

Taking Anthologies Seriously

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Among Katharine Newman's virtues was that she took anthologies seriously, one of the earliest critics to do so.¹ Anyone who understands how educational institutions really function—like Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, they of *Understanding Poetry*, *Understanding Fiction*, and with R.W.B. Lewis, *American Literature—The Makers and the Making*, among many other significant textbooks—knows well how powerful such books are. But the usual academic judgment, one I shared for many years, was that expressed by e.e. cummings' poetic joke at the expense of Louis Untermeyer:

mr u will not be missed
who as an anthologist
sold the many on the few
not excluding mr u (I XI, #XI)

The usual rap against anthologies was that they were superficial, offering a hop, skip, and jump through literary history instead of providing in-depth views of truly great works. There were too many authors, it was said, even in the most limited texts, those included were too uneven in quality, and the multitude of options distracted students from focusing on the true aesthetic value of literary texts. It was, therefore, the argument ran, best to teach whole works of value rather than offering the kind of smorgasbord of brief texts characteristic of even the best anthologies.

What Katharine Newman recognized, and what many of us have come to see, is that this argument was, in practice, a first line of defense against letting most ethnic writers in the classroom door. It was a self-reinforcing argument: that they were not in the standard anthologies argued that they were not valuable; because they were not valued, they were not in the anthologies and thus not taught. Anthologies could, she saw, enable the work of opening the canon and our students' understanding of writing, publishing, and culture more generally. That has indeed been the case, as one can quickly see by comparing tables of contents of American literature anthologies even unto the 1990s with those dominating the market today. In this chapter I want to discuss two aspects of taking anthologies seriously: some of the ways in which they are uniquely useful, and some of the ways in which, like all books and people, they become hard to change.

If in teaching literature one emphasizes primarily literary monuments, the putatively great books of the "great"—that is, canonical—writers, context and history, much less biography or analysis of movements and cultural formations, become less significant than internal and intertextual linguistic and aesthetic concerns. But what if one wishes, rather, to help students come to see literature as one form, however special, of textual production in any historical moment? What if one wishes to emphasize the differences and similarities among texts in any particular period? Or to observe the processes of change that help to answer the question "why this thing in this way at this time"? To observe change, to account for difference and similarity, to comprehend the historical conditions of textual production—all, it seems to me, lead us toward the comprehensive anthology, rather than to separate books by individual authors.

To see why, it is useful to turn to my first subject, teaching with anthologies.

I want to emphasize a number of considerations:

- The importance of literary and cultural history, that is, viewing texts and authors in relationship with one another, in time and over time.

- The usefulness of seeing texts within the historical and social contexts in which they were first produced, distributed, and consumed.
- The desirability of examining the conditions of textual production at different moments, including our own.
- The need for widening the lens to include a richer selection of genres.

These are overlapping categories, but I want to try sorting them out because they suggest somewhat differing features of what teaching with anthologies today can provide.

To begin with some revolutionary writers, Tom Paine, Alexander Hamilton, and, as will be seen, Judith Sargent Murray. At the beginning of "Common Sense," Paine writes:

In the following pages I offer nothing more than simple facts, plain arguments, and common sense: and have no other preliminaries to settle with the reader, than that he will divest himself of prejudice and prepossession, and suffer his reason and his feelings to determine for themselves: that he will put on, or rather that he will not put off, the true character of a man, and generously enlarge his views beyond the present day. (*Heath I, 936*)

The question the pamphlet poses is, then, what constitutes "the true character of a man," what is true manly behavior? The essay is, in effect, an extended exhortation to stand up and be a "true" man, not weak, or self-interested, prejudiced, or even moderate. But then, what? How does a *man* behave?

Paine answers that question in significant measure through a pattern of gendered imagery. First, Great Britain becomes a bad, indeed a monstrous mother. Then he concludes in the following terms:

Ye that tell us of harmony and reconciliation, can ye restore to us the time that is past? Can ye give to prostitution its former innocence? Neither can ye reconcile Britain and America. The last cord is now broken, the people of England are presenting addresses against us. There are injuries that nature cannot forgive; she would cease to be

nature if she did. As well can the lover forgive the ravisher of his mistress, as the Continent forgive the murders of Britain. . . .

