In November 1851, Melville wrote to Hawthorne, “I should have a paper-
mill established at one end of the house, and so have an endless riband of
foolscap rolling in upon my desk; and upon that endless riband I should
write a thousand—a million—billion thoughts, all under the form of a let-
ter to you” (Correspondence 213). He was probably expressing his deepest
wish: that he could inscribe his best thoughts to the most carefully selected
audience and that no limitation on these thoughts would be imposed by
his medium. This form of publication would serve his desire to accrue
symbolic capital while avoiding dingy commerce, saving him from the
drudgery of writing as a job of work in which he was forced to exchange
his intellectual and physical labor for always-insufficient advances and roy-
alties. Dickinson was able actually to carry out such a plan throughout her
writing life. By choosing not to strive for economic capital or even for a
public readership, she preserved her ability to earn symbolic capital within
the most restricted type of field of production: the individual recipient of
a letter or poem. (However, because sharing letters was common practice,
she could certainly expect that her words would reach a larger audience
than their explicit addressees.) This field of production is exclusive; the
evaluative criteria are autonomous (established by the artist who is also the
person solely responsible for producing the work), and the maker creates
the “public” simply by transmitting the good.

As with each writer’s decision not to embrace the “street” by pursuing
marketing by mug, the desire to participate in such an exclusive field of
production to an extent resulted from distinctions of economic and social class. Bourdieu regards aesthetic distance as a class function: the expectations that art will reflect life and that an audience should be emotionally involved with a work of art are typical of the “popular” aesthetic; in contrast, the more restricted the field, the greater the aesthetic distance between audience and work, with culture and cultural capital arising from and being granted by a social aristocracy (*Distinction* 32–35). Cultural capital can result from education, wealth, or birth; the latter is strongly associated with “high culture.” Dickinson definitely had this advantage; Melville had at least a taste of it. In mid-nineteenth-century America, however, as I will explain, this dichotomy between an aesthetic of popularity and an aesthetic of exclusion was complicated by the ideological celebration of labor as a source of value, a celebration characteristic of the American middle class. Similarly, the culture industry’s dichotomy between rarity and vulgarity would be less compelling in America. It was certainly invoked by both Dickinson and Melville in the images and diction they attached to a large and indiscriminate public (“an admiring bog,” “dayalized [as] a dunce”), but they also regarded their writing work as a valid type of labor, as deserving of respect as what craftspeople did.

The artist exerts the greatest power within a field of extremely limited production by including along with the work a description of the criteria by which it should be evaluated, a practice that conduces to the greatest possible autonomy. Melville probably came to understand this dynamic at least a year earlier than his endless-ribbon letter to Hawthorne. On 1 May 1850, he wrote to Richard Henry Dana Jr., “[D]id I not write these books of mine almost entirely for ‘lucre’—by the job, as a woodsawyer saws wood—I almost think, I should hereafter—in the case of a sea book—get my M.S.S. neatly & legibly copied by a scrivener—send you that one copy—& deem such a procedure the best publication” (*Correspondence* 160). The chief evaluative criterion invoked by Melville is experience shared by author and reader—in this case, that of having lived as a common sailor. Melville does not say he would send Dana just any new creation but specifies “a sea book.” This is not to say that a book’s content would have to be limited to shared experience but rather that in sending a manuscript to a discerning reader Melville would pitch it in such a way as to invoke what he took to be the particular grounds shared by that reader. Thus, in offering to send Hawthorne a sample from *Moby-Dick*, he would not stress whaling but rather the book’s metaphysical qualities and its association with hellish depths of thought.

He had invoked the same criterion in a letter to Dana seven months earlier (6 October 1849), when *White-Jacket* was about to be published.
Then he had written that were his novel to be “taken hold of in an unfair or ignorant way,” he would be grateful for “a word to the purpose”—presumably, vouching for the accuracy of White-Jacket’s portrayal of life aboard a man-of-war. This earlier letter’s somewhat stuttering manner suggests that he felt uncomfortable making the request: “[M]ay I hope that you will do so [say a word to the purpose], if you can spare the time, & are generous enough to bestow the trouble?—Your name would do a very great deal; but if you choose to keep that out of sight in the matter, well & good.—Be not alarmed,—I do not mean to bore you with a request to do any thing in this thing—only this: if you feel so inclined, do it, & God bless you. [new paragraph] Accept my best thanks for your kindness & believe me fraternally Yours—a sea-brother—” (Correspondence 140–41). If this letter truly reflects what Melville felt, he expected that “a sea-brother” would be the right reader for White-Jacket. Both letters attempt to establish with Dana a highly limited field for the production of prestige: by lending his name in support of or in validation of White-Jacket, Dana would enhance the prestige of its author. This loan would certainly have a positive economic impact as well, which may account for Melville’s embarrassment in making the request; he wanted to preserve or enhance his ability to earn money with his writing, but he disliked having to go begging and surely worried that Dana would think less of him as an artist.

These three letters to Dana and Hawthorne also dramatize the conflict Melville felt between trying to preserve the potential for economic capital he had established when beginning his career with the publication of Typee and Omoo, and desiring to reach a more discriminating audience of “thought-divers.” This story has often been told. The simple version portrays Melville as the romantic visionary unappreciated by most of his peers and unable to accommodate himself to the expectations of a mass audience. A more nuanced version, better grounded in an understanding of the literary culture of the time, portrays Melville as learning to appeal to a variety of audience types. In addition to the mass audience, to which Melville probably never aspired, there was a substantial middle-class readership divided roughly among (1) the readers referred to contemporaneously as “general,” “common,” or “popular,” which included both sexes and “read largely for entertainment”; (2) those who “attempted to regulate literary production as well as the aesthetic tastes of general readers; such reviewers, literary critics, clergymen, particular authors, and other people of high social standing represented a separate audience usually referred to by their contemporaries (and themselves) as ‘intellectual’ or ‘cultivated’ readers”; (3) the group between these two, “literary” readers, who “blended the
receptiveness of general readers to progressive ideological views with the particularly formulated aesthetic standards demanded by cultivated readers” (Post-Lauria, *Correspondent Colorings* 4–5). By the time he was writing *Redburn* and *White-Jacket*, Melville accepted his “social responsibility and civic duty” as an author and understood that “preservation as an author depended on loyalty to established practice rather than a deliberate literary isolation” (82–83); he had been affiliated with the New York City literary circles long enough to understand the expectations of the “cultivated” and “literary” types. He preserved this same orientation, according to Post-Lauria, as late as his magazine-fiction period, when he was sufficiently respected to be regarded as the “trademark” writer of *Putnam’s*, a position he lost when the magazine’s new editors began to try to appeal to “the general reader of sentimental fiction” (213, 228).

But in addition to these middle-class audiences, Melville was also aware of other, highly limited markets; throughout much of his writing career, as shown by the letters to Hawthorne and Dana, he recognized that private publication was the best way to reach those markets. His expressed desire for an “endless riband of foolscap” and for the economic freedom to send Dana a manuscript was not, or not only, a flight of fancy and an expression of frustration with mass-market publishing and the physical limitations of handwriting. He also understood that symbolic capital could be earned exactly as Dickinson did a few years later—“publish” by sending handwritten works to the shapers of taste (the producers of symbolic capital).

Dickinson can be read as if she benefited from Melville’s experience, as if she learned from him to aim strictly for the noncommercial, nonprint fields of restricted production: mainly portfolio poetry, letters, and commonplace books. To present one’s work within these fields is not intrinsically equivalent to publication, however. A writer might send a copy of a poem to a friend for many reasons. This becomes an act of publication when the writer selects individuals who have the power to consecrate and who will not perform that function for mass-circulated works. This means of earning symbolic capital requires the author to accept and be able to occupy a social class position at least somewhat elevated, in order to nurture relationships with the individual recipients of works produced in extremely limited quantities. Melville would not want to “bore” Dana, because to do so was a sign of low breeding, just as he did not want to “bore” Duyckinck by providing all of his reasons for rejecting the *Holden’s* offer. Similarly, Dickinson’s economic class enabled her to avoid what many other talented women of her generation had to do, write for money, and in conjunction with her family’s high social standing it also helped her develop the habitus necessary to function well within those nonprint,
middle- and upper-middle-class fields. A final requirement for such publication is that the physical object must reflect special preparation—a rough pencil draft doesn’t count.

