Teaching with Web Sites
by William Howarth  http://www.princeton.edu/~howarth

For the past few years I’ve signed my email with the above Web link, which leads the curious to a home page at Princeton, listing seven online courses I’ve built. All of these efforts are modest: they have limited graphics, no whirling GIFS or Web counters. Mostly they are text, blue oceans of it, listing Web links for hundreds of sites that offer research information, online texts, and collections of relevant images. My Web sites are simply reference desks, organized to complement the readings I have assigned for classes.

When I began to compile these sites in 1994, my colleagues in English were baffled and my only campus support came from the computing center, which gave some money to fund a summer graduate assistant. I taught her to surf the Web, using “crawler” engines that now seem antiquated, and she brought me bookmarks, which I organized in an outlining word processor. Then I tediously coded in HTML, learning by trial and error how to set type in the cyber-equivalent of a hand letterpress.

Today the business of writing Web pages has vastly speeded up, and I am no longer an anomaly in a department that sports its own Web page and lists every course online. The tools for searching and writing have greatly improved: now I search with my own engine, appropriately named “Retriever,” and I store thousands of bookmarks in a private database, called “Surf Scout” (a subset of Panorama, by ProVUE Development). In practical terms, these tools let me quickly look for topics, secure Web addresses, and build pages in an HTML editor (PageMill). In about three hours, I can prepare a complete set of links for a lecture or seminar.

Yet that efficiency of production does not make teaching any easier or less daunting. How should we use the Web in our classrooms? Over the years, I’ve conducted various teaching experiments. Sometimes in lectures I project Web sites to show images or texts—but in truth, a 35-mm slide projector does a better job. In seminars I have also displayed Web pages, but generally to make brief discussion points. The Web is less useful in these situations because it interferes with the high bandwidth of human conversation, distracting us with a technology that remains slow, cumbersome, and all too prone to system bombs.

For me, the Web works best as a supplement to classes, which students may consult before or after our discussions, especially when preparing to write. In most of my courses, I ask students to submit email responses to each week’s reading, due a few hours before the discussion class. These I print and annotate, using them as a basis for guiding our conversation. I thus know in advance what students think about the reading, where they have problems and blind spots, and what points of disagreement may be useful to explore. I also have something in prose from every student, including all those sphinxes who refuse to speak in an open forum.

At first, I ask the students to write privately to me, then after a few weeks I direct their responses to the class, usually on my Web site. The Web is perfect for this, as students can bumble through the material at their own pace, return often to the material, and write freely, because the instructor and classmates rarely read these responses. Once in a while I ask students to write a response to a Web site, but I always disclaim these: The Web is not a substitute for reading, nor is it an alternative to conversation. Where can I go? Where am I? Who are you? What are you going to do with me? Where are you coming from? What are you going to tell me?—from the Web. How have we come from our savage past, how no longer to be savages—this to teach. To look back and learn what humanizes—this to teach.

—Tillie Lerner Olsen, “Tell Me a Riddle”
Randy Bass of Georgetown University's English Department created the web site that accompanies *The Heath Anthology of American Literature*. He is the Editor of Electronic Resources for *The Heath Anthology* and the Director of the Center for Electronic Projects in American Culture Studies (CEPACS). He is the author of *Border Texts: Cultural Readings for Contemporary Writers*, which will be published by Houghton Mifflin Company in November 1998.

To join an online discussion about Will Howarth’s article, visit the Heath Anthology Web site.

Click on English at:

http://www.hmco.com/college
mail to a class “e-list,” in which all submissions are read by all subscribers. Now they are reading and reacting to what their peers think, and quite often the conversation grows more intense and collaborative. Using the Web, I will then ask students, either alone or in small groups, to explore links and compile evidence for comparative discussion: what about that review in the LA Times? Who remembers those portraits of Walt Whitman? Did anyone find a map of Wounded Knee?

One major recurring motif in American writing is the inscription of reality, the imaginative recasting of what Emerson, in “The American Scholar,” called “the common . . . the familiar, the low.” To comprehend the figural drift of Melville, Dickinson, or Faulkner, it’s valuable to see the literal content of their times and places. For me, the Web creates a series of paths into that history, the better to grasp why many years later a text reads as literature.

One spring I ran an entire American Studies seminar on “Race and Region” through Web-based research and writing. We met on Tuesdays to discuss the readings; on Wednesdays the students surfed madly, trying to solve a set of research problems: trace the route of Frederick Douglass’s northern journey; locate images of the Sonoran Desert; who sponsored the Dawes General Allotment Act? On Thursdays, we discussed these findings and their implications. Far from regarding the problems as trivia, students saw them as multiple contexts that framed the primary readings. They also reported to me that their parents were logging onto the course from far away and reading over our shoulders.

