

## THE INVISIBLE GENRE: TOWARDS A DEFINITION OF LITERARY ANTHOLOGY IN THE ANGLOPHONE CONTEXT

Niewidzialny gatunek. Próby definicji antologii literackiej  
w kontekście anglojęzycznym

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### Abstract

Anthology as a genre is often given short shrift in Anglophone dictionaries of literary terms. Despite the abundance of anthologies on the book market, this genre tends to be perceived as a given that does not require much explanation. The author of this article challenges such a standpoint and, taking her cue from C. Hugh Holman's handbook definition, considers the examples he gives in order to draw conclusions about how the concept of anthology has been used throughout the time starting from Richard Tottel's miscellany (1557) and finishing with Francis Turner Palgrave's *Golden Treasury* (1861). Relying on recent research in the theory and practice of Anglophone anthology, the author discusses the main qualities of this genre from historical perspective. She traces in particular the anthology's involvement in democratization of literature, on the one hand, and its implication in constructing literary history and cultural imperialism, on the other hand.

**Keywords:** anthology, Richard Tottel, Francis Turner Palgrave, history of literature, democratization, imperialism

### Streszczenie

Anglojęzyczne słowniki terminów literackich nie poświęcają antologii szczególnie dużo uwagi. Mimo znacznej podaży antologii na rynku książki gatunek ten traktowany jest jako oczywistość, która nie wymaga rozbudowanych wyjaśnień. Autorka niniejszego artykułu podważa zasadność takiego stanowiska, a przyjmując jako punkt wyjścia definicję zamieszczoną w podręczniku C. Hugh Holmana, omawia wskazane przez niego przykłady angielskich antologii, by wyciągnąć

wnioski odnoszące się do zastosowań pojęcia antologii od czasu publikacji zbioru sonetów i pieśni przez Richarda Tottela (1557) po wydanie antologii poezji angielskiej *The Golden Treasury* przez Francisa Turnera Palgrave'a (1861). Odwołując się do aktualnych opracowań na temat teorii i praktyki anglojęzycznej antologii, autorka artykułu omawia cechy gatunku w ujęciu historyczno-literackim. Uwagę skupia w szczególności na wkładzie antologii w demokratyzację literatury z jednej strony, a z drugiej – na ich uwikłaniu w tworzenie historii literatury i kulturowego imperializmu.

**Słowa kluczowe:** antologia, Richard Tottel, Francis Turner Palgrave, historia literatury, demokratyzacja, imperializm

### Introduction

Hidden in plain sight, the concept of anthology has given rise to a number of misunderstandings. For one thing, it is (too) often taken for granted.<sup>1</sup> For another, it tends to be used (too) liberally to denote widely diverse publications.<sup>2</sup> Anthologies are all around us. We use them as students and teachers, often without a more sustained interest than an occasional and fleeting observation that one edition may vary from the next. These variations indicate changes in literary scholarship, though anthologies, at least the ones I have used over the past decades, are rarely harbingers of revolutions. They only respond to the Zeitgeist, gradually and reservedly, like a piece of heavy machinery. Anthologies have weight in both literal and metaphorical sense. To be included into an anthology as an author is a measure of literary success. To construct an anthology is a responsibility that relatively few of the best qualified specialists can take. Buying an anthology was a considerable expense in the analog times. If anthology is such a serious and ubiquitous genre, why is the concept – in contrast to the material object on a bookshelf – so easy to overlook?

Perhaps one of the most obvious answers to this question is that the name “anthology” is often used indiscriminately to denote collections of texts in any genre, literary texts as well as critical or theoretical ones, and texts by one or more authors. It seems at times that any book composed of short pieces or excerpts could qualify as an anthology, which defeats the aim of using such a label. Furthermore, a book may profess to be an anthology on the title page, but it may also use a different name instead (a treasury, a miscellany, a compendium, etc.), or dispense with such generic self-naming altogether. The books that declare to be anthologies, usually in the very title, seem to aspire to order, completeness, and definitiveness. In other cases, that is when the genre is not indicated in the title

<sup>1</sup> A. Ferry, *Tradition and the Individual Poem: An Inquiry into Anthologies* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 1.

