When Emily Dickinson wrote about sunsets, “But mine is the more convenient to carry in the hand” (Fr557), she could have been speaking to the future, describing the early editions of her poems (first series 1890 and second series 1891), which were published in a form that was indeed “convenient to carry in the hand”—outdoors as a reinforcement of the reader’s experience of nature (Dean 257). In the context of my argument, “convenient to carry in the hand” can serve as a metaphor for “accessible to a variety of nonprofessional audiences”: consumers, true, but consumers who value the sense of a personal relationship with the writer, who value books sufficiently to give them as personal gifts, and who might wish to have the writer’s words physically ready to hand. The terms typically attached to audience-as-consumer, such as “popular,” “low-brow,” and “mass readership,” connote a class division along social, economic, and aesthetic lines, with the privileged audience being interested in “high culture” or “art.”

The twentieth-century commercializing of Melville and Dickinson has been profitable in both venues, and the profit has been both economic and cultural. Elizabeth Horan relates a telling detail. Describing the role of Alfred Leete Hampson in the saga of Emily Dickinson’s literary estate, she writes that he was responsible for the inventory that led to the 1935 volume *Unpublished Poems of Emily Dickinson* (published by Little, Brown): “[C]hief among his activities in the 1930s was keeping lists of poems by
their first lines, which he appropriately inscribed on the reverse sides of bank deposit slips” (“To Market” 109). Hampson’s choice of notepaper for this activity was probably inadvertent but nevertheless emphasizes that Dickinson’s poems were to her descendants and heirs, but even more to the publishers who were producing the volumes of her work, a significant source of revenue. The same is true for Melville.

In this chapter I will first sketch some personal issues that make the twentieth-century stories of these two authors somewhat dramatic (for Melville) or extremely dramatic (for Dickinson)—“the stuff of American soap opera” (Erkkila, “The Emily Dickinson Wars” 11). These issues repay study because they contributed to the notoriety attached to each author, especially within the academic community. I will then compare their careers, so to speak, among scholarly and high-brow reading audiences and among popular reading audiences. Finally I will consider significant cultural manifestations of each in the visual and performing arts and even in apparently irreverent genres such as rock music, cartoons, and comic books. These twentieth-century careers bear out Bourdieu’s prediction that symbolic capital will always in the long run produce economic capital. Each writer was originally “consecrated” by the mechanisms and agents of cultural capital; that consecration has been modified in response to changing priorities in American life. Each has also benefited enormously from the continued privileging of the notion of author as singular and original. (See Jaszi and Woodmansee.) This privileging influenced not only the development of copyright law, as I discussed in chapter 3, but the creation of the cultural icons associated with each author: Melville is popularly known by his fictional creations Moby Dick (the whale) and Ahab, whereas Dickinson is known by a self-created persona popularly yet mistakenly believed to be authentic—the cracked recluse in the white dress.

**Notoriety and the Personal Side of Profit**

The interesting piece of Melville drama is sketched by Ralph Maud and centers around the appropriate use of ideas, information, and access to material. Maud is essentially attempting to rescue Charles Olson, author of *Call Me Ishmael* (published in 1947), from charges of academic impropriety raised in the editorial notes of the Northwestern-Newberry edition of *Moby-Dick*, in which, Maud writes, “complaints about Olson’s behavior graduated from colloquial myth into the annals of the discipline” (1). Maud refers to “misdemeanors alleged against” Olson, later asks “[w]hat property right was [Olson] violating by using” the concept of two versions
of *Moby-Dick*, and suggests that the Northwestern-Newberry editors termed one of Olson’s apparent violations of the code of scholarship an “‘unconscious’ discrepancy so that they [did] not have to contemplate capital punishment” (1, 3, 5). Maud is obviously having fun here, but his point is serious: even such minor matters as footnotes in a scholarly edition carry significant prestige within the markets in which Melville scholarship circulates, and this prestige is worthy of legal protection because it can yield economic capital.

Having been dead roughly thirty-four years when Maud’s article appeared in 2004, Olson was not in a position to cash in on Maud’s argument. Maud himself is a different story. Already known as a collector, bibliophile, and leading scholar on Charles Olson before he published this particular piece, Maud extends his reputation into a new area by coming before Melville scholars. He demonstrates by marshaling facts from both accessible and obscure sources (such as unpublished letters) that he belongs in the Melville circle and that Olson too belongs in spite of his “eccentricities”—surely, pursuing Melville’s copy of Owen Chase’s *Narrative* for thirteen years was a worthy quest, not to mention his work on Melville’s annotations in his seven-volume edition of Shakespeare. As Maud writes, “Olson had put in his time” (2). The Northwestern-Newberry footnote refers disparagingly to “a graduate student named Charles Olson” who had a period of exclusive use of some Melville material. The full story according to Maud is that Olson was well past his graduate-student period and had “single-handedly tracked down” the Chase volume and other items from Melville’s library: “Harvard thought it proper to accept them with a ten-year period in which Olson would get first crack for his foresight and pains” (4). Indeed, “foresight and pains” should earn a person something.

A final point to be drawn about Olson’s story is the power held by institutions once a work or author has been consecrated. The “graduate student” label originated with Leon Howard, whose request to see Harvard’s “Melville papers” was initially denied. This denial was quickly reversed on the condition that Howard not publicize what he found, but in fact he loaned his notes to Jay Leyda. Maud comments:

Anyone who wants to is allowed to take [Howard’s report] as the story of a greedy “graduate student” who didn’t get away with it. The NN editors talk about “how this restriction [Olson’s ten-year privilege] was circumvented,” but before we enjoy the glee implicit in that formulation we might ask what a Professor of American Literature [Kenneth Murdock, a member of the Houghton committee] and the Director of Houghton
Maud implies that Leyda, the “stranger,” had not earned access to Olson’s labor. Equally significant is the fact that the two institutional representatives in what Howard himself termed a “rump session over the windowsill” held the power to determine who could access the potential capital of the Melville items.

I imagine that the rump session occurred in a spirit of collegiality and with the genuine desire to foster scholarship, although that interpretation is less interesting than Maud’s hint of conspiratorial skullduggery. The goodwill of the Harvard representatives (if such it was) does not seem to have extended to the Dickinson manuscripts. Margaret Dickie writes that “[t]he material evidence of the manuscripts seems now beyond the reach of everyone but the few scholars whom Harvard University will allow to view them . . . such access must be arbitrarily assigned since [Susan] Howe has apparently been denied it” (324). Dickie concludes that the editing of Dickinson’s work “offers a close view of Dickinson at her original scene of writing, a site that feminists—who have done so much to rescue her from that scene—must now examine for the wealth and variety of cultural information it contains about the woman writer. Known as the author of her poetry, Dickinson must now be studied as its editor and publisher” (332). In earlier chapters I have questioned the assumption that Dickinson’s “original scene of writing” can be known through her manuscripts; certainly these artifacts offer a window onto that scene, but as with any window the view is partial. That said, Dickie does well to emphasize the fluidity of Dickinson’s writing (both process and product), the cultural context of that fluidity, and her tripartite role as author, editor, and publisher.

