrave's *A Children's Treasury* (1875) and Coventry Patmore's *The Children's Garland* (1862).

Historians of reading in the West locate an important shift in reading practice during the late eighteenth century: Rolf Engelsing's formulation suggests that, whereas German readers in earlier centuries read a small number of books *intensively*, reviewing them numerous times and often committing them to memory, readers after 1750 tended to read *extensively*, reading a wide variety of different texts, and often skimming or skipping sections. David Hall's research on reading in colonial New England suggests a similar shift in reading practices around 1800 (Darnton 1990: 165–7; Chartier 1994: 1–23). Certainly, the new abundance of published materials led many Victorian critics and anthology editors to write about the need for readers to make careful choices among the many texts being published: 'The root of the wrong appears to be, that people, unless profession or scientific interest influences them, go to books for something almost similar to what they find in social conversation. Reading tends to become only another kind of gossip. Everything is to be read, and everything only once' (Palgrave 1860: 453). Leah Price suggests that

rather than 'replicating the move away from intensive reading that its editors registered in the culture at large, the history of the anthology inverts it', by focusing readers' attention on a selection from the bulk of available material (2000: 4). Thus, even though readers might skim through the pages of a given anthology, its editors had already remarkably narrowed the field of reading possibilities. Finally, any hypotheses about the history of reading must take into account the wide range of possible individual responses to a given text. Michel de Certeau reminds us that readers do not necessarily follow the rules laid down for them by editors, teachers or authors, preferring instead to create their own meanings: 'Far from being writers – founders of their own place . . . readers are travellers; they move across lands belonging to someone else, like nomads poaching their way across fields they did not write, despoiling the wealth of Egypt to enjoy it themselves' (1984: 174).

Poetry Anthologies and the Canon

Poetry anthologies are instrumental in shaping readers' understanding of literary history and poetic value, or, as Pierre Bourdieu suggests in 'The Field of Cultural Production', in producing 'consumers capable of knowing and recognizing the work of art as such' (1993: 37). Any anthology, whether designed for the general reader or for the student, attaches cultural value to certain texts, teaching its readers about its particular definition of 'art' or 'poetry'. Literary anthologies function within larger institutions of cultural production, such as the school and the mechanisms of literary reviewing, but they are also important institutions themselves in what Bourdieu calls 'the symbolic production of the work, i.e. the production of the value of the work or, which amounts to the same thing, of belief in the value of the work' (1993: 37). Depending on the kind of anthology, the value of the work might be expressed in aesthetic, moral or affective terms. During the Victorian period, the cultural value of poetry was frequently expressed in metaphors of accumulation and wealth, such as 'treasury', 'casket' and 'gem'. Bourdieu and Guillory suggest that institutions like the school and other mechanisms that produce the cultural values of literature, like anthologies, do so in part through the narratives of literary history that they (re)produce. Anthologies always both reflect and create literary histories, both explicitly, in their titles, prefaces and notes, and implicitly, in their content and organization.

Our contemporary debates about literary canons have led several scholars to scrutinize the Victorian canon as it was produced by the Victorians themselves and as it has been transformed throughout the twentieth century (Golding 1984; Harris 1991; Hemphill 1984; Peterson 1999). The history of anthologies reveals poets who were once considered important or valuable and who have since disappeared; the different kinds of criteria for inclusion applied during different historical periods; and the relation between academic trends and changing classroom practices. However, most discussions of Victorian anthologies and their relation to literary canon formation have not questioned the models of literary history that anthologies tend to produce, which, contested though they might be in their specific details, tend, in Guillory's terms, to create 'an ideology of tradition, that . . . collapses the history of canon formation into an autonomous history of literature,

which is always a history of writers and not of *writing*' (1993: 63). Guillory argues that we need to think beyond the simple binary of inclusion/exclusion when we analyse the complex mechanisms of canon formation and their effects on the history of reading. Historically and methodologically prior to the question of *who* counts as a poet is the question of *what* counts as literature. Yet our methodological tools for considering the questions of literary history and canons of taste tend invariably to rely upon lists of writers – a mark, in large part, of our Victorian inheritance.