O! ye that love mankind! Ye that dare oppose not only the tyranny but the tyrant, stand forth! Every spot of the old world is overrun with oppression. Freedom hath been hunted round the Globe. Asia and Africa have long expelled her. Europe regards her like a stranger, and England hath given her warning to depart. O! receive the fugitive, and prepare in time an asylum for mankind. (*Heath*, I, 941-42)

Britain has become a "ravisher" against whom the true, manly American must act to defend his mistress. She is, in turn, defined in a way characteristic of late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century texts, as Freedom, at once the muse and the lover of mankind.

By contrast, in Federalist 6, Hamilton deploys historical women as agents of misrule, of Utopian and idle theory:

The influence which the bigotry of one female, the petulancies of another, and the cabals of a third, had in the contemporary policy, ferments and pacifications of a considerable part of Europe are topics that have been too often descanted upon not to be generally known.

(*Heath* I, 1011)

To follow such women is, from Hamilton's perspective, and from the perspective of many social conservatives since, to indulge in Utopian speculations, ~~vain~~ projections, sleepy reveries. Or as he writes:

From this summary of what has taken place in other countries, whose situations have borne the nearest resemblances to our own, what reason can we have to confide in those reveries, which would seduce us into an expectation of peace and cordiality between the members of the present confederacy, in a state of separation? Have we not already seen enough of the fallacy and extravagance of those idle theories which have amused us with promises of an exemption from the imperfections, weaknesses and evils incident to society in every shape? (*Heath*, I, 1014)

The implications of these belief systems and the role that gender plays in constructing and maintaining them is reasonably self-

evident. In the classroom, the contrast is effective pedagogically, especially in literature or cultural studies courses, in which we are concerned with rhetoric and what it is within us and within the culture to which political language, like President Reagan's "evil empire" phrase, appeals. The belief systems contrast, indeed, in many ways. In another, however, both writers offer altogether limiting ideas of woman. She is either a victim of rape or the seducer of reasonable men.

Turn now to Judith Sargent Murray's discussion of Eve and Adam in her 1790 essay, "On the Equality of the Sexes":

It is true some ignoramuses have absurdly enough informed us, that the beauteous fair of paradise, was seduced from her obedience, by a malignant demon, *in the guise of a baleful serpent*; but we, who are better informed, know that the fallen spirit presented himself to her view, *a shining angel still*; for thus, saith the criticks in the Hebrew tongue, ought the word to be rendered. Let us examine the motive—Hark! the seraph declares that she shall attain a perfection of knowledge; for is there ought which is not comprehended under one or other of the terms *good* and *evil*. It doth not appear that she was governed by any one sensual appetite; but merely by a desire of adorning her mind; a laudable ambition fired her soul, and a thirst for knowledge impelled the predilection so fatal in its consequences. Adam could not plead the same deception. . . . What mighty cause impelled him to sacrifice myriads of beings yet unborn, and by one impious act, which *he saw* would be productive of such fatal effects, entail undistinguished ruin upon a race of beings, which he was yet to produce. Blush, ye vaunters of fortitude; ye boasters of resolution; ye haughty lords of the creation; blush when ye remember, that he was influenced by no other motive than a bare pusillanimous attachment to a woman! (*Heath*, I, 1162-63)

This passage is obviously great fun, but also it helps illustrate how a certain masculine common sense about gender, power, and politics was, even in the moment of America's founding, deeply contested. A text like Murray's disrupts the easy circulation then, and now too, of that "common sense" and thus enables students better to *read* texts generally acknowledged as central to American political discourse. Beyond that, placing such texts in conversation, and suggesting one line of discourse along which that conversation

proceeded, enables students to discover other elements of the conversation for themselves. But it is impossible to teach in this way without the anthology. From a practical standpoint, texts like Murray's in particular are not readily available otherwise.

