

VICESIMUS KNOX AND THE POETIC CANON: REFLECTIONS OF
A DISPARATE MIDDLE-CLASS IN THE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY
ANTHOLOGY

By

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In *The Anthology and the Rise of the Novel: From Richardson to George Eliot*, Leah Price uses the relatively obscure Vicesimus Knox as an ideal model for the late-eighteenth century British anthologist: "An amanuensis rather than a creator, [*The Elegant Extracts*] editor represents a community instead of expressing a self. In the same way that each anthology-piece functions (at least in theory) as a representative synecdoche for the longer text from which it is excerpted, the anthologist claims to stand within and for the same audience that he addresses... Far from standing above the undifferentiated passivity of the reading public, the anthologist exemplifies it" (*Anthology* 328). Price culls much of her primary evidence from Knox's prefaces to his *Elegant Extracts* of prose, poetry, and epistles. Meanwhile, her theoretical framework emanates from a critical movement that attempts to describe the history of the eighteenth-century anthology and the canon it gives rise to in economic and class-based terms. This larger project, which for the purposes of this paper will summarily be referred to as the "economic history" of the eighteenth-century anthology, has retroactively constructed an "ideal" text to serve as a model for the anthology's relationship to an increasingly bourgeois British readership. Hence Price writes, "Knox's disclaimers of novelty obscure the role of his *Extracts* in defining a specifically middle-class public which owes more to the endurance of the anthology than to the rise of the novel. By dismissing as 'private' the elite that prizes authorial obscurity and critical originality, Knox reduces the 'public' to the anthology-reading classes" ("Commonplace" 329). To assert that the anthology has been more influential in defining the middle-class than the novel, Price attempts to define the anthology as a genre in its own right "rather than a container for others" (*Anthology* 3).

Price's generic distinctions work in tandem with other economic histories of the anthology. The watershed event of these histories is the 1774 case *Donaldson v. Beckett* in which the House of Lords ruled that London publishers could not claim to hold perpetual copyright on a published work as they had through much of the eighteenth century. Two books, Mark Rose's *Authors and Owners: The Invention of Copyright* and William St. Claire's *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* examine this case through the opposing economic philosophies of John Locke and Adam Smith. Rose argues that the London publishers relied on Locke's claim that private property was a natural right that could not be infringed by social law. Perpetual copyright was therefore a common law practice, as Rose writes: "Extended into the realm of literary production, the liberal theory of property produced the notion put forward by the London booksellers of a property founded on the author's labor, one the author could sell to the bookseller" (Rose 6). St. Claire meanwhile focuses on 1770s Scottish publishers who challenged the claim to perpetual copyright. St. Claire calls *Donaldson v. Beckett*:

The most decisive event in the history of reading in England since the arrival of printing 300 years before. It was a struggle between the ancient guild approach to economic management and the emerging world of free trade and economic competition, between entrenched interests and challenging innovatory forces, between elegant old money and vulgar business, between the clear words of modern statute law and the fuzzy talk of common-law rights, between a static *ancien régime* view of society based on hierarchy, heredity, property, and allocation of roles, and the new Enlightenment science of political economy that aimed to use the power of reason to bring about social and economic improvement (St. Claire 109).

Despite his sentence's hyperbole, St. Claire evocatively sums up the stakes of this economic narrative. The shift from the miscellany to the anthology was a shift from the

aristocracy's "*ancien régime*" to the new reading nation of bourgeois merchants and professionals. The anthology supplanted the miscellany in popularity because, in accordance with Price's generic distinctions, it was efficiently organized, it did not waste the reader's time with obscure subject matter, and above all it was a utilitarian product to be used for the personal betterment of the reader. As Price puts it, "Aristocratic inheritance and bourgeois commerce stand for two competing models of literature: one compares it with heirlooms valuable for their rarity, the other with a currency whose worth depends on its circulation" ("Commonplace" 330).