Perhaps the greatest challenge I had was creating a Web-based course called “American Literature before 1825.” Here, The Heath Anthology of American Literature, second edition, came to my rescue. I liked its inclusion of Native, Spanish, and French authors, and its careful mix of historical documents with literary period pieces. Uncertain how much ancillary material I could locate on the Web, I was astonished when the total represented more than 80 percent of the works assigned. The next time I repeat the course, I plan to take full advantage of the stunning Web site created to support the latest Heath Anthology. It remains the single most impressive book-Web site I have seen.

My latest venture turns from teaching students to teaching teachers. For the next two summers I will conduct a seminar for Princeton graduate students in English and history on “Teaching with Technology.” I am working with two colleagues, from faculty and library, and we are taking on students with a wide range of technical skills. Our ultimate goal is to have them build Web sites for their fall courses. We also expect to advance their dissertation research, by teaching them about online resources and how to use software as powerful organizing and writing tools. Our aim is to develop productive scholars who are also versatile teachers, well prepared to meet the next generation of college students.

For me, the Web works best as a supplement to classes, which students may consult before or after our discussions, especially when preparing to write.

For more information, consult the College Division at Houghton Mifflin’s home page: www.hmco.com.
The editorial board of The Heath Anthology of American Literature and its panel of judges are pleased to announce the winners of the 1997 Student Essay Contest.

The winning essays, reprinted here, demonstrate excellent student writing and creative thinking. These essays, and the assignments that prompted them, demonstrate how works from the traditional and expanded canons inform each other and shape our understanding today of the literatures and peoples of America. We thank all of the students who entered essays in this seventh annual contest and all of the instructors who shared their assignments with us. Instructors are free to duplicate these essays and assignments for classroom use without requested permission.

Report Concerning the Dreadful Case of Enoch Threats

Mr. Dwayne Hansby
Chief of Police
New Bedford, Connecticut

Dear Sir:

In truth, I never once thought him mad until the horrible deed was uncovered. Yes, I knew he was dreadfully nervous, but mad? Certainly not—any man who said such would have been scoffed at by all. In faith, I thought he was no more mad than his neighbors, or the old man that had taken him in. I never actually knew the chap until I was called upon to arrest him. As for the reasons behind his crime, only our Lord knows all, and I must have faith that He will be a fair judge.

The victim’s name was Enoch Threats, carpenter by trade and known for little other than a propensity towards the bottle. Not that he drank to excess—far from it—but I have found that in such a community as ours merely an inclination towards the spirits is enough to brand one for life. I myself had known the chap since I was a child, and during his middle ages nothing extraordinary surfaced, at least nothing my small mind could notice at the time. His most distinguishing mark was the cataract covering his left eye, a defect that I must say was a bit unsettling, even to the stoutest of hearts. He possessed the eye of a vulture, a malformed orb that caused the Gypsies among us to make strange hand-signals, and compelled old women to whisper and wonder about it over fences and market-tables. As a child I did fear the man and his strange eye, and I and my comrades never approached his home even in the broadest of daylight for fear he might hex us. After I had grown I know I felt a great pity for the poor old man, because his infirmity was certainly no fault of his own, and it did little to endear him to anyone. In actuality, the eye must have grown more ugly and severe over time—such is the way of cataracts—but I must admit I did not notice a significant change until the fateful night it was forever branded on my soul.

This, of course, is the strangest aspect of this case, but no one in all of New Bedford could recall whether or not Mr. Threats had ever been married, or if he had children or any other family to speak of. Each of his neighbors, and in this list I must include myself, had merely assumed he was a widower, living alone either out of habit or necessity. However, the assumption that he would always live alone must be amended, for he did agree to take his future murderer into his home for whatever reason. The addition of the man we came to know as Henry—I doubt anyone will ever know his true name—came as a surprise to everyone concerned.

Henry appeared on the streets of New Bedford shortly after I became an officer, nearly two years past. He was, from all accounts, a shiftless, uneasy sort of fellow, skilled in nothing but day labor. His family was and is unknown, as is his place of origin, though some say he came from as far away as Georgia, and his later exploits certainly point to beginnings in such a heathen place. He was no vagrant, however; I never once saw him beg or harass anyone, nor did I hear him curse or talk above his station. He was nothing but an ordinary fellow, that is, with the possible exception of his affinity towards Mr. Threats.