**Earning Symbolic Capital with the Labor of Writing**

The young poet described by Emerson in his essay “The Poet” actually “had left his work, and gone rambling none knew whither, and had written hundreds of lines” (200); no labor is mentioned. But if this poet were a mature adult instead of a youth, he and his audience might feel that to leave whatever work he had been doing (the implication is schoolwork) and not to reflect any effort in the writing itself was a poor strategy for earning an audience’s goodwill. How Melville and Dickinson understood themselves as engaging in the work of writing and in the work of literary authorship was influenced by how their society constructed the social, cultural, and economic functions of labor. In particular, their preference for producing their work by hand was validated by their culture’s high estimation of manual labor: a manuscript tangibly embodies the manual labor required to produce it, unlike a printed, mass-produced book, which erases that labor. The ideology of antebellum America—the ideology that shaped Melville and Dickinson during their formative years and demonstrably influenced their attitudes toward the work of writing throughout their lives—deemed manual labor “more ‘productive’ of wealth than other kinds of labor,” partly because its results were visible (Bromell 26–27). But such labor was also seldom represented in art, literary or otherwise, because the trades tended to guard their secrets, insisting that they be learned in an apprentice fashion rather than from books, and because values were generally expressed in abstract terms that were ill suited for the concrete nature of manual labor (32–33). A third cause, a Marxist would argue, is that “bourgeoisie culture . . . establishes itself on the concealment of manual labor,” especially the “experiential qualities” of that labor (34). All of these factors contributed to the consistent distinction in the literature of antebellum America between work of the “mind” and work of the “hand” (34–35).

In this system, intellectual labor was most likely to accrue cultural capital; such labor typically was described in figures that made it seem manual and tangible, but the descriptions tended to ignore both the actual labor of writing (pushing a pencil or pen across paper, researching, thinking) and the actual tasks involved in authorship (reading proof, negotiating
with publishers, and so forth). To earn cultural capital, a writer had to engage in art rather than craft but at the same time had to be advertised or understood as laboring no less than a carpenter or mason. The garret, of course, was an ideal site for such labor; any primitive or rustic locale was another.

Writers such as Melville, Thoreau, Stowe, and Douglass were aware of the contradictions inherent in the mind/hand distinction and “sought to broaden the reach of literature not by diffusing it through a transcendental order, but by focusing it through the prism of the human body” (Bromell 242–43). Both Melville and Thoreau of course had performed manual labor, so while both to some extent accepted the “ontological distinction between mind and body,” both also questioned the utility of that distinction (39). For example, Melville’s “Paradise/Tartarus” diptych shows him “at pains to indicate that the work of writing is in some way a party to this [social and class] division of labor. . . . [Writing] has become a privilege that requires the exploitation of others” (73–74). This statement is generally accurate if we replace “writing” with “authorship.” The writer has no need of a copyist and can make do with the most coarse materials; the author, however, depends on others to produce the physical manifestations of her or his work. This manifestation can be a book or magazine; it may also be a professionally copied manuscript or a fair copy made by the author himself or herself using high-quality paper. In some visually obvious way the work must reflect significantly more and different labor than just placing words on paper.¹

*Ruth Hall,* the autobiographical novel by Fanny Fern (Sara Payson Willis), provides a vivid dramatization of the labor involved in both the practice of writing and the profession of authorship while also invoking the romantic image of the writer by locating her labor in a garret. Describing the early days of Ruth’s authorial career, Fern presents in great detail the physical demands of writing as well as the physical and emotional demands of embarking on this career:

. . . often there was only a crust left at night, but, God be thanked, she should now earn that crust! It was a pity that oil was so dear, too, because most of her writing must be done at night, when Nettie’s little prattling voice was hushed. . . . Yes, it was a pity that good oil was so dear, for the cheaper kind crusted so soon on the wick, and Ruth’s eyes, from excessive weeping, had become quite tender, and very often painful. Then it would be so mortifying should a mistake occur in one of her articles. She must write very legibly, for type-setters were sometimes sad bunglers . . . but, poor things, they worked hard too—they had their
sorrows, thinking, long into the still night, as they scattered the types,
more of their dependent wives and children, than of the orthography of a
word, or the rhetoric of a sentence.

Scratch—scratch—scratch, went Ruth’s pen. . . . One o’clock—two
o’clock—three o’clock—the lamp burns low in the socket. Ruth lays
down her pen, and pushing back the hair from her forehead, leans faint
and exhausted against the window-sill. . . . (125–26)

This passage and others portray the “work of the hand” involved in writ-
ing as physically demanding in itself and also demanding because of the
conditions under which it was carried out, conditions that can be summed
up as “the garret life.” The garret (literally, a room in the top floor of
a building or a room directly underneath the roof) began to be associ-
ated with poverty in the eighteenth century; by the nineteenth century, as
many literary references show, the association had expanded to include art-
ists, especially writers (OED). This association connects with the desire to
create cultural or symbolic capital; material success, which affords an artist
the ability to live in greater comfort and closer to street level, convention-
ally disqualifies the artist from garnering prestige or being able meaning-
fully to participate in important cultural dialogues. To succeed is to sell
out; it is only by living as she does that Ruth can write truthfully, and
because Ruth Hall trades on the conventions of sentimental fiction, Ruth
is able to succeed financially. (I elaborate on this relationship in chapter 4.)

The romantic image of the writer’s life could have appealed to Melville
in part because it explained his family’s decline and justified his own poor
economic showing as a writer. Both of his grandfathers were “holdovers
from the glorious past” of the American Revolution, whereas “his father
lived in a fanciful future” (Delbanco 19). The latter tried to make a liv-
ing as a retailer but “never became at ease in the increasingly impersonal
system whereby European exports were sold in bulk to American auc-
tion houses, from which they were bought by wholesalers and distributed
to the retail trade—a business in which good taste and personal charm
counted for less than the ability to anticipate rising markets by buying
low and falling prices by selling high” (20). In other words, the new mar-
ket system was beyond Allan and seems never to have interested the son
who would become famous. The garret life, however, connotes a different
type of class distinction, based not on money but on the pursuit of truth
and aesthetic perfection. Melville’s most complete description of that life
is to be found in Pierre, or, the Ambiguities. Pierre was not literally liv-
ing in a garret when he moved to New York City to take up authorship
in earnest, but his chamber at the so-called Church of the Apostles had
all of the garret trappings: it was “meager even to meanness,” a “beggarly room”—a phrase Melville uses three times over two pages (270–71). Because his room lacked heat aside from that given off by a single chimney passing through it, he had to be wrapped in coat, cloak, and surtout in order to write, with hot bricks under his feet and also “under his inkstand, to prevent the ink from thickening” (301). He spent “eight hours and a half” in these conditions every day—no wonder that the narrator exclaims, “Civilization, Philosophy, Ideal Virtue! behold your victim!” (302–3). It is a small but important detail that Pierre was not drafting in pencil but was composing immediately in ink; little wonder, then, that his publisher finally threatened legal action, although Melville’s rendering of that moment seems intended to create sympathy for Pierre, the letter coming from “STEEL, FLINT, & ASBESTOS” (356).

The emphasis on Pierre’s workday and the fact that he seems to work even on Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year’s emphasizes his condition as a manual laborer (303). Similarly, Melville’s description of himself as no more than a manual laborer, in his second letter to Dana, calls attention to the sheer physical effort involved in producing a literary good, not just the writer’s effort but that of the “scrivener” who would actually produce the finished good. This hypothetical laborer might be his wife, who prepared some of his copies for printers during this period, or someone actually paid to do the work. Melville knew that his handwriting was a poor medium for presenting a manuscript and that publication required the preparation of a fair (clean and legible) copy, one that bore no traces of the writer’s struggles and uncertainties—the manuscript book would seem to have been produced as easily and spontaneously as were the lines of Emerson’s young poet. Yet Melville’s description also implies that in order for a good produced in this way to accrue symbolic capital, it needed to be a finished product—ready for distribution—and might already have involved the paid labor of someone other than the writer. Two samples of Melville’s hand show why he would need a scrivener. Figure 3, a page from one of his journals, can with some effort be made out, as long as the reader is willing to make a couple of leaps. Figure 4 shows what would become the opening of chapter 14 of The Confidence-Man. Hayford and MacDougall offer a transcription of the uncanceled words of the second line, “may arise from the author’s conception” (417), but a reader who lacked the final published version or any other intermediary might find the page as inscrutable as the brow of the white whale. There is no question that a typesetter would prefer a scrivener’s script over Melville’s. Dana need not know that the manuscript copy would probably be prepared by one of the women in Melville’s household rather than by a professional
Began and continued an agreement which awoke in the heart of the writer.

