

Putting Contents on the Table: The
Disciplinary Anthology and the Field of Literary History

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Contents re-cognizing a list
. . . . From the content, the table
Marjorie Welish, "Cities of the Table"

This essay disputes John Guillory's contention that the canon was formed in the medium of the school syllabus. I take to be exemplary of the canon the list of authors arranged by period found in the Norton Anthology, 4th ed. (Abrams). Not much changed in the Norton's table of contents between the first edition, published in 1962, and the fourth, published in 1979.¹ By the sixth edition of 1993, the editors began to add women writers to the predominantly male list, but, in doing so, they also added more men: in other words, at that moment, the Norton table of contents changed principles from giving us a canon of great authors and works organized by period to giving us historical information. Of the seventh edition under the new general editorship of Greenblatt, Leah Price wrote, "This latest Norton enables readers to engage in what Stephen Greenblatt has elsewhere called 'speaking with the dead' – not only the proverbial dead white males but a good many others." One doesn't add women to a canonical table of contents and get another, different canon: one gets a view of cultural rather than artistic poetics, that is to say, all kinds of writing, great and otherwise.

In addition to disputing the medium of canon formation, I will also argue against many scholars' dating of its emergence. Douglas Lane Patey, Jonathan Kramnick, John Guillory, Trevor Ross, Alvin Kernan, and Thomas Bonnell argue that our current notion of the canon of English literature came into existence in Britain during the mid-eighteenth century.² That misdating is precisely what allows us to ignore the canon's dependence on medium, on a materially determined mode of presentation.

From roughly 1800 to 2000, the disciplinary anthology's table of contents has given us a mode of cognizing or carving up the world of literary history, and that mode is tied indelibly to a particular interface, the disciplinary anthology's table of contents. As I will show, our notions of period, canon, and literature – those that dominated the twentieth century – begin to emerge with publication of the first disciplinary anthologies in 1825 and 1831. William Hazlitt's *Specimens of the English Poets* was the first poetry collection to look like our Norton and to contain a canonical list of authors.³ This anthology, as opposed to all the miscellaneous poetry collections and collections of "beauties" that went before it,⁴ transformed British poetry from a series of publication events into a discipline. Collections edited by Robert Southey, one in 1799-1800, one in 1809, and the last in 1831, begin to separate works of historical interest, antiquarian "curiosities," from canonical works of earlier periods by confining each to their own kind of book.

Hazlitt and Southey did not of course invent English literary history but rather helped to establish a set of protocols for the disciplinary anthology and its Other, the poetry collection that provides merely "historical context." By "disciplinary anthology," I mean a collection of poetry which organizes into past literary periods a short list of male authors, all deceased, as those alone who can participate in a trans-historical conversation about what constitutes the literary and literary tradition as well as in exemplifying the spirit of their age far better than any of their contemporaries. The disciplinary anthology had long been in the making and "stuck" no doubt – that is, it became a dominant medium for reproducing poetry in print -- because its system for organizing literature worked so well with the new reviews (*Edinburgh, Quarterly, Monthly*) that were attempting "to forge a unity that would replace the disintegrated public sphere" (Ferris 24), the "discipline" of English Literature.⁵

1. The “Field.”

A book provides information architecture, complete with its own poetics (Fraistat 4). The table of contents as a special part of that architecture has been analyzed by Marjorie Welish in a poem called “Cities of the Table.” Much of her poetry, Welish says in an interview, concerns itself with the “scholastic book’s apparatus – table of contents, preface, endnotes, index -- . . . protocols for writing and reading” (Cooperman). This particular poem is comprised of six parts, each named first “Cities of the Table” and then, following a colon, a scholarly object: “Marginalia,” “Apparatus,” “Profile,” “Translation,” “Edit,” “Apparatus and Apocrypha.” Each part of the poem presents a table of contents, sometimes in quotation marks: Welish quotes exactly, and twice, the table of contents for Gerard Genette’s *Architext* (258, 261). Like her poem, Genette’s book-length essay performs an archeology of textual studies. Genette describes how literary critics since Plato and Aristotle have, by appealing to their authority (what Welish calls “rented advantage,” 257), attempted to “naturalize” and de-historicize “genre” (Genette 2-3, 36-38, 70-71). Like Genette’s *Architext*, her poem will analyze disciplinary objects.

“Cities of the Table” opens with a refrain that is repeated in all sections but one: “Such as we see here / as here and above” (257). Though masquerading as the “Marginalia” specified in the section’s title, “here” immediately invokes spatiality (Cooperman): the poem will be about what we see populating this city-table, the table’s space. The poem puts the words “table” and “contents” through their various language games: “We are at table” (264); “the folding table” (264, 266); “Fragile Contents” (266); “is content [i.e., happy] to” (257). Doing so is a way of examining the “grammatical fiction” of things generated by the word’s behavior: “Grammar tells what kind of object anything is. (Theology as grammar),” Wittgenstein says (103, 116). The poem also quotes all the dictionary definitions of table: “condensed enumeration,” “systematized

data" (both twice, 257, 264); "pre-existing taxonomies" (262); "to remove from consideration indefinitely," "having a plane surface" (264). Counterposed to these dictionary definitions are Welsh's own definitions: the table of contents provides "echoes . . . met in encrypted turbulence: / a topic"; its job is "articulating a convoy at full stature" – that is, in large type (264).