Henry did everything with strange suddenness; one day he was assisting the blacksmith in town by blowing the bellows, and the next he seemed to have found his place in society, that being by the side of Mr. Threats. Certainly there was whispering; some believed him to be a long-lost relative of the old man’s, while others of less repute spoke of blacker sins, things few men like to address and which I will certainly not describe here for the sake of good manners. It was apparent to us that the eye of Mr. Threats at first seemed to give his guest little grief, though constant contact with such an uneasy visage is certainly one of the contributing factors to his madness. Henry behaved, as all madmen do in the beginning, with the utmost humility and courtesy. Though I admit to have suspected him as a stranger, I did grow fond of the man in passing, though we were never acquainted until the fateful night.

I have often wondered what drives sensible men to madness. After the deed was done, Henry accused the eye of his former benefactor, raving and blathering over its power and the chilling evil of the old man’s glance. In truth, this reason sounds as good as any.
for no other motive for the vicious crime can be uncovered. The old man had spared no kindness in the care of his houseguest, and the house was not ransacked for valuables. Henry himself did not even flee the scene of the crime, even when confronted with three officers, including myself. I seriously doubt we would have even suspected him had not the hand of God intervened on the side of justice.

It was the schoolmistress who came running to my door at half-past three screaming. It was the schoolmistress who came running. The woman is well known for exaggeration—she has seen the Devil in her drawing-room on three separate occasions—and for this reason I and my fellow officers considered the visit to the Threats home merely a formality. Henry, as usual, was most cordial in his reception, and in all our searches he was smiling and courteous. However I did notice his overly pale complexion, and my companions were at unease over his eyes, which darted this way and that and refused to light on any person or subject. Though I do not expect you to believe me, I must admit that for a brief moment I believe I saw Henry’s own eye crust over and stare with the same terrible plexion, and my companions were at unease. Nevertheless, his story about the old man’s absence seemed credible, and we were but a moment from releasing him back to his bed when his mind, for no apparent reason at all, decided to become at once most unhinged. He suddenly began to rave and drool in a most unseemly manner, and we were at once compelled to produce our clubs in case of violence. Though I am loathe to admit it, even this display did not cause me to discredit his previous story, and I was still in the dark up to the moment when he began tearing up the floorboards shrieking. “Here! Here! I admit the deed! It is the beating of his hideous heart!”

With this revelation I was made privy to Mr. Threats’ true location. Never before or since have I seen a man dismembered in such a hellish and ungodly manner. His body was hewn into several bloodless pieces, and all that confirmed his identity was the afflicted eye, staring like a restless zombie into nothing.

The eye, coupled with what it had wrought, was enough for me to question all I had known, and stare at madness for the first time. After such a traumatic experience, Mr. Hansby, you can be assured I am able to do nothing but reflect on the wickedness of men. The eye now and forever steadfastly refuses to give me any solace from its gaze. I see it in the faces of strangers on the street, sometimes even in the sweet faces of my children, and there are times when I can almost feel the film creeping over my own vision. Is this a sign of madness? I must hope not, and it is necessary for me to blame the trauma of police work, or the eerie workings of evil on my soul, lest I become as truly mad as Henry. My dreams are still haunted with the heinous act, and I know I must atone for something lest the eye and Henry’s barbarism plague me for the rest of my days. Therefore, I am submitting this account to you along with my resignation.

Sincerely,
John Wimberly

SECOND-PLACE ESSAY

Title: One’s-Self The Modern Man
Author: Jessie Powell
School: College of Mount St. Joseph
Instructor: Elizabeth Bookser Barkley

Essay Assignment
Drawing upon your knowledge of Walt Whitman’s poetic techniques, form, and subject matter and the culture of the mid-nineteenth century, argue that he can justifiably be called “the father of modern American poetry.”

One’s-Self The Modern Man

Walt Whitman’s poem “One’s-Self I Sing” is one of the best reasons that he has been called the father of modern poetry. His entire poetic style differs from that of his contemporaries and predecessors in the areas of verse forms, rhythms, word choice, and even subject matter.

“One’s-Self I Sing” is a short poem. It’s only eight lines long. Yet, those eight lines contain some of the strongest ideas in modern poetry. The hyphen in the title creates a powerful word: “One’s-Self.” Whitman’s poetry is filled with such unusual punctuation, which often serves to heighten the reader’s awareness and to introduce some fundamental image. In this case, the image is of a self-contained person, “One’s-Self.” It is an image that grows throughout the poem.