My second point concerns seeing texts in relation to the contexts in which they arise. I am using the term "contexts," to borrow George Drake's recent formulation, "as constitutive rather than simply background" (198). Perhaps because I teach in Hartford, Connecticut, where she lived and from which was derived the demeaning sobriquet by which she came to be known, "The Sweet Singer of Hartford," I like to use some of Lydia Sigourney's work. Often, to illustrate the politics of literature I put Sigourney's poem "Indian Names" together with works by Philip Freneau, William Cullen Bryant, and others about Native America. Freneau in "The Indian Burying Ground" (1787) and Bryant in "The Prairies" (1832) adopt the *ubi sunt* mode, first about the mound builders, then about the Indians:

Thus arise
Races of living things, glorious in strength,
And perish, as the quickening breath of God
Fills them, or is withdrawn. The red man, too,
Has left the blooming wilds he ranged so long,
And, nearer to the Rocky Mountains, sought
A wilder hunting-ground. ("The Prairies," *Heath*, I, 2820)

Consider: this is published two years after the Indian Removal Act, and three years before the Treaty of New Echota, 1835, signed by some Cherokees under intense pressure from Andrew Jackson's administration. That treaty led directly to the Trail of Tears in the winter of 1838-39, the horror of which has become legendary.

Sigourney's 1838 poem is at once a response to Bryant and others, a cry of outrage and of frustration, and—as was true of many of her public writings in poetry and prose—an effort to intervene in the deadly federal policy being pursued:

Ye say, they all have passed away,
That noble race and brave,
That their light canoes have vanished

From off the crested wave;
 That 'mid the forests where they roamed
 There rings no hunter's shout;
 But their name is on your waters,
 Ye may not wash it out. . . .

Ye say, their cone-like cabins,
 That clustered o'er the vale,
 Have fled away like withered leaves
 Before the autumn gale:
 But their memory liveth on your hills,
 Their baptism on your shore,
 Your everlasting rivers speak
 Their dialect of yore. . . .

Your mountains build their monuments,
 Though ye destroy their dust.
 (*Heath I, 1508-9*)

Sigourney is, to be sure, speaking of names, and in the portions of her poem I have omitted speaks the Indian names: Niagara, Rappahannock, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Allegheny, Monadnock. But when I teach this poem one of my students generally points to the importance of names in terms of social power and control—as, for example, in the Old Testament when Jacob wrestles with the angel and demands his name. In the magic of epithets, in the names of cities, like Canton or Guangzou, Leningrad or St. Petersburg, or in the fact that America has yet to have a president whose name ends in “o” or “i,” much less in “ski” rather than “son.”

Texts like Sigourney's, Bryant's, and Freneau's can, and should, be read with Elias Boudinot's 1828 “Address to the Whites,” an eloquent defense of Cherokee civilization, and with Chief Seattle's perhaps spurious speech that prophetically ends with the sentence “The white man will never be alone.” These texts take on very different resonances if set in such historical contexts: Boudinot's is no longer a dry survey of Cherokee society but a passionate effort to hold back the annihilation of a people. Moreover, this approach can help students see the historical agency of literature, even texts as remote as these in time, to think of poems as active players in particular struggles. In a certain sense, the an-

thology here works against the grain of our educational system, which systematically has separated the study of history from the study of culture, to the impoverishment of our students' understanding. Brooks, Lewis, and Warren had to some extent stepped in that direction in their 1973 text, *American Literature: The Makers and the Making*. Oddly, as it may seem at first, an anthology that can thus be used historically functions as a counter-hegemonic influence toward a better integrated education.

A third point: the conditions of textual production. Here it is useful to think about the poetry of Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, certainly the best-known and arguably most influential black woman writer and orator of the nineteenth century. Harper was a gifted writer and speaker. She could, had she wished, have composed complex, multi-level texts, as one of her better-known works, "Aunt Chloe's Politics," suggests:

Of course, I don't know very much
About these politics,
But I think that some who run 'em,
Do mighty ugly tricks.

I've seen 'em honey-fugle round,
And talk so awful sweet,
That you'd think them full of kindness,
As an egg is full of meat.

Now I don't believe in looking
Honest people in the face,
And saying when you're doing wrong,
That "I haven't sold my race."

When we want to school our children,
If the money isn't there,
Whether black or white have took it,
The loss we all must share.
And this buying up each other
Is something worse than mean,
Though I thinks a heap of voting,
I go for voting clean. (*Heath*, II, 580)

Harper's problem was this: she spoke many of her poems to her audiences, mainly black people, many former slaves. Some had learned to read, of course. But they would necessarily, like most people who come to reading late in life, be less sensitive to subtleties and demands of written texts. To lay on them a poem like, say, "Prufrock" or "Mine—by the right of the White election" would be to silence them. On the other hand, they were superb "readers" of voices, intonation, inflection, fear, evasion, demand. They had learned to be such expert readers to survive. Harper's poem, wonderfully modulated in its orality, speaks to such an audience. One can hear them respond: "Yes, M'am, we know that feller, yes, yes."

