

"I do not weep at the world—  
I am too busy sharpening my  
oyster knife. "

— Zora Neale Hurston

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# THE HEATH ANTHOLOGY OF AMERICAN LITERATURE

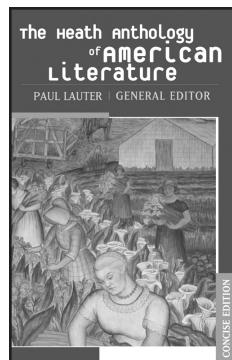
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newsletter

## INTRODUCING THE HEATH ANTHOLOGY OF AMERICAN LITERATURE, CONCISE EDITION

by Paul Lauter

*A one-volume version of The Heath Anthology of American Literature*



Those familiar with the anthology might see this as a contradiction in terms. After all, *The Heath Anthology's* main project has been to expand significantly the authors and works comprising what we call "American literature." Forty or fifty years ago, American literature might have been taught from a single book entitled *Twelve American Writers*. No more. Still, as we think readers will see, despite this reduced format, we have retained the major features of *The Heath Anthology*: diversity of writers, variety of forms, the heterogeneity of subjects and styles that constitute the rich literary culture of this complex nation. And at the same time we have provided a substantial selection of the more widely taught authors.

Like its two-volume antecedent, this one-volume version will enable the reading of well-known and lesser-known texts in relation to one another. It provides a variety of historically resonant works that will help illuminate for readers the social and cultural dynamics of an always changing place now called America. And it will allow instructors to vary their curricula from year to year without losing quality in the works taught. However, to use the words of one of Leslie Silko's charac-

ters, "It has not been easy." Every work from the two-volume edition that we had to drop remains a valuable and useful piece of writing. Yet the one-semester version of the course for which we designed this new edition is now a staple at many American colleges and universities.

The instructors and students who experience such a course deserve a thoughtful selection that preserves what has long been innovative about *The Heath Anthology*. Part of our discussion regarding this book and how it might be used focused on a set of questions: What is the most appropriate academic setting in which to study the literary cultures of the United States? The one-semester or one-quarter course? The much-used two-semester survey? Or some more extensive design? We think it is past time to reexamine such questions, and the related issues of the curricular balance among American literature, English literature, American studies, and trans-Atlantic cultural studies courses.

A related issue involves the allocation of space, and thus of emphasis. That is, how many pages should be devoted to different periods of American writing? One currently available single-volume anthology uses 831 pages for the period 1820–1865; another uses 827 pages for the period 1836–1865. In both, no other section takes up even 600 pages; indeed, one book allots as little as 398 for the modernist years between World Wars I and II. There are persuasive

arguments for devoting significant resources to the work of the “American Renaissance,” as that era was named by the scholar F.O. Matthiessen. But we do think it is worth considering what is gained and what is lost by what some might see as a disproportionate emphasis on one specific cultural moment. To be sure, the great writers on whom Matthiessen focuses in his powerful book—Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Melville, and Whitman—fully deserve more time than any of us can devote to them in a survey course. All the same, if we dedicate a quarter of an anthology (and perhaps a quarter of a course) to them, can we do justice to the rest of American literature? We do not pretend to have definitive answers to such questions but we think it is worth raising them in this context, and we hope readers of this book will share with us their ideas on the subject.

Some users of this book may well have shared their views with us already. In preparation for this new edition, we sent a survey to teachers of American literature in all parts of the country, and the responses helped us formulate the table of contents of this volume. Indeed, the contents reflect in significant part what instructors want to teach. And what you want is quite interesting with respect to the question of allocating space and time. More than 50 percent of those who responded to our questionnaire said, for example, that they wanted us to include many of the traditional works of the American Renaissance: “Song of Myself,” “Self-Reliance,” “Resistance to Civil Government,” “Young Goodman Brown,” just to list those named in three-quarters of the responses. But also named in equal numbers were Frederick Douglass’ *Narrative* and, not far down, Harriet Jacobs’ *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. Also frequently requested were works by Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, Gwendolyn Brooks, and James Baldwin, as well as by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Kate Chopin, and Adrienne Rich. More surprising perhaps, was the amount of work by early American writers selected by 60 percent and more of the respondents: a number of poems by

Anne Bradstreet, parts of William Bradford’s “Of Plymouth Plantation,” Jonathan Edwards’ sermon “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.” This feedback suggests that the marginalization of earlier writing as well as of many works by white women and African Americans has largely ended. But they also suggest that significant works from Spanish and Native American traditions, as well as more recent texts by Latino and Asian American writers, have yet to be incorporated fully into curricula. Accordingly, we have retained important but lesser-known works not yet widely taught, even some from that

*“American” is...not a simple designation but a hotly contested and vexed one.*

early 19th-century period, such as Alice Cary’s “Uncle Christopher’s” and Lydia Sigourney’s “Indian Names.” We think that stories and poems like these, and many others we could list, will provide students and teachers with vivid and perhaps surprising reading experiences.

At least one other issue seems important to consider here. We call this an anthology of “American” literature, and most courses in which it is used go by that or a similar title. But what do we mean by “American”? Many of the writers in this book—Anzia Yezierska, Claude McKay, Carlos Bulosan, and Allen Ginsberg, among them—present radically different answers to that question. Are we speaking of a portion of the North American continent? A particular nation-state that did not exist when the texts that pre-date 1776 were composed? A political entity with sometimes shifting and, in cultural and social terms, always porous boundaries? “American” is, in short, not a

simple designation but a hotly contested and vexed one; this fact may turn out to be one of the major themes of this book and perhaps of the courses using it. The key is that we commit to sharing our diverse answers to these and other, related questions, however difficult it might be to imagine arriving at an easy consensus.

For after all, *The Heath Anthology*, whatever its form, has been and will continue to be a collective exercise of a large number of people, not just a small editorial board and a single publisher. It has been shaped and reshaped by those who use it, react to what they find (and do not find) in it, and tell us about how they employ it . . . and why. We expect this process to continue with users of this volume, which is why we see *The Heath Anthology Newsletter* as an extension of this text.