I sympathize with this collage of economic interpretations. However, I believe that Price's diminution of Knox's identity—his emptying of self to become the amanuensis—discourages attempts to even hypothesize about what Knox's opinions were and how they influenced the production of the anthology. Knox was privately educated by his father, a Reverend, until the age of fourteen at which point he entered the Merchant Taylors' School in London. He received a neo-classical education, excelling in Latin and Greek while still gaining an appreciation of English literature. Knox's schooling was similar to what a young person of the aristocracy would receive, but Knox did not believe that only the aristocracy should have access to this kind of learning. One of Knox's last publications was the essay "Remarks on Grammar Schools" which begins: "On a fair estimate of the utility resulting from our antient grammar schools, they will probably appear to be the primary sources of that intellectual light which, in a very remarkable degree, has illuminated, not only the more elevated, but the middle and subordinate classes of our distinguished country" ("Grammar Schools" 279). The economic history of the anthology has rightly seized upon egalitarian sentiments of this

kind, but Knox qualifies this endorsement. He has no interest in radicalizing the content of this education. The middle-class students should be taught

to contemplate with understanding and taste, the finest monuments of classic antiquity, and (rustic as they were in their origin) to emulate at last the politest ages, those of Pericles and Augustus; and to vie with them in solidity of thought, in extent of knowledge, in sound philosophy, in generosity of sentiment, in all the attainments of elegant arts and recondite science, to which the study of the humanities, by its liberalizing influence, is directly and powerfully conducive ("Grammar Schools" 283).

Knox's goal, in other words, is to elevate all classes to a level of higher learning and aesthetic appreciation. Of course, Knox concedes, "Many of the aspirants, it is true, never reach the summit; but still they rise above the plain, and attain a very desirable mediocrity" ("Grammar Schools," 279).

Knox retains some of his elitism even as he advocates a liberal education for the masses that Price makes note of: "Knox's self-consciousness about the relations among money, gender, and the circulation of literature reflects more than a biographical mismatch between his own classical education and his readers' presumed lack of it" ("Commonplace" 331). Price argues that what she calls Knox's "ambivalence" is explained by the genre of the anthology—his personal elitism and ambivalence is subsumed to meet the demands of the genre. To make her point, Price points out the *Elegant Extracts'* similarity to other anthologies compiled by very different personalities: "The fact that the *Elegant Extracts* happen to be edited by a conservative Anglican clergyman not, like the *Speaker* or the *Female Speaker*, by a woman, a radical, or a dissenter suggests how little its commercial model of literary circulation and feminized vision of the literary public depend on any individual anthologist's identity (what Knox

himself dismisses as 'private judgement') but how inexorably they follow from the genre of the anthology itself" ("Commonplace" 331). Price is right that there are many similarities among late eighteenth-century collections despite the individual beliefs of the anthologist who produced them. I depart from her only in that I believe the "biographical mismatch" helped construct the anthological genre.

The central evidence I bring to this claim is Knox's preface to the *Elegant Extracts of Poetry*. The poetry preface is exceptional not only because Knox expresses his personal opinions on the subject of poetry, but because he does so with a vigor that reflects his background as a Reverend more than an amanuensis. Knox stridently harangues workers and merchants "in the warehouse and the exchange" who, citing John Locke, consider the study of poetry to be of little use or financial reward. The defensive tone of Knox's writing is not to be found in any of his other prefaces and I believe that this is because poetry, of all the genres, is the one which Knox most privileges. Conversely, it is the genre that Knox most fears will be reduced to a bourgeois "mediocrity"—a cheap commodity to be shelved in a literary warehouse. Knox's angst is not based on a fear that a monolithic middle-class is tarnishing the aristocratic institutions of learning. He is specifically concerned with members of the warehouse and the exchange as opposed to the increasingly outmoded artisan. This intra-class divide, or at least Knox's projection of this divide, impacted the construction of his anthologies and their consequential formation of canon as much as the grand shift from aristocratic to bourgeois readership.