This may seem an oblique way to get at the issue of the conditions of cultural production, much less the question of teaching with anthologies. But I want to suggest that the meaning of the phrase "conditions of cultural production," while it always involves material conditions, needs to be understood as quite varied, not limited to matters of publishers and editors. Every text has a story to its production, and one advantage of the anthology is precisely the variety of such stories one necessarily engages. For Harper, the dominant conditions of textual production are, as I have suggested, those arising from her particular audience and from the demands of the platform. These are different, as I need hardly point out, from the distinctive conditions engaged by Emily Dickinson or magazine poets like Sarah Piatt. To explore the implications of such material conditions through the texts that in significant ways are shaped by them is, I think, to help students engage literature not across some reverential distance but with immediacy, not as a collection of sacred texts but as language acting in, and being acted upon by, the world—just as is their language.

Further, because the anthology presents its own story, one that in my experience often interests students, it offers an immediate instance of the conditions of textual production. Why do the students encounter in an anthology these particular authors (Gloria Anzaldúa, say) rather than others (like J.D. Salinger); what has that to do with literary value, economics, copyright, or editors' tastes? And why this particular form, a massive volume of more than 3,000 pages? How has that changed over the years, and how is it

changing now? Further, what does the four-year cycle of anthology production tell of the economics of capitalist publishing? In a sense, the anthology itself offers a case study, always already a presence, of the dynamics of textual production.

With respect to genres, the comprehensive anthology can be looked at, indeed indexed, as a vast museum of various literary forms: chants, lyrics, sermons, narratives, dramas, chronicles, memoirs, tracts, songs, letters, political documents. This generic variety is important not so much in order to de-privilege or even demystify poetry, usually the literary touchstone for teachers and the bane of reading for students. Rather, generic variety is helpful in order to help professors present and students comprehend differences in formal properties as well as in the conditions of textual production that often shape form. The issue is not whether or how poetry or short fiction are more significant than, say, letters, but how they do, and do not, differ. Here, one might consider how Emily Dickinson blurs the lines between letter and poem in this note to her sister-in-law, Susan, whose child, Gilbert, had died of typhoid fever, 5 October, 1883:

Dear Sue—
 The Vision of Immortal Life has been fulfilled—
 How simply at the last the Fathom comes! The Passenger and
 not the Sea, we find surprises us— . . .
 Wherefore would he wait, wronged only of Night, which he
 left for us—
 Without a speculation, our little Ajax spans the whole—

Pass to thy Rendezvous of Light
 Painless except for us—
 Who slowly ford the Mystery
 Which thou has leaped across!

Emily.
 (Letter 868, *Heath I*, 3021)

Is this a poem or a letter? What provides answers to such a question? It seems to me that comparing forms of textuality offers the most useful path to getting inside the structural features that define

them. Only the comprehensive anthology provides us with the richness and variety of texts necessary to carry out such exercises.

The picture of anthologies I have been drawing up to this point is, however, too static. An anthology, after all, is like a culture itself, a work always in progress. As in a museum, one takes works off the wall, places others up, indeed alters the walls themselves, building new wings, refurbishing old galleries. But like a museum, too, after a while one runs out of room: books fall apart, the binding will not hold, the limits are upon us. Nothing in the making of anthologies will bring that—and its attendant train of problems—home so vividly as the process of consolidating two volumes of over 3100 pages each into a single book of some 2700 pages total. That exercise glaringly and painfully illuminates many of the issues of inclusiveness and value that I have not up to this point really addressed.

In the second part of this article, therefore, I want to look at the actual process of developing the new "Concise" version of the *Heath Anthology of American Literature*. I will focus largely on the selection of minority authors since our concern here is the value of the anthology in promoting diversity in literary study. First, I want to go back over two decades now to the beginnings of the Reconstructing American Literature project, from which the *Heath* derived. The project was started in 1978 or so at The Feminist Press and initially funded by the federal Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education (FIPSE). For the reasonably overt objective of our project was social change: by altering *which* American literary texts were seen as important, and thus taught in classrooms, we hoped to change what people saw as significant in the wider society. "Out of sight," we thought, meant "out of mind," and if we could bring into sight the writing and the lives of women and minority men, then we might help place the real-life experiences and concerns of these people on the social and political agendas of our country. We therefore designed the anthology to be far more inclusive than any other collection had ever been. Thus our objective was deeply political: if we could achieve commercial success with a newly-fashioned anthology, so much the better, but that was not what drove the Reconstructing American Literature project, nor our commitment to carrying it forward.