Welsh offers at least two stories about how the table of contents comes into existence: "From the content, the table / of that same content": an epitome is abstracted from a pre-existing text. An alternative tale is this:

Contents re-cognizing a list

breaks a very light repose

or not loathsome array of which man takes hold.

In this case, a list comes first, and the text (the contents) re-thinks it in longer form, re-posing it, as it were. However, if in reading this passage one takes "Contents" to denote not the text but the table of contents – in practice, "Contents" appears as often on books' preliminary tables as does "Table of Contents" – one gets another reading entirely. In this case, the table of contents is not simply a list but a list made (re)cognizable, breaking into the light repose of a mind that is about to engage in reading a book as the reader opens the first few pages. If the table of contents allows us to cognize what we see, to recognize it as meaningful, it does so through space ("here") and type size ("stature") – through interface. This "condensed enumeration," she says, works "in zeros and ones, apparently," its surface susceptible of being digitized on a screen.

At one point in the poem, Welsh puts Genette's table of contents inside a text box set off to the left side of the page, her own poetic commentary running alongside, down the right side of the box (261). Later in the poem, one sees a table of contents in which each line ends with the refrains that have been repeated over and over again throughout the poem: here the text box has

been removed, allowing her text and elements in a typical table of contents to mix in a way that produces nonsense (262). When you remove a table, if sentences in the same rows but separate columns run together, the words inside the table all run together, no longer making sense and revealing that layout does not simply cater to the eye but actually makes meaning. A table of contents needs to establish inviolable ground. The title of Welsh's poem misquotes, of course, Marcel Proust's *Cities of the Plain*. This table is a plane, a plain, a field containing disciplinary objects made graspable by being set in view. A literary "field of study" is partly achieved by and partly reflected in the anthology's table of contents insofar as it strews disciplinary objects around on a table, a visual field that is homologous with a physical field. The disciplinary anthology's table of contents provides a "cognitive map" that "frames [the] interactive behavior" (Chen 22-23) that we call scholarly activity by creating the grammatical illusions constituting its disciplinary objects and naturalizing them, like flowers in a field. Our primary illusion has been, until recently, the canon.

2. Canon

Jonathan Kramnick argues that the eighteenth century was, via Spenser, able to mentally transform feudal social structures into systems of literary valuation, thereby creating an aristocracy of culture. But holiness, the auratic, is not enough to inaugurate the thoroughly institutional process of canonization. Joseph Warton's list (Shakespeare, Milton, Spenser) makes a holy trinity, not a canon. A "canon" is a list of texts that has been ratified by the clergy as springing from divine inspiration, and the discipline of English literature – insofar as it takes up many religious tasks for a secular world – needed its gods, its holy trinity, before the texts that they inspired could be determined and heretics excluded.

Additionally, there is no possible way to construe as "the canon" the complete list of authors about whom Samuel Johnson wrote his famous prefaces: some of our canonicals are among them, but many are now forgotten.⁶ As Boswell put it, Johnson wrote prefaces "to any dunce's works."⁷ Thomas Bonnell calls John Bell's 109-volume *The Poets of Great Britain Complete from Chaucer to Churchill* (1776-1782) "a comprehensive English literary canon," but notices immediately that "the edition was lopsided: forty-seven of the poets had written within the 140-year span from [Milton to Gray], and only three poets within the preceding 250 years (Chaucer, Spenser, and Donne)" (130). Moreover, many of the eighteenth-century poets whose entire poetical works are included in Bell are not at all what we would consider canonical: Savage, Tickell, Lyttelton, Watts, Pitt, to name just a few. These "vast" eighteenth century lists forged by Johnson's *Works* and Bell's *Poets* are too large and unwieldy to qualify as "the canon." Alok Yadav's *Before the Empire of English* dates the canon's emergence later, sometime between 1810 and 1860. "By 1810, George Crabbe could refer to 'the vast collection of English poetry,'" Yadav says. He continues: "in 1857, [Trollope] refers to 'the imperishable list of English poets'" (27). As I will show in what follows, a "vast" list becomes a canon, an imperishable short-list, during that 50-year span. Authors and works can more easily be considered "imperishable" if not too numerous to be remembered by future generations.

Though it does not give us a canon, Bell's *The Poets of Great Britain* does something to transform the vast list of English authors into a canon,⁸ albeit not quite enough. Bell's plan included the intent to "print entire, without abstraction or mutilation of poems, or parts of poems, the whole original pieces in English."⁹ **This [body metaphor](#) is pervasive in the advertisements, prefaces, and titles of miscellaneous poetry collections produced throughout the eighteenth century.**

3. Miscellaneous Collections.

Miscellanies do not pretend to present us with “British literary history,” offering instead recently written, often previously unpublished poems. Early in the eighteenth century, miscellanies continue to look like the coterie epistle, imitating manuscripts circulated by aristocrats. Richard Steele's dedication to Congreve in his *Poetical Miscellanies* (London: Tonson, 1714) thus attests to their social interactions and engages in that rivalry through compliments typical of manuscript collections:

As much as I Esteem You for Your Excellent Writings, by which You are an Honour to our Nation; I chuse rather, as one that has passed many Happy Hours with You, to celebrate that easie Condescension of Mind and Command of a pleasant Imagination, which give You the uncommon Praise of a Man of Wit
The Reflection upon this most equal, amiable, and correct Behaviour . . . has quite diverted me from acknowledging your several Excellencies as a Writer; but to dwell particularly on those Subjects, would have no very good Effect upon the following Performances of my Self and Friends: thus I confess to You, your Modesty is spared only by my Vanity

This miscellany is as much a performance or showing of friendships and alliances as it is a collection containing "performances," as poems are called throughout the prefaces of eighteenth-century collections.