Whitman said, in the language of his time, “Who touches this [book] touches a man.” Those of you who buy this text, read it, use it are touching, and are touched by, an entire people. You and we editors are part of a community of readers located not only in the United States and past California and the Gulf, but in many countries across the world. How we have designed this book may influence how you interpret the texts in it and how you think about the people and the experiences you encounter both in your reading and in life. And how you respond to what you discover here can, in its turn, shape what the next generation of readers will find. This, then, is not only an introduction to this one-volume form of *The Heath Anthology* but a preface to an ongoing exchange about the works and ideas that constitute the richly complex body of artistic expression that we call “American literature.”

Specific features of this “Concise” edition of *The Heath Anthology of American Literature* include:

### **Colonial Period to 1700**

This section reflects the growing interest among scholars of early American and New World studies in texts not originally in English and their impact

upon the predominantly English literatures of North America. The contents also reflect a growing consensus that while the literature and culture of New England and colonial English Puritanism were major influences in the shaping of American letters and of U.S. national identity, they were neither homogeneous nor the only influences students should study. Therefore, the texts here and elsewhere in the anthology have been organized along regional lines to facilitate the comparison of different cultural and imperial agendas, as represented by Spanish America, French America, as well as by the distinctive English colonies of the Chesapeake and New England. We have tried to maintain Native American offerings that are broadly representative of the great diversity of Indian cultures and that will assist in relating them to European American literary texts and cultural movements.

### **Eighteenth Century**

The selections and organization of this section of the anthology have been designed to suggest a hemispheric rather than a strictly British American perspective on revolution and nationalism. We have also retained—especially in the section titled “Contested Visions, American Voices”—the variety of differing views on social and political issues in the Revolutionary period. The selections also illustrate the emergence of more traditionally conceived “literary” works in the newly independent nation.

### **Early Nineteenth Century**

This section retains an emphasis not only on regional differences in the emerging nation, but also on the issues that wracked ante-bellum America (e.g., abolition, women’s rights). Here we can see texts and writers in dialogue with one another as well as the range of diverse social and political issues that help characterize differing cultural communities. We have also provided units focused on the development of the literary genres of fiction and poetry in the “American Renaissance.” Here the reader will find rich selections both of canonical writers like Melville and Dickinson, and

also of their less-known peers like Alice Cary, William Apress, and Fanny Fern, as well as popular songs and ballads.

### **Late Nineteenth Century: 1865–1910**

Works in this section are designed to expand the literary scope of *The Heath Anthology* beyond New England and to emphasize the way the literature of

*The [web] site gives students contextual information, including links to visual and audio resources, and it suggests useful web sites for further research.*

the late nineteenth century participated in—and helped articulate—the productive ferment of the post-Civil War national project of remaking America as a unified country and, not incidentally, an increasingly unified market. The title of the last subsection, “The Making of ‘Americans,’” reflects our understanding that “America” was in flux geographically as well as culturally and that its expansion and consolidation was a matter of intense debate outside its borders as well as within.

### **The Modern Period: 1910–1945**

The strength of the Modern Period selections is that the canonical authors and works—Eliot’s “The Waste Land,” Faulkner’s fiction, Frost’s poetry, and so forth—can be read alongside lesser known writers like Anzia Yezierska, D’Arcy McNickel, Randolph Bourne, Charles Reznikoff, and Alain Locke (as well as others from the New Negro or “Harlem” Renaissance). The selection also highlights the contrasting cultures of the high-flying 1920s and the 1930s period of economic depression and political activism.

### **The Contemporary Period: 1945–Present**

The contemporary period selections reflect the increasing variety of American literature during the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Some of these writers, like Ralph Ellison, Robert Lowell, Gwendolyn Brooks, Elizabeth Bishop, Tillie Olsen, and Allen Ginsberg have become part of the widely accepted canon of American literature. Others, many from minority communities, like Leslie Silko, Li-Young Lee, Helena Viramontes, Bharati Mukherjee, and Dorothy Allison, though perhaps less widely known, bring new and exciting perspectives and styles to the ever-changing world of American literary study.

### **The Web Site**

This edition of *The Heath Anthology* is published coincident with a level of Internet access by instructors and students unanticipated just a few years ago. Our web site has been designed to serve as a continual complement to the print volume for both students and instructors. The site gives students contextual information, including links to visual and audio resources, and it suggests useful web sites for further research on each author. Instructors will find both resources to explore directly with their students and access to an online community of educators who share ideas for lesson plans and assignments.

We invite all instructors to submit their own suggestions for teaching materials in *The Heath Anthology*, so that the site continues to expand, incorporating fresh approaches to using the print volumes. As teachers and students strive to understand entries in *The Heath Anthology* not as isolated literary works but as pieces in a web of literary and cultural productions, historical events, political movements, and social realities, this site provides technological links to underscore that web of connections. These electronic resources further *The Heath Anthology’s* commitment to curricular innovation, and in particular to facilitating improvements in what we read and how we read it, and in what we teach and how we teach it. ■

# Do-It-Yourself Electronic Teaching with *The Heath Anthology*

## Early American Literature Teaching Group

Rosemarie Dombrowski • Kate Frost • Joe Lockard

The article that follows is one in an occasional series about the uses of technology for teaching American literature. As most of you know, the web site for *The Heath Anthology* (<http://college.hmco.com/english/lauter/heath/4e/instructors/index.html>) offers very useful material for our classes—and we do encourage you to share what you use with all of us.

But online material is obviously only one part of the problem of applying electronic technologies to our teaching. As this article points out, major issues are how we approach technology, what we do with it, and who controls it. As we have learned over the last decade, the online cornucopia may as often produce ashes masking as fruit if we are not clear about questions of use and control.

I invite readers of this newsletter to contribute to *The Heath* web site, but also to join this discussion about your own practices, the problems you have encountered, and the solutions you have devised for making good use of technology in teaching literature.

