



Miss Margaret's Emily Dickinson

Author(s): Aife Murray

Source: *Signs*, Vol. 24, No. 3, (Spring, 1999), pp. 697-732

Published by: The University of Chicago Press

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3175323>

Accessed: 09/04/2008 19:48

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=ucpress>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit organization founded in 1995 to build trusted digital archives for scholarship. We enable the scholarly community to preserve their work and the materials they rely upon, and to build a common research platform that promotes the discovery and use of these resources. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Miss Margaret's Emily Dickinson

The way to the past is never smooth. For a woman poet it can be especially tortuous. Every step towards an origin is also an advance towards a silence. The past in which our grandmothers lived and where their lives burned through detail and daily incidence to become icons for our future is also a place where *women* and *poetry* remain far apart.

—Eavan Boland, *Object Lessons*, 23–24

How did Emily Dickinson manage to be so prolific in the nineteenth century, an era when household work was so labor intensive? This thought was on my mind one afternoon as I headed into the main

This article is dedicated to the memory of Jack Pressman, 1957–97, who modeled how to be an attentive parent and a scholar—that the joy in the former transmutes into the pleasure and success of the latter. This study develops ideas that were presented in the conference paper printed in the *Emily Dickinson Journal* (Murray 1996). I thank Elizabeth Haiken, Jack Pressman, Michael Radetsky, and the editors and reviewers of *Signs* for helping me develop and organize this article. For sharing materials, comments, and correspondence that aided in the formation of these ideas, I would like to acknowledge Caroline Acker, Stephen Arkin, Carol Birtwhistle, Lynn Bonfield, Margaret Butterfield, C.K., Adele Clarke, Allan Creighton, David Barnes, Gearóid Denvir, Eleanor Evans, Mary Beth Evans, Peter Evans, Lisa Garcia, Allison Giffen, Dale Going, Karen Hansen, Susan Howe, Myung Mi Kim, Denise Liddell Lawson, Polly Longworth, Kevin Magee, Mary Meriault, Shelia Moran, Julie Nesnansky, Denise Newman, Tillie Olsen, Eoghan Ó Néill, Maureen Owen, Jim Rogers, Richard Sewall, and Martha Nell Smith. Martha Noblick, Jessica Teeter, and especially Daniel Lombardo, of the Jones Library, Amherst, Massachusetts, have provided time, attention, and kindness over a number of years. John Gibson and David Paremba of the Burton Historical Collection kindly helped during a week of archival research in Detroit, Tom Carey of the United Irish Cultural Center responded helpfully to all of my odd requests, and Melanie Wisner of the Houghton Library aided me in key moments from afar. Travel to sources and release time from work to revise this article were made possible by the O'Shaughnessy Fund of the Irish American Cultural Institute, Money For Women/Barbara Deming Memorial Fund, and these individual donors: Caroline Acker, Carol Bergman, Barbara Berry, Sari Broner, Catalina Carriaga, Mark Claycomb, Anne Finger, Elizabeth Foy, Eric Holub, Sally Hughes, Lita Jans, Susan Karlins, Robert Martensen, Betty Murray, Hank Murray, Eléna Rivera, Jaime Robles, Edna “Nan” Savage, Linda Savage, Timothy Savage, Jim Shattuck, Elizabeth Sherwin, Mary Sherwin, Carol Snow, Susan Stern, and Rich Yurman. For being my “hands” in the final hour, my thanks to Allan Creighton, Rosana Francescato, Caroline Klumpar, Wendy Mortenson, Michael Radetsky, and, most of all, Daniel Radetsky.

library.¹ Why had I not produced anywhere close to the number of poems written by Dickinson? “And you call yourself a poet,” scorned the voice in my head. In the Dickinson section of the main reading room, I pulled down from the shelf one of the two volumes of Richard Sewall’s biography of Dickinson. In a sliver of time in between work, school, and mothering, I stood there thinking, “How *did* Dickinson write so much; who helped make it possible?” The book fell open at a plate titled “The Dickinson domestics, about 1870,” and three familiar faces stared back (Sewall 1974, opposite 610; see fig. 1). The man seated in the center, Thomas Kelley, looked uncannily like my paternal grandfather. On the left stood his sister-in-law, maid-of-all-work Margaret Maher, and to the right was his niece, Margaret Kelley, a maid in the other Dickinson house, the Evergreens. “Oh,” I realized, “we Irish made it possible. My great-grandmother could have been scrubbing Emily Dickinson’s stairs!”

