Writing for the Street, Writing in the Garret

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Chapter I

1. Whether quoting from Dickinson’s letters or from her poems, I will tend to concentrate on what Jerome McGann has termed the “linguistic” codes rather than the “bibliographic.” Recognizing that much recent work on the poems (but, interestingly, not on the letters) has focused on the latter as well as on details that can only be seen by the few scholars with access to the original manuscripts, and recognizing as well that any statement I attribute to the biographical person on the basis of words that person wrote represents my conjecture as to meaning, nevertheless a fairly coherent picture of Dickinson’s reasons for pursuing nonprint publication does emerge from these linguistic codes. See McGann, *Textual Condition* 13–15, 66–67.

2. In insisting on the functional difference between cultural and symbolic capital, I find myself at odds with John Guillory, who is probably Bourdieu’s most thoughtful commentator and student, at least in the United States. Guillory describes the three main forms of capital thus:

   In [Bourdieu’s] *Outline of a Theory of Practice* symbolic capital is given the specific concept of “prestige” or “honor,” while cultural capital seems best exemplified elsewhere in Bourdieu’s work on the educational institution (*Reproduction, Homo Academicus*), where it refers as much to knowledge, skills, or competence as to the honor or prestige that the possession of this capital can command. Cultural capital is certainly a species of symbolic capital generally, but it is a form of symbolic capital certifiable by objective mechanisms . . . most importantly by the credentializing func-
tion of the school. In *The Wizard of Oz*, for example, we know that the Scarecrow has more than proven his intelligence and that he has acquired considerable symbolic capital based on that personal embodied quality. He only lacks, as the Wizard says, a diploma. It is the curious property of the diploma to certify his intelligence to those who may not be familiar with the Scarecrow’s accomplishments. (“Bourdieu’s Refusal” 381)

To term cultural capital a “species of symbolic capital generally” is to downplay the dichotomy insisted on by Bourdieu between symbolic and economic capital. The Scarecrow demonstrates his intelligence; he does not, however, demonstrate “knowledge, skills, or competence” that are located within a highly specific cultural context. The diploma may “certify his intelligence,” but it does not certify that he has read the Great Books, can apply Newton’s three laws of motion, or can identify chiaroscuro or the Oedipal Complex. Guillory acknowledges that “symbolic and cultural capital are not precisely equivalent concepts”; more dramatically, he says that the “differentia specifica of cultural capital would seem to be its convertibility into material capital, and vice versa” (382), a “convertibility” that is essential to the fundamental dichotomy theorized by Bourdieu and documented by him in his exhaustive research. In fact, to emphasize this dichotomy is consistent with Guillory’s point that Bourdieu conceives of the capitalist market as driven by pure self-interest in contrast to the market of symbolic goods, which is structured by “the most complex social practices” (386). The key point in Guillory’s discussion is that cultural capital serves as a common currency, so to speak, between economic and symbolic capital, a currency allowing for their mutual conversion albeit at a real cost—the involvement and payment of the individuals and institutions who bestow one or the other.

3. It is also possible to locate Dickinson’s opposition within what Lori Merish refers to as “feminine domestic aestheticism.” Merish notes that “[d]uring the early nineteenth century, Protestant and liberal-capitalist traditions were forged into a novel synthesis of ‘pious materialism,’ in which luxury goods were seen as a primary means to civilize and spiritualize the self while animating economic and moral progress, and which legitimized a rise in living standards, especially among the middle classes” (91). A particular manifestation of this synthesis was “the consumerist ideal of feminine domestic aestheticism,” which located “consumer refinement and gracious materiality as a specifically feminine province” (93). Domesticity was understood and constructed as a realm that was relatively separate from the market and safe from its contamination (134)—but Dickinson’s prominent use of metaphors from economics and finance indicates that for her this realm was not safely separate. According to Merish, “domestic writers like Sedgwick seem to counsel that it’s fine to shop and buy things; but once at home, be sure to take the price-tag off” (134)—perhaps Dickinson understood that the price tag could never really be removed. By the 1860s, Stowe’s *House and Home Papers* for instance revealed a “naturaliz[ation of] middle-class patterns of private ownership and helped establish consumerist domesticity as an instrument
of cultural hegemony” (138). That is, the relations between family and property were being constructed as essentially human and natural rather than created by an economic or social system.

4. In the 1851 Crystal Palace Exposition, Americans swept the awards for daguerreotypes. Rudisill notes that Brady’s gold prize entry consisted of forty-eight portraits of leading Americans, a choice suggesting that “Americans placed first importance on the truth of the individual sitter and wished to reveal his character before any other consideration” as well as a “belief that American character could best stand contest in the form of national personalities” (208–9).