—Paul Lauter

### DIY: A Counter-Politics of Electronic Education

Do-It-Yourself technology infusion into literature curricula responds to many needs with simple and readily available computer tools. Too often the ‘new model’ of electronic pedagogy comes bound together with special development budgets and technical assistance for faculty who do not have computer skills or time to spend acquiring them. Internet-based courses with high-quality designs and streaming video downloads typically require sufficient projected revenue streams to justify a team of three to six support personnel, in addition to the course instructor. A do-it-yourself hybrid course uses easy-to-master computer skills and bundled software to enable individual instructors, with only occasional need to ask for technical help, to enhance their teaching with functional course web sites.

Most important, a DIY approach to bringing technology into literature courses emphasizes a Freirean method in computer literacy, a refusal to accept the dictates of ‘superior’ cultural—or

technological—knowledge in creating a learning environment that responds to social needs. A hands-on approach to information technology, where literature teachers assume responsibility for translating their own teaching ideas into electronic form, is insubordination turned practical. Mass delivery of pre-packaged humanities and social sciences courses via the Internet, a highly problematic development in what Langdon Winner calls ‘technoglobalism’s assault on education,’<sup>1</sup> creates the very real prospect of submerging educational initiatives such as created *The Heath Anthology*. Abdication from effective response, or teaching without acknowledging how computerization has changed and continues to change contemporary discourse, surrenders literary studies to social forces that would employ the field as another opportunity to “re-engineer” the humanities as market-driven vocational education.

At the Arizona State University English department, we were given a charge for the Spring 2003 semester: reinvent a traditional lectures-and-section American literature course and create an IT-infused course that would use new technology resources and involve students. If English teachers enter the profession because they want to teach English, not computer science, it is equally true that English departments can make an enormous critical contribution where narrative and electronics meet. Our response was to create a course that emphatically based itself simultaneously in early American literature, transatlantic history readings, and do-it-yourself Internet learning. Too, this reinvention grounded itself upon concrete practicalities that teachers face in interweaving thematic concerns of an American literature anthology without diverting excessive energy into computer-driven pedagogy. The function of technology in literary studies is to improve com-

munication and facilitate coursework, not to become a central object of attention in its own right. To decenter literature in a literature course in favor of software instruction (e.g. web site construction) is to animate the wrong subject. In order to balance these competing concerns within available resources and meet our administrative mandate, we debated a range of hybrid course designs.

Why create a hybrid electronic offering for an American literature course based on *The Heath Anthology*?

Designing a hybrid literature course, one that engages students both in the classroom and online, merges pedagogical worlds. A hybrid literature course, infused with information technology, operates within, between, and through physical and computer-mediated learning environments. Hybrid courses enable students and instructors to function within ‘extensible classrooms’ that intensify engagement with literature and discursive critical practices. Such courses are one response to the proliferation of online humanities courses of questionable educational value. Public institutions in particular, subject to investment paradigms of education in order to justify state funding, have turned to online coursework in order to demonstrate their commitment to technology-based education, community outreach, and a return on public capital investment.

Among the rationales for hybrid course design, it is important to note that the erosion of teacher autonomy and prolonged collapse of the academic job market have combined to frame IT-based instruction as a means of obtaining or retaining a modest perch within the academy. From the perspective of an academic employment logic determined by a technology market, the higher the technology the better a teacher’s employment prospects.

Despite their lack of faith in some IT-based teaching practices, often faculty have lost control of their conditions of employment and see no alternative but to surrender to computer-mediated instruction methods imposed on them. Single-offering and non-repeatable hybrid courses, unlike online courses repeatable without the original instructor, have firm footholds in both the classroom and electronic fora. Hybrid courses, which can adopt flexibly a wide variety of electronic pedagogies, reinforce teaching autonomy by enabling instructors to control their means of production.

Course design at public universities today too often emerges against the background created by a political environment that places ever-increasing emphasis on the public visibility of educational technology, and where educational 'value' lies in promoting technology even if this does nothing to promote critical reading and argument. Surfing through university English course web sites, one encounters too many sites that are Potemkin Village affairs that do not involve students and have no living relationship to daily teaching. There is no actual pedagogical use for many of these web sites and they remain unchanged throughout the semester: these are display windows, no more. The same information that appears on the web site gets handed out as a first-day syllabus. Why have a visible teaching site if it is not used to teach? Part of the DIY message is that if teachers are going to take the time and trouble to build a course web site, they should be prepared to use it to actually teach, deliver course content, hold discussions, and provide review materials. The satisfaction of hands-on hybrid teaching lies in taking control, in making a course web site come alive, in refusing to become one more Internet-delivered "knowledge commodity."

Hybrid courses are an affirmative, active response to disturbing developments in online education. The online coursework models that have established themselves as the primary vehicle of electronic pedagogy represent a development that has proceeded without any substantive educational

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research based on large-scale data sets.<sup>2</sup> Massive investment in computer-mediated humanities education has been undertaken with virtually no research foundation. Comparability and equivalence between classroom and online learning experiences and credit hours simply have been posited, not proven. Historically, profound shifts in U.S. educational structures have been accompanied by empirical research that supports changes such as race and gender integration or new teaching methods in reading, mathematics, and science education. A near-complete absence of credible empirical survey data on learning outcomes for online education,<sup>3</sup> despite profound concerns over degradation of educational quality, argues persuasively for choosing hybrid courses as a means of retaining educational control while engaging with new technical modes of instruction.

Literature courses in particular risk much from the loss of face-to-face interaction and a decline in pedagogical discourse quality caused by monopolistic computer mediation. If a literature classroom is in some senses a lineal descendant of Enlightenment salons, Native American storytelling circles, and communal narratives from many cultures, an online discussion thread bears only a vague claim to kinship with these traditions. In their emphasis on using course and discussion web sites as preparation or focus for in-class discussion, hybrid courses participate in such physically present discursive traditions while adapting new technologies to reinforce—not substitute for—the learning experience of discussing literature.