Miscellanies equate individual poems with persons, with bodies, as one can see in **the spate of [multivolume collections](#) published mid-eighteenth century (the Dodsley group)**. Miscellanies, including the Dodsley group, organize their poems neither by poet, nor by theme or tone, nor by any historical overview – most if not all the poets are living. Given the hodgepodge

appearance of poems throughout the volume, the table of contents listing their order of appearance resembles a scrambled index. In fact, some such collections I have seen have no table of contents, putting instead the index on the first few pages (Pearch). At one point, Welsh calls the table of contents "an index 'which seems to me to / beckon'" (266), but in fact, indices can be generated automatically because the words comprising them appear in the text. In contrast, the table of contents requires creating names for major sections of a book. These titles can only be established as such through layout, by being set off from the rest of the text in a particular way, with numbers and large type, as evinced by Welsh's headline for the making of a table of contents: "Epitome Stunned Immortal Source Text!" (267).¹⁰

Bell's multivolume collection more drastically replaces the ad hoc with the systematic than does any disciplinary anthology. Bell's volumes place all an author's poems together either in one volume or in sequentially numbered volumes, all uniform in appearance. Sequential volume numbering of each author's works – conceived of as a whole body – constitutes "THE" history of British literature. The numbering works in chronological order, creating a list that admits of no insertions or deletions.¹¹ This fixed list, Tricia Lootens argues, "evokes a violent siege mentality" in which "human interactions with great art" are limited to "disruption and desecration" (8). Bell's volumes constitute authorial bodies clothed in the uniform appropriate for soldiers manning their can(n)on.

Had the miscellanies prevailed, and Bell never collected, our canon would be a canon of particular poems. But had Bell's list become our canon, it would be a canon of the complete works written by particular authors. Unlike Bell's collection, the table of contents in the disciplinary anthology properly speaking distributes these soldiers evenly across a disciplinary field, laid out strategically by period to cover all of literary history, all poets having

approximately equal amounts of cannon fodder – or poems – to defend their position in the canon.

4. Anthology

There has been a lot of confusion over the term “anthology.” Eighteenth-century scholarship analyzing material modes of production such as Barbara Benedict’s book on the anthology ignore what these artifacts look like, equating miscellanies and anthologies because, as Savir Kaul once said to me, “they are both modular.” However, the interfaces with literature presented by miscellaneous collections, beauties, and anthologies differ dramatically. For instance, there is absolutely no resemblance between a Norton table of contents and index, on the one hand, and whatever front or end matter appears in any eighteenth-century miscellanies. But what do the visual aspects of these various interfaces have to do with anything? Paratextual matter visually carves up the literary world, rendering its objects visible, comprehensible, intellectually manipulable. Ultimately it is precisely the visual, physical distinctions and separations that help bring into existence what has been until most recently our quintessential disciplinary objects.

Though used in its Greek and Latin forms for the titles of excerpts from Latin poetry and prose, as well as for the Greek Anthology,¹² “anthology” is first Englished in a title by Joseph Ritson, *The English Anthology*, a collection which unfortunately does not adequately represent the medium. Nor do the volumes called *The Annual Anthology* (1799-1800) edited by Robert Southey. While A. E. Case and Greg Kucich distinguish between mere collections and anthologies that represent “the tradition” of British literary works, Benedict calls all miscellaneous poetry collections “anthologies.” She can only do so, I would suggest, because

she does not go beyond the 1780s in examining poetry collections, and so does not see the profound differences between miscellanies and anthologies.

Miscellanies collect poetry that has not yet been published by popular as well as anonymous poets: reading it is a way of entering a coterie rather than learning a tradition. Disciplinary anthologies, by contrast, publish only dead poets, their "modern poetry" sections, if they have them, being more miscellaneous in form than anthological – that is, more provisionally defining "the tradition" than the other sections of the collection. Thus, William St. Clair follows Benedict's lead in calling every poetry collection an "anthology." However, because he is interested in the Romantic era, in practice, he distinguishes between what I would call "miscellanies" and what I wish to define as the "disciplinary anthology": "Between 1600 until after 1774, English printed anthologies failed to perform the selecting, canonizing, and memorializing role . . . which has often been seen as among the essential purposes and characteristics of the genre" (71).¹³ The anthology properly defined physically incarnates the canon whereas miscellanies and multi-volume collections of British literature do not.

Lootens reminds us that Wendell Harris rejects the "seductive apparent parallel" between literary and biblical canons, but then herself performs an archeology of the term as it came to be applied to texts of whatever sort, insisting on the persistence of its etymology in current conceptions. For Pliny, Lootens points out, a canon was a "model statue":

Classical society sculpted and revered a pantheon whose forms were textual, personal, and architectural; the sacred texts, standards, and saints of the medieval church glorified not only each other but the educational, legal, and religious structures of the society that sanctified them. Thus canonization has been a

figurative [i.e., sculptural, plastic] as well as a textual process: if the canon's home is a library, it is a library with busts. (5)

About “the language actually used by the [current] debaters” of the canon, Lootens says, “Not only does it slip between lists of texts and [sculptural] figures, but it vividly and repeatedly invokes a mythic canon that has, or is, a place – an architectural canon filled with the solid, plastic figures of High Art” (6).