His irregular punctuation also serves to make his poetry flow. The entire second stanza is one sentence, separated by commas. Another poet in the mid-nineteenth century might have separated the stanza into four sentences, which would have ruined the poem’s flow and disconnected its ideas.

Whitman’s poetry doesn’t follow a strict meter. Instead, it is written in free verse with lines of poetry so long that they often spill into two or three lines of text. Even the short “One’s-Self I Sing” contains this technique. Later poets have imitated this style, but his contemporaries tended to have metered poetry in which a line of text corresponded neatly to a line of poetry.

The periodic sentence is also an important part of Whitman’s poetry. It is another technique that makes him different from his contemporaries. The last stanza of “One’s-Self I Sing” is a single sentence. The subject appears at the end of this sentence. “The Modern Man I sing” (Selections 2788 8). The last line of the poem is also the subject of the third stanza.

The words that Whitman uses would not have been considered by other mid-nineteenth century poets to be properly poetic words. Even when they are not words of his own creation, they tend to be unique and unexpected. For example, he comfortably uses the word “physiognomy” (Selections 2788 4) in “One’s-Self I Sing.” He also uses inverted word order to keep the reader’s attention. Instead of saying “complete form” in “One’s-Self I Sing,” Whitman says, “Form complete” (Selections 2788 4).

To be sure, subject matter is the thing that most makes Walt Whitman the father of modern poetry. “One’s-Self I Sing” presents in its eight lines some of his most radical poetic ideas. One of the most important things that he conveys in this poem is his extraordinary ordinarity. He is the bard of America because he makes himself into America. He writes about men, women, slaves, masters, and the very land they live in (Selections 2710).

In the first stanza of “One’s-Self I Sing,” Whitman introduces the idea of one person being all people, an idea which gives a framework to the poem. “One’s-Self I sing, a simple separate person, /Yet utter the word Democratic, the word En-Masse”

(continued on page 11)
Teaching with the Heath Anthology in Korea
by Kun Jong Lee

I was probably the first teacher to use The Heath Anthology of American Literature in Korea. When Paul Lauter visited Korea in 1993, he was surprised to find somebody using the Heath there. I have used the Heath at Korea University for five years. I chose the anthology as soon as I returned from the States and got a teaching job at my alma mater. The anthology was an ideal one for me to use in an American literature course, since I am, after all, a Korean by nationality, an African-Americanist by training, and a multiculturalist by choice.

The anthology was an ideal one for me to use in an American literature course, since I am, after all, a Korean by nationality, an African-Americanist by training, and a multiculturalist by choice.

But at the beginning of my undergraduate course, I met my students’ initial resistance to my rationale of using the Heath. My students asked why I chose the particular anthology. I told them that I preferred it to other anthologies of American literature because it best represented the diversity of American literature in terms of gender, race, and color. Far from being convinced of the merits of the anthology, they seemed to suspect that this guy fresh from the States was trying to indoctrinate them with American concepts and ideologies in Korea. In a sense they were right: I was trying to teach American literature to Korean students as if I had been in an American classroom. My mistake was slowly revealed to me: I planned to teach Korean students the significance of multiculturalism in American literature without considering the cultural difference between Korea and the States! After all, we do not find big problems in our literary canon; neither do race and color constitute controversial concepts in our cultural and literary discourse.

My first challenge in using the Heath in Korea was, then, how to make multicultural American texts in the anthology meaningful to Korean students. I asked my students a series of questions about Korean literature and culture: why there are so few women writers in classical Korean literature; why those from a specific region of Korea are usually portrayed as servants, gangsters, swindlers, and tricksters in Korean films and TV dramas; why the images of Chinese and Japanese are severely distorted; why lawbreakers and rapists are ‘black’ Americans and law-enforcing MPs are ‘white’ Americans in Korean fiction, films, and TV dramas featuring American soldiers stationed in Korea. During the ensuing session of discussion, my students found the relevance of the apparently American concerns with gender, ethnicity, race, color, and stereotyping to a proper understanding of Korean literature and culture. Once their initial resistance was gone, I had very interesting and fruitful discussions with them in my survey course of American literature up to the Civil War.

