Introduction

Just before the French Revolution, the utopian writer Louis-Sebastien Mercier set out to imagine what libraries might look like in the twenty-fifth century. The only books left on the shelves, as a citizen of 2440 explained to Mercier's hypothetical time traveler, would be neither large nor new.

> Those of the greatest judgment amongst us have extracted the substance of thousands of volumes, which they have included in a small duodecimo; not unlike those skilful chemists, who concentrate the virtues of many plants in a small phial, and cast aside the refuse. We have abridged what seemed of most importance; the best have been reprinted; and the whole corrected according to the true principles of morality. Our compilers are a set of men estimable and dear to the nation.[1]

Present-day futurologists continue to predict the disappearance of the book. Yet for the digital technologies that we now picture compacting libraries, Mercier substituted verbal operations: abridgment, expurgation, compilation. The information overload that Mercier projected into our future had already begun in his lifetime. So had an arsenal of devices for containing it – the "shelf or two of BEAUTIES, ELEGANT EXTRACTS and ANAS" which Coleridge estimated sourly at "nine-tenths of the reading of the reading public."[2]

Two centuries on, anthologists have yet to become national heroes. Mercier's utopia stands alone in a tradition where anthologies have more often inspired dystopianism, even paranoia. Writing a few years later, the reformer Hannah More blamed their editors for the decay of morals: to let people assume that you had read the entire work from which an anthology-piece was excerpted, she warned girls, was no better than lying outright. In the 1840s, less predictably, Engels took time out from *The Condition of the Working Class in England* to execrate the poetic albums that littered the sofa-tables of the Manchester bourgeosie.

In the 1980s, the American poet David Antin aphorized that "anthologies are to poets as the zoo is to animals." More recently, Marjorie Perloff called for undergraduates to swear off brand-name mineral water, in the hope that abstainers could afford unabridged books rather than hackneyed fragments.[3]

Few readers listen. In Britain today, anthologies count among the only volumes of poetry that stand even a chance at mass-market success. In North America, where the economics of college survey courses have made "poem" nearly synonymous with "anthology-piece," the canon wars of the 1980s were fought over anthologies' tables of contents. Nor are anthology-pieces confined to the book. Poetic tags have long spilled over the borders of anthologies themselves to decorate billboards, calendars, even playing cards. Anthology-pieces ornament tombstones, inspire advertisements, occasion sermons, vertebrate dictionaries. More immediately (given that no argument about *Clarissa* or *Middlemarch* can appeal to more than synecdochal evidence), extracts underwrite the discipline of literary criticism as we know it. Like book reviews or film previews, the pages that follow depend on a gentleman's agreement to take the parts of a work for the whole.

Not even their most devastating critics have been able to explain how a culture without anthologies would function – to imagine, in Antin's metaphor, what a natural habitat for literature would be. Yet although literary critics spend at least as much time quoting out of context as do literary anthologists, the profession that teaches anthologies has provided few theories of the genre. The energy invested in uncovering subtle intertextual maneuvers correlates logically enough with a lack of interest in more crudely parasitic operations like excerpting, abridging, compiling. Source-study provides even fewer conceptual tools to deal with the hackneyed scraps of verse that litter eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novels; within an esthetics of difficulty, familiar quotations pose either an ethical embarrassment or a hermeneutic dead end. Nor does the language of criticism leave much room for anthologists. The middleman who excerpts cuts across the divisions of labor that make it possible to understand texts, or even to catalogue them: writer and reader, writer and critic, writer and publisher, writer and censor. The modern use of "reader" as a synonym for "anthology" defines anthologies not only as a product of writing but as a trace of reading – though also a device to spare, or prevent, its own readers from reading all the editor did. Compilers elude what

Roland Barthes calls "the pitiless divorce which the literary institution maintains between the producer of a text and its user, between its owner and its customer."[4]

Even more fundamentally, the anthology violates modern readers' expectation that the material unit (the book) should coincide with a verbal unit (the text). As a result, the anthologies which provide a vehicle for literary history have rarely become its object. We know more about the self-confident Renaissance culture of the commonplace than about its self-effacing successors.[5] Although the canon wars have drawn attention to the power of anthologists to shape national identity, a criticism which reduces anthologies to their evaluative function can do little more than catalogue binary oppositions: including or excluding particular texts, over- or under-representing a given category of authors, acknowledging or ignoring new writing.[6] Anthologies are more than a referendum. They determine not simply who gets published or what gets read, but who reads, and how.