At one remove from those physical sculptures, pictures of heads or busts populated early eighteenth-century single-author editions (Barchas 21-22). In 1750, *London Magazine* began running a series of biographies, and, like the single-author poetry editions published earlier in the century, each biography included a picture of a bust of the author or great man. Pictured memorial sculptures there became detachable from single-author books. Bell does not exactly take advantage of this liberation. He does not deviate from earlier publishing practices surrounding single-author texts. Just as he procured authoritative copytexts from poets' definitive editions, Bell's volumes offered as frontispieces portraits of 37 poets drawn and engraved from “BUSTS or PICTURES of the highest authority.”¹⁴ Moreover, Bell groups poems within each *oeuvre* by genre, offering poems “classed and arranged according to their several kinds, so that the whole of the same species of writing falls under the reader's eye in one and the same department of the book only.”¹⁵ Poems looking the same in form offer a unified body to the eye.

Hazlitt's 1825 anthology contains five heads put together in a kind of collage for its frontispiece. Like those joined heads, Hazlitt's “biographical and critical notices,” instead of forming individual headnotes, all appear in bulk at the front of the anthology:¹⁶ they therefore form a graphic counterpart to the pictured heads. Just as Sappho's picture becomes identified in

nineteenth-century translations of her poetry with the Greek characters of her name (Prins 69), these notes placed at the beginning of the poetry graphically recapitulate the pictured heads at the book's front. Southey's subsequent 1831 anthology moves biographical and critical notices to the beginning of each poet's *oeuvre*. In the disciplinary anthology, pictured heads have been replaced with headnotes: the author's head (headnote) is now no longer pictorial but purely graphic, and it has now also been joined to a body (poems) and feet (footnotes).

Hazlitt's *Specimens* does present authors in chronological order. But unlike George Ellis's 1790 *Specimens of Early English Poets* and the anonymously edited 1809 collection *Specimens of British Poets from Lord Surrey to Cowper*, it does not lay out the table of contents by King's reign. The first volume to actually periodize in the way that we do is William and Robert Chambers, *Readings in English Poetry: A Collection of Specimens from our best Poets From A.D. 1558 to 1860, Chronologically Arranged with Biographical Notices and Explanatory Notes* (1865), designed explicitly "as Reading-Books for upper classes in Schools." Here the periods aren't named, only dated, but, except for one short period corresponding to the Interregnum, all the periods are ours: Renaissance, Interregnum, Restoration, (short) Eighteenth-Century, Romantic, (early) Victorian. But while Hazlitt's table of contents doesn't explicitly periodize, a frontispiece containing heads of authors implicitly does: just as there is a pictured head, there is the age of Chaucer, the age of Shakespeare and Spenser, the age of Milton and Cowley, the age of Young, and the age of Burns. Again, the pictorial precedes its graphic instantiation that will occur later in Chambers's table of contents.

Nonetheless, it is precisely picturing authorship in which Hazlitt engages. He tells us in the Preface to his *Select British Poets, or New Elegant Extracts from Chaucer to the Present Time* that he is intent "to offer the public a Body of English Poetry, from Chaucer to Burns, such

as might at once satisfy individual curiosity and justify our national pride" (i): clearly instead of seeing an author as a body, **Hazlitt is envisioning "English Poetry" as a whole body**. He explicitly attacks previous collections for presenting readers with "a numberless quantity of shreds and patches" rather than a quantity and quality of works sufficient to represent an author's work. The allusion to Lear here clarifies Hazlitt's view: a body of poetic works without an organization and headnotes connecting them to both national poetic history and to the author is like a disinherited King Lear, a king of shreds and patches.

If it doesn't explicitly name literary periods, and doesn't join individual poets' heads to the bodies of their poetry, what makes Hazlitt's collection explicitly disciplinary is that it reconfigures a "vast collection" of past poets into a canon organized chronologically, forming the ground for disciplinary literary history.¹⁷ It does so *visually*, in its table of contents.

5. Table of Contents

Hazlitt's 1825 edition contains a list of authors more closely resembling the table of contents of Norton's 4th edition – perhaps our last canonical anthology – than anything before it ([see Table 1](#)). Many of the differences are accounted for by the larger number of pages in the Norton and by the fact that it includes prose and drama, not just poetry.¹⁸ Johnson may have been omitted from Hazlitt for reasons of copyright. The relative balance – Hazlitt contains more eighteenth-century poets, Norton more sixteenth- and seventeenth-century – has to do somewhat with his more limited historical knowledge, as is probably the case with the imbalance found in Bell. Also, Hazlitt's collection is light on early and middle-English verse because that area is so well-covered by Henry Headley's 1787 *Select Beauties of Ancient English Poetry* and George Ellis's 1790 *Specimens of the Early English Poets*, not to mention Thomas Percy's 1765 *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1775 [3rd ed.], 1794 [4th ed.]).

