

Literary Sampling and the Poetics of the Specimen

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RH: LITERARY SAMPLING

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To modern eyes, few poems of the Romantic period carry a less inviting title than Keats's "Specimen of an Induction to a Poem," published in his *Poems* (1817). Not only is this a poem without a name, it is no more than an "induction" to a poem, not the thing itself; and merely a "specimen" of an induction, not the definitive one. The pedantic, non-committal title makes the whole thing seem like a dry technical exercise. Is a "specimen of an induction" what we expect from a writer who said that "if Poetry comes not as naturally as the Leaves to a tree it had better not come at all"?¹ A full answer to this question will involve a detailed reconstruction of the publishing context of Keats's poem and take us to the theme of this special issue, the relationship between Romantic poetics and fragmentary or fugitive publication, and the making and unmaking of the Romantic book.

Appropriately, the poem is precisely about poetry not coming, a frustrated act of composition. The opening line reads "Lo! I must tell a tale of chivalry," a statement repeated three times in the space of the poem's 68 lines.² But Keats expresses both the compulsion to

¹ John Keats to John Taylor, February 27, 1818, in *The Letters of John Keats*, ed. Hyder E. Rollins (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958), 1:238–39. All subsequent references to Keats's letters are to this edition.

² Keats, *The Complete Poems*, ed. John Barnard, 2nd ed. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1977), 56–57, lines 1, 11, 45. All subsequent quotations from Keats's poems are to this edition, and will be cited parenthetically in the text by line number.

write a chivalric tale and the difficulty of doing so at this late moment in literary history, when the genre is worn out by overuse: “how shall I / Revive the dying tones of minstrelsy,” “How sing the splendour of the revelries, / When butts of wine are drunk off to the lees?” (31–32, 35–36).

Despite this seemingly rhetorical question, the poem ends on a note of hope, following an appeal to the “great bard” Spenser (line 55), a presiding presence in the 1817 volume, and to Spenser’s disciple Leigh Hunt, “thy loved Libertas” (line 61), to whom the collection is dedicated. And we do, indeed, get the poem to which this is an induction, a neo-Spenserian (and Huntian) romance in rhyming couplets entitled “Calidore,” which immediately follows the “Specimen.” Yet this too is but a fragment, explicitly labeled such: a poem that trails off, after 162 lines, into a row of asterisks. In the story of Calidore itself, the same motif of un-telling recurs. Barely has the eponymous hero arrived at the castle to begin his quest when the narrative breaks off, and the inspiring stories he had longed to hear from fellow adventurers of “knightly deeds, and gallant spurning / Of all unworthiness” (143–44) remain unheard.

If we set the two poems and titles side by side, the claims of the first seem to diminish further, making it a specimen of an induction to a fragment of a poem. The mention of fragmentariness need not, however, be an admission of failure, but rather an allusion to a fashionable genre that Keats was to employ on other occasions, notably for his unfinished epic, “Hyperion. A Fragment” (1820), a prime example of the “Romantic fragment poem,” which has come to be seen by many as the quintessential Romantic form.³ Interestingly,

³ Marjorie Levinson, *The Romantic Fragment Poem: A Critique of a Form* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 167–87; D. F. Rauber, “The Fragment as Romantic Form,” *Modern Language Quarterly* 30, no. 2 (1969): 212–21; Andrew Allport,

when Keats came to revise this fragment as “The Fall of Hyperion. A Dream,” he included an 18-line preliminary section which he refers to in a letter as “a sort of induction” (his only other use of this term), suggesting the two forms were related in his poetic taxonomy.⁴ As applied to “Calidore,” the label “A Fragment” may draw particular inspiration from Coleridge’s *Christabel* volume (1816), whose strategic deployment of the rubric of the fragment had recently demonstrated how unfinishedness could be presented as a paradoxical strength—and serve as a solution to the problem of revivifying an exhausted genre like romance.⁵

What, though, of Keats’s other paratextual terms, *specimen* and *induction*? Modern editors have passed over them in silence, most readers regarding them as an example of the stylistic awkwardness that is often said to mar the 1817 volume. The one detailed critical study of “Specimen of an Induction to a Poem,” while making a case for the poem as a tactical engagement with a “self-contained form,” the *incipit*, which has “a logic of its own,” says nothing about Keats’s actual term, induction.⁶ Incipit is a specialized bibliographic term

“The Romantic Fragment Poem and the Performance of Form,” *Studies in Romanticism* 51, no. 3 (2012): 399–417.

⁴ Keats to Richard Woodhouse, September 21, 1819, in Rollins, *Letters*, 2:172.

⁵ Anne Janowitz, “Coleridge’s 1816 Volume: Fragment as Rubric,” *Studies in Romanticism* 24, no. 1 (1985): 21–39; David Duff, *Romanticism and the Uses of Genre* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 149–54.

⁶ Chiara Moriconi, “‘I Must Tell a Tale of Chivalry’: Keats’s Early Reading of Spenser in ‘Specimen of an Induction to a Poem,’” *Keats-Shelley Review* 29, no. 2 (2015): 91. Greg Kucich, *Keats, Shelley, and Romantic Spenserianism* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania

for the opening words or lines of a manuscript, a way of identifying texts that was common before the development of titles, which occurred in the era of print.⁷ The practice is an ancient one but the term was only used in English from the late nineteenth century, and Keats is unlikely to have known the scribal convention to which it refers. Induction, on the other hand, was a word with an established literary meaning in Keats's day, though it referred to a literary form that by then was largely obsolete.⁸ Dating from the early sixteenth century, the term was formerly applied to various kinds of introduction, preface, or preamble, but its most frequent application was to a theatrical device, popular on the Elizabethan stage, involving a short dramatic action performed by two or more actors which introduces a full-length play or masque. The best-known example is the "Induction" in Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* (ca. 1592), but many other dramatists used the device, including Jonson, Marston, Middleton, and Tourneur; and by 1607 it was considered hackneyed enough for Beaumont and Fletcher to comment that "Inductions are out of date," and a "Prologue in Verse" (a related theatrical device) "as stale, as a blacke Velvet Cloake."⁹

State University Press, 1991), 153, interprets "induction" as Keats's initiation into Spenserian influence.