On the whole, I agree with St. Claire and Price that the reader's demand for utility and the anthologist's personal aesthetics do harmonize. One frequently cited benchmark

of this generalization is William Enfield's *The Speaker: Or, Miscellaneous Pieces, Selected from the Best English Writers, and Disposed under Proper Heads, with a View to Facilitate the Improvement of Youth in Reading and Speaking*. The compilation's title summarizes the generic distinctions of the anthology. Laura Mandell has attempted to define these distinctions from the retrospection of Robert Southey, a Romantic-era poet. Southey distinguished the anthology from its formal predecessor, the miscellany. Anthologies are "'living' collections of poems of aesthetic interest" whereas miscellanies are "dried bouquets of poems of historical interest" (Mandell). Mandell expands on Southey's distinctions and, like Price, ties them to an economic history of British readership: "In contrast to the miscellany's aim of including recently written poetry that has not anywhere else been collected, the anthology properly speaking presents the best selection possible... Miscellanies indiscriminantly [*sic*] list poems, so that an author's work appears scattered throughout. The leisurely aristocrat can get an idea of the author's works by reading all of the volumes of poems available. The businessman who reads anthologies needs to read less as if he were reading more; he needs to be able to convert his labor into surplus value" (Mandell). Mandell's generic model for the anthology, much like St. Claire's economic model, looks forward to the nineteenth-century anthology as it attempts to categorize the late eighteenth-century collections. Knox's and Enfield's collections deviate from Mandell's definition of the anthology. For example, while Enfield has selected the "best" writers, he organizes them into "proper heads" rather than by chronology and author. Of particular importance to this paper, Enfield also does not seem interested in segregating the genres of prose and poetry. Under the sub-heading "Narrative Pieces," for example, Pope appears alongside Sterne and in "Pathetic Pieces"

Sterne is in turn placed by Milton. In this paper, I am less concerned with the generic distinction of the anthology itself, but I do find Price and Mandell's descriptions useful insofar as they reveal the anthology's more or less consistent relationship to the bourgeoisie's desire for a utilitarian literary resource.

This utility is expressed in the title—"to facilitate improvement of youth"—and is expanded upon in Enfield's prefixed "Essay on Elocution." The essay begins with an affirmation of the anthology's utilitarian function: "Much declaration has been employed, to convince the world of a very plain truth, that to be able to speak well is an ornamental and useful accomplishment. Without the laboured panegyrics of ancient or modern orators, the importance of a good elocution is sufficiently obvious" (Enfield v). Enfield directly references the class of readers he imagines himself addressing, "Avail yourself, then, of your skill in the Art of Speaking, but always employ your powers of elocution with caution and modesty; remembering, that though it be desirable to be admired as an eminent Orator, it is of much more importance to be respected as an able Lawyer, a useful Preacher, or a wise and upright Statesman" (Enfield xxviii). These words are not addressed to the young aristocrat, but to the sons of the bourgeoisie who cannot afford to take simple pleasure in reading, but must from their earliest education be prepared to use literature to improve their social and economic position. "Every private company, and almost every public assembly," Enfield writes, "afford opportunities of remarking the difference between a just and graceful, and a faulty and unnatural elocution; and there are few persons, who do not daily experience the advantages of the former, and the inconveniences of the latter" (Enfield v-vi). In short, knowledge of elocution is not

something to be appreciated, but rather something to be taken advantage of for personal gain.

By 1790 Enfield would affix a second essay, "On Reading Works of Taste," which little deviates from the language of the first even though its subject shifts from utilitarian elocution to aesthetically-driven taste. Once again, understanding the anthology as a bourgeois project explains Enfield's emphasis on words like "BENEFITS... EMPLOYMENT... and COLLATERAL DAMAGES," all capitalized in Enfield's editions (Enfield xxxviii; xlii). This audience seems to care little for the aesthetic pleasure of good taste and instead is interested in taste only as a function of social esteem. Enfield even appears to engage in a backhanded critique of the aristocratic (or purely intellectual) reader: "Reading can be considered as a mere amusement, only by the most vulgar, or the most frivolous part of mankind" (Enfield xxxvi). On the contrary, good taste, Enfield assures his readers, "is capable of being applied to an endless variety of useful purposes" (Enfield xxxvi). Enfield remains committed to the utilitarian anthological project from 1774 to 1790, and *The Speaker* undergoes few changes to its prefatory material well into the nineteenth century.