<sup>2</sup> C. H. Holman, *A Handbook to Literature*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Indianapolis: Odyssey Press, 1975), 31.

or paratexts, the anthology emerges in the eye of the beholder, who decides if the book is orderly, complete, and definitive, at least for their own purposes. In other words, the user decides if the book at/in hand is an anthology. Thus, C. Hugh Holman remarks tentatively in his definition of the concept that *The Bible* and *The Koran* are “sometimes considered an *anthology*.”<sup>3</sup> These two examples show, however, that identifying a text as an anthology is a matter of perspective and may well be highly divisive.

Anthologies are legion, and each culture has its own favorites. In the Anglophone literary tradition, Holman offers such historical examples as *Songes and Sonnettes, Written by the Ryght Honorable Lorde Henry Howard Late Earle of Surrey, and Other* (1557), which was labeled in the late nineteenth century as *Tottel’s Miscellany, England’s Helicon* (1600), Thomas Percy’s *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765), and Francis Turner Palgrave’s *Golden Treasury of English Songs and Lyrics* (1861). Interestingly, none of these influential books, spanning some three centuries of English anthologizing endeavors, has the word “anthology” in the title. According to Merriam-Webster dictionary, the first known use of the word “anthology” in the sense of a collection of selected literary pieces or passages was in 1624, which explains the absence of the word in the first two examples, but not in the other two. There must be a different reason then for these onomastic choices.

Such words as “reliques” and “treasury” are more deeply rooted in the English language than the foreign-sounding “anthology,” which explains why they seemed preferable in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as well. With its belittling Greek etymology – flowers may be pretty but they wither soon – the word “anthology” did not signal the lasting value of the collected material, whereas the other two words did. “Reliques” and its contemporary equivalent “relics” connote a backward glance at “a tiny often physical indication of something lost or vanished.”<sup>4</sup> Especially in plural, “relics” stands for “a dead body,” and invites the reader to play with the idea of the metonymic substitution of a dead body with a piece of writing that can come alive though the author is dead. The word “treasury,” especially intensified by the modifier “golden,” signals still more forcefully the value attached to the past literary achievements. In the following pages I consider Holman’s examples of anthologies in the Anglophone culture in an attempt to elucidate their aims that have persisted over the centuries, and the parameters of the concept in the Anglophone context.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/relics> (acc. 8.07.2021).

### Love Songs for Lawyers

Named after the publisher Richard Tottel, who monopolized the lucrative business of printing common law books in England,<sup>5</sup> the “miscellany” was a breakthrough in that it made available to a relatively large reading public what had hitherto been reserved in manuscript for a courtly audience.<sup>6</sup> Published during the last year of Queen Mary’s infamous reign, which was marked by cruel Counter-Reformation,<sup>7</sup> the book was a monument to the English – as opposed to the continental – poetic talent, and to the joy of life at a time of religious controversy and persecution. The label “miscellany” attached by Edward Arber in his 1870 edition suggests neither completeness nor order, though Tottel’s book does establish a hierarchy between one poet named in the title and “the other” poets, who were meant to remain in his shadow. Some of the anthologized poets were still alive at the time of publication and their “otherness” alongside anonymity may have been occasioned by their non-aristocratic origin. At the time of printing his anthology, Tottel was, as Warner calculates, “29 or not much older”<sup>8</sup> and belonged to “a large, vibrant, and certainly sophisticated social/occupational network in London, comprising law students, lawyers, and others in the trades and in government who maintained ties to the legal profession.”<sup>9</sup> It seems reasonable then to assume that law students were both some of the anonymous contributors and the main buyers of the anthology for over thirty years that it remained in print.<sup>10</sup> However, although Tottel’s collection “was popular by the standards of his day, it was not yet a cultural institution and canonical text for wider circles of society.”<sup>11</sup>

Rather than pointing to ancient Greek antecedents, Holton and MacFaul see the origins of the sixteenth-century poetic anthologies, such as Tottel’s, in the tradition of commonplace books, that is, “volumes in which individuals or groups of people gathered material which was particularly interesting or useful to them personally or professionally.”<sup>12</sup> The tradition had persisted from the Middle Ages,

<sup>5</sup> J. C. Warner, *The Making and Marketing of Tottel’s Miscellany, 1557: Songs and Sonnets in the Summer of the Martyrs’ Fires* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), 4.