⁷ See D. Vance Smith, *The Book of the Incipit: Beginnings in the Fourteenth Century* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2001); and Whitney Trettien, "Title Pages," in *Book Parts*, ed. Dennis Duncan and Adam Smyth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 42–43.

⁸ *OED* gives 1897 for first use of *incipit* in English. *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "incipit," accessed January 6, 2020, <https://www.oed.com>

⁹ [Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher], *The Woman-Hater* (1607), Prologue, cited in *Oxford English Dictionary* s.v. "induction, n," accessed January 6, 2020, <https://www.oed.com>. The

This provenance is not irrelevant to Keats, whose revival of a defunct Elizabethan genre-label is part of an archaizing pattern in the 1817 volume that begins on the title page with an engraving of Shakespeare's bust and an epigraph from Spenser's *Muiuopotmos* (1590). The recent use of the term by another modern poet with antiquarian tastes, Edward, Lord Thurlow, in verses entitled "The Induction to my Poem, which I Designed to Write; Entitled, 'England Triumphant,'" reveals a similar impulse and brings out further meanings of "induction" which were active in Keats's title.¹⁰ "England Triumphant" was probably never written, but the "Induction" was published in Thurlow's *Poems on Several Occasions* (1813), and its genre-label is likely to have derived not from theatrical usage but from Thomas Sackville's "Induction" to the poetic miscellany *The Mirror for Magistrates* (1559), about which Thurlow also wrote an enthusiastic sonnet ("On Reading the Induction to The Mirror of Magistrates, Wherein the Poet, Led by Sorrow, Descends to Hell").¹¹

What connects Thurlow's poem to Keats's is not just the word induction but the earnest reflection on a grand artistic project, and the invocation of a mentor or muse

standard scholarly study is Thelma N. Greenfield, *The Induction in Elizabethan Drama* (Eugene, OR: University of Oregon Books, 1969).

¹⁰ Edward, Lord Thurlow, *Poems on Several Occasions*, 2nd ed. (London, 1813), 176–80.

There is no evidence that Keats knew Thurlow's work, but it was prominently reviewed by Thomas Moore in the *Edinburgh Review* (see below), and commented on by Byron, Lamb, and Hazlitt. For contemporary responses, see the entry for Thurlow in *English Poetry 1579–1830: Spenser and the Tradition: A Gathering of Texts, Biography, and Criticism* compiled by David Hill Radcliffe, <http://spenserians.cath.vt.edu>.

¹¹ Edward Hovel Thurlow, Lord Thurlow, *Select Poems* (Chiswick: C. Whittingham, 1821), 63.

(“Althea” for Thurlow, Spenser and Hunt for Keats) to initiate a wished-for, but unfulfilled, act of composition. Thomas Moore’s anonymous review of Thurlow’s poetry in the *Edinburgh Review* pinpoints both the attractions and dangers of such a confessional strategy, linking Thurlow’s “Induction” to “England Triumphant” with his “Legend of the Knight of Illyria,” “another fragment of another great work,” and commenting, with increasing irony:

There is nothing more delightful than to be admitted, as it were, into the work-shop of genius;—to see the many unhewn masses of thought which are destined to grow beneath the chisel into forms of grace and magnificence;—to observe, too, how much of this precious material has been wasted in wild experiments and forgotten fragments;—and then turn with delight to the contemplation of one divine work, which, after nights of thought, and days of labour, has at length risen into bright, consummate beauty, and waits but the last superficial polish, to take its place in a niche of Immortality's temple.¹²

Whether or not Keats was aware of Thurlow’s precedent, Moore’s sarcastic analysis says much about both the contemporary appeal of the authorial induction (a window into the “work-shop of genius”) and the potential criticism to which a writer exposed himself by expressing his ambitions and sharing his on-going or abandoned projects (“wild experiments and forgotten fragments”). Like Thurlow, Keats devotes his “Specimen of an Induction” and many other poems in the 1817 collection to artistic self-reflection and description of past and future projects, or to what Moore mockingly calls an “exhibition of all he *has* done, or attempted to do,” together with an “account of all he hereafter *means* to do.”¹³ If we now

¹² [Moore], “Lord Thurlow’s *Poems*,” *Edinburgh Review* 23 (September 1814): 414–15.

¹³ [Moore], “Lord Thurlow’s *Poems*,” 415.

interpret the “embryonic activity” (in Thomas McFarland’s phrase) of the 1817 volume as evidence of the growing talents of a major poet, as opposed to the abortive efforts of the soon-to-be-forgotten Thurlow, the two writers were tapping the same literary trend, a fashionable geneticism and experimentalism that valued the process of creation of a work of art as highly as the finished product, reading works of literature not just for their own sake but as evidence of the development of the artist.¹⁴

The term induction encapsulates this trend, its literary connotations of initiation and potentiality reinforced by its scientific meaning, denoting a form of knowledge based on inference and experiment. In this sense, Keats’s “Specimen of an Induction” stands as a paradigm for the entire 1817 collection, whose various stylistic and generic experiments offer an induction into the broader artistic project the volume announces, fragmentary specimens from which a larger *oeuvre* can be inferred. That *oeuvre* is yet to come, but Keats is at pains to show, in “Sleep and Poetry,” that he is actively planning it, mapping out his journey through the sharply visualized “realms” of poetry. Whatever the obstacles he expects to encounter,

there ever rolls

A vast idea before me, and I glean

¹⁴ McFarland, *The Masks of Keats: The Endeavour of a Poet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 22. This interest in “embryonic” creativity and authorial process mirrors “vitalist” currents in contemporary science, parallels explored by Robert Mitchell, *Experimental Life: Vitalism in Romantic Science and Literature* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014); and Amanda Goldstein, *Sweet Science: Romantic Materialism and the New Logics of Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), esp. 35–71.

