



NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE

Humanities

DIVISION OF RESEARCH PROGRAMS

Narrative Section of a Successful Application

The attached document contains the grant narrative and bibliography of a previously funded grant application. It is not intended to serve as a model, but to give you a sense of how a successful application may be crafted. Every successful application is different, and each applicant is urged to prepare a proposal that reflects its unique project and aspirations. Prospective applicants should consult the Research Programs application guidelines at <http://www.neh.gov/grants/research/summer-stipends> for instructions. Applicants are also strongly encouraged to consult with the NEH Division of Research Programs staff well before a grant deadline.

Note: The attachment only contains the grant narrative and bibliography, not the entire funded application. In addition, certain portions may have been redacted to protect the privacy interests of an individual and/or to protect confidential commercial and financial information and/or to protect copyrighted materials.

Project Title: Writing for the Street, Writing in the Garret: Melville, Dickinson, and Private Publication

Project Director: Michael S. Kearns

Institution: University of Southern Indiana

Grant Program: Summer Stipends

Narrative

Few contemporaries of Dickinson (1830-1886) and Melville (1819-1891) would have predicted that they would become important American authors. Close contemporaries in age and even relatively near neighbors while Melville was living in Pittsfield in 1850-51 and again in 1862, the two never met, nor is there any proof that either knew of the other's work. The possible connections are so tenuous that they only emphasize how apparently separate were the circles in which these writers moved and wrote. (For instance, Dickinson's poem "Success Is Counted Sweetest" was published in 1878 in the LITERARY WORLD, a magazine Melville frequently read, and in an 1863 letter she referred to spending "a few moments profitably with the South Sea Rose," which Sewall in THE LIFE OF EMILY DICKINSON speculates was a reference to Melville's TYPEE.) Melville sought a wide public audience early in his writing career, whereas Dickinson probably never desired print publication, famously referring to it as "the Auction / of the Mind of Man" (Poem 788 in the Franklin edition). Melville's early reputation was as a romancer drawing significantly on his sailing experiences; Dickinson, as far as is known, wrote only poetry and letters. Melville tried (and failed) to support his family with the products of his pen; Dickinson, economically secure, had no need to write for money.

On the other hand, they were interested in some of the same large themes of ontology and epistemology and some of the same contemporary issues, such as the Civil War. Combining skepticism with formal experimentation lost Melville the readership he enjoyed with his first two novels, TYPEE and OMOO; these same traits in Dickinson's poems probably caused Thomas Wentworth Higginson, the influential editor of the ATLANTIC MONTHLY, to advise her to continue writing but not to seek publication. Melville's comment to Hawthorne about trying to earn a living by writing, "Dollars damn me" (letter of [1?] June 1851, CORRESPONDENCE 191), is cut from the same metaphoric cloth as Dickinson's description of publication. Dickinson as a child and Melville as a young adult experienced the pleasure and reinforcement of performing for family; both also experienced as children a major reversal of family fortune. Both experienced serious eye trouble while passionately engaged with writing.

Significantly, each also left behind at death a manuscript treasure that apparently had not been known about by family—Melville left the manuscript of BILLY BUDD, and Dickinson left the vast majority of her poems. This leads to the most important similarity: both writers published some (Melville) or practically all (Dickinson) of their work privately. Recently, Dickinson scholars (notably Martha Nell Smith and Marietta Messmer) have emphasized that her epistolary output should be considered a type of publication, that not only the poems she included with letters but the letters themselves were intended as literary productions. Similarly, Melville expressed in a letter to Richard Henry Dana, Jr., that he would consider it "the best publication" to send Dana a novel in manuscript written for him alone (1 May 1850, CORRESPONDENCE 160), and he printed, at his own expense, his last two volumes of poetry in extremely limited runs (JOHN MARR AND OTHER SAILORS in 1888, TIMOLEON in 1891, both in runs of 25 copies). To publish privately meant not only explicitly seeking an audience but also being able to control the identity of that audience.

"Writing for the Street, Writing in the Garret" is intended to challenge the street/garret dichotomy (one writes either for a buying public or for oneself) that still exerts a major influence on how we understand literary culture and to show that the apparently paradoxical method of private publication was a reasonable way for Melville and Dickinson to seek influence and

prestige. The book will thus contribute to a richer view of the nineteenth-century literary marketplace—actually, as I argue, marketplaces—and will demonstrate that Melville and Dickinson were much more involved with those marketplaces than would be suggested by their reputation as garret dwellers (metaphorically speaking) aiming for posthumous fame.