<sup>6</sup> A. Holton, T. MacFaul, “Introduction,” in *Tottel’s Miscellany: Songs and Sonnets of Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, Sir Thomas Wyatt, and Others*, eds. A. Holton, T. MacFaul et al. (Penguin Books Ltd, 2011), ix.

<sup>7</sup> J. C. Warner, op. cit., 4.

<sup>8</sup> Ibidem, 14.

<sup>9</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>10</sup> Ibidem, 15.

<sup>11</sup> B. Korte, “Flowers for the Picking: Anthologies of Poetry in (British) Literary and Cultural Studies,” in *Anthologies of British Poetry Critical Perspectives from Literary and Cultural Studies*, eds. B. Korte, R. Schneider, S. Lethbridge (Amsterdam/Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 2000), 22.

<sup>12</sup> A. Holton, T. MacFaul, op. cit., x.

with such later examples of a commonplace book as Ben Jonson's *Timber* (1640) or W. H. Auden's *A Certain World* (1971).<sup>13</sup> While "[m]any collections of high-status verse were circulated [...] in England in the seventeenth century in manuscript rather than be subject to the vulgar and commercial process of printing," in the following centuries, "readers often compiled handwritten commonplace books [...] to create an individualized anthology of texts."<sup>14</sup> Today the commonplace books compiled by Jonson or Auden would be regarded at best as authorial compendia verging on intellectual autobiographies. It means that though the genre of anthology may have derived from the same impulse of collecting that also guided the commonplace book, after such popular publications as *Tottel's Miscellany*, the two parted ways. Tottel may have actually contributed to reinforcing the distinction between the personal commonplace book and the public anthology. The involvement of "the Cambridge scholar Nicholas Grimald as contributing editor, sealed the book with elite authority: this was an authoritative edition of new, approved verse, not a reader's compilation."<sup>15</sup> This endeavor to popularize hitherto secret knowledge benefitted from the democratizing impetus of the print revolution, associated with Johannes Gutenberg.

*Songes and Sonnettes* was a landmark in English literary history. According to Stephen Hamrick, it is still regarded as the most influential collection of poetry in the sixteenth century:

[c]opied by a monarch, set to music, sung, carried overseas, studied, appropriated, rejected, edited by consumers, transferred to manuscript, and gifted by Shakespeare, this multi-author verse anthology of 280 poems transformed sixteenth-century English language and culture.<sup>16</sup>

*Songes and Sonnettes* appeared at the time when both manuscript and print cultures coexisted and interacted. Hence, readers felt inclined to engage the text, amending and editing it to their own liking. Literary historians deplore, however, publisher's use of the liberties taken by the anthologist: either Tottel himself or the poet and scholar Nicholas Grimald, or perhaps an unknown editor of the manuscript. For example, since Sir Thomas Wyatt's "dark words and broken metres" were deemed less appealing to the Elizabethans than Surrey's

<sup>13</sup> C. Baldick, *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 70–71.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>15</sup> B. M. Benedict, *Making the Modern Reader: Cultural Mediation in Early Modern Literary Anthologies* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 38.

<sup>16</sup> S. Hamrick, "Introduction: Songes and Sonnettes Reconsidered," in *Tottel's Songes and Sonettes in Context*, ed. S. Hamrick (London: Routledge, 2013), 1.

“sweet Petrarchan manners,”<sup>17</sup> to please the audience, the editor(s), tampered especially with Wyatt’s poems to make them “simpler” and “easier on the ear.”<sup>18</sup>

As a promoter of the sonnet, though the term still remained vague at that time,<sup>19</sup> *Songes and Sonnettes* was well-known to aspiring young poets who later brought the genre to its height: William Shakespeare, Philip Sidney, Edmund Spenser, John Donne, and Mary Wroth. By the end of the sixteenth century, however, *Songes and Sonnettes* became outdated and thus a target for ridicule. The “artfully garbled” version of poem 182 in the Gravedigger’s song in *Hamlet*<sup>20</sup> is a good example of playful recycling by a new brilliant generation.