On the other hand, the one-volume edition was seen from the beginning as primarily a commercial enterprise. It would be part of a market until now dominated by one or two other anthologies, notably the *Norton* one-volume. At the same time, if it could, as we expect, win a significant market share, its success would also help support the two-volume version of the anthology and thus sustain the continuing social objectives of that enterprise. Obviously, however, the imperatives driving a primarily commercial enterprise and those driving a primarily ideological project differ somewhat. I don't want to erect these as an absolute binary, for, as I have written elsewhere, it turned out that ideological and market considerations were rather less contradictory and more aligned than some of us had initially assumed (Lauter 182-83). Our problem with the one-volume, then, came to be how to sustain the basic goal of inclusiveness of the two-volume anthology within the constraints imposed by the goal of producing a commercially successful shorter text.

What were those constraints? The dominant one was, of course, space. One critical part of our strategy in approaching the goal of inclusiveness in the original *Heath* was to expand the dimensions of the physical books themselves. Our editor at D.C. Heath tells the story of walking into his production manager's office and, seeing dozens of Bibles, concluded that he had become a born-again Christian. No, it was the production man's way of testing out paper, so that he could find the right kind that did not show the text from the verso, took ink reasonably well, and could be bound into a volume of 3,000 pages or so. Even then, we pressed the outer limits of what in fact could be bound without falling apart, or even what students could carry. I should point out that the size of the early *Heath*, and of other anthologies that followed our lead, has come to be about 1,000 pages bigger per volume than anthologies of a generation or so ago. But for the one-volume, the publisher had determined, a bit by word of mouth, a bit by survey, a bit by seat of the pants, that about 2,700 pages or so was the maximum that people wanted or that would be financially viable. Thus we were challenged by the task of cutting the text by almost 60 percent. How could one do that and still retain the diversity central to the *Heath*?

How could you—in particular when the survey Houghton Mifflin sent out seemed to show a cultural conservatism in what teachers wanted for the one-volume, including some striking ambiguities about the general acceptance of minority writers, other than African Americans at least? Participants were asked to check off texts included in the two-volume *Heath* they believed should be included in a one-volume version; they were also asked, among other things, to check off texts they thought should *not* be included. Surveys of this sort are, to be sure, very limited; one cannot overgeneralize from a cohort of 100 or so. Still, they are suggestive. Here's what this one seemed to suggest. More than 50% of those who responded to our questionnaire said 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. (By the way, Eliot's "Prufrock" was the text most often named, in 82% 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*—not to speak of many later works by Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, Gwendolyn Brooks, and James Baldwin, as well as by some white women authors like Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Kate Chopin, and Adrienne Rich. Among the writers whose work over half the respondents said should be included were twelve African Americans: Equiano, Wheatley, Douglass, Jacobs, Washington, Du Bois, Hughes, Hurston, Baldwin, Brooks, Hansberry, King, Malcolm X, and Morrison. That's a reasonable showing, considering that the work of only 63 writers in all fell into the over 50% range. A few other African Americans, including Sojourner Truth, Toomer, Cullen, Wright, and Alice Walker fell into the mid-to-high 40% range.

On the other hand, the only other "minority" writer to be named in over 50% of the positive responses was Leslie Marmon Silko. Maxine Hong Kingston and Sandra Cisneros were included by 45%, Louise Erdrich by 43%, others by fewer. More surprising to some of us, perhaps, was the amount of work by early American writers selected by 60% and more of the respondents: a number of poems by Anne Bradstreet, parts of William Bradford's *Of Ply-*

mouth Plantation, Jonathan Edwards' sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." These numbers suggest that the marginalization of earlier writing as well as of works by some white women and significant numbers of African Americans has largely ended. But they also suggest that important works from Spanish and Native American traditions, as well as more recent texts by Latino and Asian American writers, have not yet fully been incorporated into curricula—or, implicitly, whatever is left of a canon in American literary study.