Such investigations into the history of poetry anthologies – the history, in other words, of one institution of canon formation – need to take into account the material history of the anthologies to a greater extent than they have hitherto done. Anthologies produce literary history and aesthetic conditioning not simply through their contents, which have generally been the focus of academic study, but also in their material design, which determines how readers relate contextual information to literary texts. Gérard Genette (1991) offers the term *paratext* to describe the many features of a published work that present it to its reader, such as the cover, title page and preface, as well as the arrangement of particular information within those elements. All of these paratextual elements shape and reflect the work's interactions with the world. In the case of literary anthologies, these transactions of meaning enacted within and by the paratext are particularly complex, involving not simply the notional author and reader but also the editor of the anthology, and the cultural institutions in which the anthology takes part. Examining what information is given on the page with the poem, how it is presented and how the anthology as a whole is organized, along with the editor's introductory remarks and other paratextual elements, can reveal changing conceptions of the role of the reader, the editors and the anthology itself.

To understand the work that anthologies do in forming individual and institutional tastes, values and canons, we have to begin with the material design of the anthology and what it can tell us about the collection's intended audience and mode of use. Examining the material forms of Victorian poetry anthologies reveals how Victorian critical debates and publishing practices gradually shifted the terms of literary value away from formal or aesthetic criteria applied to *texts*, to particular *poets* as repositories of cultural meaning, making the ideal of the poet as moral exemplar or rebellious individual central to the shape of literary history. If the study of anthologies and canons is expanded beyond simply tabulating their contents, we gain the capacity to understand anew how the Victorians wrote literary history – and our own literary-historical narratives. In the sections that follow, I first survey the chronological development of different types of Victorian anthologies and analyse the key functions each type played in Victorian culture. I then discuss some of the methodological issues in describing and analysing a Victorian literary canon.

The History of Victorian Anthologies

As suggested above, anthologies play an important function in proposing and transmitting selective literary canons: any anthology necessarily presents a limited group of texts,

chosen according to explicit or implicit principles. Tracing the history of those selective principles throughout the nineteenth century reveals shifts in Victorian ideas about the function of literature in the larger culture (Golding 1984). In addition to examining the editor's commentary and selections, examining the publishing history and intended audience of a given volume helps us to understand the functions of particular collections (Haass 1985). Anthologies also reflect and participate in larger trends in Victorian publishing (Altick 1957; Erickson 1996). Anthologies make visible the multiple processes of mediation that always occur in the communication process between poet and reader (what Darnton 1990 calls the 'communication network' and McGann 1991 terms the 'textual condition'), because the reader's encounter with the poems occurs through the material form of the anthology. Numerous persons (editors, publishers, printers) and material choices (paper, typeface, book design) all contribute to the meaning of any text. Here I focus on the simplified communication triangle of editor, reader and book as the most significant for understanding Victorian anthologies and their role in canon formation.

The root meaning of the word *anthology* is a garland of flowers, or bouquet, and many of the earliest modern anthologies were constructed around metaphors of plenitude, such as the cornucopia, the feast and the bouquet (Benedict 1996: 9–12). Such *productive* anthologies proliferate meaning and emphasize their variety of texts as a range of choices available to the reader. *Selective* anthologies, in contrast, emphasize the editor's knowledge, experience or taste in choosing particular texts and thereby limiting the reader's experience. *Comprehensive* anthologies, those which aim to present all examples of a particular type of poem, or to survey a period of history exhaustively, emphasize the importance of the anthology itself in the communication process, suggesting in their size and scope their cultural or scholarly value. Although a particular anthology may fulfil more than one of these functions, these terms are useful in examining not simply the contents but also the organization and material design of the anthologies.