Knox's *Elegant Extracts* express the same bourgeois, utilitarian sentiments as *The Speaker*. The *Extracts'* complete title, for example, is nearly identical to *The Speaker's: Elegant Extracts: or useful and entertaining Passages in Prose Selected for the Improvement of Scholars at Classical and other Schools in the Art of Speaking, in Reading Thinking, Composing; and in the Conduct of Life*. Once again, the target audience is middle-class students in need of an efficient source of literary content. The purpose of delivering the content is elocution, "the art of speaking," and lessons in

conduct designed to assist the student in improving his social station. Knox's title does allow room for "entertainment," which Enfield actively discourages, but the most striking difference between the collections is that Knox segregates them by genre. *Extracts* in prose, poetry, and epistles are each published separately over a span of six years. As such, I will treat the anthologies independently, though it is important to point out that they do have properties in common. They discuss the borrowing of works from living and dead authors, the responsibility of creating a product for youth, the humility of the editor, and the competition among anthologists. These ethical subjects are not addressed at all in *The Speaker* (which was published a decade before *Extracts in Prose*). But while Knox returns to these subjects, his tone towards them varies drastically depending on the literary genre his preface addresses.

The *Prose* preface was first published in 1784 in the second edition of the prose *Extracts*. It proclaimed the compilation to be "a little Library for Learners" and advertises the advantages of this little library over collections of larger, complete works; what Knox summarizes as the extract's "unassuming pretensions of obvious utility" ("Prose" v). Actual libraries, Knox claims, were too unwieldy, especially for middle-class youth who might not know how to treat a book with care. The *Extracts*, by contrast, do not suffer the "rough treatment," of larger "more unwieldy tomes" ("Prose" vi).

Other selling-points were the *Extracts'* variety and novelty—two descriptors which again deviate from Mandell's definition of the utilitarian anthology. Knox insists that a "common sized volume, it was found, was soon perused, and laid aside for want of novelty" ("Prose" v). The *Extracts*, by contrast, can be picked up at any time and the sheer variety of works always guarantees a new and different read. Knox concedes that

he has included the familiar prose of Addison and his contemporaries, and that these writers "may no longer have the grace of novelty in the eyes of veterans, yet they will always be new to a rising generation" ("Prose" v). To assuage these veterans, Knox quickly points out that "the greater part of this book, however, consists of extracts from more modern books, and from some which have not yet been used for the purpose of selections" ("Prose" v). So again, while utilitarian definitions of the anthology are useful, they are not ubiquitous. Knox is writing to two audiences—the educator of the bourgeois youth and the more-learned, leisurely reader of the miscellany. Looking ahead briefly to the poetry *Extracts*, we will see that Knox's optimism that he can appeal to both audiences becomes significantly lessened by 1789.

After stressing the *Extracts'* novelty, Knox acknowledges one obvious consequence of collecting contemporary works: "It is presumed that living Authors will not be displeased that useful and elegant passages have been borrowed of them for this book; since if they sincerely meant, as they profess, to reform and improve the age, they must be convinced that to place their most salutary admonitions and sentences in the hands of young persons, is to contribute most effectually to the accomplishment of their benevolent design" ("Prose" v-vi). Knox chides the potentially hypocritical author who claims to write for the good of society rather than profit, and in the next sentence Knox does not hesitate to counter complaints of the publishers who officially do desire to make money: "And with respect to those among writers or publishers who are interested in the sale of books, it may reasonably be supposed, that the specimens exhibited in this volume will rather contribute to promote and extend, than to retard or circumscribe the circulation of the works from which they are selected" ("Prose" vi). Perhaps Knox is genuine in his