In a one-page preface entitled *The Printer to the Reader*, Tottel laid down the principles of his and subsequent collections of this kind. First, he sought to honor “the Englishe tong” at a time, when it was still one out of many vernacular languages in Europe that were coming into their own. Second, he explicitly prioritized the readers’ “profit and pleasure.”<sup>21</sup> Addressed to both “the learned” and “the unlearned,” the collection was meant as a handbook to the latter so that “by reding,” they “learne to be more skilfull.”<sup>22</sup> The Anglophone tradition of anthology thus emerges out of Tottel’s effort as a promoter of a national culture, on one hand, and a teacher to prospective users of the language, on the other. The readers of Tottel’s anthology, identified by literary historians as young lawyers and students of law, were not primarily poets, but by means of reading and writing poetry, they not only honed rhetorical skills needed in their profession, but also aspired to a higher social class, or at least to the leisurely pursuits of English aristocracy. In this sense, Tottel’s preface and the whole book reflect the ideas of social mobility in the sixteenth-century England and of educational effort as a prerequisite for such advancement. Both ideas may have been illusory, as Kenneth Charlton demonstrates in his book,<sup>23</sup> but in the long run anthologies have well served the Promethean purpose of stealing from the gods and making available to the people.

<sup>17</sup> J. Pitcher, “Tudor Literature: 1485–1603,” in *The Oxford Illustrated History of English Literature*, ed. P. Rogers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 80.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>19</sup> S. Hamrick, *op. cit.*, 3.

<sup>20</sup> A. Holton, T. MacFaul, *op. cit.*, xxvi.

<sup>21</sup> R. Tottel, “The Printer to the Reader,” in *Tottel’s Miscellany: Songs and Sonnets of Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, Sir Thomas Wyatt, the Elder, Nicholas Grimald, and Uncertain Authors*, ed. E. Arber (London, 1870), 1.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>23</sup> K. Charlton, *Education in Renaissance England* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 149.

### The invention of literary history and princedom

As genres came into and went out of fashion, the need to collect and promote exemplars persisted in subsequent anthologies, though the understanding of “genre” need not have been very strict. Whereas *England’s Helicon* (1600) championed pastoral poetry, Thomas Percy’s *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765) codified the ballad, by which Percy understood “popular verse: metrical romances, narrative ballads and old songs.”<sup>24</sup> Both titles highlight the national identity in the modifiers “England’s” and “English,” respectively, but diverge on the issue of artistic provenience. While the concept of “Helicon” anchors the English poets’ endeavors in Greek mythology, Percy’s *Reliques* announces in the very title that English poetry already has its own ancient history. In contrast to Tottel, who retained a strict social hierarchy of authors while imagining the social advancement of his readers, the editor of *England’s Helicon*, N.L. – disambiguated since as Nicholas Ling, a well-known Elizabethan publisher – insists in the preface entitled “To the Reader, if Indifferent,” on the nobility of poets that equals inherited aristocratic titles. Ling defends the editor’s right to place “the names of poets (all fear and duty ascribed to her great and sacred name)” with “the names of the greatest princes of the world.”<sup>25</sup> He thus justifies the ennoblement of poets with the power of poetry itself.

*England’s Helicon* was revised and published again in 1614, and it apparently served well its purpose of boosting the self-confidence of English poets. A change in the generic classification of this book occurs within the nineteenth century. In their Introduction to the third, 1812 edition of *England’s Helicon*, Egerton Brydges and Joseph Haslewood still repeatedly call the book a “collection,”<sup>26</sup> very much like Ling in the first edition. By the end of the nineteenth century, however, Arthur Henry Bullen, who edited the 1887 version of *England’s Helicon*, consistently uses the word “anthology.”<sup>27</sup> Classifying such books as anthologies may then be attributable to Victorian historicism, which privileged “anthology” as the most noble, weighty, and prestigious variant of “collection” and “compilation.” This usage seems to have solidified in the late nineteenth century.

A comparable reluctance to call a prominent anthology by this name is also evident in the making and reception of Bishop Thomas Percy’s *Reliques*.

<sup>24</sup> N. Groom, *The Making of Percy’s Reliques* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), x.

<sup>25</sup> N. Ling, “To the Reader, if Indifferent,” in *England’s Helicon: A Collection of Lyrical and Pastoral Poems: Published in 1600*, ed. A. H. Bullen (London: J. C. Nimmo, 1887), 5.

<sup>26</sup> E. Brydges, J. Haslewood, “Introduction,” in *England’s Helicon: A Collection of Pastoral and Lyric Poems, First Published at the Close of the Reign of Q. Elizabeth* (London: T. Bensley, 1812), i, ii, xv, xx.