Similarly, in his aptly titled article “Dickinson Sold Short,” William Matchett considers the “issue of institutional, as opposed to familial, legal, and economic control of literary property.” Matchett terms it a “scandal that America’s foremost nineteenth-century poet has no volume of her own in the Library of America’s [sic], which has come down to some fairly minor figures but still lacks Dickinson,” noting that his own attempt to prepare a reader’s edition of Dickinson’s poems was blocked by “a Miss Metzger, [Houghton Library’s] permissions dragon,” and that even Ralph Franklin “turned a cold shoulder” to Matchett’s work when preparing his own “reading edition” (25, 27, 30). (Matchett could also have mentioned that Dickinson is not represented in the Library of America’s American Poetry: The Nineteenth Century.) Matchett’s diction—hinting at personal
motives and clashes of strong-willed personalities—suggests that more is at stake here than what general readers deserve. It is not just that Dickinson is being “sold short” in either the casual or the technical sense of that phrase but also that Harvard is engaging in an unethical monopolistic practice and thus has deprived Matchett of the opportunity to profit from the labor he invested in examining manuscripts and preparing versions he deems superior to those in any existing edition of Dickinson’s poetry. His denigrating reference to “a Miss Metzger” sounds very similar to Howard’s “a graduate student named Charles Olson”; both reflect anger stimulated by loss—not immediately of economic capital but of the prestige that accompanies association with a world-famous author.

Much more dramatic is the decades-long conflict between Mabel Loomis Todd and daughter Millicent Todd Bingham on one side and Martha Dickinson Bianchi on the other over the rights to Emily Dickinson’s literary estate. Elizabeth Horan writes that Bingham and Bianchi “took up a Dickinson legacy” for reasons of “pride and consciousness of being the ‘last’ of old New England family lines. Each woman entered into that legacy much motivated to restore, quite literally, her mother’s name,” “literally” because Mabel Todd had left Susan Dickinson’s name out of the volume of letters she published, while Martha restored Susan as both name and presence by her editing and writing and attempted to elide both Mabel and Millicent from the Dickinson story (“To Market” 89). Bianchi seems to have engaged in what would now be considered plagiarism in preparing her 1924 volume *Life and Letters of Emily Dickinson*, because she drew heavily, without acknowledgment, on Todd’s 1894 *Letters of Emily Dickinson* (96–97). Todd and her daughter in contrast and almost certainly with calculation “gained further advantage by appearing to be more generous than Bianchi, such as by showing unpublished manuscripts to writers Genevieve Taggard, Josephine Pollit, and Frederick Pohl, who further publicized Mrs. Todd’s expertise” as one of the original editors and a person who still possessed “hundreds of unpublished Emily Dickinson texts” (100–101).

Countering that supposed expertise was the fact that Bianchi not only possessed a store of manuscripts but could claim direct blood lineage and the unique knowledge that could have been passed down through the family. An excellent example is the poem “I send two sunsets” (Fr557), which was first published in the 1914 collection *The Single Hound*, prepared by Bianchi; following the text is the phrase “Sent with brilliant flow- ers,” which does not occur on the manuscript and is thus of uncertain origin. Perhaps Martha knew that flowers had been included with the poem, or perhaps Susan made the note, but in either case the credibility of
this editorial “line of descent” is enhanced. This note is one of only two in *The Single Hound*; it stands out as a striking attempt to capture some of the physical characteristics of the manuscripts. The other comment added by Bianchi, “Written after the death of Mrs. Browning in 1861,” follows the poem Martha titled “Her ‘Last Poems’” (Fr600) and establishes the specific occasion for the writing of that poem. Two other poems in this volume have manuscript-like characteristics that would enhance editorial credibility as well as the sense of personal connection with Dickinson herself: “Who is it seeks my pillow nights” has the final line broken into two parts, and the poem “His cheek is his biographer” (Fr1499—probably sent to Ned Dickinson according to Franklin) appends the word “Thief” printed like a signature (as it was written on the manuscript, according to Franklin). These details fully justify Erkkila’s term “soap opera”: the people involved were strong-willed and apparently selfish, their conflict dragged on for decades, and the general issues are familiar to any family that has squabbled over a legacy.

Making the story more interesting—and the publication rights more lucrative—were the recognition and advertising of Emily Dickinson as an important American author, the increasing scholarly attention being paid her, and the publication figures collected and published by Charles Green of the Jones Library, an action that “allowed Mrs. Todd, indeed anyone, to figure precisely the immense profits that the Dickinsons had realized from the former editors’ work” (Horan, “To Market” 97, 101). Bianchi, on her side, repeatedly insisted that Todd had stolen the manuscripts she held and that any remaining unpublished material held by anyone else was certainly like what she herself held—“not up to Emily’s standard” as she wrote in a letter in 1930 (quoted by Horan, “To Market” 103). Horan makes the important point that by “[c]alling for standards” Bianchi was “asserting the value of the Dickinson property as it currently stood” (105). That is, she was attempting to block any new entrants who might dilute the market, especially because the *Centennial Edition of Emily Dickinson* was selling well. Todd, her daughter, and Bianchi all stood to benefit from emphasizing their lineal relationship with the poet and from claiming to know what she would have desired with her work—in short, from fostering the cult of personality that had been initiated by the first editors. Bianchi, more so than Todd and Bingham, apparently failed to see that her aunt was becoming a world author and that as such the Dickinson canon could be greatly expanded; expansion would be the rising water that would lift all boats. Bianchi seems to have understood profit in a very narrow and personal sense, whereas the representatives of “the other house” held a broader vision. Certainly, within the relatively capacious teacup that
is Dickinson studies, this “war” kept interest in her higher than it would have been otherwise, a notoriety that in turn enhanced the cash value of “Emily Dickinson” the commodity.

**The Posthumous Careers of Emily Dickinson and Herman Melville**

*Scholarship, Editions, Monuments, and Consumers*

A writer’s posthumous career depends on whether the writer or the writer’s work has been consecrated by those who produce symbolic and cultural capital. If this happens, then economic capital will sooner or later be available for anyone willing to invest time in preparing an edition, reprint, scholarly study, popularization, etc. The posthumous careers of Dickinson and Melville began as the reverse of their careers while alive, with a strong initial surge of interest in Dickinson and almost no attention to Melville. Both careers illustrate the point that Evelev makes about Melville: his work “has been central to the canonization of American literature because it thematizes issues that have been crucial to modern professionalized understandings of American life, such as resistance to the inscriptive demands of the market, the legitimation of vocational autonomy and nonmanual labor, and the importance of cultural capital” (180). Evelev’s remarks regarding canonization are based primarily on a study of Melville’s reputation from the 1940s to the present, but the same issues were present early in the twentieth century and were intertwined with the development of American literature as a field of academic study. According to Evelev, “[t]he [contemporary] English professor trades economic capital (‘I’ll always be poor’) for autonomy (‘I can learn to read and write and think’)” in the same way that Bartleby has been read since the 1960s as “opting for autonomy . . . against the lawyer’s vision of the market” (183). This expressed “preference” for poverty and autonomy has yielded a fair amount of cultural and economic capital as those same English professors have written articles and books celebrating the preference and establishing our kinship with Melville and Dickinson, whom we read as championing autonomy and spurning economic profit.

Melville’s passing in 1891 was scarcely noted; two of his literary disciples, Arthur Stedman (his literary executor) and Titus Coan, “attempted to rekindle an interest in him,” but he was such an insignificant presence in the American literary consciousness that even a decade later Frank Jewett
Mather could not secure funding for a biography; the first book-length biography, by Raymond Weaver, only appeared in 1921 (Barbour 13–14). Because so little material was available, Weaver and others “read [the novels] as autobiographical statements,” thus “[a]uthor and character merged together”; later biographers “rescued [Melville] from his own fiction, surrounded him with facts, and placed him within the intellectual climate of his times” (Barbour 14).