Saturday, June 8th, 1856. Arrived from New York through Lancaster, at 1 P.M., having passed through an interesting country of manufactures.

A rainy day. Put up at "White House Hotel," Poland. Dined there at ordinary. Before sitting down, asked the maid, "What time?" Curious to observe the thinking expression, as if shocked at the idea of anything mercenary having hard the actual hospitality of an ordinary.

More谈到 at table. Curious affection of a priestly dinner party. All thought of the public house vanished. Entertaining the priests, "Will you have wine also?"—But charged in the bill—Affection of the casual
Footnote

[61, 217] Figure 4. Manuscript fragment of chapter 14 of The Confidence-Man, in Melville’s hand. MS Am 188 (365), Houghton Library, Harvard University. Used by permission.
paid to do the work, a fact of the Melville household’s precarious economy that would have been unseemly to bring before polite society.

In his correspondence with Dana, Melville discriminated sharply between the mere wood-sawing labor of producing a book like Redburn and the (presumably pleasurable) crafting of a “sea-book” for a single discriminating reader. Redburn he characterized as labor for hire; he was producing a good that was sold in the mass market and over which he seems to have wanted no control, any more than a woman working in a paper mill could dictate who bought the paper or how it was used. The manuscript book embodies a romantic conception of labor (an expression of the whole individual, done for pleasure, valuable simply because of that genesis), whereas the marketed book is probably involved in the pragmatics of getting a living. The manuscript book can also be understood as the most pure expression of the work of writing, in contrast to the marketed book, which typically required the “writer” to turn “author,” attending to an editor’s demands, a public’s tastes, the legal niceties of copyright and compensation, none of which has anything to do with the activity that often draws people to the work of writing—exercising creativity, imagination, originality, self-expression.

Melville’s early reviewers did in fact emphasize that both “literary labor” and the laborer should be invisible, one reason for the critical blasting of Mardi (Weinstein 204). In this novel Melville attempted to redefine the production of literature as “meaningful and rewarding work” and refused to allow either his text or himself to “become part of an economy that requires an erasure of his labor” (208). He continued this reification of the labor of writing in Moby-Dick, attempting as well to involve actual readers in that process (209–10, 212). On the other hand, Melville’s extensive and unattributed borrowing in his early books may count as erasing rather than foregrounding both accountability and writerly work. Fully to discuss this issue requires consideration of copyright and of nineteenth-century attitudes toward literary borrowing, topics which I take up in chapter 3. But it is clear that, in Weinstein’s words,

as [Melville’s] career unfolded, his notion of economy shifted and expanded so as to force complex reconsiderations of the market economy and his literary labors in it. These reconsiderations, in turn, forced Melville to create within his fictions alternative economies with quite different mottoes (“I prefer not to” being the most memorable), which enabled him to avoid inflicting upon his characters and himself the psychic and bodily violations he had found to be the consequences of a market economy. (221)
Clearly, Melville regarded literary labor as distinct from the wood-sawing type involved in producing commodities for the mass market. Equally clearly, however, as Weinstein demonstrates, he insisted that literary labor was real work and, to be worthy of prestige, could not be the casual production of a dilettante. This attitude was probably influenced by his experience of the physical act of writing as involving drudgery and even pain, a topic I take up in chapter 4.

Melville certainly dramatizes in his fiction the labor of writing, but the labor within his household that was required to produce the fair copies of his work has been erased until very recently. This drudgery certainly weighed at times as much on the women of his household as did the labor of writing on their brother. According to Parker, in the winter of 1853–54, for instance, Augusta “had been in charge of servants while being Herman’s sole copyist. . . . What with using daytime for copying and perhaps for necessary sewing, Augusta had no time for reading and for her essential correspondence unless she stayed up far into the night with her candle” (Herman Melville 2:207). Some of her copying “was done under great pressure of time, unlike three years before, when she had had the luxury of copying the whale book at her own pace, well behind Herman because he was writing slowly, by his standards” (2:208). However much Melville may have attempted to create fictional economies within which his characters could avoid becoming commodified or erased, the household component of his writerly economy enjoyed no such consideration; this remained the case throughout his writing life.

Dickinson’s chosen method of publication by handcrafting challenged the commodification of a writer’s “mind”—indeed, the commodification of verbal art in general—as well as the division between mental and manual work. This method also both participated in and critiqued the division of labor into a male (business) and a female (domestic) realm. Her case demonstrates that for a woman, writing and the manual labor involved in homemaking could reinforce one another. Just as Thoreau’s patch of beans served both economic and nutritive functions (not to mention symbolic), a loaf of bread could serve for Dickinson both socially and domestically, and writing about the loaf or the patch served spiritual, intellectual, and ultimately cultural ends. Furthermore, neither the actual items nor their verbal representations needed to be mediated through a capitalist market in order to be valuable: the actual goods could be bartered or given as gifts, while the verbal goods could enter the antimimetic market. In this way Dickinson could avoid becoming soiled by handling cash and
would remain superior to “bourgeois shop culture,” thus preserving her sense of aristocratic gentility (Stoneley 584, 589).

Some of the poems Dickinson sent with gifts as well as those she sent as gifts explicitly thematize writing as a physical crafting rather than “intellectual head work.” Her poem “I send two sunsets” (Fr557) emphasizes that a verbal rendering of a sunset is in one way superior to the natural event—it is portable, as are the products of all handicrafts. The poet’s off-hand “as I / Was saying to a friend” calls attention to the ostensible ease with which the poet accomplished her creation; in the same amount of time that it took “Day” to create an “ampler” sunset, the poet “finished Two—and several Stars.” Even when her theme seems to be the power of the poetic imagination to create a tangible reality, as in the brief poem “To make a prairie” (Fr1779), she tended to choose language that evokes a sense of handcrafting: the prairie is “made,” not “created.” The online Emily Dickinson Lexicon in fact shows seven uses of the verb “to create” in its various forms, compared to 202 uses of forms of “to make”; six of the occurrences of “create” connote divine creation, but so do a great many of the occurrences of “make,” suggesting that Dickinson regarded even God as a crafter and laborer. (“Creation,” always capitalized, occurs in eight poems.) Of the twenty-seven occurrences of “work” (including both noun and verb)—not a great number, but enough to suggest that this concept interested her—at least half denote physical labor. The theme of working/making fits well with Dickinson’s use later in her writing life of pieces of paper having already served some function in the domestic realm (such as receipts and advertising fliers). It is quite possible, as scholars have recently suggested, that Dickinson saw little if any difference between handcrafting a strictly verbal article and embodying that article in scraps of paper gleaned from the domestic realm.

Of equal importance is the fact that Dickinson tended to avoid, use in a disparaging way, or emphasize the limitations of the language of finance and capitalist commerce. “Merchant” and “invest” are deemed undesirable choices in “Publication is the auction”; personal “economy” seems a “scheme” or a “sham” like “estimates,” “ultimates,” and “arithmetic” in “The days that we can spare” (Fr1229). News about “The Stock’s advance and Retrograde / And what the Markets say” is “as null as nothing” (Fr1049). The unnamed persons referred to as “they” in “I took one draught of life” (Fr396) seem to be shaped by that language. They tell the speaker that she has “paid . . . / The market price” for that “draught” (a word fascinatingly multivalent in this context, with the dominant meaning being “drink” as in “I took a drink” but a secondary suggestion of
“bank draft” lurking just below the surface); she goes on to note that they “weighed” and “balanced” her and found her to be “worth / A single Dram of Heaven!” The concluding exclamation point is equally ambiguous, suggesting that this evaluation is either appropriately high or astonishingly low—cheap, we might say.