<sup>27</sup> A. H. Bullen, “Introduction,” in *England’s Helicon: A Collection of Lyrical and Pastoral Poems: Published in 1600* (London: J. C. Nimmo, 1887), x.

In its 1850 edition, almost four decades after Percy's death, Edward Francis Rimbault still uses the word "collection,"<sup>28</sup> like Percy himself, or else "compilation."<sup>29</sup> Percy was not the first to collect and publish English and Scottish ballads, nor was he a particularly conscientious antiquarian, as his critics were only too eager to point out,<sup>30</sup> but it was nevertheless his *Reliques* that gave a new lease of life to the ballad and a new impetus to folklorist endeavors far beyond England. He inspired not only William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, the Scottish bard Sir Walter Scott, and in later generations: Lewis Carroll and Oscar Wilde,<sup>31</sup> but also the philosopher and poet Johann Gottfried von Herder, and through him, the folklorist Brothers Grimm.<sup>32</sup>

As an antiquarian endeavor, Percy's *Reliques* "provided definitive versions of popular and ephemeral poems, and was compendiously glossed with notes and reflections on native English customs, folklore, poetic traditions, and historical tidbits."<sup>33</sup> It was "an early attempt to assemble the nation's literary inheritance"<sup>34</sup> from the late medieval period to the seventeenth century, or, in other words, it was an effort to create a literary history. Especially in Book II of Volume I, which includes "ballads that illustrate Shakespeare," Percy – like Ling before him – ennobles outstanding poets. Percy's work on the *Reliques* ran parallel to "the eighteenth-century canonization of the bard."<sup>35</sup> The national genius of the great Shakespeare was built from "conjectural emendation [...], minute editorial collation, and historical explication."<sup>36</sup> Percy assumes Shakespeare's greatness, but he also highlights the outstanding poet's dependence on a rich anonymous tradition. Percy's contribution to the construction of a literary history amounts to glorifying both the named individual author, like Shakespeare – "[o]ur great dramatic poet,"<sup>37</sup> and the collective anonymous heritage of popular poetic genius. Percy's innovation consisted in "cultivating his anonymous minstrels into a class, and shaping these poets on the printing press."<sup>38</sup>

<sup>28</sup> E. F. Rimbault, "Preface," in *Bishop Percy's Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (London: Cramer, Beale, and Company, 1850), v, vii.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*, vi, vii, viii.

<sup>30</sup> N. Groom, *op. cit.*, 8; A. Ferry, *op. cit.*, 80.

<sup>31</sup> N. Groom, *op. cit.*, 3.

<sup>32</sup> A. Teverson, *Fairy Tale* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 62.

<sup>33</sup> N. Groom, *op. cit.*, 3.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*, 104.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*, 243.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>37</sup> T. Percy, *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry: Consisting of Old Heroic Ballads, Songs, and Other Pieces of Our Earlier Poets; Together with Some Few of Later Date*, the 5<sup>th</sup> edition, vol. 1 (London: F. C. and J. Rivington, 1812), 131.

<sup>38</sup> N. Groom, *op. cit.*, 244.



Anthologizing was and still remains a contested ground, and the reception of Percy's *Reliques* is a good example of heated debates and scathing criticism by fellow antiquarians. The making of collections was and still is an effort bedeviled by doubts and insoluble dilemmas. Percy, for example, was torn between "scholarly precision," on one hand, and "polite, elegant revision (and marketability)," on the other.<sup>39</sup> He retained in his book elements of the manuscript culture, and produced "a printed anthology that actually challenged the ideology of print."<sup>40</sup> As a scholar, he was disappointed with his book, in spite of its massive popularity and his own social advancement.<sup>41</sup>

