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In his foreword to *ALS 1985: The American Literature Survey*, the late J. Albert Robbins reported on plans for two new histories of American literature, *The Columbia History of American Literature* and *The Cambridge History of American Literature*. The former has since appeared in a single large volume (1988), and the latter, longer in the preparation, issues the first two of eight planned volumes this year. Al Robbins suggested that the newer projects might make their predecessor, *The Literary History of the United States* (1948), obsolete. Critical opinion will have to settle whether they manage to do that or only stand beside it as alternative versions of the national narrative.

Meantime, these attempts to overthrow an older critical tradition by writing books to replace other books seem almost archaic by contrast to the explosion of CD-ROM databases and research archives, and World Wide Web sites featuring images of manuscripts, printed materials, photographs of persons and places, even voice-recordings. Increasingly the contributors of essays to *ALS* include electronic publications among the items they review. Since reviewing presumes that the same material in the same form is widely available for others to use, however, we have made it working policy to review only those electronic materials "published" in the sense of being reproduced in multiple identical copies. We do not review electronic on-line archives, because these exist in only one form and can be altered at any time; the version a reviewer comments on here may no longer exist when a reader of *ALS* attempts to use it. This policy coincides with a natural prejudice of the discipline: our concern is American literature, and American literature begins as words on the page.

The explosion of electronic publication certainly has not dented print scholarship, to judge by the amount of material covered in this year's chapters. Thanks to the success of my co-editor, Gary Scharnhorst, in identifying new contributors last year, every chapter in our proposed
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