But it is not simply the content, the list, found in the table of contents that makes Hazlitt's *Specimens* the first disciplinary anthology. The way the table of contents looks creates the most profound feature of our canon: its gendering. Hazlitt's collection is marked by selectivity on aesthetic grounds, as he says in the introduction: "To possess a work of this kind ought to be like holding the contents of a library in one's hand without any of the refuse or 'baser matter'" (ii). Hazlitt says also that his collection is built upon the same plan as Vicessimus Knox's *Elegant Extracts* but that it "has been compressed by means of a more severe selection of matter" (i). The "'baser matter'" excluded from a view of Britain's "natural preeminence" (ii) in the field of Poetry is women's writing: Knox's volume of poetry contains women writers while Hazlitt's does not. Thomas Campbell's 1819 *Specimens* had included every "worm" who ever wrote between the time of Chaucer and Cowper, just like Johnson's multivolume collection, but in the space of a short anthology. But though its table of contents includes 246 entries, only 3 are women – they are outnumbered even by "anonymous." This is extraordinary given how popular women writers were at the time, and throughout the eighteenth-century – they were being published not only in single-author editions but in numerous literary annuals (Katherine D. Harris) and miscellanies. Many, many of the men appearing in Campbell's table of contents were less popular and less productive, not to mention less aesthetically valuable. Campbell's *Specimens* defensively presents us with a male body of English poetry. In Hazlitt's *Specimens*, each author's name appears in the table of contents in bold, last name only – the only exception being an "A" distinguishing Ambrose Philips from John Philips, author of "A Splendid Shilling." For Hazlitt, the work of gendering the canon has been done; he doesn't need to be defensive. One can list authors by last name if gender is not an issue: this is a male canon.

6. Interaction: Literary Criticism

According to Lootens, the canon is radically closed. She agrees with Alistair Fowler in seeing it as “a literary museum that could only be extended [by] the destructive attentions of a terrorist-critic” (2, qtd. in Lootens, 8). But if the canon itself is inextensible as a list, the authors and works themselves are infinitely elaborated by the existence of a discipline that generates biography and criticism, expanding upon anthology headnotes and explicating anthologized poems. In *The Achievement of Literary Authority*, Ina Ferris marks the moment when grub-street hacks working for publishers to puff their commodities were transformed into what Coleridge called the “clerisy”:¹⁹

As frequently noted, the definitive generic change instituted by [the founding of the *Edinburgh Review* (1802)] was the exchange of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment model of encyclopedic coverage (which had governed the monthly reviews of the previous century) for a model of selective evaluation. (25)

Literary criticism, directed at a mass-reading public, “the Republic of Letters,” rather than the smaller, clubbish public sphere addressed by Addison, Steele, and even Johnson, now took on a clearly pedagogical function as priests of high culture explained to the masses the reasoning behind their approbation or disapprobation of cultural objects.²⁰ These arbiters of taste simultaneously preserve the canon as immutable words and rewrite these words by embedding them, preserved like museum pieces, in critical discourse: they make the canon simultaneously closed and open, immutable and infinitely variable.

As Lootens points out, Palgrave, editor of Victorian poetry collections, has been called high literature’s “priest.” The evolution of books of excerpts, the way that they visually resemble quotations in literary criticism, bears out the connection between priestly anthologists and clerical critics. Rufus Griswold’s *The Female Poets of America* (first published in 1848) and

Eric S. Robertson's *English Poetesses* (published in London, Paris, and New York in 1883) – these two collections do not present poetry in traditional anthological fashion. Instead, they embed full poems in essays about the woman and her work. That could have been the form literary criticism took, and of course literary critics do occasionally quote full poems, but that exception proves the rule. What they really quote and elaborate upon are what the late-eighteenth and early nineteenth century Anglo-American readers would have called "beauties."

Beauties or collections of short passages, resembling earlier commonplace books, are graphically most like the poetry we find embedded in the literary criticism that came to dominate the field. The book of beauties is visually connected to the literary critical essay, and, like it, is "design'd to advance the reader's taste" (Goldsmith, *Beauties*, 1767, ii). Literary criticism as it developed in the late eighteenth century looks like a book of beauties with the interpolated commentary justifying their selection.

7. Visualizing Literature

The relatively new (ten-year-old) field of Information Visualization explores how people construct and then navigate through "cognitive maps" (Chen 22). For each person, there is an "internalized analogy," visualization experts argue, "in the human mind to the physical layout of the environment" (Chen 21). That environment includes, obviously, physical books and pages, what Lev Manovich calls "the printed word interface" which provides a "rich set of metaphors, ways of navigating through content, ways of accessing and storing data" (73). According to Chaomei Chen, cognitive maps are built in stages:

A. "Landmark Knowledge"

B. "Route Knowledge" -- "Those who have acquired route knowledge will be able to travel along a designated route comfortably without the need to rely on landmarks."

C. "Survey Knowledge" -- now people can "optimize their route for navigation" and get back on track if they wander off route. "The cognitive map is not considered fully developed until *survey* knowledge has been acquired" (22).

We can see how the cognitive map of the field of literature was built up by printed poetry collections in these stages: A. landmark knowledge is provided by miscellanies; B. Route Knowledge by historical collections; C. survey knowledge by anthologies.