My students show an unusual interest in the colonial period. Their interest is understandable partly because an American literature course in Korea usually starts with the American Renaissance writers or with Washington Irving at the earliest. My students are not so happy with the editorial policy of situating Native American oral literatures, collected and recorded in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, at the beginning of the anthology. They think the anthology has an expansionist intention in incorporating Columbus. They find the Pocahontas motif in the episode of John Ortiz and conclude that the European fantasy has a long history. They recognize a parallel between John Winthrop’s vision of the ‘Citty upon a Hill’ in A Modell of Christian Charity and Clinton’s conception of the role of the States in his New World Order. One student even hears a familiar ring in the IMF’s request to ‘Westernize’ Korea’s economic system in its master plan to help out Korea from the ‘Asian Economic Crisis’ as the conquistadores dichotomized the world, tried to ‘civilize’ the ‘barbarians,’ and imposed their rule on the ‘New World,’ he comments cynically, so the IMF, controlled by American and European capitalist interests, finds Asian economic systems outmoded and erroneous and tries to Westernize Asian countries economically at whatever cost to the Asians. Indeed, my students are able to apply their critical thinking not only to foreign texts but also to their current context.

My first challenge in using the Heath in Korea was, then, how to make multicultural American texts in the anthology meaningful to Korean students.

Kun Jong Lee is Associate Professor of English at Korea University. His interests include African-American and Korean-American literature.
By Paul Lauter

As many of you may know, Washington Post writer Jonathan Yardley produced a column on 16 February 1998 attacking the Heath Anthology. He used as the basis of his column a memo I had prepared for the Houghton Mifflin sales staff comparing the new Heath and the new Norton anthologies. Yardley claimed that the memo had been sent to faculty and departments across the country, which was not true, of course. His main comment about the Heath was a familiar, and rather careless, complaint that we decide to include writers on the basis of ethnicity, race, gender, or other such matters rather than because a writer is interesting or significant. I won’t bore you with the details of his column, which, in any case, you may have seen in the funny papers.

But because Yardley used what was a private sales memo to such perverse ends, I felt it would be desirable to provide readers of the Newsletter with something of the original memo. When I looked at it, however, I realized that only the bottom man on Kenneth Starr’s staff would really find it of interest, so instead, I’ve prepared a brief article laying out what I see as some basic differences in approach of the Heath and the Norton anthologies.

But I cannot send out this article without apologizing to my friends and colleagues on the Norton editorial board. Yardley used excerpts from the memo to suggest that the Norton Anthology was a famil-

ary and this was critical—it was clear to us that the only one included novels, the more one’s coverage of writers would be significantly reduced in scope. Finally, we found that many students complained over the fact that the only novels available in the anthologies were those they had read, sometimes more than once, in high school. For all those reasons, we decided to take The Scarlet Letter out of volume 1 and Huckleberry Finn out of volume 2 and offer them in separate books that could be packaged with the main anthology.

In addition, we chose to extend the possibilities of using whole novels or other texts in a course by offering a number of volumes in the Riverside series—like Moby-Dick, Walden, and The American—as alternative possibilities to the Hawthorne and Twain works. If this approach works well, it is possible that Houghton Mifflin will extend the Riverside series to include works not now available. Finally, we decided to add a number of longer works, like F. Scott Fitzgerald’s “May Day” (36 anthology pages) and Richard Wright’s “Bright and Morning Star” (25 anthology pages) that, while not novels, are quite complex enough to enable teachers to engage students in problems like narrative structure and development.

By contrast, the Norton editorial board chose to include not only the two familiar works, Huck and The Scarlet Letter, but also a number of other novels. It is an interesting choice, as are the novels they decided to select, and I can imagine developing a good argument for that decision. Yet, because one cannot push an anthology much beyond 3,000 pages, it has some problematic consequences.

One of the most obvious—and this was a matter to which my memo gave some careful scrutiny—was what gets left out when one devotes all those pages to novels. In this case, the omissions are significant. Among contemporary writers, those omitted from the new Norton are Tillie Olsen, Norman Mailer, Rolando Hinojosa (who, among other things, is among the best-known “American” writers in Latin America), Gloria Anzaldúa (whose Borderlands/La Frontera is an increasingly influential text), Carolyn Forché (more and more seen as among the most significant American poet of working-class origins and subjects), Helena Varramontes (whose story “The Cariboo Cafe” is a contemporary classic and vividly connected to the issues of immigration today), Cynthia Ozick, Martin Luther King, and Malcolm X.

Apart from these writers, I also pointed to the omission (just to name writers I have taught) of Hisaye Yamamoto, John Edgar Wideman, Amy Tan, Gary Soto, Wendy Rose, Pedro Pietri, Ann Petry, Joyce Carol Oates, Bharati Mukherjee, Etheridge Knight, Gish Jen, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Pietro Di Donato, Robert Creeley, Lucille Clifton, John Barth, Rudolfo Anaya. And, from earlier periods, Carlos Bulosan, Paul Laurence Dunbar, James Weldon Johnson, Nella Larsen, Charles Reznikoff, Louis Zukovsky, Alain Locke’s important essay “The New Negro,” as well as Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, Mary Antin, Abraham Cahan, Ellen Glasgow, and Susan Glaspell.