There from my liberty; thence too I've seen

The end and aim of Poesy.

(290–93)

That “vast idea” can be interpreted in various ways, but it signals Keats’s overarching ambition, the imaginative drive that lies behind the urge to “tell a tale of chivalry” and to embark on the many other literary adventures begun or contemplated in the 1817 volume.

Once recognized, the powerful resonances of the word induction gain in strength from its proximity to the second term in Keats’s title, specimen. This too has multiple resonances, several of them relevant to Keats. There is, first of all, the specialized scientific meaning (“An animal, plant, or mineral, a part or portion of some substance or organism, etc., serving as an example of the thing in question for purposes of investigation or scientific study”), which is now its dominant sense and which dates, according to the *OED*, from the 1760s.¹⁵ Keats would certainly have been familiar with this use of the term, since, at the time he composed the poem, probably in spring 1816, he would have been presented with anatomical and botanical specimens on a daily basis as part of his medical training.¹⁶ Without making the

¹⁵ *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “specimen, n.,” 4.b.(c.), first attested in 1765. Another, broader sense, 4.b.(a), relevant to my argument below (“A single thing selected or regarded as typical of its class; a part or piece of something taken as representative of the whole”) dates from 1654. Accessed January 6, 2020, <https://www.oed.com>.

¹⁶ As illustrated by J. C. Stadler’s color aquatint (after Augustus Pugin), “Theatre of Anatomy,” in Rudolph Ackermann’s *History of the University of Cambridge* (London: L. Harrison and J. C. Leigh, 1815), which depicts a sky-lit anatomy theater with anatomical specimens in jars and a suspended skeleton. For the medical historical background, see Carin

connection, Nicholas Roe's biography pictures Keats scribbling his "Specimen of an Induction" during lectures at Guy's Hospital, and writing it up at night.¹⁷ In fact, the word specimen did not appear in the title until the poem was being prepared for publication, between mid-December 1816 and February 1817, by which point Keats had made the momentous decision to renounce medicine.¹⁸ The final wording of his title may thus at one level be a kind of medical joke, a tongue-in-cheek announcement to his fellow students that he had now abandoned anatomical specimens for poetical ones.

There are, however, other implications to Keats's change of title, and the addition of the word specimen seems to be a carefully calibrated signal to the reader, made as Keats negotiated with the printer about the final appearance of the volume. He is known to have made other paratextual changes at this stage, including replacing the original title page with one that included the Shakespeare vignette and Spenser epigraph, and adding a dedicatory sonnet to Leigh Hunt, all of which, as John Barnard notes, are symbolic statements of Keats's

Berkowitz, "Systems of Display: The Making of Anatomical Knowledge in Enlightenment Britain," *British Journal for the History of Science* 46, no. 3 (2013): 359–87. Keats's knowledge of medical botany is assessed by Nikki Hessell, "John Keats, the Botanist's Companion," in *John Keats and the Medical Imagination*, ed. Nicholas Roe (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

¹⁷ Roe, *John Keats: A New Life* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012), 88.

¹⁸ In the sole surviving manuscript, a transcription by Keats's brother Tom made during December 1816, the titles of this poem and its companion appear simply as "Induction" and "Calidore": see "Commonplace book compiled by Tom Keats, July–August 1814 [*sic*]," MS Keats 3.5, Houghton Library, Harvard University, digital facsimile at

[https://iif.lib.harvard.edu/manifests/view/drs:13846463\\$5j](https://iif.lib.harvard.edu/manifests/view/drs:13846463$5j).

literary affiliations and ambitions.¹⁹ One consequence of Keats's intervention with the printer was that the published volume lacked a contents page, obscuring the careful generic arrangement of the volume.²⁰ This, too, though, may have served a purpose, reducing the impression of finality and reinforcing the sense that this was a book of inductions and experiments, a work in progress that spoke of greater things to come, rather than a fully finished monument.

The introduction of the word specimen plays into this idea. To understand why, we need to consider two other meanings of the word, and two other contexts that have a direct bearing on Keats's use of the term. The first is contemporary literary anthologies, many of which carried the word specimen in their title, indicating a particular method of selection with a well-developed rationale. Though earlier examples can be found, this publishing trend began with George Ellis's *Specimens of the Early English Poets*, a one-volume collection of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century verse published in 1790. The anthology covered similar ground to Thomas Percy's much-reprinted *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765) but was organized chronologically by author, thereby uniting, as Ellis states in his preface, "the advantages of a poetical commonplace book with those of a history of English poetry."²¹ The concept of the "specimen" was part of this editorial rationale. Unlike "extract" anthologies

¹⁹ Barnard, "First Fruits or 'First Blights': A New Account of the Publishing History of Keats's *Poems* (1817)," *Romanticism* 12, no. 2 (2006): 89.

²⁰ Barnard attributes the absence of a contents page and other "odd" typographical features not only to Keats's intervention but also to the inexperience of the printer, Charles Richards, who was setting poetry for the first time, and the publisher, Charles Ollier, who was new to the book trade. "First Fruits," 77–79, 74.