In “What would I give to see his face,” she notes that she would give, among other things, “shares’ in Primrose ‘Banks’ / . . . spicy ‘Stocks’ / . . . Bags of Doubloons” (Fr266). The explicit association of these answers with Shakespeare’s character Shylock, however, emphasizes that the foundational concepts of finance and commerce are wholly inadequate to obtain the end she desires. The concluding lines of this poem further ironize such an approach:

Sign me the Bond!
“I vow to pay
To Her—who pledges this—
One hour—of her Sovereign’s face”!
Ecstatic Contract!
Niggard Grace!
My Kingdom’s worth of Bliss! (emphasis in original)

The poem strongly suggests that the speaker wholly misunderstands what is needed actually to gain sight of “his face.” She begins by noting that to give herself would not suffice; only then does she begin to offer these additional purchase options. But like Antonio, who negotiates with Shylock in The Merchant of Venice, the poem’s speaker seems to believe that the ultimate price (“my life”) is not only inadequate but irrelevant compared to whatever can be found within the realm of banks, dowries, and stocks. The poem’s use of emphases—clearly indicated by underlinings in the manuscript copy reproduced by Franklin in The Manuscript Books—and quoted speech may be intended to suggest multiple voices engaged in a bargaining session. The exclamation marks complicate the poem even more, rendering impossible any certainty about the poem’s tone, but it seems clear that as with “I took one draught,” the language of commerce cannot accurately assess value. As she noted in a later poem, “I am afraid to own a body,” to possess a body and a soul is both “profound” and “precarious”; the speaker of “What would I give” doesn’t seem to be aware of the value of that possession or perhaps fears to recognize it, preferring instead to negotiate within the capitalist realm. (Franklin dates the manuscript of “What would I give” to 1861 and “I am afraid to own” to around 1865.)
Noncommercial Marketing of Literary Goods

Melville’s first novels were received by his publishers, by reviewers, and by the reading public as essentially autobiographical; their ability to generate symbolic capital was tied to that reception and thus limited to that cultural space—broadly understood as “travel”—about which he was believed to have knowledge. Whatever authority Melville was granted as a critic of his culture both depended on and was limited to his South Sea experiences—he was a man who had “lived among cannibals” (Correspondence 193). Thus, he could contribute to discussions of paganism, cannibalism, missionary activity, the beauty of faraway places and peoples, the structure of language, and the superiority of the American or northern European—to some but not all of the interests dominating mid-nineteenth-century American culture. Understanding that his own name as a writer was not sufficiently consecrated, he felt that his productions would fare better with the backing of a “name” like Dana’s. He was probably serious when he gestured toward establishing a quite limited field of restricted production, consisting of “sea-brothers,” for the exchange of “sea books,” but these brothers would almost certainly not be common sailors by birth, education, or social class even though they would have traveled that path for a time. Like South Sea travel, this would be a “natural site” in Bourdieu’s terminology: both topics were of interest to American readers, who would assume that the author’s experiences made him a credible voice. On the other hand, the travel book and the “sea book” were marginal sites in terms of Melville’s developing desire for symbolic capital, a desire that he first began seriously to explore with Mardi.

Dickinson presumably read Typee: she referred in a letter to “spend[ing] a few moments profitably with the South Sea rose,” and her father’s reported reaction to this activity (he “advised wiser employment”) supports Johnson’s inference that the allusion is to Fayaway (letter of 7 October 1863, Johnson 427–28). She could have known more about Melville’s career because of her literary connections and because of reviews she might have read, such as the favorable review of Pierre published in the Springfield Republican (16 August 1852), although there is no record of her reading Putnam’s and so encountering his magazine fiction. With the arc of Melville’s publishing career nearly at an end around the time Dickinson seems to have dedicated herself to writing, it is tempting, although fanciful, to regard her commitment to publishing by manuscript as her response to his advice—of course not literally so, but by example—that trying to appeal broadly to literary and cultivated readers, let alone the general middle-class audience, was a fool’s errand.
That she was so committed is still a matter for debate among scholars, but the idea has been forcefully supported at least since Martha Nell Smith published *Rowing in Eden* in 1992. I am refining this position by arguing, along with Karen Dandurand, that Dickinson actually targeted highly specific markets whose criteria for evaluation she understood and even influenced, and within which she could earn prestige. Dandurand explains that the editors of *Drum Beat* and *A Masque of Poets*, possibly also of the *Round Table*—all of which included Dickinson poems—sent copies to all contributors, meaning that Dickinson’s work could have been read by such luminaries as Louisa May Alcott, Oliver Wendell Holmes, William Cullen Bryant, Charles Eliot Norton, Sidney Lanier, and Christina Rossetti (256–57). She well understood that newspapers reprinted material from other papers, and several reviewers of her first published books of poetry remembered individual poems from their appearance decades earlier in the papers and even remembered her as the author (258–59). In short, her strategy seems to have worked.

To read Dickinson as publishing by manuscript is to see her expecting or even demanding to be taken seriously as a producer of literary art and willing to have her productions read by persons outside her intimate circle. A writer publishes to earn capital—economic, symbolic, or cultural. “Publication is the auction” (Fr788) makes it clear that publishing for economic capital is disgraceful, but the poem also invokes the inverse relationship between economic and symbolic capital, implicitly laying claim to the latter by associating it with divinity, the “Creator.” She understood that traditional publication includes marketing the writer’s very self, as is clear from one of her earliest letters to Higginson, 25 April 1862: “Two Editors of Journals came to my Father’s House, this winter—and asked me for my Mind—and when I asked them ‘Why,’ they said I was penurious—and they, would use it for the world—” (*Letters* 404–5). The editors (probably Samuel Bowles and Josiah Holland, according to Johnson—*Letters* 405) almost certainly asked to be allowed to publish something that she had written. Like “Publication is the auction,” this letter shows that Dickinson well understood her culture’s inclination to commodify the literary work and to equate it with the writer, an equation that constitutes an erasure of the actual writer: the writer’s labor and mind become the literary good and can be owned by the highest bidder (Weinstein 208). Dickinson’s use of the word “penurious,” as I will explain in chapter 3, also resonates with the copyright issue of whether to privilege the constitutionally protected right of the American public to the fruits of an author’s labor (“use it for the world”) or an author’s perpetual ownership of the right to copy. But Dickinson’s point in this letter probably has less to do with that legal
context than with her understanding of what audiences do to writers and their works.

Dickinson’s experience with publication has often been characterized as negative. As she wrote to Higginson regarding the published version of “A narrow fellow in the grass” that appeared in the Springfield Republican, “Lest you meet my Snake and suppose I deceive it was robbed of me—defeated too of the third line by the punctuation. The third and fourth were one—I had told you I did not print—I feared you might think me ostensible” (letter of early 1866, Letters 450). This comment historically was taken as yet another sign of her opposition to print publication. Recently, however, scholars have been less willing to make that interpretive leap, noting instead that she was complaining specifically about the change in lineation and was concerned about Higginson’s opinion of her—she probably intended “ostensible” to connote “seeming (but not really being) opposed to ‘print.’” By this more nuanced reading, she was commenting on the poem within its marketed context. In the view of Habegger, Dickinson’s “work was eminently publishable—subject to the usual editorial adjustments, of course”; Samuel Bowles, editor of the Springfield Republican, “was always confronting barriers and crossing boundaries and seeking a vital new woman’s voice,” and Fidelia Hayward Cooke, that paper’s literary editor for approximately six years beginning in 1860, would have been especially open to such voices (383–84, 389). Habegger goes on to write that

[i]t is not the case that Dickinson was denied an outlet, or that her work was deemed too “modern” or “incorrect” or “daring” to be published in her time . . . many conservative nineteenth-century Americans continued to hold the old idea that the best sort of writing circulates in private. This seems to be how Dickinson wanted to be read. Certainly, it was in line with her father’s views of feminine decorum, her brother’s uneasiness about her “wild” side, and her own profound shrinking from the public gaze. (389–90)

Habegger implies that Dickinson’s desire to be read was caused by the expectations set for her within her family. This is a plausible reason, but as a writer in contact with other writers, editors, and other literary tastemakers, Dickinson also understood that the means of production inevitably limit the type and amount of capital the literary good and its author can accrue. Habegger is also correct to point out how the preference for private circulation tended to be held by “conservative Americans”; he could as well have said “economically secure Americans.” As I noted in chapter
1, Dickinson’s attitudes toward and practice of literary art reflect her position in a family that was privileged in terms of education, social class, and (with some fluctuations) wealth. This was the class within which symbolic capital could be generated by privately circulated writing.