Now I would not argue that all of these writers are essential to any good, upstanding American anthology. But my memo suggested that, cumulatively, such omissions necessarily distort a full picture of American culture. Particularly, I concluded, when it came to certain areas, like the representation of Latino and Asian-American writers, or writers of the 1930s, like Meridel LeSueur, Clifford Odets, and Mike Gold. That point was, needless to say, what touched off (continued on page 8)

For more information, consult the College Division at Houghton Mifflin’s home page: www.hmco.com.
Yardley. He also chastised us for omitting Cheever, Vidal, and Vonnegut.

What seems to me really at issue here is not what conservatives like to call “affirmative action” selection but rather how one best represents the differing yet overlapping cultural traditions that make up the mosaic of American literature. It has seemed to us from the beginning of the Reconstructing American Literature project, from which the Heath Anthology grew, that such a goal could be accomplished only if we richly exemplified those traditions, in all their variety and contradiction. For it is silly, after all, to maintain that there are no significant differences in cultural origin, intertextual references, ground-level experiences, among many other matters, between, say, Cheever and Hinojosa—that they are simply, solely, and unmarkedly “American writers,” one and all. The Norton editors understand that quite well.

Our difference arises from history and from different editorial processes. When we began the Reconstructing American Literature project some twenty years ago, we saw it as our goal, and our obligation, to provide a fuller and, I think it is fair to say, more accurate and honest picture of American literary culture than had theretofore been offered. In pursuing those objectives, we were supported—and urged on—by literally hundreds of people, many of whom became contributing editors. Technically, the anthology is the “property” of Houghton Mifflin Company; mechanically, it is the product of a group of editors, and a very much larger group of contributing editors. But intellectually and, if I may put it this way, morally, it is the expression of a broad community of literary scholars and students. In a certain rough but insistently way the Heath editors answer to that community, and it is that sense of responsibility to a community of ideas and of people that leads to our basic decisions, like the one not to sacrifice a rich diversity in coverage for the sake of including long works, like novels, which can easily be made available in separate volumes.

My memo also pointed to a number of other differences, some of which involve simply questions of taste and preference, but others of which derive from the same fundamental decision about printing much longer works. Those involve the Heath’s inclusion of a range of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century poetry, Paula Bennett’s new selection of the work of nineteenth-century women poets (most of which is otherwise unavailable), and Cary Nelson’s “sheaf” of political poetry from the modernist period. Other matters I discussed had to do with why we use ten plays, both longer ones like Mordecai Manuel Noah’s She Would Be a Soldier and David Henry Hwang’s M. Butterfly and shorter works like Susan Glaspell’s “Trifles” and Clifford Odets’s Waiting for Lefty.

But I am sure my readers have had enough of comparisons and lists. So I will conclude with the text of my response to the Yardley column. The International Herald-Tribune printed it in full, but the Washington Post chose to cut it to the point of utter dullness—apparently it was not sufficiently salacious for today’s dailies. Here it is, in any case:

19 February 1998
To the Editor
Washington Post

Dear Sir or Madam:

I was gratified to find that the Heath Anthology of American Literature, now a decade old and in its third edition, still has the capacity to raise the hackles of a cultural heavy like Jonathan Yardley. But for all the pleasure Yardley’s column (Post, 16 February 1998) gave me, I do think he owes me a cut of the proceeds. After all, half his article consists of my words or ideas. And while he suggests that we make scads of money from the Heath, I’ll bet a c-note that he pulls in more from a single column than I do from a year of editing the anthology.

In any case, though he did spell my name right, I wish he had gotten the rest of the details straight. The anthology doesn’t cost $100 but under $40 for each of the 3,000-page volumes; that’s probably cheaper per page than the Post. And my memo, from which he quotes so freely, wasn’t written to college faculty or departments as he claims, but to the sales staff of Houghton Mifflin Company, which now publishes the Heath.

Such silliness aside, I’d suggest that readers interested in the richness of American literature have a look at what the anthology actually includes. Like readers in some fifty countries around the world, they are likely to find it of rather more interest than promotional memos or even, alas, J. Yardley.