belief that the anthology will aid the sale of original works, or perhaps he is goading publishers in the wake of *Donaldson v. Beckett*. In either case, again, Knox does not seem terribly concerned with the ethics of anthologizing as it concerns originality or intellectual property—the two subjects on which both St. Claire and Rose have focused. Indeed, not only does not Knox borrow from living authors, he borrows from other anthologists as well: "The editors of similar compilations, it is feared, may not so freely forgive the borrowing of many passages from them: but it should be remembered that they also borrowed of their predecessors... A compiler can by no means pretend to an exclusive property in a passage of an author, which he has himself possessed on a very disputable title" ("Prose" vi). In referencing other compilers, of course, Knox is also talking about himself. He too claims no exclusive property to "his" passages, which he admits to having secured with some disputation. Again, Knox seems to care little for the economic and ethical debate between Locke and Smith (as retroactively channeled by Rose and St. Claire). His unconcern for property continues in the poetry preface, but there his tone is thick with defensiveness.

Knox's *Elegant Extracts of Poetry* was not published until 1789, some five years after the successful prose *Extracts*. Knox advertises the convenience of the poetry collection just as he did the prose, calling it "a little Poetical Library for school-boys, precluding the inconvenience and expence of multiple volumes" ("Poetry" iii). The poetry preface also touches on the same points of utility and intellectual property as the prose, but it lacks the easy confidence with which Knox previously dispatched his antagonists. However, before reaching these moments of similarity between the two prefaces, Knox makes a major change to the preface's organization. Aside from its shift in tone, the

poetry preface differs most dramatically from the prose by featuring a full-throated defense of the genre of poetry before re-engaging with the familiar defense of the anthology.

The preface begins in the middle of an argument: "Since Poetry affords young persons an innocent pleasure, a taste for it, under certain limitations, should be indulged" ("Poetry i). The word "since" signifies a preclusion that Knox assumes has already been made; namely that poetry's pleasure is an "innocent" one. This of course had been disputed the year before by Enfield who, as stated above, attacked those who read for pleasure as "the most vulgar, or the most frivolous part of mankind." Enfield, however, was not talking specifically about the genre of poetry—which he barely distinguished, organizationally, from prose—but Knox seems supremely concerned with poetry's perceived association with amusement and pleasure. To gauge the shift in Knox's rhetorical posture, one need only contrast this opening "since" with the first line of the prose preface: "It may appear singular to make the avowal, but it is certainly true, that of all the literary tasks, the compilation of a book like this is attended with the least difficulty" ("Prose" v). The precluding force of "since" is more defensive than the subjective "it may appear..."

Enfield, though a literary competitor, is not Knox's only or even main antagonist in the ensuing apology, and contemporary authors and their publishers do not receive attention they did in the prose preface. Instead, Knox directs most of his hostility towards a specific subset of the middle-class readership. John Locke also makes an appearance in this passage, though not in the context Rose would predict. Knox writes: "*It is seldom seen that any one discovers mines of gold and silver in Parnassus*, says Mr. Locke. Such

ideas have predominated in the exchange and in the warehouse" ("Poetry ii). For Knox, the warehouse is in direct opposition to Parnassus. Locke appears not as a philosophical advocate of private property, but as a figure who can only appreciate things in terms of their capital value—just like the merchant. Knox contrasts these merchants and warehouse workers to the young readers his anthology is directly intended for, calling the latter "Unseduced by the love of money, and unhacknied in the ways of vice" ("Poetry" ii). Knox sees youth as a site of resistance to greed and vice—a site where the innocence of poetry might inoculate youth from the temptations that lie ahead.