## Redesigning a Survey Course

Together with these 'strategic' considerations, several 'tactical' and practical concerns preoccupied the course redesign. Absence of an historical framework among students for the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was perhaps the first problem in re-inventing our early American survey course. How could we develop a transatlantic cultural map and historical schematic that could be expanded upon as we proceeded through the course? Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker's recent and outstanding transatlantic history, *The Many-Headed Hydra: The Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Verso 2001), suggested itself as excellent accompaniment to *The Heath Anthology*. Both volumes share a defining concern for integrating diverse cultural histories and both originate from an insistence upon the recovery of hidden subaltern histories and literatures.

Teaching these texts in tandem meant that much of our work became an integration of common themes within the pair. After covering the topics of European enclosures and loss of cultural autonomy in *The Many-Headed Hydra*, for example, we were able to compare colonial reports in Gaspar Pérez de Villagrà's *History of New Mexico* and Don Diego de Vargas' "Letter on the Reconquest of New Mexico" in order to evidence the transatlantic closure of commons and transplantation of dispossession practices into the Americas. There is an especially convenient coincidence between an extended treatment of Equiano's life in *The Many-Headed Hydra* and *The Heath Anthology's* reprinting of the majority of Equiano's *Narrative*. Linebaugh and Rediker's explication of the religious ferment underlying the English Revolution provides closely related background reading for understanding the theocratic perfectionism of Puritan texts such as those of Winthrop, Bradford, and Shepard. Later in the course, Linebaugh and Rediker's instancing of the social roles of sailors in communicating and shaping revolution and transatlantic culture informed readings of Melville, both in "Benito Cereno"

and *Billy Budd*. Most important, *The Anthology* and *Many-Headed Hydra* reinforce each other in shaping a close acquaintance for students with the forces of social violence, resistance, and revolt.

Making time to incorporate a sweep of transatlantic historical background into a *Heath*-based early American literature survey course was perhaps the most difficult planning challenge. However, the general lack among

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*Literature courses in particular risk much from the loss of face-to-face interaction...*

students of substantive knowledge of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century American history, as well as an absent sense of its multi-directionally transatlantic nature, made it a crucial area for emphasis. Reading comparatively from Equiano, Franklin, and Paine emphasizes this Atlantic dimension and its continental interrelationships. It has the benefit of enabling students to appreciate the thunder of preceding centuries as they enter nineteenth-century readings, which many enter the course thinking is 'early' American literature. Thus "My Kinsman, Major Molineaux," with its ambiguous laughter—or fear?—as Robin spies his tarred uncle, speaks to Hawthorne's complex understanding of crowds, power, and American revolutionary history. Or, Whittier's morally indignant poetical rhetoric can be related to both Woolman's religious antislavery writing and Edwards' jeremiads of the eighteenth century. The risk lies in packing a survey syllabus too tightly with reading and leaving insufficient discussion time available, but an historically inclusive pre-1860 American literature survey course has much more unfamiliar territory to cover than its usual post-Civil War companion course.

Together with historicized course content, the course plan emphasized an interrelationship between performance and information technology, bringing them into play together in order to sharpen student understanding and enjoyment of the texts. One instructor led an IT & Performance break-out section that met weekly. Students who volunteered for this section undertook to perform designated texts or characters during lecture meetings, and then—after individual tutoring sessions in PowerPoint and Dreamweaver—create and web audiovisual presentations to recapture their in-class performances. Class performances included renditions of a Jonathan Edwards sermon, Mike Fink yarn-telling, group performance of a scene from Royall Tyler's 'The Contrast,' and a Walt Whitman impersonation, among others. Integration of information technology with performance served to emphasize, both to student participants and student audiences in class and online, that narrative involves imaginative transformations: a graphically illustrated online reading of a Poe poem is one more transformative twist.

The 'glue' holding together these diverse discussions and initiatives within one course was a pair of linked web sites, one for course information and materials review [<http://www.public.asu.edu/~jlockard>] and the other a now-outdated Web Board threaded discussion site employed for weekly discussion questions.<sup>4</sup> In-class PowerPoint presentations were available for online review at the course web site immediately after a class session. While well-deserved critical comment has been directed at PowerPoint for encouraging bullet-pointed lists that reduce lectures to information delivery for idiots<sup>5</sup>, there is no intrinsic reason it needs to remain a meat-grinder for human thought: this software is capable of framing text passages, discussion questions, and provocative images. Webbing PowerPoint presentations—a skill acquired by both students and graduate instructors during the course—was selected as the upper technical limit, as dictated by accessibility concerns. For the IT &

Performance section students in the course, webbing a revised version of their in-class performances required adaptation of texts to a new narrative format, work that also provided fellow students with a visual and audio review of materials.

Integrating discussion threads into literature classes has become old hat in US universities in surprisingly few years. The discussion thread already needs reinvention, both pedagogically and graphically. We focused on integrating the discussion thread into cyclical directed discussions, with mid-week posting of a questions prompt about the current reading text followed by responses and counter-responses prior to a Friday morning in-class discussion section. This concentrated weekly cycle reinforced earlier lecture sessions and raised questions to aid Friday classes, while avoiding drag-on discussions characterized by fading energies and ever-briefer participatory responses. Constant participation from all course instructors is key to creating an energetic discussion.

Two-thirds of course students indicated that they had broadband access at home and the rest had access on campus or in their workplaces. Based on our experience, the real technological limitation at a course web site in a contemporary US university environment, then, is less likely to be student access to sufficient bandwidth and more likely to be instructor willingness to enter into increasingly sophisticated technologies (e.g. streaming video) without convincing pedagogical rationales, learning pay-off, and available equipment and technical support. A do-it-yourself electronic pedagogy does not mean turning teachers' offices into production studios; it means making rational choices among commonly available, easy-to-use, and relatively inexpensive computer technologies. Cheap and simple DIY technologies, like free blogging software [<http://blogger.com>] can be adapted by *Heath Anthology*-based courses to far better effect than indulging expensive technical obsessions to the detriment of an engagement with American literatures.