Yours truly,

Paul Lauter
Smith Professor of Literature
Trinity College
Hartford, CT 06106
USA
Some Teachable Ironies about the Stieglitz Photo on the Cover of *The Heath Anthology, Volume 2*

by Peter B. Harris

During the first half of this century, Alfred Stieglitz was America’s most vigorous and persuasive champion of photography as an art form. He kept battering at the partition between fine art and what, to many, seemed the far too easily mastered practice of taking pictures. To this day, photography exhibits tend to be in the basement of museums, but better there than nowhere, and thanks in no small part to Stieglitz.

He also promoted, through his gallery and his avant-garde circle in New York, many artists associated with international and American modernism in both painting and photography, including Georgia O’Keeffe, who became his second wife. Stieglitz’s legacy also includes his brilliant photographs, including *The Steerage*, on the cover of volume 2 of the new *Heath*. It was his favorite, so much so that he once wrote, “If all my photographs were lost, and I were represented only by *The Steerage*, that would be quite all right.”

Why would a person of such daunting connoisseurship be tempted to such hyperbolic partiality? Why did one hastily composed photograph of working-class people on the lower decks of an ocean liner seem to him the redemptive epitome of his life’s work? An attempt to answer these questions delivers us into the contraries at the heart of a very complex fellow. And also into thematic tensions that run throughout American experience and literature.

For Stieglitz, *The Steerage* encodes a class-A epiphany. By 1907 Stieglitz, already enabled by a high-powered German education, had married an heiress whose wealth made it unnecessary for him to do conventional work and, therefore, freed him to promote photography and modern art. Sailing, as he said, at his wife’s insistence—on the fashionable Kaiser Wilhelm II—he soon become heartily sick of the atmosphere in first class. What he hated, though, was not so much the wealth and privilege but the insufficiently knowing display of it—“the ‘nouveaux riches.’” Altogether too many unsinkable Molly Browns.

On day three at sea, he went forward for a walk and found a place on the edge of the first-class deck that allowed him to look across at a lower class and also down into the lowest class, steerage. He was thunder-struck by the convergence of significant form and content. The geometry of the scene, particularly the empty gangway that went over the heads of the people on the lowest deck, and the arrangement of the people, particularly the man in the straw hat and the mother with child, summed up, as he said, “the feeling I had about life.”

The most immediate and pragmatic question that faced Stieglitz is one that has faced many a writer in the *Heath*: “should I try to put down the seeming new visions that held me—people, the common people . . . the feeling of release that I was away from the mob called the rich.” The answer was, of course, “yes.” He ran to get his camera, returned, and since there wasn’t a whole lot to do in steerage, everybody was still there when he got back; nonetheless, it seemed a miracle to him that he was able to return in time to take what he, and many others, considered to be the photograph of his life.

Whether it is or not is a moot question. But *The Steerage* does imply a great deal about Stieglitz’s self estrangement and his desire to heal, evade, or mediate it through art. There are ironies and binaries aplenty here. The view he discovered on his stroll delivered him into, and gave him a sense of release from, some of the deepest tensions in his life. The picture, because of its strong sense of formal design and the presence of the proletariat, brought high and low art into momentary relationship. When he first looked at the scene, he thought of Rembrandt, another artist who sometimes chose common people as his subjects, even, on occasion, Jews. Like many a Jew of German extraction at that time, Stieglitz was uncomfortable with his ethnicity and even identified Jewishness as what was most vexing about him, “the key to my impossible makeup.” Yet there in the center of *The Steerage* is a woman wearing a shawl, striped like a tallith, or Jewish prayer garb. It would have been highly unusual for a Jewish woman of that day to wear tallith, yet perhaps the resemblance of her shawl to the garb of an observant Jew may have contributed to his identifying the scene with his sense of real “life,” at least seen from above, at the remove of altitude, lens, religious identifications, and class. As Benita Eisler points out, Stieglitz, unlike his protégé Paul Strand, always photographed the poor from a distance rather than close-up. And like, for example, Hamlin Garland’s protagonist in “Up the Coule,” Stieglitz, in *The Steerage*—figuratively, at least—returns to his origins, identifies them as somehow central to his deeper life, but also exploits them as material for rejuvenating his art.

Certainly one of the central reasons for the continuing appeal of this photograph is that it iconizes the great drama of emigration to America. It’s hard not to be touched by the grave bearing and the gritty dignity of people we suppose are about to land on Ellis Island. If invited to speculate, we, and our students, might guess that the figures in *The Steerage* are buoyed up by a sense of promise but weighed down by a sense of uncertainty about the future and, perhaps, with a sense of grief over abandoning their culture and their homelands. But if we did so guess, we might be right in general but wrong in this particular case.