Two other phrases in Habegger’s statement deserve special note: “the best sort of writing” and “how Dickinson wanted to be read.” Almost all scholars agree that Dickinson wanted her writing to be read—but how, how much, and by whom, aside from her regular correspondents? I argue that like Melville, she desired to reach an audience of “thought-divers” and wished to be understood as writing what was “banned.” She obviously wanted to produce “the best sort of writing”—not just socially and aesthetically acceptable to a conservative audience but profound, capable of dealing “heavenly hurt” or “dazzl[ing] gradually” as she put it in “There’s a certain slant of light” (Fr320). Thus, the audience’s conservatism would have to be limited to the social and perhaps the aesthetic realms and would exclude the intellectual realm. Bowles may have been receptive to such writing: Habegger argues yes, while Sewall cautions that Bowles’s “taste in poetry was thoroughly conventional,” hence that Dickinson “experienced the frustration of an original mind in an uncomprehending time” (“Emily Dickinson’s Perfect Audience” 207). Dickinson had been blessed with receptive audiences even as an adolescent: her friends were all bright and well educated, and she early developed a reputation among them and within her family for the “finesse, the unexpectedly droll turns, and the brilliant resourcefulness of her word spinning” (Habegger 148, 164–65). But if that youthful willingness to perform continued into her mature life, her “profound shrinking” itself needs to be read as a performance of considerable rhetorical sophistication, and her desire to circulate her writing privately must have included the recognition, even the expectation, that it would be shared with people outside her intimate circle.

I suggested in chapter 1 that Dickinson pursued symbolic capital in order to enhance her authority to speak critically, if also cryptically or gnomically, about her culture’s dispositions in the realms of organized religion, sexual relations, and transcendent reality—realms that were foregrounded by the subject divisions in the first editions of her poems. Reaching out to Higginson would then be similar to sharing her poems and ideas with Samuel Bowles, her sister-in-law Susan Gilbert Dickinson, or the other tastemakers whose validation she sought in order to become recognized as an author—someone willing to go before a public—by appropriating the writerly context of the personal letter. Agnieszka Salska argues forcefully that Dickinson intended her letters to function this way. The letters
“contain the fullest record that we have of the poet’s conscious life,” demonstrate “the convergence of the principles of poetics for all her writing,” often display the oxymoronic quality of “intimate impersonality,” and were written within “a culture of intimacy of which the letter was a primary vehicle” (163–65). Dickinson’s culture, Salska insists, “persistently encouraged the fusion of literary and personal experience”; “radically and experimentally” she appropriated for “her own use a pervasive cultural habit” (166). Thus, “[t]he essence of her attitude in letting the genre of the private letter color all her writings and pattern her relationship with the reader should be seen as analogous to the innovative use she made in the sphere of prosody of popular ballad and hymn meters” (166–67). Her letters “maintained her connection to the intellectual and literary circles of the New England of her time” and also “prepared and created an audience for her poetry” (167–68).

In other words, Dickinson’s letters reveal her as desiring recognition as an author. In the early Higginson letters, “for the first time in her life, Dickinson separates her artistic concerns from her emotional involvements and attempts to test the response to her poetry of a reader who was personally unknown to her but professionally well established. Writing to Higginson seems a ‘coming-of-age’ gesture of a ‘homegrown’ artist” (Salska 175). Salska points out that these letters to Higginson followed whatever experience it was that led to the writing of the Master letters; followed within a few days the departure of Samuel Bowles to Europe, and occurred within the “conspicuous two-year gap during 1862–3 in the correspondence with Susan” (175). Her decision to initiate contact with a stranger could thus have been an attempt to fill the gap in her intellectual and writing life that was created by these other conditions—she needed an audience (a fact, as I show in chapter 5, that was ignored by most of those responsible for her twentieth-century career).

The manner of these letters to Higginson is also key. Salska describes the letters as a “coming-of-age gesture” (my emphasis): already a master of personae, Dickinson was now trying on yet another mask, this time of the hypothetical “young contributor” to whom Higginson had addressed the Atlantic Monthly “letter” that seems to have stimulated her contact. She desired to appear to Higginson as a “homegrown artist” just “coming of age” in the sense of seeking expert evaluation, but it seems unlikely that this is how she imagined herself. After all, she had already written hundreds of poems, and the contact with Higginson did not initiate any significant development or change in her practice, aside from the possibility that it contributed to her ceasing, two years later, the construction of fascicles. She was already thirty-one and had been taking care of her mother
for years, had experienced passionate friendships, had known death and other types of personal loss.

These letters to Higginson, like many others, also should be understood as transactions within a sexual economy, intended to “seduce” each correspondent “into an intimate relationship” (Salska 165). Salska describes what she terms Dickinson’s “double perspective: subjective—that is, her own as experiencer’s—and external, because she had to consider her addressee’s response” (172). This double perspective, which Salska says began as an intuitive discovery made by Dickinson through her letter writing, informed her poetry from the beginning, because she crafted and dramatized “the writer–reader bond on the paradigm of the relation between intimate correspondents” (172–73). But it is also possible that Dickinson fully intended to “seduce” that personally unknown but professionally established editor in order to expand her actual or potential symbolic capital. (This is the view of Suzanne Juhasz, one of Salska’s sources.) Dickinson certainly understood that she could play the game of sexual flirtation to powerful effect as a way of engaging and holding audiences and that the genre of the personal letter was the ideal field for this game. The end result would then be a conversion of sexual capital into symbolic capital.

It is likely that the letters of many ordinary people would reflect the same development that Salska traces in Dickinson’s, the development toward a double perspective or from expressive (writer-centered) toward transactional (reader-centered). The quality of “impersonal intimacy” in Dickinson’s more mature letters is unusual, but it is far from unique. This quality, however, would serve to develop symbolic capital while protecting the writer’s self from being dragged through the marketplace. Writing at a time when the identity of the author powerfully influenced how a work was received, Dickinson combined manuscript publication with extensive use of personae to signal to a limited and receptive audience that the work was to be the focus and that the writer was not to be possessed through the work, even as she intentionally and playfully offered individuated personae for possession by individual recipients of her work. She could reasonably—and professionally—expect these recipients to recognize the voice as coming from a mask rather than as from the heart, a point I develop in chapter 4. Yet she could also turn to her advantage her audience’s predilection to read the author through her work: “Maybe I can possess the writer, because the writer really is allowing glimpses of herself to me alone.” Furthermore, the writer preserved the right to appear in her own self, if this initial trial proved successful and if she decided that something was to be gained by doing so. Certainly, this strategy was likely to be more productive of symbolic capital than that followed by Melville:
allowing a large audience to identify him so closely with his first fictional protagonist that he could never be wholly free of that label.

Dickinson probably understood that although “nineteenth-century female poets were clearly as engaged as their male counterparts in issues of national importance,” they “were denied both recognition and authority for their work” and were able to succeed financially only by relating with editors in ways more resembling marriages than business arrangements (Petrino 10, 23–24). The goods produced by women also risked being devalued if presented to readers as “portfolio poetry” (Petrino 36). Such poetry “offered a culturally defined space for the seriousness of any writer’s unpublished and unpolished (and, to that extent, unconventional) work”; the poetry could function this way in part because Emerson had written in support of its value, although Dickinson’s reworking and polishing of her poems went contrary to the expected spontaneity of portfolio poetry (Miller, “Whose Dickinson?” 245). However, portfolio poetry was unlikely to be consecrated, especially during the middle third of the nineteenth century: it was deemed valuable because it was closer in spirit to inspired first drafts than was poetry crafted specifically for the common marketplace, but the “culturally defined space” was a marginal one until near the end of the century (Petrino 36–37), similar to the space “Mr Typee” was allowed to occupy. In his preface to the first edition of Dickinson’s poems, Higginson, (in)famously, wrote that “she must write thus, or not at all,” which within the context of the 1890s was only modest praise. Higginson did not mean that Dickinson had put herself through an apprenticeship, practicing and learning all available forms and committing herself to one; he meant that her form and style chose her. She sang this note well, but it was the only note she could sing. Such an artist, who was simply expressing an inner drive, could be interesting as a spectacle of nature and might even command substantial economic capital, but to be taken seriously as an author of lasting value required overt signs of conscious control (adherence to norms of diction, syntax, and meter, for instance), signs that were lacking in her poetry.