A. Landmark Knowledge: the Miscellany

Robert Southey published *The Annual Anthology* for two years, in 1799 and 1800, but he had planned to publish it continuously. On the one hand, the volume looks forward to the first literary annual published in 1823, the *Forget Me Not* edited by William Coombe (subsequent *Forget Me Nots* were edited by Frederic Shoberl), although the first literary annual is unlike its successors insofar as it is a kind of combination of a poetry collection and an *Annual Register*, a news journal. Southey's 1799 and 1800 volumes are a misnomer: they are not like disciplinary anthologies at all, but are instead miscellaneous in structure: they offer, as the "Advertisement" to the first volume claims, poems that have never been printed or printed only recently in *The Morning Post*, thus otherwise destined to die the death of printed ephemera. Like editors of the literary annuals to come, Southey asks potential authors to send him work. But Southey's tables of contents for the two volumes differ from the nineteenth-century annuals where the author of almost every piece is named, if not fully then through initials or by mention of previous works. Southey's *Annual Anthology* resembles more closely Richard Steele's *Poetical Miscellanies* of 1714 than Shoberl's *Forget Me Not* of 1824 insofar as it lists only some poems as by authors, and those authors are recognized names: Coleridge, Robinson, Lamb, Southey himself, in the 1800 collection, Pope, Swift, etc., in the 1714. These author names are landmarks; the table of contents provides landmark knowledge.

B. Route Knowledge: the Historical Collection

In the preface to his three-volume poetry collection *Specimens of the Later English Poets* (1807), Southey plainly acknowledges that his ambition is to present works of historical interest rather than providing anthological knowledge of the canon: "My business was to collect specimens as for a hortus siccus; not to cull flowers as for an anthology" (iv). Here he uses the term anthology properly, in a way he had not used it in 1799. Anthologies contain poems comparable to *living* flowers precisely because canonical and thus their immortality assured. But in this 1807 collection, Southey chooses rather to gratify curiosity: the reader's desire to know the peculiarities of the age, the manners and customs of the time. Southey sees his collection as coinciding with the intentions of George Ellis's: "I wished, as Mr. Ellis has done in the earlier ages, to exhibit specimens of every writer, whose verses appear in a substantive form, and find their place upon the shelves of the collector" (iv). Southey and Ellis do not attempt, as does Henry Headley and later Hazlitt, to present "legitimate and established Poets" (Headley xxxii) but rather excerpts from "the cabinets of literary collectors" in order to gratify "the curiosity of the public" (Ellis ii).

This 1807 collection is for historians, antiquarians, and philologists:

Down to the Restoration it is to be wished, that every Poet, however unworthy of the name, should be preserved. In the worst volume of elder date, the historian may find something to assist, or direct his enquiries; the antiquarian something to elucidate what requires illustration; the philologist something to insert in the margin of his dictionary. (vii)

This kind of collection will give students of great literature Route Knowledge: you can drive through the time, distinguishing brush (history) from landmarks (great works) based on which

kind of book gathers them, which one physically holds them. You know the route without having an overall picture in your mind of the landscape.

C. Survey Knowledge

Something major happens in the movement from Route to Survey Knowledge achieved via the disciplinary anthology. In introducing his 1807 collection of curiosities, Southey splits literary knowledge in two: "The taste of the publick may be better estimated from indifferent Poets than from good ones; because the former write for their contemporaries, the latter for posterity" (iv). "The latter" are precisely those who will appear on a different table than history: they will inhabit rather a field of immortals divided up by literary period.

8. Period

Both literary critics and historians say that the concept of "literary period" first came into existence in Britain during the Romantic "period" (Wellek, "Periodization" 484; Vogler 132; Blix 52; de Grazia 96-97; Chandler 108-110). As Thomas Vogler recognizes, though, to say "the notion of 'literary period' emerged during the Romantic period" is circular if not strictly speaking tautological, dating the emergence of a disciplinary object as an instance of that object:

For us the periodization of history continues to bear the ideological stamp of Romanticism, the 'period' which initiated our concept of period and to which all discussions of period inevitably return. . . . What we continue to call the Romantic period raises in history the question of history. . . . How we deal with Romanticism will be the touchstone for how we deal with the concept of historical period at its most profound level. (Vogler 132, 134)

If previous authors were aware of stepping onto the stage of history, Romantic writers were the first to see literary history as printed performance within book history.

The period concept, as Wellek has shown, is "a section of time to which some sort of unity is ascribed" (485). A specious (Reider 26-29) or "imperfect" unity (Wellek, "Periodization" 485), the totality thus generated presents us with a homology of "the Author": in critical discourse, periods are personified bits of time just as an author's name personifies a "body" of texts. Like the figure of the Author, the concept of literary period unites history with style. It is "a time-section dominated by a set of literary norms (conventions, genres, ideals of versification, standards of characters, etc.) whose introduction, spread, diversification, integration, decay, and disappearance can be traced" (Wellek 484). One can see how necessary the notion of pervasive style to the idea of the literary period by contrasting it to the idea of the "age," a politically and socially determined historical moment. Both Richard Hurd and Thomas Warton speak of "ages" of poetry: Elizabethan poetry is, Warton says, "commonly called the golden age of English poetry."²¹ Wellek rightly notes that, in contrast to the *age*, "the dependence of literary *periodization* on political and social history has [. . .] never been complete" (483).