In the 1820s, the growth of affordable publishing gave rise to a new kind of poetry anthology, the annual or 'giftbook'. The first was the *Forget-Me-Not*, published in 1823, followed shortly by *Friendship's Offering*, *The Literary Souvenir*, *The Amulet; or Christian and Literary Remembrance*, *The Keepsake* and many others. These collections were lavishly bound and illustrated, generally published near the Christmas season, and expressly intended to be given as gifts to friends and family members. They contained new poems written by both famous and unknown poets, who were sometimes assigned by the publishers to write a poem to accompany a particular engraving. Although an author's reputation might well enhance the sales of a particular giftbook, thematic coherence and affective values generally governed the arrangement and marketing of these volumes. The most successful annuals were issued each year, and competition between them could be fierce (Faxon 1973).

The annuals mark the increasing commodification of literature in the Victorian period in their treatment of poems as items to be marketed and sold to a variety of consumers. The annuals often reprinted poems from other periodicals, recirculating those texts to a different audience, and sometimes the entire contents of an annual were reissued by a later publisher under a new name. These books were intended for casual reading and were fre-

quently the centrepiece of drawing-room conversation, as George Eliot describes in *Middlemarch* (1871–2) when one of Rosamond Vincy's suitors arrives with a copy of the latest *Keepsake*:

> He had brought the last *Keepsake*, the gorgeous watered-silk publication which marked modern progress at that time; and he considered himself very fortunate that he could be the first to look it over with her, dwelling on the ladies and gentlemen with shiny copper-plate cheeks and copper-plate smiles, and pointing to comic verses as capital and sentimental stories as interesting. (Eliot 1965: 302)

By the 1850s, the annuals had all but disappeared in England, and Eliot's retrospective historical irony reveals how dated this form of publication seemed to later Victorians. Some poets and critics feared that the annuals detracted from the reading public's ability to appreciate poetry seriously, because the illustrations would be distracting or would overshadow the readers' ability to interpret the poem on their own. Others recognized that participating in the newly evolving visual commodity culture would help them to reach new readers.

The success of the annuals in the 1820s and 1830s set the stage for the success of more expensive illustrated anthologies of poetry, like Henry Vizetelly's *Christmas with the Poets* (1851; six editions by 1872) and Robert Willmott's *Poets of the Nineteenth Century* (1856; six editions by 1885). With the advent of photography and new lithographic and engraving processes, Victorian culture was increasingly visual, and popular anthologies met that demand for associated images and texts. Pressures on the poetry market from the annuals also made other poetry collections designed for particular readers (e.g. young ladies) or with particular themes (seashore poems) more marketable than many single-author volumes.

In the 1860s, three important anthologies were published that made substantially different claims about the value of their contents and aimed to reach a general audience: William Allingham's *Nightingale Valley*: *A Collection, Including a Great Number of the Choicest Lyrics and Short Poems in the English Language* (1860), Francis Turner Palgrave's *The Golden Treasury of the Best Songs and Lyrical Poems in the English Language* (1861) and Richard Chenevix Trench's *A Household Book of English Poetry* (1868). Each of these volumes claimed to select only a few 'excellent' poems for their reader's enjoyment and illumination, and presented their contents in thematic or idiosyncratic ways. The very titles of Allingham's and Palgrave's collections reveal their selective goals, as compared to earlier anthologies of 'works' or 'specimens', or to the wide range of texts and images included in the annuals. In his preface, William Allingham distinguished his project in *Nightingale Valley* from both of these earlier types of collections:

> The intention of this book simply is to delight the lover of poetry. Specimens critical and chronological have their own worth; we desire to present a jewel, aptly arranged of many stones, various in colour and value, but all precious. Nothing personal or circumstantial, nothing below a pure and loving loyalty to the Muse, has been wittingly suffered to interfere betwixt the idea and its realization. (1860: v)

The selective anthologists of the 1860s declared their principles of selection to be both narrower than those of the historical anthologies at the turn of the century, and less influenced by fame and commercial success than those of the annuals, which were frequently associated with particular social or artistic coteries. In thus claiming for his anthology an aesthetic or literary purity, Allingham borrows the metaphors of the precious gem frequent throughout nineteenth-century poetic criticism.