Any “culturally defined space” both empowers and limits, a fact of which Melville and Dickinson were certainly aware. That said, Dickinson’s fascicles do not belong within such a space, because as far as we know she never showed them to anyone; they cannot be termed “self-published” as can the poems she distributed in notes and letters. Gabrielle Dean argues that the fascicles reveal Dickinson “imitating the book but refusing print,” a tactic by which she “kept her fascicles in print and authorial rights and savored the materiality of the text—yet another way of making an unenforceable contract, like that she celebrates in ‘Mine!,’ beside but outside
the reach of the law” (271; emphasis in original). The fascicles thus “present the ideal dream of the book as intimate object, an expression of the author’s person outside the law of copyright. The central paradox—and triumph—of the fascicles is that, as much as they invoke self-publication, they are not reproducible because they are not and never were in print” (272). A scholar may read the fascicles as unpublished imitations of published books, but such a reading remains only a hypothesis about Dickinson’s authorial goals, that is, about “Dickinson as author,” and it should carry relatively less weight than what can be understood from her actual practices of self-publication. Domhnall Mitchell’s caution must be born in mind when considering what we know to have been disseminated compared to what may have remained private: “Emily Dickinson may not have been fully conscious of the potential her unpublished manuscripts possessed—or would acquire—as published documents. It may be later scholars who invent or reconstruct that potential” (“Revising the Script” 731). As interesting as are the fascicles for what they may show about Dickinson’s revising habits and her sense of the groupings into which her poems might naturally fall, they at best support hypotheses, not facts, about her authorial practices.

THE MARKETS FOR SYMBOLIC GOODS AND ART AS INTIMATE CONNECTION

Two types of writing that generated handcrafted goods were especially important for Dickinson’s construction of herself as an author—the “poetry of the portfolio” and the personal letter. Both types circulated within markets that had nothing to do with economic capital; Dickinson did not have to imagine herself outside of an economic market, as Melville did until late in his career, but instead explicitly placed her poems in ways that could earn her symbolic capital. These noneconomic, antimimetic markets were also amenable to goods that embodied and reflected household labor of the sort that would have been done or managed by middle- and upper-class women, hence Dickinson’s occasional poetic and epistolary depictions of this work. “The Rose did caper on her cheek,” for instance, portrays a presumably young woman “fumbl[ing] at her [needle]work” because of the presence of someone else who seems to be a secret lover; it is possible to imagine this scene taking place in a lower-class household, but it is certainly iconic of novels of romance focusing on the gentry (Fr200). A similarly sentimentalized situation is depicted in “Death sets a thing significant,” in which the fact of death leads people “To ponder little
Workmanships \ In Crayon, or in Wool” that were the final products of the now-dead hands (Fr640). Much less sanguine, “Severer service of myself” portrays work as an unsuccessful method to “fill the awful Vacuum” caused by a loved one’s death: “I strove to weary Brain and Bone—/ To harass to fatigue / The glittering Retinue of Nerves—” (Fr887).

The genres of letter and portfolio poetry continued the eighteenth-century tradition of genteel amateurism, in which the work of writing was relatively more prominent than the work of authorship: imagination and self-expression, as valorized by romanticism, were tangibly visible to the audience, unlike with published material. These modes also required money to purchase diaries, albums, scrapbooks, and the like, and they did involve labor. Dickinson’s writing life may have commanded a good deal of her thought on a daily basis, but as a woman with a household to manage she probably did not spend much time actually putting pencil to paper (especially given that because of her eye problems and the relatively poor artificial lighting of the time, she may have needed to fit in most of her pencil-to-paper time during daylight hours, when the household duties would also have been most demanding). Even in a family that had a servant, running a household was a demanding job: “Simply for Sunday dinner, chickens would have to be slaughtered and plucked, the spices ground for breads and pies, or puddings. The designated family baker, Dickinson . . . rose before dawn to make the fires and to prepare the family breakfast . . . chores were endless” (Barker 81). In fact she expressed resentment about the amount of work, and it is likely that she would have been much less productive during the crucial years 1858–62 were it not for the presence of a maid (Murray 703, 724).

Does this mean that Dickinson intended her collage-type texts using domestic household materials to “invoke” the “ideologically valorized” labor of household management, as Newbury says of middle-class male authors in the context of other types of labor (693–94)? This interesting thesis has been advanced by scholars such as Jeanne Holland and Melanie Hubbard. It is also possible that the genteel-amateur tradition and the cultural significance of letters and other forms of personal, intimate writing allowed Dickinson to regard her writing as a culturally sanctioned, seamless blending of her intellectual work and her household work. That is, for her this type of labor was not at all “emergent” (Newbury’s term) but long-standing, although she gave it her own distinctive imprint. It could further be the case that other women whose authorial authority tended to center on the domestic sphere (the magazine poets discussed by Cheryl Walker, the prose writers discussed by Susan Coultrap-McQuin and Jane Tompkins) had ready to hand a realm of labor (the household) within
which they could plausibly situate their themes and characters. But that possibility is beyond my scope here; suffice it to say that Dickinson experienced writing as labor and understood it as such. For her as for Melville, the labor was real, an inescapable component of her authorial authority.

Given that portfolio poetry, letters, and other hand-produced forms functioned as fields of restricted production within which symbolic capital could be earned, Bourdieu’s theory calls for investigation into the evaluative criteria that were applied to these forms. Bourdieu insists that the criteria would have differed from those of the mass market, would be directed at other producers of symbolic capital, and would overtly suggest an “art for art’s sake” orientation. For several reasons, however, this aspect of Bourdieu’s work must be modified for the period I’m considering. First of all, mass audiences and highly limited audiences equally expected that they would be able to have an experience of intimacy mediated by the work. The technique perhaps is most tellingly captured in a famous pair of lines from Whitman’s “Song of Myself”: “This hour I tell things in confidence, / I might not tell everybody, but I will tell you” (conclusion of section 19 of the 1888 version—the lines were present in every edition from 1855 on, differing only in the later addition of the comma after “everybody”). By publishing the poem, Whitman does tell everyone, but he still allows an individual reader to feel individually and even intimately addressed, singled out as worthy of this confidence. Second, both types of audience were ready to grant poetry a higher value than prose, deeming it more likely to convey enduring truth. Third, because egalitarianism and pragmatism loomed so prominently in American ideology, an author would be expected to avoid overt expressions of superiority and of “art for art’s sake,” but at the same time, the American emphasis on self-reliance would respect an individual offering a high estimation of his or her own value if that estimate was backed up in some way. All of these qualities can be summed up in the phrase “art as intimate connection”—they are the autonomous criteria for evaluation within the extremely limited circles which Dickinson throughout her writing life and Melville from Clarel on desired to reach.

Melville appealed equally to intimacy and egalitarianism—for instance with his expressed interest in writing “sea-books” for “sea-brothers,” even if these brothers were not imagined as common sailors. His statement to Duyckinck that he believed his “illustrious name” to be “famous throughout the world” need not be taken as pure vanity but fits well with the tone of the rest of that letter, a tone of frustration with a republic of letters
that seemed unable to value genius—a common complaint in America at this time, unlikely to be read as elitist (*Correspondence* 180). Allowing his homodiegetic narrators, most famously Ishmael, to establish an intimate and privileged relationship with narratees similarly conveys the sense of an extremely limited field of reception. Parker speculates that until the early 1850s Melville was influenced by the “art for artists” theory propounded in Hawthorne’s tale “The Artist of the Beautiful,” according to which “what is important is not the created work of art but the artist’s feelings” about the work, but that ultimately Melville “had to think beyond” the writer whom he had earlier taken as an ideal model (*Herman Melville* 2:160–61). Certainly the “art for artists” theory was present and not just in a possibly satirical form in the literary culture of Melville’s time, but it was not a theory to which he subscribed from the publication of *Pierre* in 1852 until 1866, when *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War* appeared. During this period he attempted to achieve both economic and symbolic capital as a writer of imaginative magazine fiction and, later in the period, poetry, and was not overtly pursuing individual, private readers. He almost certainly understood the magazine-fiction and poetry fields fairly well, as I explained in chapter 1. According to Charvat, the magazine world of the 1850s was populated by “the upper middle class,” whose taste “was beginning to be interpreted and guided by the editors of national monthly magazines like *Harper’s* and the *Atlantic*” (262). This world was “Melville’s proper level” in terms of the goals he set for himself as a “thought-diver.” The success he did achieve was “as an anonymous magazinist” (the magazine practice being not to print bylines) and was doubtless supported by his skill at embodying his critique of culture in characters and situations, thus preventing readers from easily imputing the critique to the stories’ author (279). But this success, such as it was, came too late to be profitable: his income from *Israel Potter* and his magazine pieces from 1853 to 1856 averaged “about $240 a year” compared to $1,600 a year during his first five years (1846–51) as an author (Charvat 193–94), and later he earned even less.