CHAPTER 2

1. Kristie Hamilton asserts that Fern “relocates women in the public sphere” and “foregrounds the conditions of women’s labor” (96). Fern could count on “the predisposed outrage of a bourgeois audience at the prospect of women being forced into public spaces,” but even while this publicity was probably experienced by Fern and other women as a violation, it also constituted a means to secure “women’s subjectivity (not subjection), insight, and self-protection” (98). Insofar as their authorship was public (and it must be remembered that many authors labored under anonymity), it offered protection against exploitation. Fern emphasizes “the issue of money” when specifying how much Ruth earns for her labors even while preserving Ruth’s heroic stature by means of her “character and gentility”; this is true both of Ruth’s stitching and of her literary labor, as Fern reveals “the conditions of labor” to be the “bottom line” whether the labor is mental or manual (101). That is, Fern “collapses a central figuration, the manual/mental binarity, of class difference accepted in the dominant culture”; we see a variety of laborers, from the typesetters to the author Horace Gates, living “the garret existence of an exploited worker” (102). Hamilton does not note, however, that the “garret existence” itself was strongly identified with the romantic ideology of authorship, was constructed within the culture as an admirable, even noble marker of a life devoted to the pursuit of artistic truth, and thus significantly contributed to an author’s potential for symbolic capital. Certainly, this novel can be read “as a record, critique, and partial analysis of the mechanisms by which bourgeois domestic ideology effected . . . the continued identification of womanhood with certain narrowly defined activities and with a particular socioeconomic status” (103). But it must also be read as a validation of that ideology, because Ruth’s success in earning symbolic capital very quickly translated into a great deal of money.

2. Many scholars who have studied this topic have failed to account for the difference between writing and authorship. Newbury, for instance, argues that Hawthorne’s and Thoreau’s writing “attempted to reclaim for authorship the virtues and physical health persistently associated with manual labor and production” and that they did this “by mediating their representations of authorship through
modes of idealized and residual manual work” (683). Newbury generalizes: “Self-declaring middle-class exercise, residual forms of more or less recreational labor, and spiritualized housework and domestic production became the means through which white-collar men and middle-class women could distinguish themselves from working-class people even as they paradoxically claimed the moral, corporeal, and spiritual benefits of increasingly transformed modes of physical ‘work’” (693). Newbury argues that the “professionalization of authorial work” differed from “the professionalization of the middle class,” because while the latter was “characterized by an increasing distance from residually valorized modes of physical work,” the former was “a history of evolution from one form of genteel and aristocratic headwork to another form of professionalized headwork. . . . This fact of literary history, however, did not prevent antebellum authors from imagining authorship as outside the market precisely by imagining authorial work through modes of manual labor” (694). Newbury takes this phenomenon as indicating “how powerful the cultural invocation of craft and artisanal production had become as a response to the professionalized sense of self” (694).

Some of the writers Newbury uses as examples were representing neither the work of authorship nor the actual physical and intellectual activity of writing. True, “Hawthorne . . . went to Brook Farm not only to support himself and his wife but also to situate himself in an economy that would re-establish a non-commercial basis for authorship by grounding it in support provided by labors of the hand” (697). But The Blithedale Romance’s ironizing of Miles Coverdale shows that Hawthorne was well aware of how difficult it was to unite manual and intellectual labor. In fact, Newbury ignores that Coverdale tried to write and failed, a gap in the novel that Hawthorne surely intended and that obviously does not signify his inability to describe or thematize the labor of writing. Regarding Thoreau, Newbury writes that “[b]ean farming, in the end, represents a model for authorial labor not because it emphasizes the benefits of actual subsistence farming but because it is performed wholly outside the contingencies of material necessity or exchange of any kind” (705). This reading of Thoreau’s experiment with bean farming ignores his fundamental principle of economics, that as he put it in the first chapter of Walden (Economy), “the cost of a thing is the amount of what I will call life which is required to be exchanged for it, immediately or in the long run” (20). To characterize bean farming as “a model for authorial labor” that is located “outside the contingencies of material necessity or exchange” is to fail to recognize the possibility of markets other than the capitalist one. Thoreau’s point was precisely that where noneconomic capital (cultural and symbolic) was concerned, the market of interest was precapitalist or antimimetic, certainly not capitalist.