The rescue, however, did not and still does not extend to popular culture, for which Melville remains an avatar of both Ishmael and Ahab. This outcome reflects the default identification of author with first-person voice and drives home how relatively insulated is a cultural icon from scholarly understanding of that icon. Another possible cause of this identification is that Melville from early in the twentieth century had a significant popular readership. Hennig Cohen documents the presence of an adaptation of Moby-Dick in the anthology Famous Tales of the Sea published in 1899, as well as selections from Typee and the complete “The Bell Tower” in two other volumes of the “Famous Tales” series (179–80). Cohen notes that the Sea volume describes Moby-Dick as “based upon the actual experience of the author” and that this book stands as “Melville’s chief title to fame” (180). According to Cohen, “[t]hat Melville appears in three volumes of a series and that the series warranted reprinting [“in an handsomely illustrated edition” from the Bodleian Society of New York] suggests a larger readership in this country at the turn of the [twentieth] century than has been generally recognized” (180). Thus, although Charles Anderson’s Melville in the South Seas (published in 1939) was notable because it “put to bed the prevailing notion of Melville as an autobiographer and enabled scholars to examine him as an artist” (Barbour 19), the operative term here is “scholars”; just as Melville understood that in most of his contemporaries’ eyes he was “the author of ‘Typee’ ‘Piddledee’ &c” (Correspondence 343), so his popular identification as “Ishmael” or “Ahab” in the twentieth century was solidified by 1939.

A new biography could significantly revise the cultural icon, for instance if it became the basis of a widely viewed film or widely read fictional treatment. For now, however, Melville’s posthumous career must be seen in relation to the cultural icon “Melville/Ishmael/Ahab.” That icon has determined how, in what forms, and in what venues a significant portion of economic capital can be earned. For instance, no matter how grandiose a claim might be made for Melville’s poetry, or how respected the person making the claim, readers are unlikely ever to be drawn to a Valentine’s Day gift book of that poetry the way they will be to a similar item featuring Dickinson. On the other hand, a great deal of economic
capital has been generated under the name of Herman Melville, although this outcome was not foreshadowed by the meager profitability of his books through the first decade of the twentieth century: $10,444.53 from 1846 to 1887, on sales totaling 34,577 copies in America and 15,905 in England; $379.06 to Melville’s widow by 1898 on new editions of Typee, Omoo, White-Jacket, and Moby-Dick brought out by the United States Book Company; royalties of $117.85 on another 2,347 copies of these titles prepared by Dana Estes & Company and sold between 1901 and 1906 (Tanselle, “Sales” 199–203). Below I will consider in detail the profitability of Dickinson’s work during this same period, but here I want to note that alone the first edition of her poems, prepared by Higginson and Mabel Loomis, sold ten thousand copies very quickly, a striking contrast to the early posthumous publications of Melville’s work.

By 1907, in spite of these relatively poor sales, Moby-Dick was deemed of sufficient value to be included in Everyman’s Library, and in 1920 it was published in the Oxford World’s Classics series (Tanselle, Checklist 9). This development is a telling sequel to Wiley and Putnam’s inclusion of Typee in their Library of American Books. James Fenimore Cooper, on the other hand, has fallen dramatically in value since 1917, when Carl van Doren assigned him an eminent position in the Cambridge History of American Literature and grouped Melville with “contemporaries of Cooper” (Mathewson 245). The fact that a novel selling approximately 3,200 copies during its author’s lifetime has become a world classic directly reflects both the development of American literature as a field of academic study during the early years of the twentieth century and the pertinence of Moby Dick and Ahab to American ideology in the twentieth century.¹

Moby-Dick’s status as a cultural monument was much in evidence during the period 1952–76, which saw the preparation of twenty-eight new editions of which twenty-five “contained introductions, afterwords, or editorial material of some kind,” a development that signifies both increased scholarly attention and increased classroom use (Tanselle, Checklist 19). The scholarly and classroom attention paid to Melville testifies to his centrality in the canon of American literature: his canonicity is now so well established that anthologies designed for surveys of American literature usually even include a selection of his poems. In sum, Melville has gone from being known in the middle of the nineteenth century as “the author of Typee and Omoo” to being the author of Moby-Dick, from being known as a popular writer of sensationalized travel narratives to being a world author, the study of whom has been the source of lifetime employment for quite a few scholars.
What might not be expected is the extent to which the overlapping disciplines of editing and literary scholarship carry the potential for creating cultural and economic capital. Melville was one of the first authors to be enrolled under the MLA banner of the Centers for Editions of American Authors. The early volumes in the Northwestern University/Newberry Library series were significant enterprises; one early reviewer approvingly quotes the *Times Literary Supplement* description of the project as creating “a monument to Melville” (Allen 441, quoting from the *TLS* of 21 January 1972). A monument is a marker of consecration; like many monuments, the comparatively massive *Moby-Dick* volume has elicited significant criticism as a misuse of public funds. According to Julian Markels, this edition, published in 1988, should have been greeted with rejoicing, but instead it “comes embedded in a commodified artifact of our professional culture that can chill the impulse to cut ribbons” (105). Markels is not quarrelling with editorial apparatus in itself; in fact he praises Tanselle for his portion (the publication history of *Moby-Dick*). Instead, he criticizes Hayford and Parker for using their portions to advance their own hypotheses and in general for not honoring the purpose of a scholarly edition. Markels concludes: “[T]he Northwestern-Newberry editors have discharged an intellectual public trust in an unwittingly self-serving manner. . . . [I]t is hard to see how the public whose taxes helped finance this edition or the community of scholars who are its essential audience and who were made to await it for years can be undistractedly grateful for the package as delivered” (119–20). By using the phrase “intellectual public trust” and suggesting that the high price of the volume ($89.95 in 1994) resulted in part from the “inadvertent” yet “self-serving” pursuit of idiosyncratic scholarly interests, Markels draws attention to the commodity aspect of this text and implicitly to the Northwestern-Newberry edition as a whole. The profit (in terms of both economic and symbolic capital) that will accrue to Parker and Hayford by virtue of the association of their hypotheses with the consecrating stamp of the CEAA has not been earned by the regular process of competing in a marketplace of ideas.²

Dickinson’s posthumous career differs from Melville’s in several key ways. First, unlike Melville, Dickinson became a significant literary figure soon after her death. Second, her case was complicated by what has become known as a “war between the houses” over control of publishing rights. (The term was coined by Mary Lee Hall, “friend and neighbor” to Lavinia Dickinson—Sewall, *Life* 157. See Sewall’s section on this “war” as well as his substantial appendix that collects all of the pertinent doc-
ments available when he was working on his biography of Dickinson.) This war advanced her reputation because the combatants were personally and actively engaged: for them it was explicitly a matter of both reputation and money.

The initial consecration of Dickinson as an artist worthy of attention was carried out by Higginson and Mabel Loomis Todd, her editors during the 1890s. Higginson, as preeminent man of letters, was well placed to promote Dickinson’s work; he and Todd also paid a great deal of attention to the volumes as physical objects, bringing their “architecture . . . into conformity with others of the period” by adding “generalizing titles” and dividing the contents into categories (Buckingham xv). Roberts Brothers, the publishing house, did their part, binding the first volume “with an eye toward Christmas and wedding sales” (Buckingham xii). As a result of these efforts, the first edition of Dickinson’s poems, in 1890, sold out quickly; a second edition followed in 1891 and a third in 1896, with a two-volume set of letters edited by Todd in 1894.