My approach features three innovative elements. First, I consistently evaluate for both writers the explanations offered for why each had this strong interest in private publication. This comparison allows me to differentiate between what may be idiosyncratic and what seems to have a larger cultural resonance. Second, I interpret this interest as reflecting a commitment to markets other than those involving commercial print publication. The frequency with which both Dickinson and Melville employed figurative language based on economics, finance, and labor suggests that even when they were not aiming to earn economic capital they still understood their authorship in market terms. I read Melville's and Dickinson's authorship in light of the theory of cultural production articulated by Pierre Bourdieu (*THE FIELD OF CULTURAL PRODUCTION*) and John Guillory (*CULTURAL CAPITAL*), according to which cultural artifacts are produced and sanctified (Bourdieu's term) by systems whose purpose is not simply and at times not at all to earn economic capital. Third, I apply the perspective of composition studies to the physical conditions under which they wrote and to what is known and can be inferred about their methods of composition. This perspective, unusual in literary scholarship, introduces a helpful skepticism regarding some widely accepted assumptions about their composing habits, such as that Dickinson worked out her poems on paper. (Her lifelong use of the hymn stanza suggests that she could have composed orally or subvocally.)

I have completed drafts of four chapters and intend to revise the entire book during 2007-8. Chapter one, "Marketing by Mug" (8,500 words), situates each writer's refusal to provide a photographic image to a mentor, as well as their crafty and extensive creation of personae, within their opposition to being commodified for a mass market. Chapter two, "The 'Endless Ribband of Foolscap' and Publishing by Manuscript" (6,800 words), argues that Melville's desire to reach an audience of "thought divers" continued long after he ceased commercial publication, that Dickinson's entire project was informed by the same desire, hence that both writers chose the methods of private publication. These first two chapters will be expanded during revision.

In chapter three, "'Firmament' or 'Fin': Copyright, Authority, and Work" (14,600 words), I suggest that Melville and Dickinson valued private publication as a way to enter the markets in which cultural and symbolic capital could be earned while at the same time to avoid ceding control to market interests and the public, whose stake in all new products, processes, and ideas was enshrined in American copyright law. This chapter also emphasizes the important differences between the work of authorship and of writing; these writers' comments on writing and publishing challenge their culture's idealization of physical labor. In chapter four, "'The brain is just the weight of God': Materialist Psychology and Materialist Hermeneutics" (12,200 words), I propose that both writers accepted and inscribed into their works an important component of their culture's ideology—that the human mind is a tangible entity, not only "soul" but also "brain"—and that this component contributed to their trope of the physical text produced by hand as literally embodying the writer's thought in a way that the conventionally printed text could not. I also suggest that each writer's eye trouble made this trope even more compelling.

The chapter for which I am seeking NEH support, "'[Not] Convenient to Carry in the Hand': Commercializing Melville and Dickinson in the Twentieth Century," will bring my generative questions up to the present day. I will focus on the posthumous success of the works of

these two writers, including their presence within contemporary popular culture, as an example of how cultural capital is attached to and even "authorized" by a dead artist. I expect to spend six weeks drafting this chapter, comparing the publication histories of Melville and Dickinson, the debates over which editions should be read (and in the case of Dickinson over whether she should be read in printed type or in a manuscript facsimile), their representation in anthologies and literary histories (both popular and scholarly), and their presence in films, musical works, visual art, and of course *THE BELLE OF AMHERST*. I am especially interested in why 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. No travel is necessary to carry out this work; the publication records and popular-culture manifestations are readily available through my institution's library. Important sources include the Northwestern-Newberry edition of Melville's work, the Johnson and Franklin editions of Dickinson's poems, Johnson's and Smith's/Hart's of her letters, Franklin's edition of the Dickinson manuscript books and Werner's of the late fragments, Bryant's *THE FLUID TEXT* (2002), Horan's 1996 and 2001 articles in *THE EMILY DICKINSON JOURNAL* on the copyrighting of Dickinson's work, Inge's 1986 article "Melville in Popular Culture" (*COMPANION TO MELVILLE STUDIES*), Miller's "Whose Dickinson" (*AMERICAN LITERARY HISTORY* 2000), and Mitchell's *MEASURES OF POSSIBILITY* (2005).

I will also spend two weeks studying the physical conditions under which nineteenth-century writers worked; this study will contribute to my fourth chapter. (I will seek a grant from my institution for travel costs.) A general sense of these conditions can be gleaned from writers' journals and letters as well as from autobiographical fiction such as *RUTH HALL* (whose heroine actually wrote in a garret). However, I would like not just to understand intellectually but to experience and describe the paper, pens, pencils, lighting, and so forth that they would have used. Lighting, for instance, is especially important, considering both writers' eye problems. I will use the American Antiquarian Society (Worcester, Massachusetts) as my base but will also visit the Dickinson Museum in Amherst and the Melville museum Arrowhead near Pittsfield, in order to gain a more concrete sense of the physical environments where Dickinson and Melville wrote. The curators of these institutions have told me that their collections will be useful for my research.

Throughout my book, I give Dickinson's letters and Melville's letters and journals equal weight with their more overtly literary productions, in order better to understand how they placed themselves in relation to their era's literary marketplaces. I also pay special attention to their manuscripts (and, for Melville, the proof pages he marked), because these tangible products also embody the writers' sense of themselves as authors engaged in private publication. Ultimately, I hope to convince my readers that even a writer who seems to disdain any interest in commercial print publication may desire to be heard and respected as an author.

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