Finally, electronic pedagogies translate into questions of labor, questions that we need to ask continually as we redesign courses. Are we really not training students for future corporate employers when we introduce webpage authoring and database software into literature courses? Or, in teaching contexts where IT methodologies may be appropriate, do these promote the social knowledge and critical argumentation that enable students to change their future terms of employment? As literature teachers, are we adopting electronic pedagogies that enable us to teach better with greater flexibility and individual student attention, or will we dead-end as soon-to-be-surplus teacher avatars replaced by the latest digital CoursePack running on a Blackboard site? Technophobia only guarantees adverse answers to such questions. Do information technology yourself, or be done to. ■

<sup>1</sup> Langdon Winner, "The Handwriting on the Wall: Resisting Technoglobalism's Assault on Higher Education," in Marita Moll [ed.], *Tech High: Globalization and the Future of Canadian Education* (Ottawa: Fernwood Pub., 1997).

<sup>2</sup> Based on extensive searches in November 2002 of the ERIC database for studies reported in educational research literature. No reported large-scale studies compare learning patterns and results between physical and virtual study environments.

<sup>3</sup> For a rare large-sample study of online learning, see Joanne M. Nicoll and Nicolas C. Laudato, *Celebrating New Beginnings* [Proceedings] (Long Beach, CA, October 26–29, 1999) [<http://www.educause.edu/conference/e99/proceedings.html>]. With approximately 1850 students in 20 courses at the University of Pittsburgh, this five-year-old study is the largest available in the assessment literature. Nearly all this literature reports single-course instructor experiences.

<sup>4</sup> The sites described here required about 500M of webspace.

<sup>5</sup> Edward Tufte's *The Cognitive Style of PowerPoint* (Cheshire, CT: Graphics Press, 2003) [see [http://www.edwardtufte.com/436295572/tufte/books\\_pp](http://www.edwardtufte.com/436295572/tufte/books_pp)] provides an excellent critique of PowerPoint's communicative limitations. For a now-famous PowerPoint anti-example based on 19th-century American political rhetoric, Lincoln's 'Gettysburg Address,' see Peter Norvig's version at <http://www.norvig.com/Gettysburg/index.htm>.

## Teaching American Literature in Hong Kong

by Jennifer M. McMahon

*"For culture is not something that just comes with one's race or gender. Culture comes only through experience; there isn't any other way to acquire it. And in the end everyone's culture is different, because everyone's experience is different."* —Louis Menand, *American Studies*

The first text that I taught in Hong Kong was *Romeo and Juliet*. This was a somewhat daunting task as many of these freshman year students at the University of Hong Kong had never read any literature in English before, much less taken up the challenge of Shakespeare. I was a graduate student then and had been hired as a demonstrator in the department of English. My job was to lead small tutorials following the large group lectures and evaluate all writing assignments (not to conduct cooking demonstrations at the grocery store as my friends thought my title suggested). Each group was made up of five or six students and met every couple of weeks. Of course, I entered the small room with my own set of biased expectations—one of which was that these were Asian students and they would be prepared. But in response to the discussion questions my students had been asked to prepare, there was silence. Now silence was a phenomenon with which I was not unfamiliar. I had taught at Lehman College in the Bronx before this and when my students were prepared, they were enthusiastic and vocal; if they weren't, an oppressive stillness would reign. So my first assumption was that not one of the students had done the assignment. But then I noticed the notebooks of two students, Evian and Milk, were covered with notes (almost all of my students had both an English and Chinese name—though the coincidence of two beverage names in one tutorial group was unusual). What I didn't yet understand was that it would be considered arrogant and boastful to volunteer an answer. So while they had fully prepared answers to my questions, there was an extreme reluctance to speak unless addressed directly. It took months before I was able to guide a discussion that did not

rely so heavily on direct questions and answers. And in that time the myth of the Asian student fell apart. Like my experience in the Bronx, I had a small group of extremely bright and enthusiastic students, a large group of interested students, and a small group of unmotivated stragglers. The exception to these admittedly general groupings was my one Mainland Chinese student who worked incredibly hard (he told me he had looked up every word in the first act of *Romeo and Juliet*) but was struggling with serious second language difficulties.

It was with this small group that I developed two teaching techniques that I ultimately used throughout my five years in Hong Kong. The first is that I made every effort to eliminate idioms from my speech—the wave of confusion that would spread over my students' faces made it clear that this was not an effective way to communicate. I had not realized until then how culturally embedded idioms are and how perplexing they can be for someone from outside the culture, even someone with a good handle on English. My partner refers to me as the Queen of Idioms so this elimination from my verbal diet took some effort. The other strategy I employed was to try to say anything important three different ways. This was one way to address the second language issue that varied from almost non-existent to quite severe. The only problem with this technique is that can be habit-forming and quickly drives native speakers, both colleagues and family, to very irritated distraction. But the students seemed to appreciate the chance to layer the various versions and put together something coherent for themselves.

I arrived in Hong Kong in early 1995 and started working at Hong Kong

University that fall. The students in the department were overwhelmingly Chinese and female; the faculty was predominantly British and male. Hong Kong was still a British colony then, and the divide between student and faculty representation reflected that dynamic. By the time I left in the fall of 2001, the department had changed quite dramatically to include more women, more Asians, and more Americans on the faculty and more men in the student body. This is a transition that might have happened anyway, but it felt as though the change in colonial rule opened up new opportunities for different perspectives and unsettled, sometimes quietly and sometimes quite dramatically, the long embedded power structures at Hong Kong University. Part of this change included offering more courses focusing on American literature and film, courses that were very popular with the students.

Eventually I became a lecturer in the Continuing Education program at night while still working as a demonstrator during the day. The first course I taught was called *The American Short Story*. Both the day and evening students expressed a real eagerness to learn about American culture. This was in stark contrast to the British and European expatriate communities in Hong Kong that maintained a kind of genteel hostility toward anything American. Living overseas, one becomes much more sensitive to how truly pervasive American culture is and the ubiquity of anti-American sentiment. Many expatriates in Hong Kong felt overwhelmed by the growing numbers of Americans coming to work in Hong Kong and the Hollywood invasion in film and television. So I was surprised by the unjaded enthusiasm my students expressed in their desire to study American literature and their expectation that this literature provide a window onto American culture with me as the spokesperson.