Approached as a genre in its own right rather than a container for others, the anthology begins to look like a rather less conservative institution. Where poets and critics interested in the content of anthologies have tended (with good reason) to attack their resistance to change, those few who examine their form – most searchingly Robert Crawford and Barbara Benedict – have argued on the contrary for the liberating potential of the combinatory structure that allows anthologies (in Benedict's words) to "pull language out of legal frameworks and decentralize literary culture . . . by their subversive deferral of a central authority."[7] Benedict's Bakhtinian celebration of anthologies' formal variety is not, I think, irreconcilable with a suspicion of their literary-historical unanimity. At once the voice of authority and a challenge to prevailing models of authorship, the anthology traces its ambiguity to the late eighteenth century, when an organicist theory of the text and a proprietary understanding of authorship gathered force at the same moment as legal and educational changes lent compilers new power. Even biography confirms the contradictory role that the anthology took on at that time: of two of the most influential eighteenth-century collections, William Dodd's *Beauties of Shakespeare* and William Enfield's *Speaker*, one was edited by a future forger, the other by the author of a treatise on intellectual property.

The anthology's effect on reading practices is equally equivocal. The proliferation of schoolbooks that followed the 1774 defeat of perpetual

copyright in Britain appears at first to confirm Rolf Engelsing's hypothesis of a late-eighteenth-century shift from the rereading of a few prized texts to the consumption of many ephemeral ones. This is less because anthologists encouraged extensive reading, however, than because of the energy they spent staving it off. Vicesimus Knox, whose *Elegant Extracts* (1783) swelled to enough volumes to create a market for meta-anthologies like *The Prose Epitome* and *The Poetical Epitome, or, Elegant Extracts . . . Abridged from the Larger Volume*, elsewhere claimed that the "superfluity" of books turned every reader into an anthologist: "the art of printing has multiplied books to such a degree, that . . . it becomes necessary to read in the classical sense of the word, LEGERE, that is, to *pick out* . . . the best parts of books." Nearly a century later, Francis Turner Palgrave compiled the *Golden Treasury* to cure a culture in which "everything is to be read, and everything only once."[8] The solution, apparently, was to refrain from reading "everything" – not only to ignore non-anthologized texts, but to pass over all but a few passages in the works that did make it into the *Treasury*. While the rise of extensive reading remains difficult to assign to a specific historical moment, what does seem clear is that generation after generation of anthologists saw their campaign against speed-reading as a losing battle. Far from replicating the move away from intensive reading that its editors registered in the culture at large, the history of the anthology inverts it. The moment to which Engelsing dates that shift is precisely when the early eighteenth-century miscellany – which, as Barbara Benedict has shown, valued variety and novelty – gave way to anthologists' mission not only to reprint older literature, but to revive a style of reading that they situated in the past.[9]

By reproducing scattered fragments while excising much longer stretches, however, even Knox and Palgrave marked the moments of intensive reading that they invited as the exception rather than the rule. Far from substituting extensive for intensive reading, anthologies forced their editors alternately to re-enact and to undo that historical shift by oscillating constantly between the two. Within each source, they distinguished some passages to be read once and immediately forgotten from others to be quoted, memorized, republished, and re-read. The anthology trained readers to pace themselves through an unmanageable bulk of print by sensing when to skip and where to linger. In the process, its editors set an example for the stop-and-start rhythm of reading that made possible new genres like the gothic novel (which punctuated prose narrative with verse epigraphs), the

life-and-letters biography (which used narratorial summaries to frame epistolary excerpts), and even the tourist guidebook (which by the 1830s, as James Buzard has shown, came to ornament logistical instructions about the quickest routes with snatches of poetry to recite upon reaching a scenic stopping-place).[10] In each case, the contrast between two paces of reading – a leisured appreciation of beauties and an impatient, or efficient, rush through the plot – allowed critics to project the divided structure of individual texts onto the social makeup of the reading public.