3. John Murray, the London publisher of Typee, wanted to include the book in his “Colonial and Home Library,” which “specialized in the experiences of foreigners in strange places,” but he was initially skeptical that the book was factual (Howard 279). Wiley and Putnam, the American publishers, were troubled more by some of the book’s perceived raciness, an issue that would have less of an
impact on the book’s reception because it was not situated within genre. Turning to *Omoo*, Melville relied much more on print sources to refresh his memory about life in the South Seas but wrote with the same lively, personal style he had used in *Typee*, a fact that caused some reviewers to continue to doubt “the authenticity of the narrator as a person” (Roper 325). Murray published this volume in London, while in America Melville offered the book first to Wiley and Putnam but ended up signing a contract with Harper & Brothers (Roper 328–29). Had Melville’s first publishers situated *Typee* differently, had he included more elements that could be taken as romance rather than journalism (as did Cooper, for example, with the Leatherstocking series), he might have better positioned himself to accrue symbolic capital either with these books or with those that came later. It is also possible that Melville’s lengthy relationship with the house of Harper limited him, as they were interested in seeing him continue to produce profitable material like what they had already published.

4. R. Jackson Wilson offers a detailed analysis of Higginson’s “Letter to a Young Contributor,” demonstrating that “he had managed to fuse two ethics that his contemporaries worried might be contradictory, the ethic of ‘noble’ art and the ethic of large profits. He had also managed to celebrate an esthetic of industry and trade, and to justify the artist’s pursuit of ‘gain.’ He had sketched a world where literary ‘jobbing’ was not tawdry but a rich source of new linguistic ‘coinage’ and ‘exchange.’ And in such a world, writing for publication, for the literary marketplace, was not only an acceptable thing to do; it was the only acceptable thing for a writer to do, the only thing that put the artist truly in touch with the ‘average judgment of intelligent minds’” (246). Wilson takes Dickinson’s third letter as “a cryptic soliloquy on herself, her work, and—most urgently—her relationship to the literary marketplace” (253). Dickinson used the same “strategy that had been deployed by Irving, Garrison, and Emerson” and most other “serious professional writers in the first half of the nineteenth century [to] justify their struggles in the literary marketplace”—that is, they assumed a “modest posture, a barefoot rank, a relinquishment of fame” in order to be able to claim “the moral and esthetic high ground” (255). For every writer at this time “the marketplace was the most important existential reality. Its enticing possibilities, its demands, and its potential for humiliation set the boundaries within which [Dickinson], no less than any other writer of the nineteenth century, defined her work” (259). Dickinson’s response to these possibilities, demands, etc. was to construct herself as an apprentice, an archaic position in this “market economy with little place for masters and apprentices in any industry (and no place at all for them in the industry of literature)” (260). Wilson also points out that “[d]ecades earlier, the notion that an author probably will ‘starve in some garret’ was already conventional, so conventional that a woman like Frances Maria Lloyd Garrison could use it to mock her own son’s literary ambitions. Dickinson’s use of the cliché [in “Publication is the auction”] gives point to her observation that this poet—whose ‘We’ may be editorial, but might also be comically regal—is straining after a purity so perfect that it will not allow her to ‘invest’ her poems” (273).
5. Stephen Railton has noted that while authors have always depended on
audiences, during this period in American history they were “peculiarly depen-
dent” and experienced considerable “performance anxiety” as a result (5).

CHAPTER 3

1. We have not only his father’s mention of the word “on the street” but also
Poe’s 1841 remark in a review of the author’s second book, The Seaman’s Friend:
“His ‘Two Years Before the Mast’ was, very deservedly, one of the most popular
books ever published, and proved immensely profitable—at least to his booksell-
ers” (quoted by Metzdorf 322).

CHAPTER 4

1. More recently, Werner has reflected, in a fascinating way, on the editorial
process of producing electronic facsimiles. However, there is still a tendency to
attribute to the markings on paper a particular mental state or process: “On the
surfaces of Dickinson’s manuscripts, the turbulence of the mind expresses itself in
a series of legible signs and illegible marks—in letters, dashes, pointings, strike-
outs, pen-tests, blurs, and blank spaces,” although Werner oddly also recognizes
the difficulty of determining a timeline for many of the marks on a given fragment
(“‘Woe of Ecstasy’” 33, 41). In fact, one of the goals of the Dickinson Electronic
Archive is to enable users to gain a sense of Dickinson the writer as reflected in
her manuscripts, the poem variants, the epistolary contexts, and so forth, a goal
that seems committed to regarding her work under the horizon of the holograph
rather than allowing for oral production. See Christensen, chapter three, for a
recent consideration of this commitment.

2. Domhnall Mitchell, in Monarch of Perception, documented that the Dick-
inson household did not have gas at least in 1863—311, n. 19. As shown by
the account books of George Cutler & Company, Dry Goods, of Amherst, with
whom the Dickinson family primarily traded, kerosene, along with wicks and
glass chimneys, were frequently purchased into the 1870s, while no purchas-
es of candles or whale oil are shown. These books are in the collection of the
Jones Library in Amherst. According to George Whicher, in Dickinson’s girlhood
“[a]stral lamps burning whale-oil, or tallow dips, supplied illumination” (3). Mur-
ray says that lighting was provided by whale-oil lamps or tallow candles, but this
seems not to have been the case when Dickinson was doing the majority of her
writing (716).