The acclaim for Dickinson, however, was far from universal. The responses were of three types, distinguished according to the ability of the respondent to consecrate: Dickinson was dismissed by “the elite and largely New York critics” (Roberts Brothers was a Boston house), was regarded by “a middle level” as “troublesome but interesting,” and was embraced by some reviewers who wrote for newspapers and for “the family, society, and religious weeklies” (Buckingham xiii–xiv). This division was also in part created by “literary rivalries”: Andrew Lang versus Higginson and Howells, the New York Tribune versus the New York Post and Nation, and so forth (xvii). Categorizing Dickinson was also difficult: on the one hand “her work was experienced as fulfilling many of the common reader’s religious and sentimental expectations for poetry,” but on the other hand her originality and willingness to bend if not break poetic conventions was valued by the nascent “art movement” (xvi).

The reviews collected by Buckingham also reflect how those with the power to consecrate tended to denigrate artists whose work achieves popular acclaim: “[W]hen it became evident that booksellers couldn’t keep the new poet on their shelves, Dickinson’s popularity was charged against her” (xviii). Dickinson was put forward at the end of the nineteenth century as a reticent, native, and naive genius, not as a careful crafter of linguistically and formally complex poems and certainly not as intending to acquire a role or voice in her culture’s deliberations about religion, gender roles, commerce, the Civil War, and so forth. This representation of Dickinson in fact had market value; for instance, in promoting a forthcoming edition of Dickinson’s letters, Higginson emphasized her reclusiveness in order to
appeal to readers “feeding on the idea of the lonely and misunderstood spinster of Amherst” (Christensen 19). According to Buckingham, “By the end of the century the last hope for edging Dickinson into the canon lay with those . . . who . . . rested their case on the subtlety of her art. She ended the decade as she began, a high-brow poet” (xix). That “high-brow” interest, coupled with the publicity efforts of Todd and her daughter and of Bianchi, ensured that Dickinson became part of the “growth of American literature as a discipline in the 1920s” (Horan, “Technically” 36). Martha Dickinson Bianchi “regarded herself as the sole heir, at once owner, keeper, and gate keeper of a family trust,” whereas “the publishers regarded a diversity of opinions and approaches as essential to building the cultural capital associated not just with Emily Dickinson and her relation to modern poets, but for encouraging the study of American literature generally” (38).

This development actually contributed to the decline of Bianchi’s influence on Dickinson publishing. She continued to conceive of Dickinson’s works mainly in the context of gift-giving between women (the marketing tactic initially taken by Roberts Brothers on the advice of Mabel Loomis Todd), failing to realize that the market for college textbooks was highly valued by publishers, because of its stability, especially after the stock market crash of 1929 (Horan, “Mabel Loomis Todd” 68), and that college professors had become, like reviewers, important shapers of taste (84). As a result of these market forces, by 1929, approaching the centenary of Dickinson’s birth, sales of her books were “at an all-time peak” and commemorations were being planned by Yale, Amherst, and Mount Holyoke (82). This interest continued into the 1930s, publishers recognizing that their “prestige within the book trade” would be enhanced by developing their Dickinson materials (86).

Dickinson’s economic and symbolic value was also enhanced by one of the “founding assumptions” of literary studies in the early part of the twentieth century, that literature stands as “a reaffirmation of the cultural power of mind and genius against the debased imperatives of both the capital marketplace and the democratic masses” (Erkkila, “Emily Dickinson Wars” 12–13). Erkkila points out that Dickinson became a “cultural icon” for such modernists as Amy Lowell and especially some leading New Critics—Winters, Ransome, and Tate (14). Dickinson’s poems became for these critics “both the exempla and the occasion for modernist and New Critical definitions of the literary—grounded in distinctions between poetry and history, aesthetics and politics, high art and mass culture, form and feeling—that came to dominate academic criticism and literary studies in the United States during the Cold War period” (16).
The growth of American literature in college classrooms and in academic circles means that the cultural and economic capital associated with Melville and Dickinson can be gauged by their representation in anthologies. Amanda Gailey has studied the presence of Dickinson in anthologies of American literature and has concluded that prior to 1955, most anthologies followed the lead of the first anthologist to include her, Frederic Lawrence Knowles in his 1897 *Golden Treasury of American Songs and Lyrics*. Knowles’s biographical sketch “would become a refrain in almost every anthology to treat her life. . . . Most would emphasize her ‘shy’ reclusion and her ‘intense imagination,’ and attribute to her an unthreatening ‘witchcraft’: an otherworldliness kept safe within her own head, or at least within the confining walls of her home” (63). She was often referred to as “Emily” (63), and her reclusive nature was always explained in terms of family or a failed love affair, never as a calculated choice (64). She was typically “naturalized” as a “feminized private explorer” and was thus more acceptable to anthologists than other women and minorities (65, 67). This creation of Emily Dickinson by anthologists was made easier because there were almost no photographic images of the actual person. The first published image, based on an oil painting done of Dickinson at age nine, appeared in the first volume of the *Letters*; other than that, there were only various retouched and altered versions of the single daguerreotype, photographs of the daguerreotype, and finally the actual daguerreotype plate which was discovered in 1945. (See Kromer Bernhard for a listing of these images.)

Although the norm, such treatment of Dickinson by anthologists was not universal. Gailey notes that one anthology, Louis Wann’s 1933 *The Rise of Realism: American Literature from 1860 to 1888*, not only “resist[s] the confined explorer image of Emily Dickinson” but also includes letters, thus “bolster[ing] Dickinson’s reputation as a cross-genre writer and challenges the image of her self-containment” (78). Furthermore, Dickinson was the American poet “most frequently anthologized in American literature and American poetry anthologies . . . and the second most frequently anthologized poet in freshman composition readers, introduction to literature texts, and introduction to poetry texts” from 1890 through 1976 (Chappell 87). This prominence was largely due to the influence of New Criticism, whose methods and assumptions privileged and were best suited for the short, complex lyric. In spite of Dickinson’s prominence in anthologies, she was not included among the “eight American authors” elevated by the Modern Language Association in the inaugural volume by that name. This volume, published in 1956, covered Poe, Emerson, Hawthorne, Thoreau, Melville, Whitman, Twain, and James; compared to
these men, little scholarly work had yet been done on Dickinson, although
in his preface Floyd Stovall notes that Dickinson had been considered for
inclusion (Chappell 95–96; see also Eight American Authors).

Melville was at first more fully represented in anthologies than was
Dickinson, but the advent of New Criticism resulted in a warping of his
representation. His work appeared in nineteen anthologies while he was
still living (Richard Johnson 7). Five of these contained selections from
Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War (8), showing that he actually had
begun to achieve the recognition he desired as an American poet. Once
the canon of American literature began to be developed in the twentieth
century, Moby-Dick became much more important, but the New Criti-
cal emphasis on complete works that could be studied for their “organic
unity” led to the curious situation of Melville being known as the author
of Moby-Dick but studied as the author of shorter prose pieces (Mathew-
son 243, 252). If chapters from the novel were included in an anthology,
they were intended either to whet a student’s appetite for the complete
work or to demonstrate Melville’s “emphasis on style and experimenta-
tion with form” and were selected because they could stand alone as unified
works (248–49). Similarly, the few poems that were included were meant
to show Melville’s creative range but not to place him among the then
important poets such as Bryant and Longfellow.