Within a culture of the excerpt, the novel forms a test case. Few genres have been better placed to escape the anthology's sphere of influence. Sheer scale helps define the novel. So do the pace and duration of reading which that scale elicits. But the novel depends just as much on readers' resistance to those demands.[11] Skipping (or anthologizing) and skimming (or abridging) have never been separable from a genre that cracks under its own weight. What has come to be studied in classrooms and endorsed from pulpits is not the novel itself so much as the novelistic anthology-piece, whether actual or potential.

This is not to say that the "rise" of the novel correlates directly with the representation of novels in anthologies. On the contrary, over the course of the nineteenth century editors narrowed their generic range until the anthology-piece became tacitly synonymous with the lyric. Even in late-twentieth-century America, where the intellectual superiority of novel-readers over non-novel-readers appears to be more uncritically accepted than at any other time or place, size alone has sufficed to ensure anthologies' displacement of the novel by the theoretically less canonical genre of the short story. The recent appearance on North American campuses of a series entitled "Norton Anthology Editions" – one-volume novels marketed to buyers of the *Norton Anthology of English Literature* and designed, as the preface to the latter puts it, to "match" the *NAEL* – betrays the supplementary status of a genre that has become central to our imagination of the canon but whose size prevents it from entering that canon's most concrete material manifestation.[12] Norton's urge to make the anthology coextensive with the curriculum suggests how difficult it is to classify a genre resistant to one but essential to the other. The contradiction to which the portmanteau phrase "Anthology Editions" responds raises questions not only about the place of the novel within the canon, but about the relation of the canon to the book.

Until modernism made novels more difficult and didacticism less respectable, however, the novel eluded the anthology for qualitative reasons even more than quantitative ones. The anthology contained moral truths and esthetic touchstones, the novel corrupted morals and taste; one was expected to be memorized and re-used, the other to be devoured and discarded. While novelists gave their name often enough to the individual anthologies examined in the following chapters – from Defoe's *Serious Reflections during the Life and Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, to Richardson's *Collection of Moral Sentiments,* to the *Beauties of Sterne*, to the *Wit and Wisdom of Sir Walter Scott*, to George Eliot's *Sayings* and *Birthday Book*, to George Meredith's *Birthday Book* and *Pilgrim's Scrip* – the novel remained largely absent from the more encyclopedic multiply-authored anthologies that defined the canon. When Virginia Woolf congratulated Hardy on his absence from an anthology of English prose, she invoked the commonplace that the two genres have nothing in common: "The great novelists very seldom stop in the middle or the beginning of their great scenes to write anything that one could cut out with a pair of scissors or loop around with a line of red ink . . . One must not go to [novelists] for perfect passages, descriptions, perorations, reflections so highly wrought that they can stand alone without their context." As it happens, by the time Woolf wrote this, Hardy had already been excerpted very publicly in a *Thomas Hardy Calendar* which culled 365 thoughts for the day, but her point stands.[13] For a novelist, to be excerpted is sometimes an honor (as for Richardson), sometimes an embarrassment (as for George Eliot), but always an anomaly. Yet as I'll suggest, precisely because anthologies tend to derive their raw material from more esthetically and morally serious genres (epic, lyric, essay), the novel tests the anthology's power. By salvaging anthology-pieces from their low origins, editors prove their authority to grant personal dispensations from generic rules.

The novel makes visible the anthology's own cult of the anomaly. An anthology-piece is not a random sample any more than an abridgment is a scale model. ("In the case of written composition," one Victorian editor complained, "there are no mechanical appliances, as there are in painting and architecture, for varying the scale.")[14] The anthology's ambition to represent a whole through its parts is always undermined by readers' awareness that the parts have been chosen for their difference from those left out. But anthologies drawn from the novel destabilize that delicate balance by subordinating the representative to the anomalous. In the hands of its editors, the novel rose piecemeal: islands of lyric

or didactic or sententious collectibles bobbing up occasionally from a sea of dispensable narrative. The novel could not have become respectable without the tokenism embodied in the anthology – a synecdochal esthetic that corresponds to an equally atomistic model of individual upward mobility. As I'll argue, the novel rose less by challenging the esthetic and social hierarchies which had kept it down than by projecting those stratifications onto its own audience. Far from leveling class or gender distinctions (as hostile critics accused in the eighteenth century, and as celebratory ones from Ian Watt to Margaret Anne Doody have more recently argued), the novel has internalized and even reinvented them.[15]