These same metaphors of precious worth were extended in Palgrave's ambitious project in *The Golden Treasury* not simply to select *some* of the best poems, but 'all the best original Lyrical pieces and Songs in our language, by writers not living, – and none beside the best' (1861: ix). Palgrave's decision to exclude the work of living writers freed him from issues around copyright ownership, as well as potential personal conflicts with the poets he knew. This practice, which was followed by many other editors, meant that very few Victorian poems were included in some of the more popular Victorian anthologies. Palgrave's anthology, which I discuss in more detail in the following section, was hugely successful: twenty impressions were made of the 1861 version, and the revised editions of 1884 and 1890 were issued several times. After 1900 Macmillan issued the separate books of *The Golden Treasury* as school texts, and when the anthology went out of copyright other publishers issued their own versions. *The Golden Treasury* has been updated several times by subsequent editors and remains in print to this day, its design still remarkably similar to its original one. The success of Palgrave's anthology had many effects on the Victorian anthology market, particularly in its focus on shorter lyrics.

In the preface to his *Household Book of English Poetry*, Richard Trench justifies the need for his anthology by emphasizing the editor's 'direct and immediate investigation . . . into the treasures of our English Poetry'. He criticizes other anthologies, commenting that 'it is difficult to think that any one who had himself wandered in this garden of riches would not have carried off some flowers and fruits of his own gathering; instead of offering to us again, as most do, though it may be in somewhat different combinations, what already has been offered by others' (1868: vi). The work of the anthologist was explicitly conceived in the 1860s as that of selection, of carefully culling from the vast resources of English poetry those poems which would bring the greatest wisdom, delight or edification to the reader. This canon was, in these anthologies, not explicitly organized by author. Although Palgrave's and Trench's are each divided into four sections, one for each century, the arrangement of individual poems in all three of these anthologies is primarily by theme or mood, or in Palgrave's terms, 'gradations of feeling or subject' (1861: xi). In each of these three anthologies, the poems of any particular poet are interspersed with those of other poets, frustrating any author-centred reading practice. The underlying goal of these collections was not simply the reader's casual enjoyment, but instead the 'Wisdom which comes through Pleasure' in accidentally encountering 'great' works by diverse poets (Palgrave 1861: xi).

In each of these selective anthologies, the work of choosing favourite poems has, in a sense, already been performed by the editor. The reader is meant to accept those choices and the arrangement by mood or theme, which are necessarily subjective components of poetry. The reading protocol encouraged by this arrangement and the lack of

biographical information minimizes attention to particular poets, conflating all of them into the voice of the anthology. In the case of the *Golden Treasury*, the emphasis on short lyrics (which Palgrave frequently condensed or altered to suit his personal aesthetic) works even more strongly to create the sense of a corporate lyric speaker or the 'voice' of English poetry (Nelson 1985). In general, the design and organization of these three anthologies highlight the selectivity and authority of their editors, rather than the weight of literary history and tradition.

This selectivity was presented as simultaneously convenient and valuable for the reader. Palgrave worked with Macmillan to ensure that his *Golden Treasury* would be small and portable, and Trench hoped that his book could be found in the emigrant's trunk and the traveller's knapsack (1868: viii). These editors responded to the pressures of urban modernity by insisting that poetry need no longer be limited to the genteel drawing room, and could instead provide solace and delight of the highest quality in any location to any reader. In an essay published in 1860, Palgrave advised:

> let a man, or a woman who wishes to claim her natural mental rights and position, read mainly the best books, and begin again when the series is ended. Life is not long; but the available list is briefer still. Putting aside the books which give special information or discuss points of theory, a few shelves would hold all the modern master-works – how few the ancient! (Palgrave 1860: 454)

The *Treasury* Palgrave would publish the following year was intended as a storehouse of these few great texts. These selective reading anthologies were no less commercial than the annuals and illustrated giftbooks – and Palgrave's was certainly far more commercially successful – yet the rhetoric of cultural value in these volumes asserted the importance of poetry in entirely different terms.