²¹ Ellis, ed., preface to *Specimens of the Early English Poets* (London: Edwards, 1790), ii.

such as Vicesimus Knox's *Elegant Extracts* (1789), designed for educational use, Ellis's anthology was focused on a single period and confined to short poems rather than extracts from longer works. While retaining the diversity of subject matter, genre, and tone that might be expected from a commonplace book, Ellis's specimens were selected for their representative value, to "characterize the manner of the several authors" and to illustrate the distinctive literary culture of the period.²²

Ellis's approach was, as Dahlia Porter explains, an intervention in a vigorous debate around 1800 about methods of anthologization that was to have far-reaching consequences for our understanding of literary history and for the future of the discipline of English. The approach he adopted, of selecting texts not just for their own sake but as representative "specimens," illustrative examples "standing in for a larger authorial corpus or class," and ordering them chronologically, established the principles that still govern most literary anthologies today.²³ This approach to literary collecting was, Porter argues, conditioned both metaphorically and materially "by the projects of botanical collecting, preservation, classification, description, and illustration of the previous century."²⁴ The traditional metaphor of the poetic collection as a gathering of flowers, contained in the word "anthology" itself (from Greek *anthologia*, "flower collection"), was given literal expression as eighteenth-century anthologists modeled their practices on contemporary botany. For Porter, the seminal figure in this history is Percy, whose *Reliques* established the "specimen" approach as well as the fashion for "ancient" English poetry, but it was, I suggest, Ellis who

²² Ellis, Preface, iii.

²³ Dahlia Porter, "Specimen Poetics: Botany, Reanimation, and the Romantic Collection," *Representations* 139, no. 1 (2017): 61.

²⁴ Porter, "Specimen Poetics," 62.

made “specimen” an anthologists’ buzzword, and his more rigorously chronological approach that crystallized the possibilities of this historical method.²⁵

Ellis produced an expanded, three-volume edition in 1801, extending the chronological range to include medieval and Anglo-Saxon poetry, and adding a historical introduction on “the Rise and Progress of the English Poetry and Language.” Further editions followed in 1803 and 1811, the latter issued by his new publisher, Longman. In 1805, Ellis reused the term in his *Specimens of Early English Metrical Romances*, also published by Longman. In this case, his method of anthologization was to present samples, through extract and paraphrase, of some twenty English medieval romances, highlighting their distinctive features in accompanying commentaries.²⁶ Building on Ellis’s success, Longman then commissioned three other “specimen” collections: Robert Southey’s *Specimens of the Later English Poets* (1807), designed to pick up chronologically where Ellis ended; George Burnett’s *Specimens of English Prose-Writers from the Earliest Times to the Close of the Seventeenth Century* (1807), a prose counterpart to Ellis; and Charles Lamb’s influential *Specimens of English Dramatic Poets Who Lived about the Time of Shakespeare* (1808), which extended Ellis’s editorial technique to drama, singling out representative scenes and adding interpretative headnotes and footnotes.

²⁵ For the development of a chronological approach in both “specimen” anthologies and multivolume collections of English poetry such as John Bell’s, see Julia M. Wright, “‘The Order of Time’: Nationalism and Literary Anthologies, 1774–1831,” *Papers on Language and Literature* 33, no. 4 (1997): 339–65.

²⁶ For Ellis’s place in the scholarly revival of romance, see Arthur Johnston, “George Ellis,” chap. 6 in *Enchanted Ground: The Study of Medieval Romance in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Athlone Press, 1964).

Several points can be made about the use of the term specimen in this context. First, it functioned for a time as a Longman brand, though Ellis's anthology was first published by a different firm and by the 1820s other publishers were using the term, examples being Thomas Campbell's seven-volume *Specimens of the British Poets* (John Murray, 1819); Elizabeth Scott's *Specimens of British Poetry* (James Ballantyne, 1823); and Alexander Dyce's innovative *Specimens of British Poetesses* (Thomas Rodd, 1825), a chronological collection of eighty-nine female authors from the fifteenth century to the present. Secondly, it was associated initially with early literature, though subsequently applied to more recent authors.²⁷ Thirdly, and most importantly, it was linked to a *critical* enterprise. When set against "beauties" or "elegant extracts," labels used for other kinds of anthology, "specimens" might seem a cold and unattractive term.²⁸ But for early nineteenth-century readers, it was a coded invitation to a fashionable and pleasurable activity, literary criticism.

²⁷ The association with early poetry can be traced back to Evan Evans's *Some Specimens of the Poetry of the Antient Welsh Bards, Translated into English* (London: Dodsley, 1764). Frequently cited by Percy and others, this was the first anthology to use "specimens" in its title.

²⁸ For these rival anthological traditions, each with its own editorial principles and market share, see Daniel Cook, "Authors Unformed: Reading 'Beauties' in the Eighteenth Century," *Philological Quarterly* 89, nos. 2/3 (2010): 283–309; and Michael Suarez, "The Production and Consumption of the Eighteenth-Century Poetic Miscellany," in *Books and Readers in Eighteenth-Century England: New Essays*, ed. Isabel Rivers (London: Leicester University Press, 2001). Parallel rivalries in full-text, multivolume collections are charted by Thomas F. Bonnell, *The Most Disreputable Trade: Publishing the Classics of English Poetry 1765–1810* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

It invited exploration of a neglected literary archive and critical evaluation of exemplary texts from the past. A “select beauty” or an “elegant extract” called for delectation and memorization; a “specimen” called for inspection and analysis.