Furthermore, even the success of placing pieces in magazines was qualified, because of the anonymity. Contributors might be listed in tables of contents, as for instance with *Harper’s*, but then as now readers tended to “leaf through” magazines rather than scrutinize them. Even if the author’s name were initially associated with a magazine piece, the widespread practice of reprinting, which I discuss in chapter 3, meant that authors’ names might not follow what they had written, except for those extremely popular authors such as Fanny Fern whose names would help sell copies. The main reason Melville did not continue to pursue magazine publication,
however, may have been that he was uncomfortable with the “singular collective identity” and “the amalgamation of art and morality under the rubric utilitarianism” that had shaped America’s literary magazines during the two decades prior to his magazine career and that were still significant (Bohde 34). Melville would not have embraced the magazines’ self-appropriated role “as arbiter of a singular American character” (40), and for that matter neither would Dickinson.

This may partially explain why Melville began to strive around 1856 or 1857 for the status that was traditionally accorded only to poets (Parker, “The Lost Poems” 261). By 1860 he had completed a volume, now lost, to be titled Poems. He asked Evert Duyckinck to review the volume and to help locate a publisher if he deemed the project worthwhile, and he wrote for his brother Allan “the fullest instructions he had ever given for the publication of one of his works,” a memorandum that provides “powerful evidence of how seriously he took his new role as a poet” (Parker, “The Lost Poems” 263). Three of Melville’s points in the memorandum are especially telling in considering this “new role”:

5—For God’s sake don’t have *By the author of “Typee” “Piddledee” &c* on the title-page.

6—Let the title-page be simply,

Poems

By

Herman Melville.

7—Don’t [sic] have any clap-trap announcements and “sensation” puffs—nor any extracts published previous to publication of book—Have decent publisher, in short. (*Correspondence* 343–44; emphasis in original)

He understood that his ability to command symbolic capital was still hampered by his early reputation as an author either of travel narratives or of unreadable philosophizing; his hoped-for new identity was to be “Herman Melville, Poet,” rather than “the author of ‘Typee’ ‘Piddledee’ &c.” The proposed title page aptly sketches that identity: brief not prolix, declarative rather than evocative, elegant but not overwrought. Moreover, here is no game with personae or anonymity, no promise (or threat) of metaphysical meanderings.

Parker offers additional evidence that Melville regarded *Poems* as an important step in “reemerg[ing] into the literary scene as a poet” (262), especially the books he read on the round-the-world voyage he began on 30 May 1860 on the *Meteor*, commanded by his brother Thomas. The books were mainly poetry, “most often volumes that contained epic poems
or else very long poems,” which Melville would have studied to learn how to “write great poetry in his own time” (269, 272). Parker’s interpretation fits with everything that is known about how and why Melville read: always in dialogue with voices he hoped one day to match in power and prestige. When he arrived in San Francisco on 12 October, however, he learned that instead of being a published poet, he was “a mere unpublished ‘poetaster,’” Duyckinck having been unable to find a house willing to gamble on Poems (Parker 273). Regardless of the failure of this endeavor, any complete study of how Melville understood himself as a writer must recognize that Poems really existed, was read by George and Evert Duyckinck (the latter responding favorably and agreeing “to help see the poems into print”), and was looked at by two, possibly more, publishers (Parker 263, 261).

Once Melville began working at the New York Custom House in December 1866, his only attempt to accrue either economic or symbolic capital through the medium of commercial publication was Clarel, which was published in 1876 with the assistance of a subsidy from his uncle Peter Gansevoort, which fared poorly with both critics and purchasers, and the remaining copies of which were pulped in 1879. From 1866 on Melville was able to adopt at least the practice, if not the leisured posture, of the “gentleman author,” who often turned to the handmade book or limited edition in order to distinguish himself from those who wrote for the masses (Reiman 113). Parker emphasizes that the writing of Clarel did involve “real work. Melville toiled on Clarel, as he had toiled on Moby-Dick, in hours when he was exuberantly energized and other hours when he was crushed by fatigue and strain . . . we need to take the composition of Clarel out of the realm of the magically appearing artifact and see what writing it must have meant if Melville spent four or five years on it” (Herman Melville 2:688). If Melville’s handwritten note prior to the first page of the book can be taken as revealing his honest feelings, he had no positive expectation for its reception: “If during the period in which this work has remained unpublished, though not undivulged, any of its properties have by a natural process exhaled; it yet retains, I trust, enough of original life to redeem it at least from vapidity. Be that as it may, I here dismiss the book—content beforehand with whatever future awaits it.”

The prefatory note to Clarel suggests that Melville was finally, fully embracing the “art as intimate connection” principle as well as moving toward the “art for art’s sake” aesthetic of which he had been aware and with which he had at least dallied since working on Mardi. During the period of Timoleon, John Marr, and what would become Billy-Budd, Melville had finally developed a small following of readers who would actually
be able to appreciate a presentation copy of one of those last volumes: W. Clark Russell, E. C. Stedman and his son Arthur, for instance. The criteria for evaluation within this extremely limited field were tangibly present in a manuscript or in a self-published work of extremely limited run. The recipient of such a work was automatically privileged; the relationship between author and reader was intimate and sincere (not involving masks); the content of the work was guaranteed to be significant.

Symbolic capital did not remain out of Melville’s reach during his lifetime; as I discuss in chapter 5, several of the poems from *Battle-Pieces* frequently appeared in anthologies. There is no record of his response to this modest success. When the name “Herman Melville” did begin to garner symbolic capital in the twentieth century—and to generate significant economic capital as well—it was of course not as a crafter of manuscripts, commercially published poems, or self-published poems. In fact this component of his writing life was almost entirely erased: the twentieth-century Melville was created as a romantic artist whose financial failure was due partly to his own personal and business flaws but more to his contemporaries’ inability to appreciate his brilliance. The same is true of Dickinson. In the 1903 *Reader’s History of American Literature* he coauthored with Henry Walcott Boynton, Higginson predicted that although her poetry likely “can never attain popularity—the last fate which its author could have wished for it—it is likely, in the end, to obtain the attention of the ‘audience fit, tho’ few,’ which a greater poet once desired of fate” (Higginson and Boynton 131). In praising her poetry’s “remoteness of allusion” and “boldness of phrase,” Higginson enunciated qualities that at this time would position Dickinson not among the popular poets but in the same category (although of lesser stature) with John Milton.

On the other hand, Dickinson was able to put into long-term practice Melville’s wish to send individual manuscripts to individual readers, appealing to them partly because of her “remoteness of allusion” and “boldness of phrase” but more so because she practiced the “art of intimate connection” while presenting herself as a representative voice. Her statement to Higginson that “[w]hen I state myself, as the Representative of the Verse—it does not mean—me—but a supposed person” (*Letters* 412, letter of July 1862) echoes Emerson’s assertion that “the poet is representative,” standing “among partial men for the complete man, and appris[ing] us not of his wealth, but of the commonwealth” (“The Poet” 198). Dickinson may also have been alluding to Emerson’s essay in the lines “For love of Her [“Nature”]—Sweet—countrymen—/ Judge tenderly—of Me,” which according to Wolff show her “intend[ing] to speak of the general condition and for all men and women” (142). Higginson
is today the best known of Dickinson’s literary correspondents, due to his role in publishing her work, but during her lifetime others were also not just well-known but equally well positioned: Samuel Bowles (editor of the Springfield Republican, which in spite of its regional character had a national reach), Josiah Holland (affiliated first with the Springfield Republican and then editor of Scribner’s Monthly), and the novelist and poet Helen Hunt Jackson, to name just three. Jackson may have been the most important in Dickinson’s later years, perhaps even regarded as a true peer (Sewall, “Emily Dickinson’s Perfect Audience” 212). Although not herself recognized as a literary figure, Dickinson’s sister-in-law Sue received the greatest number of known letters, was probably viewed by Emily as a writing-workshop partner, and was for several decades a center of Amherst’s literary culture because of her salons, in which Emily’s poems were almost certainly read. These individuals and others were able to both value and circulate Dickinson’s work among a discriminating readership.