By the end of the sixteenth century, in the English culture, the title of "the Prince of Poets" was reserved for Edmund Spenser, but the following generations of authors at least knew to what kind of status they could aspire. Authorship could bring with it social prominence, and anthologies – conceptualized as fairs of literary talent – were in a position to secure (or jeopardize) especially posthumous recognition. First and foremost, however, anthologies were there to spin a narrative of national literary history and print it into existence, as Groom showed in the case of Percy. In his Preface to *The Golden Treasury of English Songs and Lyrics*, the celebrated Victorian anthologist Francis Turner Palgrave promises to bring "all the best original Lyrical pieces and Songs in our language, by writers not living, – and none beside the best."<sup>42</sup> To qualify as the best, the poets needed to be dead, which brings back the idea of "relics" that was foundational for Percy's collection and conceptualization of national history. Interestingly enough, Palgrave uses both words "collection" and "anthology" in his dedication and preface, in a way which signals the semantic difference between them. In his dedication to Alfred Tennyson, Palgrave describes his *Golden Treasury* as "a true national Anthology of three centuries" only to switch to the modest "[t]his little Collection" at the beginning of his Preface. Reinforced by relevant modifiers, the "anthology" connotes ambition, and the "collection" – modesty. Like Ling, Palgrave personifies poetry as a woman, but his final assertion makes evident the long way the English language has gone from Tottel's modest attempt to honor the new vernacular "tong." Palgrave concludes his Preface with a sentence that echoes the British imperial ambition, in which the English culture was massively implicated: "wherever the Poets of England are honoured, wherever the dominant language of the world is spoken, it is hoped that they will find fit audience."<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Ibidem, 9.

<sup>40</sup> Ibidem, 192.

<sup>41</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>42</sup> F. T. Palgrave, "Preface," in *The Golden Treasury of the Best Songs and Lyrical Poems in the English Language: Selected and Arranged with Notes* (London: Macmillan and Company, 1861), n.p.

<sup>43</sup> Ibidem.

One can praise Palgrave's "hard, meticulous, and patient work"<sup>44</sup> as well as "the brilliant originality" of his book's arrangement,<sup>45</sup> which is marked by his divergence from a strict "historico-chronological orientation."<sup>46</sup> Like Percy, Palgrave conceptualized history not as linear but genealogical. His anthology made history or rather, as Spevack explains, a myth that was more lasting than the book itself:

It was not the first anthology but it may have been the first of such self-confidence as to not only address and satisfy the 'fittest' but, on the tide of surging national identity and burgeoning world power, also to attract and persuade those to be made fit for poetry. One jewel in the crown of Victorian enterprise and expanse, it became a myth in an age of myth, its influence more profound than the thing itself.<sup>47</sup>

Despite criticism from modernist innovators of English poetry, including most notably Ezra Pound,<sup>48</sup> "Palgrave," as the book came to be known, has been revised and expanded by renowned poets and critics, and "[e]ven well into the twentieth century" it "was still the point of reference in justifications of new anthologies."<sup>49</sup> The implication of Alfred Tennyson in the process of selection<sup>50</sup> – comparable to Tottel's cooperation with Grimald – fed into the economy of literary princedom, for which Palgrave's anthology seems to stand. Paradoxically, the writer's anthologies, such as the series of anthologies by Joyce Carol Oates in our time, loop the anthology back to the private commonplace book, thus conflating authority with informed personal preference.

### **Conclusions: towards a definition**

One obvious conclusion is that the examples selected by Holman and discussed above all concern poetry, which appears to be the most amenable to anthologizing endeavors. Not without resistance, though. For example, the American poet David Antin claimed in the 1980s that "anthologies are to poets as the zoo is to animals."<sup>51</sup> Although "[f]ew genres have been better placed to escape the anthology's sphere of influence" than the novel,<sup>52</sup> novels too have felt the pressure

<sup>44</sup> M. Spevack, "The Golden Treasury: 150 Years On," *eBLJ The Electronic British Library Journal*, Article 2 (2012): 5.

<sup>45</sup> A. Ferry, op. cit., 47.

<sup>46</sup> M. Spevack, op. cit., 8.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibidem*, 16.

<sup>48</sup> Qtd. in M. Spevack, op. cit., 17.

<sup>49</sup> A. Ferry, op. cit., 40.

<sup>50</sup> Vide M. J. Sullivan, "Tennyson and *The Golden Treasury*," *Essays in Criticism*, vol. 66, issue 4 (2016): 431–443.

<sup>51</sup> Qtd. in L. Price, *The Anthology and the Rise of the Novel: From Richardson to George Eliot* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 2.