This was already implicit in Ellis’s original preface to *Specimens of the Early English Poets*. The addition of a “Historical Sketch of the Rise and Progress of the English Poetry and Language” to the second edition made it even clearer, as did the scholarly apparatus in his *Specimens of Early English Metrical Romances*, where the sample texts served to illustrate the generic development mapped out in his “Historical Introduction.” Southey’s critical motives in *Specimens of the Later English Poets* are similarly explicit. To underline the scientific pretensions of his approach, Southey invokes the botanical meaning of specimen, distinguishing between his editorial practice and that of a regular anthologist: “My business was to collect specimens as for a *hortus siccus*; not to cull flowers as for an anthology.”²⁹ His principles of selection, he insists, are historical rather than aesthetic: the specimens include the work of “indifferent Poets” as well as good ones, his purpose being to illustrate “the rise, progress, decline and revival of our Poetry” and document “the fluctuations of our poetical taste, from the first growth of the English language to the present times.”³⁰ As Porter notes, this approach is intrinsically inductive, counteracting the atomism to which extract anthologies are prone by making each selection a specimen of some greater whole.³¹ Lamb,

²⁹ Southey, ed., preface to *Specimens of the Later English Poets; With Preliminary Notices* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1807), 1:iv.

³⁰ Southey, preface, 1:iii.

³¹ In “Specimen Poetics,” Porter notes that, for Southey, literary collections “ought to function typologically” (86); in *Science, Form, and the Problem of Induction in British Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), she presents Romantic authors

too, employs an inductive method, for the purposes, in his case, not of quasi-scientific literary historiography but of critical appreciation and historical recovery: his “dramatic specimens” are intended to demonstrate the artistic excellence of Shakespeare’s neglected contemporaries and “to illustrate what may be called the moral sense of our ancestors” by showing the power with which they imagined the complexities of human behavior.³²

That three of these anthologies were edited by members of the Wordsworth-Coleridge circle suggests how close this critical endeavor was to the creative pulse of English Romanticism. The search for literary specimens was not some arid activity undertaken by pedants but, like Matthew Arnold’s “touchstones” later in the nineteenth century, a meaningful way of exploring the literary tradition and testing critical principles.³³ Wordsworth himself took an active interest in specimen-collecting, initiating a correspondence with Alexander Dyce in which he expresses a wish to compile his own volume of extracts from female poets, or to advise on a new edition of Dyce’s *Specimens of British Poetesses*, should there be one.³⁴ Lamb, in turn, refers in a letter to Wordsworth’s

grappling with the logical problem of moving from parts to wholes, partially solved for Southey by means of a “poetics of the commonplace” (see chap. 3, “Poetics of the Commonplace: Robert Southey’s Analogical Romance”).

³² Lamb, ed., preface to *Specimens of English Dramatic Poets Who Lived About the Time of Shakespeare: With Notes* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1808), vi–vii.

³³ For Arnold’s “touchstone” method, expounded in his essay “The Study of Poetry” (1880), see Stefan Collini, *Matthew Arnold: A Critical Portrait*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 63–64.

³⁴ Wordsworth to Dyce, October 19, 1829 and later correspondence, cited by Paul Salzman, *Editors Construct the Renaissance Canon, 1825–1915* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan,

critique of Thomas Gray in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* as another kind of specimen-criticism, playfully coining a new verb, “specimenify,” to describe it.³⁵ Coleridge, too, makes constant use of the word specimen, praising Lamb in *Biographia Literaria* for the “just and original criticism” of his “Dramatic Specimens,” and adopting the term as part of the metalanguage of his own brand of “practical criticism,” which he defines as the endeavor “to discover what the qualities in a poem are, which may be deemed promises and specific symptoms of poetic power.”³⁶ As with Lamb, the selection and analysis of suitable “specimens” are central to this critical project.

Given the prominence of the term in contemporary critical discourse, for Keats in 1817 to introduce the word specimen into the title of a poem was not, therefore, to relegate his composition to the status of a technical exercise. Though the term has a distancing effect, it serves to enhance rather than diminish the pretensions of the poem, connecting it to a familiar poetics and inviting a particular kind of critical attention. The co-presence in the title

2018), 8–9. A second edition without changes was published in 1827 but there was no further edition.

³⁵ “[T]he line you cannot appropriate is Gray’s sonnet, specimenified by Wordsworth . . . as mixed of good and bad style.” Lamb to John Payne Collier, May 16, 1821, in *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “specimen, n.” (sub-entry on Derivatives), accessed January 6, 2020, <https://www.oed.com>. *OED* misdates the letter to 1820.

³⁶ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983), 2:79, 2:19. For the development of this critical method among the Coleridge-Lamb circle, see Gregory Dart, “Practical Criticism,” in *The Oxford Handbook of British Romanticism*, ed. David Duff (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

of the word induction reinforces the impression that the poem is both a creative performance and an act of critical self-reflection in which the reader is invited to share the author's work in progress and infer from this specimen of his art the poetic power to which the volume as a whole lays claim. What makes the term especially apt here is that it links Keats's poetic meditation on the viability of reviving the old and "dying" genre of romance with projects such as Ellis's and Southey's, who were using "specimen" collections to undertake just such a revival in the critical sphere. Michael Gamer has noted that Keats's poignant remark, "I think I shall be among the English Poets after my death," made in a letter of 1818, prophesies his inclusion in collections such as John Bell's *Poets of Great Britain* (1777–83); Keats's heavily annotated copy of Bell's *Poetical Works of Edmund Spenser* was "a concrete embodiment of his poetical ambition."³⁷ A similar claim might be made for Keats's "Specimen of an Induction," a text that addresses his illustrious precursor Spenser while aspiring to inclusion in some putative "specimen" anthology of the future—a prospective vision of retrospective recognition.³⁸ As with much of the "embryonic activity" in the 1817 volume, Keats's experiment in induction-writing is thus also an experiment in imaginary book-making and self-canonization.

What gives further pertinence to such bookish imaginings, and to Keats's creative exploitation of the paratext, is that the term specimen had a third meaning, also palpably

³⁷ Keats to George Keats, October 25, 1818, in Rollins, *Letters*, 1:396; Gamer, *Romanticism, Self-Canonization, and the Business of Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 33.