An anthology both reflects and furthers a reading strategy. “[T]he inti-
macy we attribute to Dickinson and extend to ourselves in the experience
of reading her poetry—a personal quality, a child-like quality, a secrecy, a
nun-like quarantine that exalts friendship and places in the interlocutor the
sacred trust of friendship—is an effect in part constructed by Dickinson’s
first editors, her first ‘public’ readers” (Dean 243). This effect began with
Higginson’s preface to the first volume of Dickinson’s poetry; Higginson
drew from Emerson’s 1840 essay “New Poetry” (published in the Dial)
the term “verses of the portfolio” to describe her poetry, explaining that
she had produced it “absolutely without the thought of publication, and
solely by way of expression of the writer’s own mind” (243). Dean sug-
gests that the Dial began to train generations of readers, including Hig-
ginson, to read by “browsing,” thus initiating a type of reading that would
be widely enough practiced by 1890 to receive Dickinson’s poems as Hig-
ginson presented them (245). In preparing this first edition, Higginson
was certainly guided by the precepts he had presented many years earlier
in his “Letter to a Young Contributor”—that great care should be paid
both to the physical manuscript (so that “it shall allure instead of repel-
ling”) and to the content, so that “it shall not need the slightest literary
revision before printing” (Dean 256 quoting Higginson). The size of the
1890 edition is similar to that of books of poetry published in Dickinson’s time: a small book (between seven and eight inches long, between 4½ and 5½ inches wide) was convenient for carrying in the outdoors to reinforce experiences of the natural world and was also convenient as a fetishized object, to be loved and held close (257).

The physical characteristics of this and the other editions of the poems and letters produced during the 1890s significantly contributed to the “private, confidential and mysterious authorial presence” who became the Dickinson known through most of the twentieth century (Dean 263). Thus, for instance, the Dover Thrift Edition of 1990 “demonstrates how, one hundred years later [after the first publication of Dickinson’s poems], the Dickinsonian mythology has become so firmly embedded that it can be reflexively invoked at the subtlest invitation—and that each invocation can also serve the purpose of updating the myth to suit later generations of readers” (266). The introductory note, titling of poems, and other details of the Dover edition “do for the twentieth-century reader what Higginson and Todd did one hundred years before . . . ensur[e] that the reading of Dickinson’s work will be integrally related to the reading of her life” (268–69). Thus, like Melville, Dickinson was shaped to fit the alienated-artist, garret-dwelling, antimaterialistic narrative of early twentieth-century American literature.

While throughout much of the twentieth century the interests of publishers and scholars converged, that may no longer be the case as electronic resources proliferate and as the copyright-based tension between profit and public interest plays out in this new realm (Horan, “Technically” 49). The question of which Melville and which Dickinson readers will encounter carries significant economic weight. Will “writers and scholars” indeed serve as “mediators” between corporate interests and public interests, as Horan suggests with respect to Dickinson (49)? This seems unlikely, given that “[t]he material and economic conditions of symbolic production in many spheres, especially the Internet and the World Wide Web, are simply becoming less and less compatible with those under which the literary author produces for the market of printed books” and thus that author-centered legitimacy may become a thing of the past (Paulson 405–6). The Internet promises for the first time in human history essentially free and universal access to cultural material. It also promises something even more radical: readers can become editors—instantaneously publishing their own versions of Dickinson poems and letters, of Melville stories and poems and novels. On the other hand, given that access to the Dickinson Electronic Archive is not yet free and universal, one might argue that even this admirable initiative preserves what Paulson terms “traditional intellectual
legitimacy” (413). After all, putting up an image of a manuscript on the Web—or, in the case of Melville, not only manuscripts but corrected typescripts, pages of first American and first British editions, and so forth—still requires access to that manuscript as well as access to technology. Legitimacy is a precondition for such access—only those who have established their legitimacy within the scholarly field are allowed to be involved. Thus, while the author-centered view of the literary marketplace may be losing some of its power, there is no doubt that having access to the author’s textual body still counts for a great deal.

Once Melville and Dickinson were consecrated, their works existed within a specific and clear set of expectations having to do with what imaginative literature will actually do and reinforced by editorial decisions (Tanselle, “Emily Dickinson” 79). Because these decisions are of their time, they—and the attendant consecration—are continually being reviewed and either renewed or modified. Thus, for example, while Dickinson’s first editors presented her as uninterested in a wide readership, current thinking asks whether she intended to be read (and assumes that she did) and goes on to wonder by whom (Horne 737–38). She may have asked her servant, Margaret Maher, to destroy her manuscripts, because they had been stored in a trunk belonging to Maher, but the evidence is regarded as equivocal (Murray 726–27). She apparently did direct that her letters be destroyed. On the other hand, her practice of sending letters and including poems with them constitutes unequivocal evidence that she intended these items at least to be received and expected these receptions to be idiosyncratic and individual.4

Setting aside the question of Dickinson’s expectations, the question of how she is to be received today remains a site of ideological (and economic) conflict. Should readers have the experience of easily accessing the poems in something approaching the order of their composition or the order of their appearance in a fair copy? The experience of perusing the fascicles? The experience of perusing all versions of a single poem? Should the experience be located in print or in manuscript facsimile, and in hard copy or electronic copy? Should readers be expected to choose among these options? For many decades in America, because Dickinson has long been recognized as a source of cultural capital, it has been taken for granted that the experience in whatever form is valuable, and the market has long been sufficiently healthy to support many different venues. One certainty is that regardless of the actual writer’s intentions, “Emily Dickinson” will continue to remain a source of all types of capital and will continue to be marketed to the wider public as a familiarly mysterious oddity.
The same holds for Melville. On the one hand his case is more straightforward because the best-known texts of his work are in a real sense “public property,” thanks to the efforts of the Centers for Editions of American Authors (CEAA), unlike the Johnson and Franklin editions of Dickinson’s poems and letters. Melville was one of the first authors to be selected for publication by the CEAA project, which originated in 1963 under the Modern Language Association with funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities. At this time there were only “two completed editions of American authors that aspired to textual reliability,” the Johnson edition of Dickinson’s poems and letters being one (Bruccoli 237). A crucial element of the CEAA program was the seal that was given to an “approved text.” This seal indicated that the text had been prepared using the best practices for determining the author’s “final intention”; perhaps even more important was that “the published text—without front or back matter—would be made available for reprinting on a non-exclusive basis for a reasonable fee” (240). Bruccoli notes that there was some complaint about the sealing process and about the expectation on the part of the NEH that work be done, progress be made, and so forth; that “textbook publishers did not line up to obtain reprint rights”; and that the publishers who did reprint the approved texts were not as careful as they should have been in ensuring textual reliability (240–42). These problems notwithstanding, the Northwestern-Newberry edition of Melville has been in part funded by public money and, as an approved edition, is available for reprinting “for a reasonable fee”; it functions as a public resource. Harvard University Press, in contrast, has achieved no little notoriety for how much it charges for the reprinting of Dickinson material, a practice consistent with the restrictive policy followed by Houghton Library regarding who is allowed to view Dickinson manuscripts.

The fact that both Dickinson and Melville are embodied in editions regarded as complete and scholarly solidifies their canonical status and reinforces their presence within the cult of the author, but these editions and their attendant status, not to mention their economic power, put the actual writers at even greater distance. As John Bryant has been arguing for over a decade and most dramatically in the context of *Typee*, the public-property artifacts fail to allow actual readers to explore or even easily to be aware of the complex interactions among writer, publishers, reviewers, and cultural taboos and preferences, so the “Melville” whom we might think we know as the author of *Typee* (for instance) is far from the dynamic, developing writer and reviser who can be at least glimpsed by means of “fluid texts.” Bryant emphasizes that authorship itself is “fluid,” that it “unfold[s] historically through the now irretrievable processes of revision
and reprinting”; the problem for the editor is how to “give readers access to the unwitnessable” (29–30).