Thomas Hayward's 1738 collection of excerpts of poetry, *The British Muse*, might at first glance seem to periodize poems. However, it prints those excerpts "according to the Order of TIME in which they wrote; to shew the gradual IMPROVEMENTS of our Poetry and Language" (title page). Moreover, the collection does not collect works by author situated in historical chronology but rather by subject: it is "A Collection of Thoughts Moral, Natural, and Sublime, of our English Poets . . . The Whole digested Alphabetically under their respective Heads" (title page). Organizing poetry according to "ages" often, as here, implies evolution, but it can also imply devolution, even or especially if designated by the terms "neoclassical" or "Augustan" which implicitly claim similar but lesser greatness. In contrast to this notion of age, each period

has its own specific criterion of greatness that differs from all the others and according to which canonical shortlists can be made.²²

The birth of the concept of the period, I would argue, requires P. B. Shelley's response to Thomas Love Peacock's "Four Ages of Poetry." Declaring Milton "to stand alone between the ages of gold and silver," Peacock attacks "the Lake Poets" for faux-primitivism, for their "modern-antique compound of frippery and barbarism" (762-763). For Shelley as for Peacock, primitive language was most poetical:

In the infancy of society every author is necessarily a poet, because language itself is poetry [. . .] Every original language near to its source is in itself the chaos of a cyclic poem.

Primitive language is poetic because it provides "pictures of integral thoughts" or metaphors instead of mere "signs for portions or classes of thought" – which is to say, dead metaphors. Poets become more rare as time goes on because language devolves from poetry into dead metaphors: "new poets," Shelley says, can and should "arise to create afresh the associations which have been thus disorganized" by becoming dead metaphors, too habitual to be felt as poetic and thought through as models of what they depict. Poets are needed to revive language for "all the nobler purposes of human intercourse." The exceptional genius, the true poet, turns language back into the cyclic poem it once was by unearthing its primitive potential for the people of his age who have become immune to it (1073). Thus, when he answers Peacock in his "Defence of Poetry," Shelley incorporates the primitive not as past historical moment but as present possibility.

Shelley's view pervades Romantic theory of the 1790s in Germany as well as analyzed by Simon Critchley: "the naïveté of romanticism [. . .] is the belief in the possibility of

producing a modern artwork that would be the peer, but not the imitation, of the art of antiquity" (102). The possibility of modern primitivism lifts the works of any of Shelley's contemporaries able to cultivate it up out of their historical moment as expressing the time's zeitgeist. For Shelley, "his thoughts are the germs of the flower and the fruit of latest time." The Poet expresses his time or period by intellectually rising above it as "legislators or prophets" (1073).

It takes a while for what we know as literary period to appear visually in tables of contents. The first volume of Chalmers's 1810 *Works of the English Poets*, his *Poems of Chaucer*, includes an "Index" of all the poets' names, organized alphabetically, whose works are collected in the 21 volumes. It indexes by name rather than organizing by period. Earlier volumes had at least organized poets chronologically rather than alphabetically, but mere chronology doth not a period make. In 1865, William and Robert Chamber's *Readings in English Poetry* lays its contents on the table this way: "POETS: 1558-1649." There is of course political significance to those dates, reigns and political upheavals delineated, but it differs from both Ellis and Headley in collecting beneath those dates exemplary poets with their imperishable works.

The exchange between Peacock and Shelley took place in 1820-1821, though Shelley's "Defence" was not published until much later (1840). It therefore participates in the process of immortalizing poets as exemplary of an age. This process involved **channeling "non-canonical" poetry into [collections that directly contrast with the disciplinary anthology](#)**. Subsidiary collections present poetry interesting for reasons other than their aesthetic value. The presence of one or two items of historical interest only in Southey's 1831 anthology rather proves than disproves the rule of selecting according to aesthetic value: curious works of historical interest are tabled, confined to the historical kind of poetry collection. The contrast –

bibliographic scapegoating, one might call it – is created visually and physically, by putting canonical authors at their own separate communal tables in their own separate types of text.

Although Shelley's argument with Peacock presents a conceptual basis for the notion of authors exemplifying periods, Shelley's *Defence* does not give us a list of literary periods which are notoriously difficult either to define exactly or to do without. The protocols of the disciplinary anthology's table of contents lay out a list of authors exemplifying their literary periods – that is, as subheadings of them. Since "period" is concept central to our discipline without ever really being definable, the notion is perhaps established less by disciplinary discourse than by habitual interaction with physical objects and habitual visual apprehension via specific print interfaces.

Literary period becomes a disciplinary object when tables of contents map time onto space.²³ The tables of contents in Hazlitt and Southey helped create the notion of literary period and, with it, our discipline: they participate in the creation of our discipline by transforming time ("century") into the name for a list of objects (authors names, poem titles) laid beneath them in the physical space of a table-page.

9. Conclusion

I have been examining here the way that the various media of literary collections lay contents on the table and thereby organize for us a disciplinary field and indeed the work of our own lives as editors and critics. To say that one is putting something on the table is a way of metaphorically physicalizing a business transaction, the transaction here being the discipline of vernacular literary studies. But for me the word "table" has also its seventeenth- and eighteenth-century meanings. In *Hamlet* and in Locke, tables of the brain are malleable by what one

imprints on them, Samuel Johnson terrified (in *Rambler* No. 4) that the imprinting on paper might directly without one's own consent or intervention print ideas on the tables of one's mind.