Other kinds of selective anthologies were also important during the mid-Victorian period, as editors and publishers responded to the increasing specialization of the reading public, of the publishing industry and of literary criticism. Anthologies of religious poetry included B. W. Savile's *Lyra Sacra: Being a Collection of Hymns Ancient and Modern, Odes and Fragments of Sacred Poetry* (1861) and Orby Shipley's *Lyra Eucharistica* (1863) and *Lyra Mystica* (1864). Anthologies focused on particular forms included Edmund Gosse and J. A. Blaikie's *Madrigals, Songs, and Sonnets* (1870) and the many collections devoted solely to the sonnet, such as Leigh Hunt's *The Book of the Sonnet* (1867), John Dennis's *English Sonnets: A Selection* (1873) and David Main's *A Treasury of English Sonnets* (1880).

One of the most significant developments around mid-century was the articulation of a separate history of women's poetry. Twenty years after Alexander Dyce's *Specimens of British Poetesses* (1825), a number of very successful anthologies were published in England and in the United States that focused solely on women writers, including George Bethune's *The British Female Poets* (1848), Frederic Rowton's *The Female Poets of Great Britain* (1848), Caroline May's *The American Female Poets* (1850) and Rufus Griswold's *The Female Poets of America* (1849). Linda Peterson (1999) suggests that because women's poetry began to be seen as having its own lineage, women poets were increasingly excluded from

general poetry anthologies at mid-century. Certainly, the separation of women's poetry reflected the Victorian ideology of separate spheres, as Rowton's preface makes clear:

> while Man's intellect is meant to make the world stronger and wiser, Woman's is intended to make it purer and better . . . It is not, however, to promote a rivalry between the sexes that these pages are written. They aim, not at separating the two half minds of the world, but at making them act in concert and unison. Single, they are incomplete; but together they are powerful for every kind of good. (1981: xxxix)

Rowton argues that his anthology should be the companion to the existing collections of male poets just as Victorian women were expected to be the moral guide and support of men. The increasing interest throughout the Victorian period in the biography of the poet, rather than in generic or formal distinctions among texts, also fostered interest in the lives of women poets as a separate group.

Children's literature too developed as a distinct publishing category. Coventry Patmore's *The Children's Garland from the Best Poets* (1862) and Francis Turner Palgrave's *The Children's Treasury* (1875) were both quite successful up to the end of the century, and were adopted for use in some primary schools during the later 1880s. Other important anthologies of poetry for children at the end of the Victorian period included Andrew Lang's *Blue Poetry Book* (1891) and W. E. Henley's *Lyra Heroica: A Book of Verse for Boys* (1892).

As the nineteenth century drew to a close, several comprehensive anthologies offered extensive selections from large numbers of poets, creating multi-volume histories of English poetry that were updated and expanded through the early twentieth century. Thomas Humphry Ward's *The English Poets*, first published in four volumes in 1880, is organized chronologically and includes a critical essay prefacing the selections from each of the poets. Ward excluded living poets from his collection, which he updated in later editions by adding texts from poets who died after 1880, first in an appendix to volume IV, and then finally in a separate fifth volume, rather than changing any of his original selections. Ward's preface to the first volume explains that he is attempting to do what Thomas Campbell had done for a previous generation: 'represent the vast and varied field of English Poetry . . . to cover the whole ground and to select on a large scale . . . to collect as many of the best and most characteristic of their writings as should fully represent the great poets, and at the same time to omit no one who is poetically considerable' (1921: I, v–vi). Granting that 'It is indeed impossible that a selection of the kind should be really well done, should be done with an approach to finality, if it is the work of one critic alone', his collection draws on many different scholars to select the texts and write the introductions for each poet (I, v). The table of contents lists the author's full name and dates, as well as the name of the writer of the critical introduction and the specific titles included in the anthology. In both the table of contents and the bulk of the anthology's many volumes, the individual careers of numerous poets are shown to be the basis of English literature, and worthy of specialized attention. The authority of Ward's anthology – both in its selections and in its team of editors – is thus simultaneously collective and specialized.