The concept of an edition itself, especially one that purports to be complete, has long been linked with “our modern sense of authorship” (Nash 1). From editions of Chaucer at the end of the sixteenth and beginning of the seventeenth centuries to the nineteenth-century editions of Wordsworth and others, these projects strongly influenced how authors were to be understood because they typically included a narrative of the life and were regarded by authors as “the ultimate embodiment of their artistic endeavors” (2, 4). Nash concludes that “the gathering force of our digital environment makes the re-editing and re-collecting of our ‘archive of cultural works’ an inevitable necessity” (13). The recent debates over electronic editions of Dickinson and Melville participate in and are framed by this larger context, because these editions can challenge, invoke, or even replace the existing “collected editions” and thus are powerfully implicated in cultural iconicity and the potential for economic capital. These editions, however, should not be privileged as providing closer access to the actual person who did the writing, as Werner and Bryant tend to suggest they can do. Thus, Bryant: “When we read a literary work as the fluid text it invariably is, we have access to concrete evidence of the writer’s acts of acceptance and resistance; we can see rhetorical strategies in the shape of revision strategies; we can witness more directly the interpenetration of writing and cultural processes, actual struggle, not allegories of struggle” (34). Certainly, reading in this way brings more information to bear, but part of that information consists of interpretations—for instance, whether a revision constitutes an “act of acceptance and resistance” to a culture, signals a writer’s preference of one word over another for its rhythm, or even, as those of us know who regularly teach English 101, marks a moment when the writer couldn’t remember how to spell the initially selected word and so replaced it with one she or he knew.

THE CAPITAL OF POPULAR CULTURE

Popular culture is usually thought of as making people rich, in contrast to high culture’s function of enriching (Weiner 85). This dichotomy, however, is simplistic; as Weiner shows, popular culture can take an icon such as *Moby-Dick* that serves “as a password for culture and a touchstone for complexity” (86) and make it accessible to a wide audience. Thus, what has been an “object of desire” controlled by the cultural elite becomes a commodity that the public can embrace and own, a “popular icon” (85–
Not only is this process applicable to a specific text like *Moby-Dick* and its well-known characters, it also applies to artists themselves. Dickinson has become the “complex artifact.” She is the mystery, the iconic figure in the white dress who is most significantly known for being inscrutable and for concentrating on weighty topics such as death and God, and for rendering impressions of nature that sound as if they came from a very wise child. Like the novel *Moby-Dick*, she is grounded in nature and extends beyond nature to the metaphysical realm. Saying “Emily Dickinson,” like saying “Moby Dick,” is to imply “mystery and power”; to say or recognize either is to invoke an “intellectual status symbol” (87).

A work becomes an “artifact of high culture” when it is “consecrated” by an institution of cultural production (a salon, a taste-shaping magazine’s editors). Consecration normally requires that the work not already have been sullied by involvement in a mass market. Such a work may be produced by an artist who accepts the paradigm of the starving poet in the garret, creating literature for posterity and not for her or his own age. On the other hand, the artifact may be produced by any one or a combination of other interested parties such as an editor, publisher, family member, or literary executor. This artifact will still be presented to the public, however, not as a physical object created to earn capital but as the embodiment of an abstract work, an idea given artistic shape by a creative individual whose main purpose was such creation.

This process provides the backdrop against which Melville and Dickinson as cultural icons have come to be “objects of desire” within popular culture. Dickinson was available early in the twentieth century as an intimate yet mysterious authorial figure; this identity has only been strengthened by subsequent textual recreations of her works and is easily captured in a few memorable images and verbal clichés: the white dress, the recluse, the somewhat severe albeit youthful face of the only known photographic portrait. The identity is deepened by the apparent simplicity of the most anthologized poems such as “Because I could not stop for death,” “I’m nobody,” and “There is no frigate like a book.” These poems have fairly straightforward metrical and rhyme structures and don’t overtly challenge a reader in terms of diction and syntax, yet they convey an impression of thoughtful depth with their aphoristic treatment of serious themes and their reflections of and on ideology. While the “authorial presence” is mysterious, the poems are presented as accessible, individual communications between a writer and a single reader: “Then there’s a pair of us? / Don’t tell! They’d advertise—you know!” The popular-culture artist or adapter need only reference a couple of these cues to invoke both the authorial presence and the cultural significance of that presence. This “authorial
The presence of course has always been a creation of editors; the private Dickinson presumably was committed to preserving privacy and confidentiality.

This dynamic requires a modest revision of Weiner’s assertion that *Moby-Dick* or any similar artifact “serves as an object of desire controlled by intellectual elites who market its complexity to affirm their own identity while calling everyone else’s into doubt” (87). A superb example of how “intellectual elites” function is Harvard University Press’s control over the scholarly editions of Dickinson’s poems and letters. These editions by definition “call into doubt” such popular editions as the Dover Thrift. But the proliferation of popular editions also demonstrates that Dickinson is at best imperfectly controlled by the elites: most people who consume Dickinson in the form of a book are consuming the “supposed person” created by a collaboration, so to speak, among (a) the dead Dickinson who adopted memorably strange habits; (b) her first editors, Higginson and Todd, who modified and reified that supposed person in the 1890 *Poems by Emily Dickinson* and subsequent editions; (c) Martha Dickinson Bianchi and her heirs, who also contributed to the reification of the garret-dwelling (metaphorically speaking) Dickinson; and (d) later publishers like Dover who reprint the public-domain editions with new introductions.

Given this context, the discovery of a significant body of work by one of America’s world-renowned authors would be major news. Betsy Erkkila notes of William Shurr’s *New Poems of Emily Dickinson* that his “discovery” of “new poems” became a “media event,” but of course the “new poems” were only “discovered” in the sense that Shurr rearranged, as verse, passages from Dickinson’s letters. According to Erkkila, the central issue becomes “the necessity of maintaining the integrity and purity of Dickinson’s intentions as individual author and origin of the poetry”; Susan Howe and others are trying to ground Dickinson’s intention in the holograph, this intention being based in traditional concepts of creativity and genius, but there is no compelling proof that she did or did not accept those concepts (Erkkila, “Emily Dickinson Wars” 20, 24).

Melville, too, although he has been consumed in a much greater variety of forms and genres than Dickinson, remains fundamentally a creation of the early decades of the twentieth century, when *Moby-Dick* was canonized as both a world classic and a quintessentially American work. M. Thomas Inge in 1986 offered a superb overview of Melville’s presence in popular culture, a presence that is rivaled, if at all, only by Edgar Allan Poe and Mark Twain (695). The details of this presence have changed over the past two decades (see Elizabeth Schultz’s 2006 essay), but Inge’s central points remain valid. He notes that while Melville began his career as “the man who lived among the cannibals,” in the twentieth century “[h]e came
to represent the danger and tragedy of being an artist in a democratic, capitalist society, where pleasing the tastes of the mob and making money counted for more than producing a classic work of literature” (695). This representation is embodied in his creations, chiefly Ahab, Ishmael, and Moby Dick, with Bartleby and Billy Budd occupying a second tier. Inge aptly notes that there are many complex reasons why *Moby-Dick* in particular has been so influential, including that novel’s effort to “push humanity to the outer limits of the universe” and the portrayal of Ahab as a kind of alienated superhero, “a solitary, irredeemable egomaniac . . . determined to fling a challenge in the face of God” (696)—themes with much broader resonance in the twentieth century than in 1850.