It was in this position that I became acutely aware of my own ideological baggage and felt compelled to remind my students often what, to my knowledge, that was. I would remind them

that I was a woman, I was white, I was straight and married, I grew up in the suburbs but was now from New York City, I was from the middle class, I was a bleeding heart liberal (though of course I couldn't use the phrase

*...it felt as though the  
change in colonial rule  
opened up new opportuni-  
ties for different perspectives*

“bleeding heart” because I was on the idiom diet), and anything else that seemed relevant. Perhaps I felt this need to qualify my background because our discussions so often veered from the text to the social issues invoked by the text. For example, “*Sonny’s Blues*” inspired questions about drug use and race relations. My students would ask very general questions like, “What is the relationship between blacks and whites in America now?” or “Why do so many people use drugs?” This might lead to, “Why do so many people own guns?” I was expected to answer these questions primarily as an American and only secondarily as a literature lecturer. Perhaps because I was in a position of authority, I was always uncomfortable speaking for the whole country; I always felt compelled to remind my students that my perspective was unique and influenced by several factors that other Americans didn’t share. This pressure was partly natural caution but was also because I had already seen how many Hong Kong Chinese perceived whites as more American than people of color. Qualifying my perspective was, in part, an effort to challenge an assumption that was reinforced every time a Hong Kong Chinese student went to a Western movie or turned on English-language television.

In one class on Asian literature in English that I attended as a student shortly after I moved to Hong Kong, there was one other American in the class. He was Chinese-American and considering attending school in Hong

Kong. During one class discussion, it became clear that his ancestors arrived in America long before mine did. Even with the knowledge that his family had been living in America since about 1850, the other students in the class were shocked (and somewhat disdainful) that he didn’t speak Chinese; they had a difficult time accepting that he was as American as I (even more so if family lineage counts). Conversations with other Chinese-Americans living in Hong Kong confirmed that they often encountered skepticism about their American-ness and hostility about their perceived lack of Chinese-ness.

Of course learning about culture in a classroom is a two-way street, and teaching American texts gave me some interesting insights into different aspects of Hong Kong society. For example, in “*Sonny’s Blues*,” many students were struck by the differences in perspective between the narrator who is a strict and parental older brother and his wayward younger brother, Sonny. This divide reflected a similar tension in Hong Kong between an older generation, mostly immigrants from Mainland China, who had worked very hard just to gain an economic foothold in a very unforgiving climate and a younger generation who were far more comfortable economically, confident in their Hong Kong identities and willing to explore independent creative expression. Many students felt that their elder siblings and parents were threatened by their desires to move away from a survivalist mentality. Similarly, many of my female students felt an affinity with the narrator of Jamaica Kincaid’s “*Girl*,” a young woman who is under the palpably oppressive weight of her mother’s rigid expectations and loaded superstitions, particularly regarding sexual modesty. Faulkner’s “*A Rose for Emily*” also provoked discussion about living in a period of intense cultural transition. This was felt both between generations—one generation fleeing economic and political oppression—and their progeny growing up in the relative stability and wealth of Hong Kong, but also because we were living through Hong Kong’s transition from British colonial



rule to Mainland Chinese rule. This is not to suggest that Hong Kong was like the Reconstruction South, but what my students recognized in Faulkner's text were his insights into how people cope (or don't cope) with sudden and intense cultural transformations.

Teaching F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* offered an unexpected window into middle class Hong Kong family life. Most of the day-students at the university were from middle income families. The poor generally couldn't afford both the tuition costs and the lost wages. The wealthy generally sent their children abroad to be educated. So our students were predominantly middle-class, and while they appreciated the various ways in which Fitzgerald was interested in the effects of cultural decay in early twentieth-century America, what 90 percent of my students wrote about was marital infidelity. I had not realized until then how pervasive the practice was of Hong Kong Chinese husbands having a second wife (and sometimes family) in Mainland China. In essays that were sometimes uncomfortably personal, my students saw the easy morality and sudden wealth described in *The Great Gatsby* as a mirror onto Hong Kong society of the 1990s; my students' essays suggested they felt witness to a similarly disruptive decadence.

I started with Louis Menand's quote from his recent collection of essays, "American Studies," because it captures astutely the feeling I had as an American teacher in Hong Kong. I felt very intensely that I was an American, but that my American-ness was unique. I also felt deeply the varieties of experiences among my students and the vast differences between different Chinese communities that all shared a piece of congested Hong Kong island and the identity it offered. I have since returned to my native New York and to my idioms, but my sense of being an American and a teacher was profoundly shaped by my interactions with my Hong Kong students. As Juliet says to Romeo, "The more I give to thee, / The more I have, for both are infinite." ■

## A Vital Crossroads: On Teaching *The Heath Anthology* at an Historically Black College

by Robert Jackson

I. When Paul Lauter invited me to write a piece on my experiences teaching *The Heath Anthology of American Literature* at an Historically Black College, one of his e-mail messages included the following lines:

*In general, what I'd be interested in knowing is what your students really respond to. We make an implicit assumption that African American students will cotton to texts by African American writers. To what extent is that actually true?*

One immediately striking aspect of this passage is the way that it slides from the first person singular "I" in the first sentence to "we" in the second sentence. Who is this "we" that makes such an assumption? The anthology's editors? Americanists as a scholarly collective? White people? American culture as a whole? I probably would not have even noticed this minor point (after all, e-mail writing is an acceptably imprecise genre these days) but for my current position, teaching American literature at a small college in Alabama where I am usually the only white person, and one of very few non-Southerners, in the classroom. "We" is, quite frequently, a loaded term in this setting. Sometimes it just means "we," as in "We are going to the library." But at other moments, and with great ease and confidence, my students use it with an implicitly racial connotation, referring to African Americans as an historically continuous culture from slavery and Reconstruction through Civil Rights and into the present. Among the constructions I have heard in the classroom: "We should have gone back to Africa right after the Civil War"; "We were enriched by history because everything that happened made us tougher and more versatile"; "We need better leaders." There are, it seems to me, enormous problems and opportunities attendant to any such collectively autobiographical ventures in the arena of American culture. Of course,

this awareness is encoded into *The Heath* itself, the Preface to whose Fourth Edition expresses its interest in "the conversations that have come to define America as plural, complex, heterogeneous—a chorus, perhaps, rather than a melting pot" (xxxv). This built-in openness to autobiography, and the spirit of inquiry into the contextual harmonies, disharmonies, and counterpoints of texts it fosters, is one of the anthology's great advantages.