<sup>52</sup> L. Price, op. cit., 5.

of extracting and collecting, much to the chagrin of its major practitioners, including, for example, Virginia Woolf, who “congratulated [Thomas] Hardy on his absence from an anthology of English prose.”<sup>53</sup> When the culture of the excerpt, taking shape on the anvil of educational demand and supply, joined forces with the culture of mass print, anthology was the inevitable outcome, prized by some (especially readers) and anathematized by others (authors and critics). Exposed as a powerful tool of cultural politics, for example, in “the canon wars of the 1980s [...] fought over anthologies’ tables of contents,”<sup>54</sup> anthology has become difficult to take seriously and at face value. It has become “posies for the public and snacks for students.”<sup>55</sup> As a genre, despite its ubiquity and popularity, it gives rise to ambivalence: one accepts its educational value, but resent its presumption.

The slight and censure of anthology as a genre seem to derive from too high and too vague expectations. It is necessary then to define it anew with the benefit of the hindsight that cultural history, including book history, offers. It is necessary to take anthology for what it has been for centuries, that is, first of all, as I would like to point out, a meta-genre, that is a genre “occurring later than or in succession to,” “situated behind or beyond,” and “more comprehensive: transcending”<sup>56</sup> than the texts it encompasses. As the foregoing discussion sought to demonstrate, anthology deals critically with genres and literary history. Given to (self-)glorification, it can promote genres and make a literary history, not once and for all, but for its own time, however short or long.

Second, anthology takes its strength from the democratizing impulse, even if it affects elitism (as in the case of Palgrave). One aspect of democratization concerns readership (from Tottel to Palgrave and beyond), the other – no less significant – applies to authorship (Tottel or Percy, but not Palgrave). Anthology makes an audience and “bridges diverse social groups,”<sup>57</sup> but it can also make an author.<sup>58</sup> Tottel, for example, managed to smuggle into his collection contributions by contemporary amateur and non-aristocratic poets. To this day anthologies, whether they include living authors or not, function as equalizers in that they bring together excerpts from the large body of a famous author’s works (for example, Thomas Hardy or Oscar Wilde) and from the far less copious output of a writer discovered posthumously (for example, Gerard Manley Hopkins).<sup>59</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Ibidem, 6.

<sup>54</sup> Ibidem, 2.

<sup>55</sup> M. Spevack, op. cit., 17.

<sup>56</sup> <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/meta> (acc. 8.07.2021).

<sup>57</sup> B. M. Benedict, op. cit., 28.

<sup>58</sup> Ibidem, 16.

<sup>59</sup> For example, R. Clark, T. Healy, eds., *The Arnold Anthology of British and Irish Literature in English* (London: Arnold, 1997).

Third, apart from the high-flown ideals of democracy attained through education, anthology making is also a business enterprise. It requires a considerable effort, which is supposed to bring profit. Hence, an anthology needs to appeal to a wide readership for an extended period of time. This means that in subsequent editions an anthology needs to attune itself to changing trends. An anthology like Tottel's or Palgrave's was meant to last and the condition for its durability was that it would remain a living text, exemplifying the kind of plasticity and adaptability that our own age (unjustly) seems to claim for itself.

Fourth, anthology has more to do with the impulse to collect than it shares with such amateur and private genres as scrapbook or commonplace book than with its ancient Greek namesake. It transpires from the brief overview offered above that English anthologists were reluctant to use the word "anthology" and they did so only when wedding their literary-historical enterprise to some form of cultural imperialism (the case of Palgrave). Barbara Korte's question if anthologies are "still live cultural texts that remain relevant outside academic use"<sup>60</sup> indirectly exposes the imperialism inscribed in educational endeavors. Academe has, however, invented the concept of "reader," a collection that serves exclusively educational purposes, which leaves anthology in hyperonymic relation to it and free to offer more than education. Anthology no doubt aspires to please as well as educate a much larger audience than strictly academic, unless it explicitly names its audience in the title.<sup>61</sup>

Fifth and last, anthology's authoritative manner is the source of its own undoing. Anthology is there to be challenged and discussed with, as was the case with Percy's or Palgrave's collections. Although made carefully to last, it is there to be rendered outdated and superfluous in the course of discussions it has triggered in the first place. Anthology can perform important cultural work, and its inevitable (self-)destruction, sooner or later, is the best news for the renewal of literature and literary scholarship.

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<sup>60</sup> B. Korte, op. cit., 29.

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