The table of contents in the medium of the disciplinary anthology allows our eyes to run over a field, organizing our world cognitively. This "plain" may be like the cities Sodom and Gomorrah, but for all that, Welsh insists, it is a "not loathsome array of which man takes hold" (257); a table is a useful urbanity. For Welsh, demystifying the artificiality of literary objects does not invalidate them: "Take hold," she orders; study and learn them all the while seeing their genesis as human artifacts. We can recognize the cognitive impact of our medial environment without becoming technological determinists. Our literary world is continuously transformed by theory and practice, ideas and materials: conceptual developments predict and inure us to new media that themselves re-cognize how we think.

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Subsidiary Essays Offering Greater Detail, linked in the text above:

[Body Imagery Figuring Kinds of Poetry Collections](#)

[Mid-Century Miscellaneous Collections: the Dodsley Group](#)

[From Commonplace Book to Rhyming Dictionary to Beauty](#)

[Historical Curiosities versus Imperishable Text](#)

Notes

¹ The fourth edition contains two women authors, Anne Finch and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, that the 2nd edition of 1968 did not; it also contains scientific prose, including John Locke, whereas the 2nd edition contained only Bacon.

² It seems to me that Patey avoids his own insight when he says that "The aestheticization of literature [in the Romantic era] revis[ed] the canon" (27): he should have said, transformed a list into a canon, given his earlier arguments (18).

³ The version of it printed in 1824 was not mass-printed, not produced for sale, until after its table of contents page had been altered. The living authors were removed from the 1824 version, the proverbial dead white males alone appearing in the 1825 edition that was finally produced and disseminated.

⁴ I define both types shortly.

⁵ The rise of the discipline of English is, of course, historically overdetermined. Other accounts, be they complimentary or competing, might make more sense in other interpretive contexts. For those accounts, see Court, Crawford, Engel, Moran, Scholes, Soffer, and Wellek (*Rise*).

⁶ *The Works of the English Poets, with Prefaces Biographical and Critical* (1779).

⁷ Boswell 3.137, qtd. in Bonnell 128 n. 2.

⁸ Bell's list is much closer to the canon than Johnson's.

⁹ Bell, *Cowley* 1:[lviii], qtd. in Bonnell 133.

¹⁰ I am grateful to Jerome McGann for this insight.

¹¹ At first, each issue of the 109 volumes was assigned a number based on the order of its printing; that number appeared on paper labels affixed to wrappers. After the whole set was completely printed and assembled, in May of 1783, the volume numbers were assigned that

transformed the collection into a chronological list of poets (Bonnell 133, Note to Table 1). The difference between volume numbers based on chronology and order-printed numbers differentiates poetry as field from its specific productions, its material performances.

¹² See Alan Cameron (*The Greek Anthology*, 1993) and James Hutton (*Cornell Studies in Classical Philology*, v. 23 and 28).

¹³ In the elided portion of this quotation, St. Clair claims that manuscript collections of poetry did indeed perform anthologizing functions. I disagree with him about that, and will argue against it below.

¹⁴ *Morning Post* 16 May 1777, qtd. in Bonnell 136.

¹⁵ Bell, *Prior* 1:[xlvi], qtd. in Bonnell 134.

¹⁶ This in some ways resembles the state of HTML-generated web pages at our moment – only one head per body; yet, when the separate HTML pages are generated by one TEI document, multiple heads are possible. Unfortunately, TEI garbles the metaphor a bit, since multiple heads occur WITHIN and not before bodies.

¹⁷ John Aikin's 1820 *Select Works of the British Poets. With Biographical and Critical Prefaces* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1820) is another contender for the first disciplinary anthology, as much of what is said here about Hazlitt's collection is similarly true of Aikin's. However, Aikin is concerned with educating young schoolboys, including, he says, no poems "unsuited to the perusal of youth. The Work, within these bounds, may be termed a 'Library of Classical Poetry,' and may safely be recommended to the heads of Schools in general, and to the libraries of Young Persons" (Preface).

¹⁸ The 4th edition of the *Norton Anthology of Poetry* was edited by Margaret Ferguson, Mary Jo Salter, and Jon Stallworthy. Those editors chose to reflect the historical recovery efforts by feminists and included women writers. Hence, its table of contents is very unlike Hazlitt's.

¹⁹ Samuel Taylor Coleridge (36); see also Deborah White.

²⁰ The advent of a mass reading public during the Romantic era has been debated (cf. Klancher to Cressy, e.g.). However, St. Clair documents a huge rise in the number of volumes printed after 1774, as well as a huge increase in bookseller's businesses, that seem only possible given a growing market (114-120). But whether in the fantasy about readership maintained by writers or in actuality, a new, bigger reading public, extending beyond coterie or club, needed rules for reading and laws laid down for arbitrating issues of taste (Ferris 22-23).

²¹ Thomas Warton, *The History of English Poetry*, 4 vols. (London, 1774-1781), 3.490, quoted in Wellek 482; Wellek also mentions Hurd's "On the Golden Age of Queen Elizabeth" (1759).

²² Wellek differentiates the notion of "age" from "period," but Robert Griffin productively intermingles the two.

²³ I get this idea from reading Blix, Chandler, and Lowenthal.