Perhaps the most instructive irony of all connected to this photograph is one that implicates not just Stieglitz but us. It concerns the direction of the ship. It’s headed east, back to Europe! The people in this photograph are part of the tens of thousands of reemigrants. By some accounts as many as 17 percent of immigrants returned home. While the great majority of Jews, Irish, Germans, and Scandinavians who came to the United States stayed, other ethnic groups were less willing to call it home. Among men, while only 4.3 percent and 8.9 percent of Jews and Irish, respectively, returned to their homelands, 45.6 percent of Italians, 51.9 percent of Spanish, and 65 percent of Russians took the same trip that Stieglitz captures so memorably.

In the era of cultural studies, *The Steerage* may help our students see that photogra-

(continued on page 10)
phy, no less than literature, is a medium that invites everyone's projections and constructions. When we know that the chic Kaiser Wilhelm II was leaving the Promised Land, Stieglitz's photograph changes. Suddenly, we look at the scene and wonder if the travelers had become discouraged and homesick in the face of American loneliness, or if they had been defeated, or just disgusted at the excesses and inequities of capitalism.

And as for Stieglitz himself, students might be instructed to know that he may have identified so deeply with this scene in part because, as a child, he had also been uprooted to make this reemigrant trip, albeit under different circumstances. His pro-German family, having made their fortune in America, returned to Berlin so that young Alfred could have a proper German education. In his later years, Stieglitz ran a gallery called The American Place designed specifically to support American artists. But this nationalism concealed the fact that, at some level, he always felt estranged or mid-Atlantic, neither German nor Jewish nor entirely American. And nothing more poignantly expressed those tensions than the picture he took looking down into classes removed from him but, nonetheless, expressing his sense of the essence of life.

Peter B. Harris is Professor of English and Director of Creative Writing at Colby College. He writes the Poetry Chronicle for The Virginia Quarterly Review and is the author of a book of poems, Blue Hallelujahs.
In the last line of the last stanza, he states "The Modern Man I sing." Each stanza of the poem expands upon this "One’s-Self" until the vastly complete image of "Modern Man" is created. In fact, every human being is a single part of this entity.

Further, he doesn’t confine himself to distant thoughts on God, a technique which was popular in the poetry of his time. Especially in "One’s-Self I Sing," he propels himself into Godhead, and challenges the Christian view of God. In the second stanza, Whitman points out that "Not physiognomy alone nor brain alone is worthy for the Muse" (Selections 2788 4). First, he is exploring the concept of a higher power in these lines, which he indicates with the words "worthy for the Muse" (Selections 2788 4). He draws Plato’s Forms into the God theme by capitalizing the word "Form" (Selections 2788 4). Plato believed that material objects were merely imperfect representations of perfect non-material objects, and that we all strive constantly to equal these perfect Forms. In Judeo-Christian philosophy, God is considered to be perfect, and humans to be merely imperfect representations of God.

But Whitman isn’t placing God above man with this poem. The "Form" he refers to is the combination of body and brain that make up the human being. The word "Form" touches on his celebration of the human body (Selections 2710). Whitman is making the human Form into the ideal. He is making man, and the poet especially, into a God. This "Man-God" idea is now contained in that powerful word "One’s-Self.”

He also explains, in the second stanza, that "The Female equally with the Male I sing" (Selections 2788 5). This line contains two important ideas. First, Whitman makes clear that "One’s-Self" is not only a man; it is also a woman. Secondly, it shows how Whitman’s poetry is political (Selections 2710). Feminism was an issue in the mid-nineteenth century, although it was one which the dominant Protestant culture would liked to have swept under a philosophical rug. Whitman drags the issue out into the open in his poetry, an act in which other male poets of the time would not have participated.

In the final stanza of the poem, he capitalizes the word Life. Now, the "Man-Woman-God" is more even than all of humanity, it is all of life. It is the "passion, pulse, and power" (Selections 2788 6) of all living things. Whitman gives this "Man-God-Life" entity two names. The first is "One’s-Self,” which is not only a part of the poem’s title, but is also the first word of the first line. The second name is, appropriately, contained in the poem’s last line; “The Modern Man I sing” (Selections 2788 8).

We are all that “Modern Man” (Selections 2788 8), and Whitman is our father. With poems like “One’s-Self I Sing,” Whitman shows his universality. His concept of the modern extends back to the beginning of creation and forward until the end of time. He wrote to be read for all time, not just during his life. In doing so, he made himself the father of modern poetry.