³⁸ Keats's heavily marked and annotated copy of Lamb's *Specimens of English Dramatic Poets*—which he later gifted to Fanny Brawne—demonstrates his imaginative investment in such anthologies.

active here, which relates to the publication process itself. It is to this final context that I now turn. In the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century book trade, the specimen was a widely used marketing device involving the distribution of a printed sample of a forthcoming or projected work in order to attract advance sales. This advertising technique was particularly common in subscription publishing, a method of publication used for expensive, illustrated books and multivolume books such as encyclopedias and sets of collected works, though occasionally also for more modest, single-volume publications, such as books of poetry.³⁹ With the more grandiose projects, a specimen page or pages would sometimes accompany the prospectus, a good example being Josiah Pratt's *Prospectus with Specimens of a New Polyglott Bible*, advertised to potential subscribers in 1797. The "Prospectus" part, running to nine pages, explains the rationale for publication, the plan of the work, how it improves on its competitors, and the credentials of the author. A separate "Conditions" section sets out the terms of sale, specifying details such as publishing format, typeface, paper quality, price, and method of delivery. Printed alongside are specimen pages, showing exactly what the published work would look like.

In Pratt's case, the specimen pages were of particular importance since a key selling point of his *Polyglott Bible*—aimed primarily at Divinity students—was the printing of parallel texts in five languages, including Hebrew, ancient Greek, and Latin, a typographical feat involving multiple fonts, special characters, and complex page layouts. Four specimen pages are included, the prospectus as a whole, including the title page, half-title, and dedication, running to an impressive seventeen pages. The book itself was to be published in five or six quarto volumes, at a total cost of ten guineas, an enormous sum at the time. The

³⁹ James Raven, *The Business of Books: Booksellers and the English Book Trade 1450–1850* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 316.

prospectus alone cost two shillings, an unfortunate decision on Pratt's part since, then as now, it was highly unusual to charge for an advertising brochure, however elaborate. In the British Library copy, the price has been altered by hand to one shilling, an ominous sign that Pratt had misjudged his market from the outset.⁴⁰ It comes as no surprise to learn that he failed to find enough subscribers and the work never appeared.

Specimen pages were usually distributed as part of or alongside a prospectus, but in some cases they were issued separately and served as advertisements in their own right, with little or no commentary. An example is the *Specimen of a Volume of Modern Poetry*, printed in New York by the émigré French bookseller Hocquet Caritat in 1801.⁴¹

Place figure 1 here on ½ page with the caption underneath the image

(Caption): *Specimen of a Volume of Modern Poetry, As Proposed to be Published by H. Caritat, Bookseller* (New York, 1801), title page. Author's own copy.

This contains a single page of advertising copy (entitled "Advertisement," in the double sense of a notice to the reader and a marketing announcement), but twenty-seven specimen pages, including full texts and mock-up title pages of two of the poems Caritat proposed to include in the volume, M. G. Lewis's *The Love of Gain* and Henry Mackenzie's *The Pursuit of*

⁴⁰ Pratt, *Prospectus with Specimens of a New Polyglott Bible in Quarto for the Use of English Students* (Oxford: Printed at the University Press, for the Author, 1797), British Library copy, General Reference Collection 1214.k.9.

⁴¹ *Specimen of A Volume of Modern Poetry, As Proposed to be Published by H. Caritat, Bookseller* (New York, 1801). For biographical information and a list of Caritat's publications, see George Gates Raddin, *Hocquet Caritat and the Early New York Literary Scene* (Dover, NJ: Dover Advance Press, 1953).

Happiness (first published in London in 1799 and 1771 respectively). Caritat was a prominent member of the New York publishing scene with his own circulating library and reading room. The precise circumstances of his *Modern Poetry* project are unclear, but there is no evidence that it came to fruition. The interest of the marketing brochure, of which very few copies survive, is that it shows how far the technique of sampling could be taken, and how the printed specimen was a familiar enough feature of the Romantic book trade for it to function as an autonomous publication. Caritat's multipage *Specimen* is a striking example of the book part circulating as a free-standing publication, separated not only from the yet-to-be-published volume of which it was intended to form part, but also from the publishing prospectus which would normally accompany such a specimen. The brief "Advertisement" tells us nothing about the conditions of sale or indeed the proposed contents of the volume it announces, except for the two sample poems. Whether the poorly printed reprints (stitched together as part of a pamphlet but each with its own, dated title page) constitute "editions" of the two poems, or merely simulacra, is a moot point, but they illustrate forcibly the bibliographical grey area between text and epitext, publication and prepublication, that historians of book advertising confront and that is now part of the terrain of literary scholarship.

Another grey area in the literary history of the specimen is where an author publishes a small sample of their work to test the market for a larger publication, as in Thomas Boyce's *A Specimen of Elegiac Poetry* (1773). Boyce, a clergyman and, briefly, aspiring dramatist, prefaced his slender publication (just seventeen pages long) with a brief "Advertisement" stating that the two poems of which the volume consists, "are selected . . . from a small number written in the same manner.—The opinion of the Publick upon this Specimen will

best inform that Author whether the others merit any further trouble or attention.”⁴² Since there was no follow-up publication, we can assume the verdict of the public was negative, but Boyce’s marketing strategy is a revealing one, showing as it does with unusual candor the element of risk involved when an author submits their work for public approval. Subscription publishing can mitigate the financial risk since an author or publisher can determine the minimum number of subscribers to make publication viable, but the intellectual risk of issuing a prospectus or a sample of an unfinished project and inviting public judgment on it cannot be removed. The non-publication of Boyce’s “other” elegiac poems may be no great loss to English literature but there are undoubtedly cases where this advertising strategy has prevented or delayed the completion of significant creative work, creating at the same time the bibliographical anomaly of published “specimens” of works that do not exist in any other form.