Of course, we hardly followed the mandates, such as they were, of the survey. We decided to include some 40 African American writers, as well as other songs and tales from black origins. Additionally, we included work by 18 Native American authors, as well as two sets of oral texts, ten works by Latino and six by early Spanish writers as well as three sets of tales or *corridos*, and nine Asian American writers, as well as some Angel Island poems. I think it is fair to say that this represents a reasonable diversity. But to achieve that goal, we had to address a number of sticky issues.

First of all, there has been a narrowing of the diversity of our editorial board itself. When we first organized the editorial board in 1982, we wished to deal with the fact that never had there been a minority participant on the editorial board of an American literature anthology and, until that time, only one or two white women. We decided to insure that there were equal numbers of men and women, of white and minority board members. That configuration was designed to express a certain symbolic message, but also it was necessary given the state of scholarship at the time. Very few men had been working on writing by women: Emily Dickinson and one or two others aside; and even fewer white Americans had done serious scholarship on minority writers. It was simply necessary, if we were to include a serious selection of the work of minority authors, to include a serious diversity of editorial knowledge. And we did.

In the intervening two decades, however, things have changed: more and more white scholars are doing significant work on minority authors, and at least some men on women writers, though fewer than one might imagine. At the same time, and for a variety of reasons, participation in our editorial board has narrowed, so

that the proportion of minority members has somewhat declined, a fact we are now addressing. That presents a somewhat different problem than it did twenty years ago. Now, more people are doing more diverse scholarship and teaching a greater diversity of texts. But relatively fewer of our editorial board members are mentoring the next generation of minority students and scholars, and thus it is less clear to us just which minority writers are being taken seriously by those newer generations, and how their work is being configured in relation to the texts of other authors. To what extent should we continue in a very restricted space to include, say, Etheridge Knight or Michael Harper, as compared with Yusef Komunyakaa, Harryette Mullen, or Nathaniel Mackay? Or, say, Chang-Rae Lee and Sherman Alexie as against Bapsi Sidhwa or Theresa Cha? Which of these is being read and taught by the rising generation? That's harder for some of us to know, now, than it was years back. A social institution, of which an anthology is one, always runs the risk of falling out of touch with the moving frontiers of social practice.

Second, we faced a different kind of organizational question from the one we dealt with in the initial edition. Then, we had to decide, among other things, whether we would present the Harlem or New Negro Renaissance as an entity separate from the dominantly white high modernists of Pound, Eliot, Stein, and the like. There are problems either way. To integrate the black writers into a single modernist unit would, we felt, be to lose the distinctive intertextuality and the political dimensions of what was, after all, at least in part a separate cultural and social movement. One ran the risk of seeing the black writers buried among the more familiar texts like "Prufrock" and "Babylon Revisited." To separate them, however, suggested a kind of ghettoization, and it might also misrepresent the particular modernist character of writers like Langston Hughes, Jean Toomer, and Sterling Brown. In any case, we did decide for a division, and in my judgment that has been fruitful. But for the one-volume, that was no longer the issue. Rather, the problem was whether we should, given the sharp limitations of space, opt for including *fewer* works by *more* writers or relatively larger selections by a somewhat more limited group of authors. For example, we knew we were going to include Phyllis

Wheatley and Gwendolyn Brooks, possibly Audrey Lorde and June Jordan.

But how many texts would constitute a teachable selection of these writers? Here the survey was marginally helpful: it told us which actual works (often few) the respondents were likely to have taught, but given the unevenness of what was being taught and our desire to broaden what was included in a syllabus, that could not be conclusive. While 61% of the respondents wanted us to include Wheatley's "On Being Brought from Africa to America," only 29% proposed including "To the University of Cambridge, in New England" and only 16% the important, and distinctively African American poem "To the Right Honorable William, Earl of Dartmouth." Similarly, while 56% wanted Brooks' "We Real Cool," only 38% wanted "The Last Quatrain of the Ballad of Emmet Till" and 35% "The Mother." None of Lorde's poems were recommended by more than 27% of the respondents, and not by more than 19% any of June Jordan's. Ultimately, we decided that earlier writers needed somewhat richer selections, so we included seven of Wheatley's, including the ones I mentioned as well as her letter to Samson Occom. But for more contemporary poets, we decided only to include two or three works, and for contemporary writers of short stories, only a single text. Thus, we include Ishmael Reed's "I am a cowboy in the boat of Ra" and "Flight to Canada," Sonia Sanchez's "to blk/record/buyers," "Masks," and "A Letter to Dr. Martin Luther King," as well as, for example, Sylvia Plath's "Daddy," "Lady Lazarus," and "Fever 103°," and Theodore Roethke's "Root Cellar," "Elegy," and "My Papa's Waltz." That way, we could maintain the wide diversity of authors. But whether that approach will meet the needs of teachers who use the one-volume text remains to be seen.