But in addition to this "we" problem, which is really just another of our endless authority issues, what struck me about Dr. Lauter's e-mail was his use of "cotton" to describe a process of identification, recognition, and approval by African American students of African American writers. It reminded me of recent stories in the national media about furious charges that the word "niggardly" had been used as a racial slur, as a sly, back-door attempt to insult without recourse to openly insulting language. "Cotton" no doubt represents a different case altogether, but reminded me again of the extraordinarily allusive power of race in my Deep Southern milieu, where euphemism and double-speak abound on both sides of the racial divide. I'd say region is as significant as race here, since cotton (the noun, dating to the fourteenth-century Arabic *qutun*) has served as a vital contact point between black and white cultures in the South for centuries. And if a term like "we" can be so loaded with meaning in this space, couldn't "cotton" in this particular sentence spoken by a white man in reference to black culture, encode brutally repressive intentions?

I'm purposely misreading the sentence not just to acknowledge the incendiary potential of any discussion of race in America, but also to suggest the fundamental idea that good reading, close reading, careful and accurate

reading, still matters, and may matter more desperately here and now than ever before. The larger point I'd make—that great literature matters—is also fundamental, and also worth repeating and illustrating.

Following *The Heath's* model of letting the chorus speak, I asked my students very generally to write about their good experiences with literature in the past. One of the most striking responses came from a female student from Selma:

*The best experience I've had with literature was in elementary school. I was an avid reader at that time and discovered my sister's book. It was entitled To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee. It was then that I discovered the power of quality authorship. I felt that I was Scout. I felt her exasperations, pains, anxieties, joys, and pleasures. This was only achieved through Harper Lee's ability to transport readers back in time to that old, sleepy Southern town. The woman had skills.<sup>1</sup>*

Is it even important for this student that the novel deals with racism? No; or if so, only secondarily. The facts of the student's background—her blackness; her provenance from Selma, the cradle of Civil Rights, and Selma's close proximity to Harper Lee's hometown—scarcely matter in themselves. She describes an experience of discovery and intense, subtle feeling, in which her identification with the novel's autobiographical narrator temporarily, ecstatically, suspends everything outside the story. "That old, sleepy Southern town" might just as well have been on the other side of the planet as a few miles down the road in Alabama. Reading this description, and others like it, enables others—teachers, critics, people of other races or genders, anyone—to strip away their own prejudices about what a book like *To Kill A Mockingbird* should mean to a young black girl from the Deep South, and to replace them with memories of their own experiences of the same book. Doesn't this description remind professional scholars (and they, we, do need reminding on occasion, I would argue) what got them into the business in the first place? Finally, there was something about this student's concluding evaluation—

*My student's transcendent reading of To Kill a Mockingbird was motivated by an aesthetic agenda—her desire for a good story...*

"The woman had skills."—that took my breath away. "Skills" as a term and the idiomatic expression as a whole are being borrowed here from a black vernacular dialect, in much the way a great three-point shooter in basketball will be described as having skills, expressing very familiarly, very intimately, a critical recognition of Lee's technical expertise and emotional depth as a writer. Blackness, nonetheless, is not a requirement for benefiting from the expression's insight—any contemporary English speaker would know what my student is talking about here.

Emerging from scores of insights like this one in my teaching, I think the collective assumption (I'd be more comfortable calling it a hypothesis) voiced by Dr. Lauter, that African American students prefer African American writers, is incorrect, or, perhaps more accurately, crucially incomplete. Great literature is well received regardless of the backgrounds of its individual author and reader. But more needs to be said about this. For we do maintain another, and I would say separate, level of interest and appreciation for certain kinds of writing because they hit close to home. I'd be wary of attributing this to race alone (after all, race alone is not "home" for anyone); the credit goes, more generally, I think, to culture itself, of which race is certainly a huge part, but not the only one. To name a few others: ethnicity (quite a different entity than race), gender, class, region, generation, and, of course, religion. A related idea to keep in mind is that any literary text may be read for many reasons, and may contribute to any number of experiences. The past century of literary theory has shown us,

among other things, that a text can be mined for any number of different experiences, different wisdoms, different veins of learning. My student's transcendent reading of *To Kill A Mockingbird* was motivated by an aesthetic agenda—her desire for a good story—rather than the political, historical, racial, or other agendas with which another reader might feasibly approach the same book. This distinction is particularly relevant, of course, to the several-decades-old debates about expansion of the literary canon in which *The Heath* has played a prominent role. The question is not, merely, "What are we reading?" but also, and simultaneously, "Why are we reading?" As a cultural artifact, *The Heath* represents a vital crossroads (to evoke another mythic Southern site of metaphysical contact) of the trajectories of these two questions.