SYMBOLIC CAPITAL AND THE INTIMATE HAND

Ownership, labor, identity, authority, and symbolic capital most visibly coalesce in nineteenth-century attitudes toward the writer’s “hand,” or penmanship style: a manuscript should be legible, but ideally it would also be visually unique. Even though “print was prior . . . in terms of its cultural status” (McGill, “Duplicity” 41), there was still a significant space for handwritten art. Part of an author’s individuality is the author’s hand, a trait that Poe for one hoped to preserve, but also, by experimenting with printed imitations of others’ handwriting, attempted to exploit. The hand-produced work would be strictly the property of whoever owned the artifact itself; it embodies the writer’s labor, should be unequivocally identifiable as that person’s work (otherwise forgery would not pay), and if received by someone with the power to consecrate can generate symbolic capital. At the time of Melville’s education, handwriting instruction in America attended to both the ornamental and the useful; Melville and his family recognized his “hand” as deficient in both ways, neither beautiful nor legible (Renker 18–19). Melville regarded producing a text by hand as the true mark of “authorship” but knew he could not produce legible copy. By the principle of the art of intimate connection, the original, handcrafted manuscript would stand as the true work of art.

Near the end of his life, Melville may have found a way to combine the technology of print production with the intimacy of handwriting. The American Antiquarian Society collection includes a first edition of Clarel,
inside the front cover of the first volume of which I found a loose title page from *Timoleon* with the following reproduced on the verso side, in Melville’s hand:

New Book by Harper & Brothers.

“Clarel,” published by George P. Putnam’s Sons, New York—a metrical affair, a pilgrimage, a what not, of several thousand lines, eminently adapted for unpopularity—the notification to you here is ambidexter, as it were: it may intimidate or allure.

Again thanking you for your friendly note, and with best wishes to yourself and your circle, I am

Very truly yours

Herman Melville

The staff of the Society were unable to help me determine how the loose sheet had come to be inside of this volume or where it had originated, although markings on the front of the sheet trace it as far back as “C. A. Stonehill (Lond.)” and identify it as item 90 in catalogue 137, 1938, with a price of £90.00. (See figure 5.) The text itself (excluding “New Book by Harper & Brothers”) is from a letter of 10 October 1884 to James Billson; this letter is also listed in Stonehill’s catalogue (*Correspondence* 483). Possibly Melville used this sheet to accompany a presentation copy of *Clarel* late in his life, or even of *Timoleon* itself, but why would he have copied the personal letter? Melville’s note, I deduced (from embossing) and was assured by the Society staff, was printed not handwritten. This being the case, it is possible—although certainly a stretch—that Melville intended the sheet to embody the personal intimacy of a handwritten note even though it was mechanically reproduced; perhaps he intended to use the sheets to accompany a number of presentation copies. As such, the sheet itself, like *Clarel*, carries the potential both to “allure” and to put off a recipient—to allure the recipient who feels singled out for a special handwritten note, and to put off the recipient who looked closely at the sheet and determined that it was after all not an original signature.

Dickinson’s attitude toward handwriting has remained unstudied, although Thomas Johnson, Ralph Franklin, and others have provided a chronology for the changes in her handwriting and have used that to date her poems and letters. Wolff describes her writing as “very difficult to read, so much so that some of the products of her last years seem little more than hieroglyphics to an untutored eye” (4). The phrase “an untutored eye,” however, is telling. As Martha Nell Smith notes, in letters to correspondents other than Sue, Dickinson “almost always used more formal,
Figure 5. Broadside: title page from Timoleon with an inscription on the verso side in Herman Melville’s hand. Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society.
New York by Harper & Brothers.

"Cherub," printed by George P. Putnam's Sons, New York — a medley affray, a pilgrimage or what not, of several thousand lines, eminently adapted for unpopularity. — The nostalgic to your line is ambivalent, as it were: it may intimidate or allure.

Again thanking you for your friendly note, and with best wishes to yourself and your circle, I am

Very truly yours,

Herman Melville
often gilt-trimmed stationery, in effect dressing her texts like a gift edition of poetry or a deluxe edition of biblical scripture” (“Susan and Emily Dickinson” 53–54). The letters, thus, would reach their recipients already making a claim as to their value, regardless of any difficulties created by her “hand.” Furthermore, the recipients would not be “untutored”; they would know the writer and after receiving several letters would be familiar with her penmanship. In fact, while Dickinson’s very late handwriting does somewhat challenge a reader, the poems she sent to correspondents typically pose no problem. For instance, she enclosed with her first letter to Higginson, dated 15 April 1862, copies of four poems, including “The nearest dream recedes” (Fr304B). As figure 6 shows, this manuscript is quite legible; of course it should be, as she did not yet have any sort of relationship with the famous man of letters and was asking him to determine whether her “Verse” was “alive.” She would probably also want her handwritten self to show that she understood the need for truly “fair copy” if one wanted to be taken seriously as a potential author, especially considering how odd were some of her expressions in that cover letter, such as “The Mind is so near itself—it cannot see, distinctly” (Letters L260).

Curiously, although Dickinson frequently refers to the hand as engaging in actions, including writing and drawing, she does not figure it metonymically as penmanship style. Equally curiously, in an era when pencils were used for fine drawing but in writing were relegated to drafting (fine copying always being done in pen), she refers in her poems to “pencil” a few times but never to “pen.” Or perhaps this is not so curious. She may have regarded the pencil as the technology most conducive to masking, because its marks can so easily be erased and because it does not immediately convey the impression of an actual person who cares enough about the writing to convey it in a relatively permanent form. It could of course also be regarded as suitable for poetry of the portfolio, as such poetry was to convey a sense of immediacy rather than of reflective thought.

In sum, then, within this culture in which “print was prior,” a significant space was available for the production of handwritten or otherwise self-produced art. Within this space, symbolic capital could be earned; Melville and Dickinson recognized the opportunity, although he only seized it near the end of his life, while she made use of it throughout her writing life. Melville reveals that even in his ideal situation of sending handwritten manuscripts, the evaluation criteria he imagined were not wholly autonomous: labor after all was widely esteemed. His awareness of the material and economic bases of literary production contrasts with Emerson’s portrayal of the relationship between a poet and the poet’s nation, according to which the poet, as opposed to a mere maker of verses
(a poetaster), would be valued by the nation yet would not be limited by that audience’s history, culture, or economic support. Nothing in Emerson’s formulation could be taken as advocating art for its own sake, art evaluated solely by autonomous criteria. Emerson’s anecdote of the youthful poet makes clear that a discriminating audience is essential, an audience “credulous” not in the sense of casually moved but in the sense of being willing to invest belief in and be spiritually moved by the presence of art. Because, according to Emerson, a poet was to be evaluated in the context of “partial men,” an audience was needed. Not surprisingly, Emerson’s idealistic theory ignores the labor of production; Melville, on the other hand, grasped that in the literary/cultural/economic system in which he participated, using paid labor to produce a good might aid in or even be necessary to the favorable reception of that good by an audience. Further, as Melville understood, that audience had to be paid for but not “bought” in the derogatory sense. The payment might be in the form of versions of one’s self, such as photographic images or verbal stereotypes (the cannibalistic man), a price Melville was not willing to pay. At the other end of the scale, it could be in the form of handcrafted artifacts, a price he idealized. It could also be in the form of a self-published volume of extremely limited distribution, his practice late in life.

Dickinson invested herself solely in the handcrafted forms practiced by the more leisured classes, forms that better tallied with Emerson’s description of the ideal poet in terms of being produced without a profit motive and with the expectation of being received by a discriminating audience. But these forms would tend to erase the labor of production and the capitalistic system that made leisure possible for some. She challenged this tendency with her self-conscious use of domestic materials and her frequent incorporation of figures drawn from the language of commerce and finance. She certainly understood, with Melville, that audiences expected a fair exchange: positive evaluation bought with a sense of at least momentarily possessing a bit of the writer’s mind. Like Melville, Dickinson met this expectation with lifelike and plausible personae and reinforced it with actual handcrafted works rather than with merely the promise. She learned his lessons well.
Figure 6. Manuscript copy of "The nearest dream recedes" in Emily Dickinson's hand, sent to Thomas Wentworth Higginson. Courtesy of the Trustees of the Boston Public Library/Rare Books.
Neddie of the Boy.
Staring bewilder.
At the Mocking Sky.

Homeward for steadfast
Home.

Ah! the 365

This not-
that.

وارن Variant.