The nuance of Knox's view does not get noticed, for example, by St. Claire. He imagines a unified, bourgeois reading public in which poetry synthesizes with pre-existing discourses like religious sermons: "Now that a range of attractive reading material was available and affordable, persons of all ages, whether previously literate or not, could teach themselves to read. A parson might quote Young's *Night Thoughts* to a congregation of farm workers in his Sunday sermon. A shoemaker or tailor might read aloud to his fellow workers in their workshop" (St. Claire 139). In his eagerness to celebrate the positive effects of the anthology, St. Claire not only fails to denote literary genre, he also depicts a romanticized middle-class. He imagines *Night Thoughts* being read in the country-side or the quaint workshop, but he does not consider the realms which Knox is preoccupied with—the exchange and warehouse. These latter sites of the evolving British economy are the progenitors of hypercapitalism, hardly realms critics today would associate with humanistic achievement. Knox deserves some credit, I think, for recognizing that capitalism would radically alter the relationship between poetry and the ruling class—and not to the benefit poetry. Barbara Benedict summarizes the

diminishing prestige of poetry in her book, *Making the Modern Reader: Cultural Mediation in Early Modern Literary Anthologies*: "Not only were prose forms—the periodical essay, the novel, and books of biographical anecdotes—encroaching on the cultural prestige and centrality of poetry, but sentimental, proto-Romantic principles were diluting neoclassical literary criteria while sentimental, Scottish, 'ancient,' and folk or rustic verse in freer forms was transforming classical genres like satire, panegyric, and georgic" (Benedict, Paragraph 23).¹ With a little suturing, St. Claire and Benedict complement each other: the shift away from poetry and neo-classicism was in part caused by an increasingly middle-class British readership, but this readership, for Knox, was not unified. The bourgeoisie of the warehouse had more extreme demands for literary utility than St. Claire's artisan.

Because Knox recognized this outmoding of neo-classicism, poetry, and aristocratic leisure, he was left in a difficult position. On the one hand, he believed that pleasure was innocent and worthy of attention in its own right, but he was also writing for the audience of warehouse and exchange workers that he believed disagreed. Knox therefore attempts a compromise, if not a total surrender, midway through the following passage:

¹ Knox's concern with poetry as an outmoded genre is reinforced by contrasting his poetry preface to the epistles preface, published only one year later. The latter is, as usual, concerned with the utility of learning to write letters through reading the great letters of others. Knox does not become as rhetorically engaged in this preface, but he once again pays attention to the epistolary genre as it relates to class. He writes: "All are not to be Poets, Orators, or Historians; but all, at least above the lowest rank, are to be sometimes Letter-writers" ("Epistles" iii). Knox also singles out the men of the warehouse and exchange: "It is indeed a remark, confirmed by long experience, that merchants and men of business, and particularly ladies, who have never read, or even heard of the rules of an *Erasmus*, a *Vives*, a *Melchior Junius*, or a *Lipsus*, write letters with admirable ease" ("Epistles" vii). The letter is a genre suited for the workers of the warehouse (and women, an association Price investigates), whereas poetry is for the elites and the artisans.

Why should they [youth] be forbidden to expatiate, in imagination, over the flowery fields of Arcadia, in Elysium, in the Isles of the Blest, and in the Vale of Tempè? The harmless delight which they derive from Poetry, is surely sufficient to recommend an attention to it, at an age when pleasure is the chief pursuit, even if the sweets of it were not blended with utility. But if pleasure were the ultimate object of Poetry, there are some who, in the rigour of austere wisdom, would maintain that the precious days of youth might be more advantageously employed than in cultivating a taste for it. To obviate their objections, it is necessary to remind them, that Poetry has ever claimed the power of conveying instruction in the most effectual manner, by the vehicle of pleasure. ("Poetry" i).

As Knox points out, the debate regarding pleasure and utility existed well before Enfield and the new anthology. None other than Sir Francis Bacon, founder of the Enlightenment which Enfield and Knox would coincidentally conclude, argued for an "ulterior motive" for literary study: "The use and end of which worke I do not so much designe for curiosity and satisfaction of those that are the lovers of learning; but chiefly for a more serious, and grave purpose, which is this in fewe words, that it will make learned men wise, in the use and administration of learning" (Lipking 8). Lawrence Lipking emphasizes Bacon's quotation in his introduction to *The Ordering of the Arts in Eighteenth-Century England*. Lipking contends that "most scholars would have agreed; the end of learning should not be amusement or curiosity but wisdom and usefulness" (Lipking 8). An argument of literature solely for aesthetic pleasure would find itself on the losing side of Enlightenment reasoning and likely prompted Knox's attempts to suture "innocent pleasure" and the "conveying of instruction."