II. I teach a survey course called "American Literature I: Colonial America to 1865." By far the most well received text in this course is Jonathan Edwards's "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." Even more than other colonial American religious writings, Edwards's 1741 sermon commands the attention of a largely Southern Baptist student population. "O sinner!" Edwards exhorts his flock, "Consider the fearful danger you are in: it is a great furnace of wrath, a wide and bottomless pit, full of the fire of wrath, that you are held over in the hand of that God, whose wrath is provoked and incensed as much against you, as against many of the damned in hell" (647). A colleague tells me that during a reading several years ago, one female student began to weep uncontrollably and rushed out the door, leaving everyone else to contemplate the compromising position in which their sins had left them. One of my students, an aspiring minister who has been preaching since the age of twelve and has developed a wonderful style in the best traditions of the Southern black church, gave a reading of Edwards's sermon last fall that will not soon fade from my memory. "I think we don't have a very good concept of evil anymore," one student opined, perhaps feeling gypped because contemporary culture hadn't

prepared him adequately for eternity; sensing an opening, I read to them several passages from Andrew Delbanco's 1995 book *The Death of Satan: How Americans Have Lost the Sense of Evil*, then circulated the book throughout the class. It is these moments of contact, between eighteenth-century New England and twenty-first-century black Alabama—and, in this latter case, a highly secularized mainstream America as well—that reveal the complexity of our heritage. It's all here. We have contact and divergence between distinct but often overlapping oral cultures, regional cultures, racial cultures, religious cultures; and like most college students, ever pragmatic, ever individual, mine sample the goods, and buy what they like. One student calls Emerson's "Nature" her "second Bible." Another, to my surprise, finds Thomas Jefferson's schizophrenic racial attitudes more sympathetic than Frederick Douglass's single-minded abolitionism. Melville's "Bartleby, the Scrivener" helps one better understand the implications of soul-crushing part-time job at a fast food joint, and his boss's subtle rhetoric of conformity and exploitation. Others, of course, don't do much reading and leave the scene the same as when they came.

One advantage of teaching *The Heath* in this setting is the freedom to nudge the course in any number of directions. Weighing in at over three thousand pages, Volume 1 (used for "American Literature I"; the spring course uses the equally fat Volume 2 to move from 1865 to the present) includes far more texts than any single syllabus would be able to hold. Juxtapositions of texts provide excellent ground for larger historical and cultural approaches to literature. Seeking to establish a call-and-response theme with a self-consciously racial slant, I include Washington/Du Bois and King/Malcolm X, as well as such invigorating pairings as Chesnut/Twain, Eliot/Hughes, and Baraka/Ginsberg. A less obvious but equally fruitful pairing pits H. L. Mencken's "The Sahara of the Bozart" against Alain Locke's "The New Negro"; I employ a pugilistic language of critical confrontation, then challenge

students to convince me of the implicit sympathy, the points of shared concern and deep humanism, between these bruising essays. If boxing provides an apt metaphor to characterize the cultural and intellectual exchanges, as well as the racial contact zones, of the Teens and Twenties, this pedagogical approach brings something of the same competitiveness and intensity, as well as a broader understanding of different American cultural contexts, to each essay.

*The Heath* is wonderful for nonfiction and poetry, but I have been frustrated at times by its lack of longer fiction works. Because of its modest financial resources and small bookstore staff, my institution limits the number of books I may order for each course. Consequently, I am unable to supplement *The Heath* with novels I would like to include in these survey courses: *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (no longer anthologized in *The Heath*), *The Great Gatsby*, *The Sound and the Fury*, *Lolita*, *The Crying of Lot 49*, *Song of Solomon*, and others. The novel as a form is neglected; I try to fill this space with a greater range of short fiction, not just to patch over the novel's absence but to approach American literature in unique ways. A greater emphasis on nonfiction, on genre, and of course on general figures like race, region, and religion replaces what would probably be a more random sampling of longer works in a course not anchored by *The Heath*. My courses have a certain narrative momentum to them, a kind of thematic unity that bridges the culturally diverse texts in wonderful ways. Still, I miss the novels. My students miss them too, though they may not realize it.

Another limiting factor is the simply fact that a semester is, like Fitzgerald's novel, all too short. One makes difficult choices in assembling a syllabus that covers so much ground in so few weeks. My institution's effort to prepare its demographically underrepresented students for graduate school in English drastically narrows the figures and texts I teach. The need to prepare students for what remains a canonically conservative GRE exam means that the traditional figures of the canon

remain central to my survey courses. *The Heath* certainly invites me to add to these voices with marginalized ones, but in the week-to-week crush of short classes and rich discussions, it remains logistically difficult to take full advantage of the anthology's offerings. In this there is a certain irony. After all, my colleagues were initially attracted to *The Heath* because of its diversity; the anthology articulates a constructive model of American diversity and inclusiveness with obvious relevance for an Historically Black College. But our desire to place more students in graduate programs necessitates curricula designed less to explore the diversity and humanity of this culture, and more to angle for the advancement of our graduates. We seek, ultimately, the same sort of balance between idealism and pragmatism in these designs that most departments and institutions seek; our particular problems, real and perceived, may be distinct but they are not special.

I see that these last lines repeat Dr. Lauter's construction, moving seamlessly from "I" to "we" in a collectively autobiographical voice. Professional affiliation and, just as important if you can pick up the tones, a sense of mission, ground this collective voice. It was this latter quality, a friend recently told me, that he found so obvious among faculty at Historically Black Colleges and Universities. His statement came with a tone not just of admiration but also of resignation: he teaches English at a large state university nearby, where, he left me to gather, a comparable sense of mission is conspicuously lacking. The abuse of race looms large these days, in Alabama and everywhere else in America. But discovery looms larger still—my student's timeless discovery of Harper Lee's "quality authorship"; the discovery of a DNA-like helix of swirling American racial complexity, burden, opportunity, in all the cells of our being; the discovery, on most of *The Heath's* six thousand plus pages, that, in America anyway, autobiography is culture—the discovery that "we" means "yes." ■

<sup>1</sup> My thanks to Regina Williams for this piece of writing, and for permission to include it here.

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The purpose of *The Heath Anthology* newsletter is to provide a forum for American literature and American studies instructors to share their experiences teaching from the anthology. We are always in search of contributions to the newsletter, which reaches about 10,000 readers.

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Please contact us via email at [college\\_English@hmco.com](mailto:college_English@hmco.com).

Articles should be approximately 2000 words in length, accompanied by a brief (2–3 line) biography of the author.

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