The size of the novel presents anthologists with the same problem as the size of its audience: good readers need to be sifted from bad ones as urgently as anthology-pieces from forgettable dross. Anthologies' logic of the exception does not simply demarcate quotable passages from the bulk of the novels in which they originally appeared. It also distinguishes anthologized authors from the mass of novelists, and the readers of anthologies (or reviews or criticism) from the novel's mass public. Each process feeds into the other. Eighteenth-century anthologists chose excerpts for truth, nineteenth-century editors for style, but esthetic beauties came to perform the same function that moral "beauties" had earlier filled in the structure of novels. Both punctuated the narrative, interrupted the time of reading, and forced readers to surface periodically from the self-indulgent pleasures of mimesis to a higher, less particularized, more disinterested plane. In that sense, the opposition between fragment and frame cuts across the historical shift from didactic to formalist criticism. Even as the discourses against which narrative was defined changed – from maxims in Richardson, to inset lyrics and landscape descriptions in Radcliffe, to antiquarian collectibles in Scott, to self-authored epigraphs and self-referential generalizations in Eliot – what remained constant was editors' urge to prise narration apart from static, atemporal, self-contained passages of something else. By training women to prefer one and men the other, abridgers and anthologists together exchanged the novel's traditional difference from other genres for a gendered (but constantly shifting) division of labor within its own public. In the century separating Richardson's death from George Eliot's, a culture in which serious critics appreciated timeless truths while frivolous ladies devoured stories gave way to one where women relished ornamental digressions and men demanded the narrative point. Yet both cultures debated

what to do with the non-narrative parts of novels, and both freighted that decision with social consequences.

The rise of serious discourse about novels – which required the description and proscription of alternative ways of reading them – can be dated to the years stretching from the first edition of *Clarissa* in 1747–48 to the wave of obituary assessment that followed George Eliot's death in 1880. Within those boundaries, the following chapters oscillate (rather like the texts they discuss) between survey and example, sandwiching an account of the anthology-piece's dislocations at the turn of the nineteenth century with more detailed case studies on either side. Chapter one charts the tension between narrative authority and epistolary compilation that Richardson's novels bequeathed their nineteenth-century successors. Although *Clarissa* credits its coherence to an inscribed editor who compiles, excerpts, and abridges letters – and its moral power to an author/publisher who anthologizes the novel in turn – each successive edition raised more urgent ethical questions about its characters' impulse to appropriate others' writing. Richardson himself excerpted the maxims from *Clarissa* to form an anthology that not only inculcated moral lessons about the outside world, but also, more self-referentially, inoculated its audience against the vice of skipping. The division of labor that later emerged between dangerously entertaining abridgments and strategically boring anthologies further widened the gap which within *Clarissa* itself had already separated the centripetal editorial apparatus from the composite structure of the text that it framed. Not until his last novel did Richardson resolve the contradiction inherent in an epistolary mode which defined writing as collectively produced but privately owned. Yet even in *Sir Charles Grandison*, where the figure of the executor finally disjoins property from authority, competition from rival printers combined with the collaboration of personal friends to threaten the ownership of the book itself.

The changing techniques that editors have used to compress the bulk of Richardson's novels provide an index to shifting assumptions about the most efficient way to convey information – or indeed about what counts as information at all. But nineteenth-century abridgments also shed light on the riddle of the death of the epistolary novel, by providing one of the only clues we have to the way old epistolary novels were being read at the moment when new ones ceased to be written. Paradoxically, as long as the epistolary novel remained in vogue, abridgers transposed letters into retrospective, omniscient narration; conversely, epistolary

abridgments began to appear as soon as the novel in letters was no longer a viable form. That second wave of abridgments draws on a tradition of nineteenth-century works in radically different genres – from Sir Walter Scott's edition of Richardson (1824) to his ambivalently epistolary novel *Redgauntlet* (1824, 1832) to J. G. Lockhart's intermittently epistolary *Life of Scott* (1837) – which revive the letter to test the relation of social history to literary scale.