Even as he attempts to meet the utilitarian demands of the warehouse, Knox carefully aligns himself with the vestigial artisan. In the prose preface, I noted that when Knox argues that other anthologists have "disputable title" to their works he denigrates his own. In the poetry preface, Knox continues his self-deprecation by contrasting

himself to those who would become the canonized poets of English literature: "The Editor can claim no praise beyond that of design. The praise of ingenuity is all due to the Poets whose works have supplied the materials. What merit can there be in directing a famous and popular passage to be inserted from Shakespeare, Milton, Pope, Gray, and many others of less fame, indeed, but in great esteem, and of allowed genius" ("Poetry" iii). In retrospect, it appears that Knox is adamantly participating in the project of canonization which many critics directly associate with the eighteenth-century anthology. Satisfying Rose's thesis, Knox associates originality and genius—even if he still neglects to address originality and intellectual property. But as he acknowledges the genius and originality of these poets, Knox bruises his own identity—he deserves neither praise nor merit.

Price is right that Knox's personal identity as editor and, therefore, as critic is contrasted to popular opinion. Knox continues to explain why he selected these great poets: "Their own lustre pointed them out, like stars of the first magnitude in the heavens... The best pieces are usually the most popular. They are loudly recommended by the voice of Fame, and indeed have been already selected in a variety of volumes of preceding collections" ("Poetry" iii). Here, Knox recalls his pithy dismissal of contemporary anthologists from who he borrowed in the prose collection, but his use "popular" suggests a critical standard other than the aesthetic. Knox is again attempting to suture the utilitarian demands of his middle-class audience with the increasingly outmoded elite aesthetic. Knox cannot bring himself to say that popular opinion always indicates a great work, but he concedes that it "usually" does. The use of usually signifies slight resistance on Knox's part to popular opinion; a lingering belief that there is such a

thing as a superior, elite understanding of poetry which is in continual danger of being overrun by crass practicality. Knox's ambivalence stems from the knowledge that he is producing a work that will be used to perpetuate and increasingly solidify the kind of middle-class reader that threatens the art he loves.

The irony of Knox's position is that, though he is the editor, the poetry is not really being selected by him—it is already determined by the demands of the consumers. This leads to yet another striking difference between the prose preface and the poetry. In the former, Knox, in the spirit of the miscellany, offers novel prose to those readers who may have grown tired of Addison. For the poetry, Knox reverses his position:

It was the business of the Editor of a *school-book like this*, not to insert scarce and curious works, such as please *virtuoso readers*, chiefly from *their rarity*, but to collect such as were *publicly known and universally celebrated*. The more known, the more celebrated, the better they were adapted to this Collection... Private judgment, in a work like this, must often give way to public. Some things are inserted in this Volume, entirely in submissive deference to public opinion; which when general and long continued, is the least fallible test of merit in the fine arts, and particularly in Poetry. ("Poetry" iii).

In the prose preface, Knox was eager to please virtuoso and popular readers alike, but now only works which are "publicly known and universally celebrated" are admitted. Because Knox believes poetry is losing its cultural capital in the warehouse and exchange, he produces the most "canonical" volume he can. There is no room to indulge in poetic curiosities when, as Knox believed, the continued existence of a genre was on the line. Knox's private judgment gives way to "submissive deference to public opinion" ("Poetry" iii).