Inge locates the source of the popular awareness of Melville and specifically of *Moby-Dick* in John Barrymore’s 1926 silent film *The Sea Beast* and his 1930 sound film *Moby Dick* (696). Both versions were huge successes, the latter being “the most successful of five pictures made by Barrymore under a million-dollar contract with Warner Brothers, perhaps because the public wanted to hear the great profile’s seductive voice” (701). *The Sea Beast* “was the first popular success that Herman Melville had enjoyed since *Typee* made his name a by-word in this country” (Stone 179). John Huston’s 1956 version starring Gregory Peck as Ahab was also a commercial success although denigrated by academic critics (Inge 705).

More recent films continue to solidify Melville’s cultural status, for instance three that appropriate *Moby-Dick*: Woody Allen’s 1983 *Zelig*, Michael Lehmann’s 1988 *Heathers*, and Jon Avnet’s 1992 *Fried Green Tomatoes*. Weiner notes that all three directors seem to share Melville’s ambivalence about success: they “take their uneasy place in an artistic world where acceptance produces anxiety and rejection becomes subject matter” (86). The directors’ statements suggest their belief that popular and artistic/cultural successes are usually incompatible at least within the artist’s lifetime. In *Zelig*, Allen references *Moby-Dick* as an “intellectual status symbol” that “presuppose[s] audience recognition” of the novel, allows the public to embrace and own the icon, and so enables a mass-market realization of the “high culture text” (87). Lehmann’s film, likewise, presumes that its audience of teenagers will recognize the icon, a recognition that will reinforce the film’s critique of the “commodification of culture” (88). This example leads Weiner to conclude that “[d]espite the current fears that our culture is eroding, it seems clear that new cultural constructs evolve through reference to their predecessors” (88). The status of film as a medium is enhanced “by adapting the classics,” these adaptations invariably reflecting a culture’s immediate concerns: “During more vigorous periods of our century the movies presented *Moby-Dick*
to the public as the story of a great quest for a great goal. But in this equivocal age, as our international role is undergoing redefinition and our national identity is in crisis, movies too have become self-reflective and their appropriation of *Moby-Dick* is more mediated” (Weiner 89–90). Randy Last deepens the thematic relationships between *Moby-Dick* and *Heathers* by reading Veronica as an Ishmael character, suggesting that the film “rewrites *Moby-Dick* as a rock video” at the same time that “something of Melville’s profound moral vision trickles into *Heathers*, complicating its conventional Hollywood ending” (72).

Like film, the comic book as a medium both reflects and rewrites a culture’s notable texts. *Moby-Dick* was the third most popular Classics Comics title (Inge 711). (The series was Classics Illustrated after 1947.) The 1942 version “familiarizes the novel for its readership by refracting it through the familiar prisms of boy’s adventure fiction and the comic book genre itself” (Berthold 1). The readership was assumed to be young boys, and the stated hope of Meyer Kaplan, an employee of and apologist for the Classics series, was that the young reader would become hooked by the stories, would have in his “mind’s eye a picture of what the author was trying to portray in words,” and thus would later turn to the original (2). In support of this goal, the original Classics version concluded by urging readers to explore the full novel and by “laud[ing] *Moby-Dick* as ‘possibly’ the ‘greatest’ of American novels. The comic is merely a single stop in a series of institutional stations that house and eternize such greatness” (3). The more recent Classics version, published in 1990, “employs some of the rhetoric of humanism that informed Kanter’s enterprise” but also in its presentation invokes “methodological post-modernism” and “begins to suggest the symbolic, ontological and epistemological complexities of Melville” (4). Berthold notes that the creator of this version, Bill Sienkiewicz, “benefits . . . from the general growth of the Melville industry” which has made both Melville and *Moby-Dick* “recognizable without necessarily being known” (5). This recognizability no doubt has contributed to the freedom Sienkiewicz has felt to dispense with some of the comic book conventions such as speech balloons, verisimilar representations of characters and actions, and multiple panels on a page (5–7). The form—better thought of as graphic novel than comic book—captures the novel’s metaphysical and epistemological themes, such as the unknowability of the whale (8).

The novel has been similarly popular as a reference point for thousands of cartoons (Inge 717). Of the latter, Inge writes that “[i]f scholars have taken Melville too seriously, then America’s comic artists have compensated by finding inexhaustible uses for him in their humor and satire. It
largely is a comedy of appreciation, however, rather than ridicule” (717). Inge goes on to state that in these cartoons “[t]he joke is often on the reader unable to come to terms with the magnitude of the writer and his ideas” (717). I would refine this generalization: the joke requires a reader who recognizes the icons, and the joke may also play in an elitist way on the fact that average Americans who recognize the icons probably have never read *Moby-Dick*, not even extracts. But elitism is not essential; many of Gary Larson’s *Far Side* treatments of Ahab, Ishmael, and the whale function perfectly without the reader assuming that others don’t get the joke. For instance, a sailor on lookout sings out: “The White Whale! . . . No, no. My mistake! . . . A black whale!” Standing in the bow of the ship and looking somewhat perturbed is Ahab. Obviously, we miss the joke if we don’t recognize that the cartoon is referencing *Moby-Dick*, but we need not have read the novel or feel superior to people who don’t get it, any more than with any other cartoon that requires some sort of knowledge. The same is true of the single panel simply showing a sperm whale with a harpoon sticking in his forehead and the line curling into his mouth; the best part of the cartoon is the whale’s eye, conveying at once irritation and satisfaction—again, no special knowledge is needed.

The most telling bit of evidence for how significantly *Moby-Dick* in particular has permeated culture may be the children’s riddle “What’s purple and lives at the bottom of the sea? . . . Moby Grape” (725), something that I remember quite well from fourth or fifth grade, that is, 1957 to 1959. Although as a child I read quite a bit, I am almost certain that I had no idea of the literary context for this riddle; the humor, if I remember the workings of my juvenile mind, resulted from incongruity—an animate grape with a name, and a grape that lives in the sea. But the formula “Moby X” lodged in my memory, as it surely did in the memories of my peers, along with the association between that formula and the ocean, establishing a rudimentary cognitive field that would be filled with other popular culture references and ultimately with my first reading of the novel at age sixteen (thanks to a dynamic first-year high-school teacher who decided to challenge her students to read outside of class *Moby-Dick*, *War and Peace*, and *The Brothers Karamazov*, among others, our only reward being her esteem).

Similarly, Dickinson’s many personae in poems and letters invite readers with complex, intimate gestures. Another important commonality is less apparent: the icon will typically be appropriated as if it is strictly monologic, although certainly the works and most of the texts of Melville and Dickinson are intrinsically both dialogic in the sense described by Bakhtin (incorporating the speech of others in their own voices—324)
and polyvocal (incorporating many explicit voices). Robert Wallace use-
fully calls attention to the “dialogic voice” used by Rinde Eckert in his
opera *Great Whales* in contrast to “narrative voices” used by other adapt-
ers of *Moby-Dick* (323). Wallace is referring specifically to Eckert’s use of
two singers on stage, but his point has a much larger reach. The now-
iconic status of the sentence “Call me Ishmael” and the memorable quality
of the events involving Ahab, Queequeg, Starbuck, and the white whale
tend to dominate adaptations and thus obscure the dialogic quality of the
novel that is created by Melville’s extensive appropriations from the lit-
erature of cetology, by his occasional use of a dramatic mode (as in the
Quarter-Deck scene), and by Ishmael’s explicit addresses to readers. Pop-
ular-culture appropriations of any writer will tend to limit that writer to
a single-voiced self, yet such appropriations can also be understood as a
conversation between a present-day culture and these voices from the past.
These appropriations develop over time and modify the authorial icon.
Thus, while a culture may “hear” a single voice from the Melville or the
Dickinson it is appropriating, there are probably also echoes of the voices
heard by earlier eras.