Despite the risks, prospectuses and specimens were a very familiar part of the publishing world of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. I have shown elsewhere how the prospectus, a now largely forgotten genre, entered the Romantic bibliographic imagination, inspiring works such as the “Prospectus” to *The Recluse*, which is not simply a manifesto for Wordsworth’s visionary poetics, as it has traditionally been interpreted, but also a strategically placed advertisement for future installments of his magnum opus (which, needless to say, failed to appear).⁴³ As a form of public announcement which is also a type of speculative, anticipatory writing, the prospectus came to epitomize the strain in Romanticism identified by Maurice Blanchot in his commentary on the German

⁴² Boyce, *A Specimen of Elegiac Poetry* (London: Becket, 1773), Advertisement, n.p.

⁴³ David Duff, “Wordsworth’s ‘Prospectus’: The Genre,” *The Wordsworth Circle* 45, no. 2 (2014): 178–84.

journal *The Athenaeum*, a Schlegelian poetics in which “art and literature seem to have nothing to do but manifest themselves” and “announce themselves.”⁴⁴ The prospectus tells literally of “the book to come,” a recurring metaphor in European Romanticism from Schlegel to Mallarmé, even if the book sometimes does not come, as exemplified by the many aborted projects which are equally characteristic of Romanticism.⁴⁵ Wordsworth’s “Prospectus” is just one of many Romantic works which adapt and transform the genre, turning it from a marketing device of the book trade into a significant literary form.

Here I want to point briefly to the creative adoption and transformation by Romantic writers of that other advertising device, and other piece of bibliographic metalanguage, the specimen. My first, and strangest, example is Coleridge’s “Prospectus and Specimen of a Translation of Euclid, in a Series of Pindaric Odes,” a bizarre poem he sent to his brother George in a letter (or *as* a letter, since the two forms merge) in March 1791.⁴⁶

Place figure 2 here on ½ page with the caption underneath the image

(Caption): Samuel Taylor Coleridge, “Prospectus and Specimen of a Translation of Euclid in a Series of Pindaric Odes,” contained in a letter to his brother George Coleridge, March 31, 1791, Berg Coll MSS Coleridge, page 1 of 4. © Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

⁴⁴ Blanchot, “*The Athenaeum*,” trans. Deborah Esch and Ian Balfour, *Studies in Romanticism* 22, no. 2 (1983): 163–72.

⁴⁵ Blanchot, *The Book to Come*, trans. Charlotte Mandel (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

⁴⁶ Coleridge, “Letter to his brother George Coleridge, 31 March 1791, containing Prospectus and Specimen of a Translation of Euclid,” Berg Coll MSS Coleridge, New York Public Library, first published in 1834.

The editor of the Bollingen edition describes it as a “schoolboy joke,” the joke partly consisting in the idea that Pindaric poetry could be written on a subject as abstruse as Euclidean geometry.⁴⁷ In fact, though, Coleridge is merely literalizing the claim made by his favorite theorist of the ode, Edward Young, who had argued that lyric poetry, even that of the wildest odes, “has as much Logick at the bottom, as *Aristotle*, or *Euclid*,” though “to some Criticks” it “has appear’d as mad.”⁴⁸ Coleridge takes Young’s idea to its logical conclusion, writing an ode that actually puts into verse Euclidean axioms, thus bearing out the statement in his prefatory letter to George (which serves as the “prospectus”) that the “unwarrantable liberties” he has taken in the poem are “liberties equally homogeneal with the exactness of Mathemat[ical] disquisition and the boldness of *Pindaric Daring*” (1:34). By presenting the poem as a “specimen” translation—a translation of Euclid’s Greek both into English and into the language of verse—Coleridge adds a further level of humor, parodying the advertising techniques of the book trade by offering to imaginary subscribers what is surely the most improbable publishing project even conceived. Though clearly a private *jeu d’esprit* which Coleridge made no effort to publish, the text plays with the forms and conventions of an emphatically public discourse, that of publication itself, and it stands as the first instance of

⁴⁷ Coleridge, *Poetical Works I: Poems (Reading Text)*, ed. J. C. C. Mays (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 1:33. Subsequent quotations are from this edition, cited parenthetically in the text by volume and page number.

⁴⁸ Young, “On Lyrick Poetry,” in *Ocean: An Ode. Occasion’d by His Majesty’s late Royal Encouragement of the Sea-service. To which is Prefix’d, an Ode to the King; and a Discourse on Ode* (London: Thomas Worrall, 1728), 20. For Coleridge’s deep interest in Young’s theory, see Duff, *Romanticism and the Uses of Genre*, 87–88.

what became a lifelong fascination with prospectuses and specimens, genres which, given his fragmentary, speculative, and often fugitive output, carry a symbolic import that is yet to be fully recognized. A minor detail on the manuscript, the addition in superscript (presumably as an afterthought) of the words “a series of” above “Pindaric Odes” in the title, says everything about Coleridge’s imaginative propensities: even as he completes one “specimen” of his fantasy project of an odic version of Euclidean geometry, he conceives of others—the unstoppable momentum that makes him the prospector and specimenizer, if not the book-maker, *par excellence* of the Romantic era.

Another, more extended parody of—or imaginative fantasia upon—these mundane tools of the book trade is John Hookham Frere’s *Prospectus and Specimen of an Intended National Work . . . Intended to Comprise the Most Interesting Particulars Relating to King Arthur and his Round Table* (1817).⁴⁹

Place figure 3 here on ½ page with the caption underneath the image

(Caption): [John Hookham Frere], *Prospectus and Specimen of an Intended National Work, by William and Robert Whistlecraft . . . Intended to Comprise the Most Interesting Particulars Relating to King Arthur and his Round Table*, 2nd edn. (London: John Murray, 1818), title page. Author’s own copy.