Alfred Miles's *The Poets and the Poetry of the Century* (1892–7), updated and reissued in ten volumes in 1905, follows a very similar plan, except that Miles does include the work of living poets. The first six volumes are organized chronologically; later volumes present the work of women poets and religious poets separately. Like Ward's, Miles's anthology relies on the work of numerous critics to write the introductory essays, and they are indicated in the table of contents just as in Ward's. Miles's preface focuses on the history of nineteenth-century poetry as a history of poets, and on the difficulty of allotting appropriate representation to major and minor figures. Because Miles includes the work of living poets (whom he consulted in selecting their works) he is sensitive to the work of canon formation that his collection would necessarily perform. Unlike Palgrave or Allingham's selective anthologies of the 1860s, which were organized according to aesthetic or affective responses, both Ward and Miles construct documented histories of English poetry, including copious biographical notes as well as critical commentaries. Miles, for instance, explicitly links the two forms of criticism in his introductory preface: 'This work aims to be an Encyclopaedia of Modern Poetry . . . Its plan is to represent each poet in the variety of his work, giving such biographical data and such criticism as may serve to illustrate it' (1891–7: I, iii).

The American critic Edmund Clarence Stedman, who in 1875 had published a very successful critical account of Victorian poetry (*Victorian Poets,* published in England in 1876, updated in 1887), published *A Victorian Anthology 1837–1895* in 1895 as a companion volume. Both were reissued many times and helped, along with Ward and Miles, to define Victorian poetry for later generations. Stedman explicitly presents the goal of his anthology as critical; rather than following Palgrave's selective model, he intends to display the:

> poetry of the English people . . . at this stage of their manifold development . . . not to offer a collection of absolutely flawless poems, long since become classic and accepted as models; but in fact to make a truthful exhibit of the course of song during the last sixty years, as shown by the poets of Great Britain in the best of their shorter productions. (1895: ix)

To assist the reader in understanding the development of English poetry, Stedman divides his anthology into three chronological divisions ('Early Years of the Reign', 'The Victorian Epoch' and 'Close of the Era') which are further subdivided into groups or schools of poets, such as the 'Composite Idyllic School', 'Meditative Poets', 'Balladists and Lyrists' and 'Elegantiae'. These groupings reflect both generic distinctions and thematic preoccupations.

Of course, anthologists' prefatory remarks follow certain conventions which require them both to acknowledge the work of previous editors, particularly Palgrave, and yet also to stake claim to some new territory or a new method of selection that would make a new anthology worthwhile. Yet it is clear that the goals of these comprehensive anthologies were very different from those of the 1860s. All three of these comprehensive anthologies extensively document their contents and integrate chronological and critical terms either in the critical commentaries or in the organization of the volume itself. Elements of the

poets' biography are presented as necessary information to assist the reader in understanding the poem. These anthologies began to name and codify certain traditions of English poetry, and certain ways of writing literary history, that would for many decades constitute the Victorian canon. Relying on the authority of several poets and literary critics, these anthologies also reflect the increasing specialization of knowledge in the literary field during the Victorian period, granting authority to the book as a collection of learned opinion and commentary. The weighted point of the communication triangle for these anthologies is the book itself, which metonymically represents the field of literary knowledge.

Analysing the Victorian Canon

As suggested in the brief survey above, each of the different types of Victorian anthology fulfilled a different cultural function, whether it aimed to produce new texts and readers, to select only a few poems according to certain criteria, or to document comprehensively the range and history of nineteenth-century poetry. Each of these functions contributes different texts and prescriptions for reading to the larger cultural discourse about literature, as well as to a generalized literary canon.