Chapter two examines the range of competing tools that turn-of-the-century editors devised to re-order a threateningly large and shapeless reading public: anthologies, abridgments, expurgations. Unlike late-twentieth-century anthologies that seek to represent diversity through their selection of authors, anthologies published in post-1774 Britain located difference among readers. So did the new novelistic subgenres that made a bid to take over the anthology's mission of constructing a middle-brow, middle-class public. Where Vicesimus Knox reduced the scholarly anthologist to the amanuensis of a consensual audience, Ann Radcliffe's reviewers appropriated the formal conventions of the anthology to distinguish their pace of reading from that which they attributed to an all-too-common reader – a contrast which Radcliffe's own use of the epigraph had already inscribed within the structure of the novel. Shakespearean editors, too, expanded the audience for a single national poet only by packaging his work in a range of different forms calibrated as finely as the market segments that they called into being. In the process of distinguishing stretches to be skimmed from moments to be remembered, they not only set a precedent for the half-hearted canonization of the novel a few decades later, but taught their readers to recognize themselves as members of a class, a generation, a sex. By the early nineteenth century, Susan Ferrier was able to enlist Shakespearean anthology-pieces and indeed Shakespearean anthologies in a campaign against solipsistic novel-reading, producing fictions so riddled with hackneyed quotations as to be barely readable today. Her pedantry repels not because its sources are too difficult for modern readers to recognize, but because their facility stops interpretation short. Ferrier's shallow allusiveness tests the limits not only of intertextual reading but of feminist literary-historical revisionism.

I end with the novels of George Eliot, more ruthlessly excerpted than any since: chopped into anthology-pieces, recycled as calendar decorations, used to test army officers, deployed in a Zionist tract, plastered onto billboards, and quarried for epigraphs to a socialist treatise and even an abridgment of Boswell's *Life of Johnson*. Like Radcliffe, Eliot

disciplines feminine readers' impatience by diluting her narrative with more static modes of discourse. Punctuated with chapter mottoes attributed or misattributed to other authors and studded with atemporal generalizations so self-contained as to be universally applicable, her last novels bear the traces of being written for – and against – the anthologies in which she expected to be repackaged in turn. Those collections redefined the genre of Eliot's oeuvre and the gender of its author, in contradictory ways: they canonized her novels by packaging her as a poet, and bracketed her with male predecessors by marketing her to women.

Nineteenth-century reviews and twentieth-century criticism characterized her work more explicitly as peculiarly quotable, even as – like Eliot herself – they questioned the ethics of appropriating others' words. Their distaste for Eliot's lapidary generalizations reversed traditional assumptions about the relation between plot and pleasure, replacing the figure of the self-indulgent female reader about whom eighteenth-century critics had worried by a new figure of the self-important female sage. Debates about Eliot's sententiousness reflect reviewers' and critics' growing doubts about the synecdochal logic of their own practice. Eliot's shifting place in the canon over the past hundred years reveals not only evolving assumptions about the structure of literary texts, but changes in the evidentiary value accorded to quotation. Those worries gave rise to legal debates: what constitutes fair use? Does obscenity reside in the parts of a text or depend on the proportions of the whole? But they have also had more direct consequences for the theory of literary genres and for the genres of literary criticism.

The work of professional mediators like editors, condensers, and reviewers figures less often in critical text than in scholarly footnotes – or only, anecdotally, as corruptions that reflect a "horizon of expectations" against which to measure authorial originality.[16] Yet competing editorial alternatives (anthology, abridgment, expurgation, collected works) add up to more than a series of accidents in the transmission of particular texts. They also shape a larger generic system. Shakespearean editing set a precedent for the power of condensations to scramble genre: anthologies chopped lower literary forms (first the drama, then the novel) into pseudo-lyric snippets as mechanically as abridgments translated verse into quasi-novelistic prose. Richardson's editors, too, forced readers to choose among methods of miniaturization which borrowed their formal conventions from opposite ends of the generic