This interpretation should give pause to the ways in which critics think of the formation of the English canon. The so-called "canon wars" of the 1980s and 90s seemed to believe that the academic and critical elite could radicalize the literary canon by changing syllabi and anthologies so as to include "underrepresented" poets and authors. Change was in the hand of these academic elites who knew better than the student masses who had been force-fed a litany of "dead white men." Ironically, the attitude of progressive critics of the Reagan era relied on a trickle-down paradigm of canon making. Their approach suggests that in the eighteenth century, anthologists like Knox, Enfield, and Johnson exerted their aesthetic taste on an ignorant public. As I have demonstrated, in Knox's case the public exerted an immense amount of influence over the supposed taste maker. Knox's canon formation was a defensive gesture generated by his personal affection for poetry—not an act of cultural imperialism.

Knox did not shape British literary culture, he was overwhelmed by it. He writes, "To confess an humiliating truth, in making a book like this, the hand of the artisan is more employed than the head of the writer. Utility and innocent entertainment are the sole designs of the Editor; and if they are accomplished, he is satisfied, and cheerfully falls back into the shade of obscurity" ("Poetry" iii). In the end Knox considers himself an artisan, not a writer, and not—even more importantly—a man of the exchange or warehouse. Artisans and writers were both dying breeds in eighteenth-century England; the former being replaced by the new industrial worker and the latter being confronted with demands for a new utilitarian "aesthetic." The cultural divide, therefore, was not just between the aristocratic readers of the miscellany versus the bourgeois readers of the

anthology. There was a divide within the middle-class which affected the anthology's production.

This intra-class divide is Knox's projection. It is a concoction of his personal opinion and observation, but despite the subjectivity of its existence, it had a profound impact on Knox and on the anthologies he produced. The "biographical mismatch" yields productive questions, questions that by and large harmonize with Price's interrogations. What, for example, are the consequences of repressing one's self-consciousness and identity to satisfy a genre? If an anthologist like Knox felt ambivalence towards the project of anthologizing poetry, might that ambivalence, however repressed, leave its traces in the canon which Knox helped produce? Or does, as Price suggest, the genre of the anthology suture or erase those traces?

I argue that the anthology-canon relationship is not as monolithic as Price's genre theory or St. Claire's economic theory suggests. Imagining the canon as an imperializing monolith had a utilitarian value for the canon wars. It allowed critics to treat the canon as one thing that could either be disassembled entirely, or at least have significant parts replaced. My reading of Knox's prefaces suggests that the canon already contains artifacts of its creators' anxieties, resistances, and ambivalences that residually disturb the canon's totalizing project. As we consider how to critically engage the canon in the future, it is worthwhile remembering that these artifacts—call them traces or repressions—have always existed in the canon. This suggests that to "radicalize" the canon one need not necessarily perform the superficial, representative act of adding or removing texts and authors, but that instead one might engage in the subterranean, intrusive act of uncovering or resurrecting these traces that the canon contains despite itself.

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Who were the women poets of the eighteenth century? This anthology presents writings by more than a hundred women, few of which have been published in conventional surveys and anthologies of eighteenth-century verse. Unlike the women who wrote fiction, the vast majority who wrote verse have been ignored and forgotten since their own day. What can hardly be doubted is that the education and literary reputation of women, particularly in the middle and upper classes, had markedly improved in the course of the century and that they had come to play an increasingly significant part, both as producers and consumers, in the rapidly expanding book trade.

Vicesimus Knox, *Elegant Extracts: or useful and Entertaining Pieces of Poetry, Selected for the Improvement of Youth, In Speaking, Reading, Thinking, Composing; and in the Conduct of Life; being similar in Design to Elegant Extracts in Prose* (London: Charles Dilly, 1784), v, A.Google Scholar. 22. Vicesimus Knox, *Essays, Moral and Literary. The Second Edition, Corrected and Enlarged* (London: Edward and Charles Dilly, 1779), I.37-8. Google Scholar. 26. The poets of the period did not deal with strong human passions; they were more interested in the problems of everyday life, and discussed things in verse. The hero of the novel was no longer a prince but a representative of the middle class. This had never taken place before: so far, the common people had usually been depicted as comic characters. They were considered incapable of rousing admiration or tragic compassion. Literature became very instructive: problems of good and evil were set forth. Writers tried to teach their readers what was good and what was bad from their own points of view.