Some necessary first steps, in describing and analysing a Victorian canon as seen in nineteenth-century anthologies, would include specifying which kind of canon one is investigating (the educational canon; the popular canon; the critical canon) and then choosing which kinds of anthologies to use to document it. The method one chooses to use to analyse the selected anthology will produce rather different definitions of the literary canon. The simplest method is to examine which writers are included in which anthologies, and to determine which writers appear most frequently. Wendell Harris's analysis of anthologies of Victorian poetry throughout the twentieth century, for instance, reveals a significant reduction in the number of poets included, particularly in collections designed for classroom use, reflecting the codification of the teaching canon (Harris 1991: 114). Alan Golding (1984) ties his analysis of the authors included in nineteenth-century American poetry anthologies to larger cultural and historical shifts that are similar to those I have described in British anthologies. Examining the contents of Victorian anthologies can also reveal important differences between our contemporary canons and those of the nineteenth century. Surveying the contents of Ward, Miles and Stedman's anthologies, for instance, reveals a number of poets who are rarely anthologized today: William Caldwell Roscoe, Cosmo Monkhouse, Philip Bourke Marston, Emily Pfeiffer, Lord de Tabley (John Leicester Warren), Dora Greenwell and Aubrey de Vere, among others. Much recent critical work in Victorian studies has been fuelled by feminist and historicist scholarship interested in recovering such 'lost' writers, and in determining when and why they disappeared from the critical and pedagogical canons.

Although this kind of tabulation provides a general picture of the history of literary taste and canon formation, it does not reflect the relative importance assigned to particular writers within an anthology. Anita Hemphill (1984) attempts to establish this in her description of the Victorian canon by estimating the number of pages devoted to each

author in an anthology, and assuming that those with more pages were considered more important. Yet even setting aside differences in typeface, margins and page design, this kind of analysis still does not account for the myriad complexities of nineteenth-century anthology publishing: poems are frequently printed in columns and over one or more pages; some writers are represented by one long poem and others by several shorter poems; some works are extracted and some are given in their entirety. To estimate a canonical hierarchy accurately requires more specific analysis of the texts included in a given anthology and their relation to aesthetic and generic preferences.

The selections from Elizabeth Barrett Browning's poetry in Ward, Miles and Stedman's anthologies, for example, raise a number of questions for further research. One of the pre-eminent Victorian poets during her lifetime, Barrett Browning's status in the critical and teaching canon declined during the twentieth century, until feminist scholarship revived interest in her verse novel *Aurora Leigh* and drew attention to the reception history of her poetry. The critical introductions in Ward and Miles both include biographical details, such as her ill health and domineering father, but also emphasize the breadth of her learning and the linguistic variety of her writing. Each editor selects rather different poems, with only 'A Musical Instrument' and some brief selections from 'Sonnets from the Portuguese' and from *Aurora Leigh* being included in all three anthologies. The extracts from *Aurora Leigh* in no way attempt to represent the work as a whole, and function instead to highlight moments of intensity. Stedman's and Ward's anthologies add titles to their extracts from *Aurora Leigh*, such as 'The Beauty of England' and 'Marian's Child', in essence creating short lyrics from the original narrative poem.

Estimating Barrett Browning's relative importance within any one of these anthologies is difficult because her sonnets and shorter lyrics are given pre-eminence in the critical accounts for their compelling language. Miles's selections are the most extensive, but the size and scope of his anthology are much greater than those of the other anthologists, and sheer length of selections does not account for the way Victorian critical principles were applied and manifested in anthology selections. A comparative assessment among the different anthologies would also need to take into account the significance of Barrett Browning's placement. In Stedman's anthology she is grouped under the heading 'Poets of the New Day: Humanity – Free Thought – Political, Social and Artistic Reform', which perhaps explains why 'The Cry of the Children' is the first poem he prints. Miles presents the work of women poets in two volumes separate from his main chronology of nineteenth-century poetry, reflecting the Victorian critical tendency towards biographical interpretation. In Ward's anthology, Barrett Browning is presented as part of the main chronological narrative of English poetry, between Thomas Lovell Beddoes and Emily Brontë. Analysis too extensive to perform here would be required to uncover the significance of these different arrangements and selections in determining the late Victorian assessment of Barrett Browning as reflected in and created by these anthologies.