Scholarly studies of Melville within culture, especially within popu-
lar culture, unfortunately often substitute the product for the producer,
almost always *Moby-Dick*, and this substitution seems to happen with-
out the scholar even noticing it. Similar studies of Dickinson preserve an
emphasis on the person, a difference from Melville that is not at all curi-
ous, given the early creation of “Emily Dickinson” as fascinatingly idiosyn-
cratic and mysterious, and for both authors, the icon always looms. Jonnie
Guerra, in her superb overview “Dickinson Adaptations in the Arts and
the Theater,” acknowledges this emphasis when she notes that “[a]dapta-
tions of Emily Dickinson’s *life* and poetry . . . have been widespread”
and that a great variety of “creative projects” have been inspired by “*Dickinson*
and her poems” (385; emphases added). Guerra comments that “adapta-
tions . . . signal a collaborative effort . . . between the dead poem and
the living artist as well as between their ‘texts,’” that the adapting artists
express a “strong personal identification with Dickinson,” and that adapta-
tions “have continued to reflect the views of her early biographers, editors,
and critics” and thus to perpetuate both the “powerful romantic legends”
about her and the “thematic categories” into which the first editions were
divided (387).

Two other aspects of Dickinson’s twentieth-century career are similar
to those of Melville’s. First, the “collaborative effort” identified by Guerra
can be understood as dialogic in that at least two voices typically are heard,
that of the adaptor and that of Dickinson. Some very recent adaptations
go even farther, for instance Meisha Bosma’s dance production *Violet in my Winter*, which features an offstage voice reading selections from Dickinson’s poems and letters while dancers move onstage. The presence of multiple dancers adds to the dialogic aspect because it is not possible to say that any one dancer “is” Dickinson; the effect is rather of multiple and shifting personae on stage echoing and occasionally contrasting the voiced words. (See Fraser and Heginbotham for a review of this performance.) Reports of performances of Martha Graham’s 1940 *Letter to the World* as well as the overall design of the ballet (two dancers in the role of Emily and other dancers performing as abstractions relevant to Dickinson’s time and art such as the Lover and the Ancestress) suggest that *Violet in my Winter* is following in the Graham tradition. (See Guerra 392–94.) These adaptations are far removed from the still best-known *The Belle of Amherst*, written by William Luce, which premiered in 1976; this “monodrama offers a circumscribed view of the poet’s life, narrowing the spectator’s attention to focus on a ‘Dickinson’ defined exclusively within domestic space” (Guerra 390). On the other hand, *The Belle of Amherst* can be understood as reflecting cultural, social, and political concerns of its era as the film versions of *Moby-Dick* have done, although it is unlikely that the Broadway run (117 performances) and the public television redaction of the play gave as significant an impetus to Dickinson’s presence in mass culture as did those films. That said, as with Melville, Dickinson’s presence in popular culture definitely differs from her presence in higher culture, where audiences are less likely to regard Luce’s “distorted presentation as a fact of literary history” (Guerra 391).

Second, one of the most interesting markers of the continuing salience of both Melville and Dickinson in popular culture is their use by rock musicians. In 1992, Carlton Lowenberg was able to list over 1,600 musical settings of Dickinson’s poems and letters by 276 composers (Guerra 386). Most of those settings are what is usually referred to as “art song,” but rock musicians have also been turning to her words. Boston-based Sebastian Lockwood and Nanette Perrotte, for instance, have produced an eight-song compact disc titled *Emily Dickinson: Zero at the Bone* (Fehrman). The best-known use of a Dickinson poem is probably in The Lemonheads’ 1988 album, *Creator*; the lead track, “Burying Ground,” concludes with the final stanza of “After great pain.” Melville has been more prominent in this scene. In August 2007 The New Pornographers evoked *Moby-Dick* in the cover art for *Challengers*: the torso of a man in a boxing pose bears a tattoo of a breaching sperm whale and a small human figure attached to the whale by a harpoon line. An ad for this album, with the same artwork, fills the back cover of the Summer 2007
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issue of *Magnet*, an interesting example of the expectation by the band’s label, Matador, that the album will be worth this investment. According to Eric Miller, a staff member at *Magnet*, the standard charge for a back-page ad at that time was $3,000, if the label is an independent, a substantial amount for such a label even when the band is as successful as The New Pornographers. The artwork may seem somewhat strange, given that the band’s main members are Canadian; on the other hand, because the Pornographers’ music is categorized as “indie rock,” which is typically considered less mainstream and more artistic, their use of this highbrow allusion surprises less than it otherwise might.

A better known and perhaps more notorious example of how contemporary music has appropriated Melville is the heavy-metal group Mastodon’s 2004 album, *Leviathan*. This appropriation was successful, according to Craig Bernardini, because it assimilated not the “generic prestige of high culture” but “the prestige of the sublime masterpiece . . . by invoking the masculine ideologies of size, power, risk, and ambition” (28). Studying online postings as well as professional reviewers, Bernardini concludes that while the novel may not have been read or studied by the teens who comprise the bulk of heavy-metal’s audience, they tend to value it precisely because, like their music, it is deemed “unpalatable” by the mass-market consumers, their high-school classmates (35). Both the novel and the music thus accrue “deviance prestige,” with additional mutual reinforcement coming from the similarity between the novel’s bombastic language and large themes on the one hand and heavy-metal’s sonic traits (high volume and distortion) and dark lyrics on the other (35, 37).

Many more popular-culture manifestations could be listed; the tabulations of anthologies, editions, and adaptations could be brought up to the minute; college and university catalogs could be surveyed to document the prominence of Melville and Dickinson in course descriptions. Such an exercise would only underline with a bolder stroke one point to be drawn from the posthumous careers of these two writers: garret work that later becomes successful in the street will always constitute a blue-chip stock in terms of cultural, symbolic, and economic capital. This exercise would also dramatize the continuing debates over who owns the authors (their visual identities, textual identities, canonical and anticanonical identities) and how their identities should be transmitted and received.

A second point to be drawn is that these identities are always and only constructed by the mechanisms of transmission and reception, because the authorial personae are precisely that—personae—surely connected to the
flesh-and-blood writers but in ways that can at best be coarsely sketched and must always remain tentative. The personae have truly become commodities; when we refer to Melville and Dickinson as icons of American culture, we are acknowledging their presence in the same category as Kokopelli refrigerator magnets, dashboard Marias, framed prints of George Washington, and indeed coffee-mug caricatures of famous writers. I note that as of today (3 December 2009) I can buy on eBay for $59.95 a coffee mug featuring Steven Cragg’s 1992 caricature of Dickinson (a large and large-headed figure inside a transparent box). The capitalist in me mourns my loss of that very mug a year ago after giving a paper, fittingly, on Dickinson as cultural capital. The text on the opposite side of the mug, to the best of my recollection, compares her favorably to “your Aunt Lurleen” who also wrote poems, suggesting that this artifact may appeal both in terms of high culture and in terms of the street—if you don’t yourself have an Aunt Lurleen, you can easily imagine someone who does.

The final words spoken in *Pierre*, Isabel’s deathbed “All’s o’er, and ye know him not!” (362), can serve well as an epitaph for both writers. Like the speaker of T. S. Eliot’s “Ash Wednesday,” we might say “Consequently [we] rejoice, having to construct something / Upon which to rejoice” (61). We can never “know” any historically distant individual: it is even more hopeless to try to know a writer on the basis of what that writer has produced, especially when the writer has so resolutely practiced and thematized the use of personae in order to create an authorial self or multiple selves. Consequently we know and celebrate exactly and only what we construct, each era constructing its own Dickinson and Melville.