This problem is bound to get even more tense as other groups make their presence more visible on the American cultural scene. As some of my examples suggest, that is becoming the case for South and Southeast Asians. Aside from Bapsi Sidhwa, whose story "Defend Yourself Against Me" is superb, I'm thinking of people like A.K. Ramanujan, Lan Cao, Jhumpa Lahiri, Fay Myenne Ng, and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. And it is certainly going to be the case that we will want to look at the work of Arab

Americans, some of whom have been studied for a number of years (see, for example, the three items by Majaj mentioned in Works Cited), but none, even after September 11, 2001, yet sufficiently recognized—for whatever complex of reasons—to be included in a comprehensive American literature anthology. The situation is paradoxical since the contemporary section is probably the least taught of the units in the book, and yet its representative quality is among the most cited of an anthology's features.

In thinking about this problem we quickly encounter a question related to the nature of the course for which a one-volume anthology is designed: the one-semester (or even one-quarter) survey of American literature. I wanted to put into the Preface to the book a brief discussion raising the question of whether or not such a course should actually be taught, but the in-house editor really demurred, saying that it didn't make sense to bring into question the very course for which the book is designed. Well, maybe and maybe not. The fact is, however, that most English departments—and they are still "English" departments—would never think of reducing the British literature survey to a single term. So why 500 years of a quite varied American literature? What the survey made clear was that, when push came to shove, as it must in such a limited time frame, what survived was the familiar. . . and the brief (of which more in a moment). Perhaps the Preface to such a book isn't the place to raise such questions—at least not in a negative way—but it seems to me that they do need to be raised, for it will almost certainly be the case that, in a time of increasing fiscal constraint and shifts in education toward so-called "career" programs, writers, experiences, histories, cultures previously marginalized will continue to be so pushed toward the edges. I think of the case of Rolando Hinojosa, one of the best known and celebrated North American writers in Latin America, but who is seldom taught even by users of the *Heath*, and whom we painfully did not include in the one-volume. Just as, in this post-Enron moment, I think we have to push back against the corporatization of the university, I also believe it is necessary to challenge the very concept of trying to comprehend American literature in a single fourteen-week term, or of squeezing the representation of our subject into a single volume shorter even than the anthologies of old.

Perhaps more fundamentally, what is really at contest are the "standards" by which we make such decisions. These are not only "contingent," as Barbara Herrnstein Smith has pointed out, but deeply conflicted. When we first started trying to decide which of the hundreds of authors and thousands of texts proposed to us should be included in the first edition of the *Heath*, we performed what turned out to be a powerful exercise. We decided to look at a little-known text by, at least in mainstream English departments, a little-known author: Saunders Redding and his autobiographical and social history, *No Day of Triumph*. For my own part, I knew a bit about Redding only because I had read his history, *The Lonesome Road*, on the bus en route to Jackson, Mississippi during the freedom summer of 1964. The chapter from *No Day of Triumph* turned out to be a revelation, for it is superb and compelling writing and raised for all of us the question of why few of us had known it, much less taught it, before. It put our basic graduate school training into question, or at least forced us to ask about the standards by which we were being asked to make judgments about the authors and texts we had before us. But of course, nothing is easy.