Victorian anthologies can contribute a great deal to our understanding of the reception history of particular writers. However, to focus discussions of the Victorian canon only on particular poets actually reveals more about our reading perceptions and assumptions than about those of Victorian readers. If our analysis of the anthologies stays focused

on the inclusion/exclusion binary – counting who gets 'in' to 'the' canon, or even, at the more particular level, who gets included in which anthologies and why – we stay within an author-based mode of writing literary history. Such a paradigm necessarily retains assumptions from our own version of the Victorian canon, which colours our understanding of the lists of names generated from the anthologies: we cannot look at these lists without recognizing some, and not recognizing others. Our reactions differ depending on our ideological assumptions, but it is important to recognize that valorizing either the known, canonical figure (Wordsworth, the Rossettis) or the unknown (Pfeiffer, Marston) results in the same thing: an author-based narrative of literary change and periodization that obscures other aspects of the social meaning of writing, as John Guillory suggests:

> histories of canon formation, when they consist primarily of a narrative of *reputations*, of the names which pass in and out of literary anthologies, explain nothing. Such narrative histories fail to recognize generic or linguistic shifts which underlie the fortunes of individual authors by establishing what counts as literature at a given historical moment. (1993: 64)

Victorian anthologies offer a variety of other kinds of information that we can use to complicate our understanding of what counted as literature for Victorian readers and editors, and why and how it was read. Our focus on an author-centred model of the literary canon stems from the ways we tend to write literary history, which developed out of Victorian criticism and publishing practices. The pages of Victorian anthologies offer us discrete examples of the literary text's communication process, which we can describe by examining the kinds of information on the page with the text of the poem.

The selective anthologies edited by Allingham, Palgrave and Trench deliberately minimize the presence of the poet on the printed page by placing the poet's name after the poem, in very small type. A reader's first engagement with the poem thus occurs *without* the name of the poet, reinforcing the collection's claim to aesthetic selectivity. Such collections were designed to discipline the taste of the increasingly literate Victorian consumers. Visually, the pages of these collections focus on the text of the poems – the largest type presents the poem's title, rather than the poet's name, and the running heads on each page reinforce the name of the collection. *Nightingale Valley* or *The Golden Treasury* or the *Household Book* thus become significant entities unto themselves as they are repeatedly invoked on each page. These cultural treasuries offer the condensation of lyric through pages uncluttered by historical information, just as their overall organization rejects chronology in favour of mood or tone.

As the purpose and range of the later comprehensive anthologies edited by Ward, Miles and Stedman differed from those of the 1860s, so too does the page design in these volumes. Not only is biographical information considered an integral part of the critical account that precedes each entry, but it also helps to organize the reader's orientation to the page. In each of these anthologies, the poet's name is placed in one of the running heads, so that at any opening of the collection, one knows instantly which poet's work one is seeing. Biographical information, in the form of names and dates or in lengthy

notes, is one mechanism by which the field of literary value is produced. In these anthologies the literary labour of both the poet and the critic is individualized and specialized, made explicit on the page where it was only implied in the mid-century volumes.

Taking these differences in page design and implied reading protocol into account reveals how our very ideas of who can be a poet, what a poet's role is, and what counts as significant poetry are rooted in collections like these Victorian anthologies. The differences in content among the anthologies in terms of poetic texts, or numbers of poets, can be tabulated easily enough. The different representations of particular poets in the biographical notes are also easily enough compared in order to reveal the ideological constraints of particular critics or anthologies. But in theorizing the cultural effects of any anthology, especially in relation to questions of canon formation, the material elements matter. To begin to examine the material construction of these ideas might be the first step in rewriting Victorian literary history, and our accounts of its canons, as a history of *writing* and not simply a history of writers.

See also: THE MARKET; LYRIC; SONNET AND SONNET SEQUENCE.

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