3. In fact one of the major drudgeries of authorship in the precomputer age—
copying—probably weighed at times as much on Augusta as did the labor of writ-
ing on her brother. According to Parker, in the winter of 1853–54, for instance,
she “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 the luxury of copying the whale book at her own pace, well behind Herman because he was writing slowly, by his standards” (2:208). Delbanco puts the point even more strongly: “[B]y now [1855], everyone had accepted Herman’s defective handwriting as incorrigible, not a personal tic but, because of its consequences, a family problem, although it was becoming clear that Augusta could not be enslaved forever as she had been in much of 1854” (244).

CHAPTER 5

1. This was also the fate of Thoreau’s Walden. There is probably a point of major significance to be made here about American cultural imperialism, but to pursue that point would be beyond my scope. See, however, Sanford E. Marovitz’s discussion of the Melville revival, in which he notes that for some scholars the revival itself was less about Melville or his works than about the cultural and especially ideological uses to which the icons could be put.

2. A different perspective is offered by G. Thomas Tanselle, one of this generation’s most respected textual scholars. Tanselle states that the Northwestern-Newberry Edition “separates intention from expectation: it attempts to approach Melville’s artistic intention, held in the privacy of his own study, before that intention got entangled with the intentions of other persons involved in the publication process (however much Melville may have expected those persons to alter his texts)” (“Text” 333). Tanselle emphasizes that “the intention” of Melville is difficult to specify because it seems to have shifted from work to work and from version to version of a work; the editors of this edition attempt to identify the “intention that emerged from a full engagement with the original conception of a work” (335). Thus, for instance, revisions that seem to have been hurriedly made on a proof copy would not be given precedence over an early manuscript version, but revisions would be selected that seemed to involve “full engagement” with the work as determined by textual or biographical evidence. Tanselle notes that recent editorial theory and practice has generally been driven on the one hand by a recognition that “literature is a collaborative art” involving many individuals and institutions in addition to the artist (336) and on the other by “an increased concentration on earlier intentions—or, more precisely, on textual genesis and development as reflected in successive drafts and revisions” (340).

3. Dean asserts that Higginson and Todd were responding “to the material dilemma posed by [Dickinson’s] fascicles” (243). However, there is no indication in the extant material regarding the first editions that these editors regarded the fascicles and sets as posing a “dilemma” in terms of the form the editions should take. Millicent Todd Bingham, for instance, in tracing the discovery of the poems,
quotes from her mother’s journal that she did see the “over sixty little ‘volumes,’” but her concern was strictly with how “hopeless” the manuscripts would look “from a printer’s point of view,” because of Dickinson’s handwriting and the presence of alternative word choices (17). “Portfolio poetry” itself posed no dilemma; if it was written as sketches, then editors were free to organize the sketches however they chose. Higginson and Todd determined that subject groupings would be most effective, in the same way that watercolor sketches could be organized by subject; although Todd saw the actual sewn fascicles, their form obviously was not compelling enough to cause her to replicate it.

4. The decline of the author-centered view has been motivated in part by the recognition, as Tanselle puts it, that a writer may expect to be published without approving of the publication: “expectation and intention are very different things” (“Emily Dickinson” 68). Referring to Dickinson’s well-known complaint to Higginson regarding the publication of “A narrow fellow in the grass” (Fr1096) in the *Springfield Republican*, Tanselle insists that Dickinson’s “disapproval here cannot be used either to claim that she approved of everything else or to suggest that she wished to have unconventional punctuation in print—for the inserted question mark does not make the punctuation more conventional but substantially changes the meaning” (68). In fact Tanselle goes on to say that Dickinson “is easier to edit” than many other authors because most of her works do not exist in the multiple versions created during the process of moving from manuscript to print—that is, do not exist in versions over which she had control (69). The same cautions hold for the approach I’ve been advocating in this book—taking poems sent in letters as published. Tanselle reminds us that “documents (manuscript or printed) are social instruments, enabling texts to be transmitted between people,” but also that not every element of these documents necessarily signifies an intention (71).

5. The weight of Inge’s article reflects the relative power of the media that have been used to bring Melville to a popular audience: of approximately thirty-one pages of text, he devotes roughly fourteen to a discussion of film, with the remainder of the article treating Melville’s presence in comics, radio and television, popular literature (from children’s to adult), and “general culture” (advertisements, menus, names of establishments, etc.).

6. Dickinson’s presence in music and the visual arts is significant, but as Guerra points out she is also represented in “what traditionally are regarded as women’s crafts—china painting and textile art such as sewing, embroidery, and quilting” (398).