Indeed, anthologists and teachers generally assert that we choose selections because they are, in Matthew Arnold's noble language, "the best that has been thought and said." In the real world, however, somewhat different motives intrude. For example, there is the issue of longer or shorter, and complete or excerpted works. Our friends who edit the *Norton Anthology* have made something of a fetish of advertising the number of longer, complete works that appear in that collection. This has allowed them to play into the ideology of us English department types, who are supposed to prefer teaching whole, presumably organic texts, although in fact we seldom deal with them fully. Besides, what constitutes a "longer complete" work remains somewhat ambiguous: Richard Wright's "Bright and Morning Star"? Tillie Olsen's "Tell Me a Riddle"? Amiri Baraka's "Dutchman"? More problematic: what are the consequences of including, for example, a whole novel like Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* in terms of what must be omitted, not only by way of minority and ethnic writers, because so many pages are otherwise eaten up? We faced that issue in two

ways. First, the two-volume *Heath* includes a number of quite long stories that we have felt are not only excellent but well suited to teaching in a single class period. These include, for example, two I mentioned, "Bright and Morning Star" and "Tell Me a Riddle," as well as James Baldwin's "Sonny's Blues" and Theodore Dreiser's "Typhoon." But we found, as push did get into shove with the single volume, that using these longer pieces would probably mean excluding other writers altogether. Therefore, we decided to use what we think are equally interesting but frankly shorter works by the same writers: Wright's "The Ethics of Living Jim Crow," Olsen's "I Stand Here Ironing," and Baldwin's "Previous Condition." Are these reasonable alternatives?

Length was not, of course, the sole consideration. The longer texts are difficult, require substantial contextualization of the sort I discussed earlier, and might be seriously problematic for students who had never imagined anyone *wanting* to protect a communist, much less being one, or who might never so much as heard the blues much less a piece of jazz! Could the work needed to teach such texts be accomplished in a single-term survey of *all* American literature? Would such works therefore be taught at all? Am I making a pedagogical virtue of a publishing necessity?

A different, equally problematic case—the one that gave us the most difficulty and was the last to be resolved—concerned Baraka, ever the hub of controversy. We wanted to include "Dutchman." We had already concluded that long, three-act plays like Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* and Lorraine Hansberry's *Raisin in the Sun* would occupy far too much space. But we were using five or six one-act plays like Susan Glaspell's "Trifles" and Tennessee Williams' "Portrait of a Madonna." Could we afford yet another play, especially given the fact that drama is, on the whole, much less taught in survey courses. Baraka could, we concluded, be represented by five of his poems, four or five pages worth rather than the twenty-some of the play. Here again, length was not the only consideration: we had to take into account what teachers were likely to teach. Have we thereby excised a significantly representative work of the angry 1960s?

Representation offers yet another issue, and a peculiarly complicated one. For is the problem to represent particular groups of

writers, as I suggested before, or particular groups of *students*, whose sense of authority can be enhanced by discovering authors like themselves? For us, that complex of issues came to focus on one of the last writers to be included, Paule Marshall. The survey indicated that she was desired by only 10% of the respondents, and there was other evidence to suggest that she was not widely taught in survey courses. On the other hand, she was one of the few authors of Caribbean origin in a book likely to be used in a collegiate, particularly community college, world with ever-larger numbers of Caribbean and Latin American students. What in this case did we owe both writers and readers? Or, to push things one further step, is “representation” a valid standard of selection in the first place? Then again, is inclusiveness? Or only the suppositious “best”? The best of exactly what or for whom? For us, obviously, representation in this sense is as central a virtue as any other, as important in literary study as representation might be in democratic polity. Or is literary study inevitably and necessarily non- or even anti-democratic?

As is clear, then, decisions in such publishing are seldom made in a purist empyrean. They are inflected—some would say corrupted—by a variety of material considerations of the sort I have here sketched in my effort to follow Katharine Newman in taking anthologies seriously. One has to, as I have suggested, both as a teaching tool and as a problematic cultural construction shaped by a variety of motives and demands. But these discussions hardly exhaust the subject, however much they might have exhausted my readers. Technological developments, like the possibility of shaping individual anthologies from on-line text bases, will force new assessments of the value and roles of such collections. The changing nature of undergraduate education itself, and of student bodies, will require the reassessment of literary pedagogy. Wherever these developments lead, however, at least we have ceased treating the anthology as a paperweight and doorstop.

Notes

1. Katharine Newman edited two anthologies: *The American Equation: Literature in a Multi-Ethnic Culture* (New York: Allyn & Bacon, 1970) and *Ethnic American Short Stories* (New York: Washington Square, 1975). Among other significant scholarship on anthologies, I would include the book of my colleague Barbara Benedict, *Making the Modern Reader: Cultural Mediation in Early Modern Literary Anthologies* (Princeton NJ : Princeton UP, 1996) and a recent issue of the magazine *Symplok* on "Anthologies," 8.1-2 (2000).

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