Frere’s poem is often cited as a model for Byron’s *Don Juan* in its comic use of *ottava rima*, but it inspired, too, Byron’s deployment of a self-reflexive, digressive narrator, both poems relying for part of their comic effect on the oscillation between story-telling—the narrative

⁴⁹ [John Hookham Frere], *Prospectus and Specimen of an Intended National Work* [. . .] 2 vols. (London: John Murray, 1817–18). Subsequent quotations are cited in the text by canto, verse, and line number.

task in hand—and satirical observations on modern literary life.⁵⁰ In Byron’s case, these mostly take the form of barbed allusions to named literary contemporaries, whose private foibles and—as he saw it—shabby political compromises are merged with critique of their stylistic and intellectual idiosyncrasies. Frere’s poem, though, offers a more thorough-going satire of the literary profession, parodying a whole series of publishing trends, including the advertising devices that supply his title. The pointed repetition of the word “intended” in his title exposes straightaway the dangerously speculative nature of prospectuses and of the subscription model of publishing, reliant entirely on promises and good intentions, while foregrounding of “specimen” alerts us to the superficiality of a literary culture whose most popular commodities are samples, fragments, and extracts. It is no coincidence that Frere’s “intended national work” (a phrase that is itself parodic, exposing the overuse by publishers of the grandiose label “national”) is a chivalric romance, since two of the connotations of “specimen” explored in this essay come together here. The first is the association, via Ellis, with the anthologization of early literature and medieval romance, a publishing trend which, while satisfying fashionable demand for all things antique, panders to the short attention span of contemporary readers by providing not full narratives but only “the most interesting particulars” of Arthurian legend. In Frere’s poem, as in a contemporary anthology, the specimen has become the thing in itself, a self-sufficient text from which, for most readers, nothing more need be induced.

The second association Frere exploits is with advertising techniques, the practice of printing of specimen pages for a projected future publication. This is a running joke throughout the poem, both in the two cantos published in 1817 and the other two added, in

⁵⁰ For Byron’s play in *Don Juan* with the idea of “samples,” and other book-trade satire inspired by Frere, see Duff, “Wordsworth’s ‘Prospectus’: The Genre,” 182.

response to popular demand, in 1818. The awakening of that public demand is an explicit theme of the first two cantos, which end, as “our Romance unravels” and the author nervously anticipates the “Reviews and paragraphs in morning papers,” with some pragmatic advice from his decidedly mercenary Muse:

“My dear,” says she, “I think it will be well
 To ascertain our losses or our gains:
 If this first sample should succeed and sell,
 We can renew the same melodious strains.”

(2.1x.1–4)

Appropriately, when the poem does indeed resume, with the publication one year later of Cantos 3 and 4, it opens, in the narrator’s voice, by naming Frere’s publisher, who has made an offer he cannot refuse: “I’ve a proposal here from Mr. Murray, / He offers handsomely—the money down” (3.i.1–2). Of all publishers, Murray made fullest use of literary advertising, publishing his own advertising journal (the *Quarterly Literary Advertiser*) alongside the highly successful *Quarterly Review*. Frere served his literary apprenticeship as a contributor to *The Anti-Jacobin* (1797–98), a journal in which book-trade satire mingles freely with political and personal satire. Later, he was one of the founders of the *Quarterly Review*. It is Frere’s immersion in the Romantic book world, as well as his instincts as a classically trained satirist, that enable him to comically exploit and expose the dubious poetics of the specimen.

Examples could be multiplied—and a full literary history of the specimen remains to be written—but these comparisons show, I hope, that Keats, in using the term specimen, was touching a nerve that runs deep through Romantic literary culture. There is no indication that his poem is satirical in intent, though there is clearly a playfulness in the overdetermination of

his title, and the possibility of a medical joke about literary and scientific specimens should not be discounted. In presenting his meditation on the genre of romance in the form of a “specimen,” he was almost certainly picking up on the associations installed by Ellis and later parodied by Frere. The relationship between specimen and induction would seem to confirm this, underlining both the critical detachment of his approach to romance and his desire to draw readers into his imaginative workshop. That Keats may be playing, too, with the machinery of the book trade, the trade jargon of prospectuses and specimens, is another intriguing possibility, suggesting a vein of bibliographic irony with which he is not normally associated. That possibility comes into sharper relief alongside an actual specimen of an induction, a sample leaf of the “Induction to A Myrrou for Magistrates” issued as a “Specimen of the Type, and Mode of Printing” with the prospectus to *The Poets of Great Britain, on a New Plan* (1793).⁵¹ Keats’s “Specimen of an Induction” is not a literal publisher’s advertisement, nor a printer’s sample, rather a set of reflections on his ability to write the poem it introduces. But it does nonetheless give deliberately tantalizing glimpses of the imaginative attractions of the tale he is about to tell, even if he is unable fully to deliver it. Like his alterations to the title page of the volume and other paratextual changes, the late addition of the term specimen into the title of the poem suggests a desire to loosen and provisionalize the book even as he completes it and sends it to press. In this, it may be

⁵¹ “Cheap Edition of The British Poets: in Eleven Volumes. This Day is Published Vol. I.II & III . . . of A Complete Edition of The Poets of Great Britain, on a New Plan” (London: J. & A. Arch; Edinburgh: Bell & Bradfute, [1793]), 2–3. Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, JJ Prospectuses 36. This edition completed publication in 1795.

symptomatic of a broader trend in Romantic poetics which scholars are beginning at last to recognize.

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