I remember stepping out to the library’s front steps, pausing on the granite walk. I sensed that in Dickinson’s story, “women” and “poetry” came together because of the presence of another woman, Margaret Maher, whose life was consumed with the daunting detail of nineteenth-century housework. Dickinson’s “voice,” in a sense, had depended on Maher’s “silence.” Like my grandmothers, Maher was a poor woman who labored her entire life. Without knowing it at the time, this was the moment when I found my own lineage as a writer—in the twinned inheritance of Margaret Maher and Emily Dickinson. Then I headed quickly to the bus that would deliver me to my son’s school, just in time.

In an 1897 legal deposition, Maher explained that Dickinson stored her manuscript books in Maher’s trunk. Eight years after Maher died, Dickinson’s niece, Martha Bianchi, published *Emily Dickinson Face to Face*, in which she described Maher’s role in saving Dickinson’s manuscripts from destruction. Who was Maher and why did she matter? These questions confounded me and spurred my search to imagine Maher and her relationship to Dickinson. Of a woman who worked steadfastly in daily intimacy beside the poet for seventeen years, scholar Theodora Ward comments, “The robustness of her mind and body gave to her loyalty the quality of a somewhat awkward but faithful watchdog, and to the Dickinsons’ friends she came to hold a place of her own in contributing to the vital atmosphere

¹ There is an underlying idea here that housework is women’s work and that the woman who wants to write must hire someone to do “her” housework. For more about women whose writing was made possible by the labor of working-class women, see Olsen 1979, especially “One out of Twelve: Writers Who Are Women in our Century” (22–46); and Romero 1992.

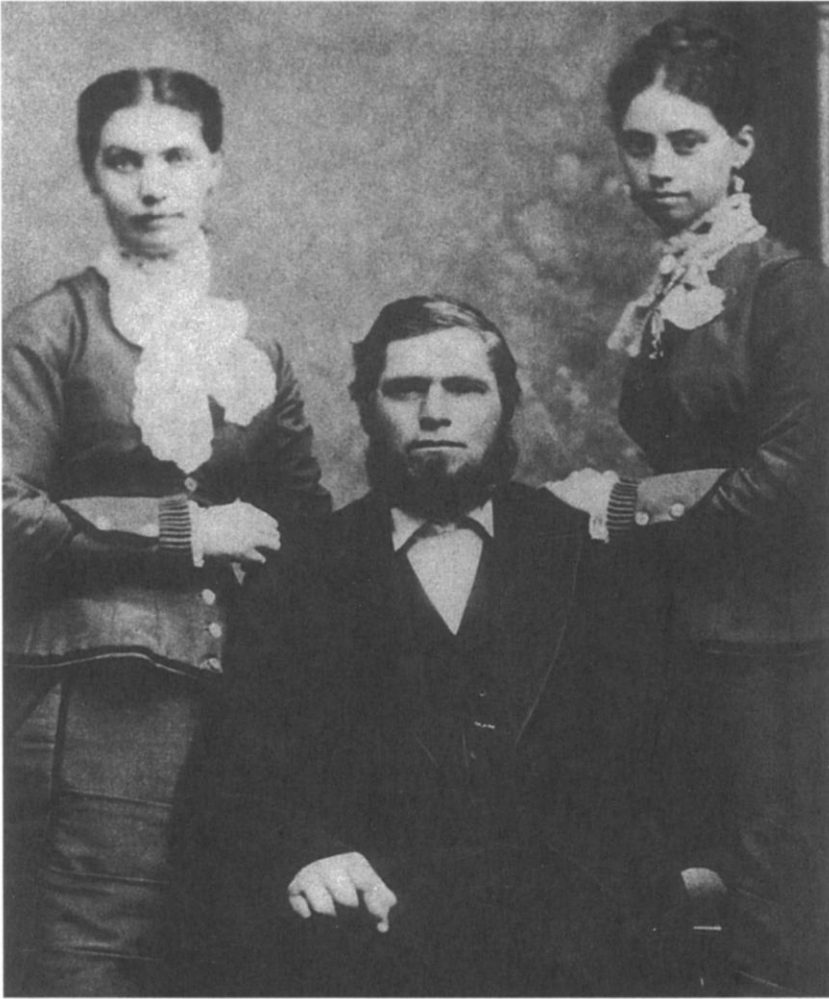


Figure 1 Left to right: Margaret Maher, Thomas Kelley, and Margaret Kelley. This image was loaned to Richard Sewall, for use in his 1974 biography, by Miss Helen "Nell" Harrington, the granddaughter of Thomas Kelley who cared for Maher in her old age. Photograph by J. L. Lovell. Courtesy of Farrar, Straus, & Giroux.

of the house" (Dickinson 1951, 96).² In spite of her condescension, Ward's mention of Maher—and brief comments made by other Dickinson biographers—intrigued me since, other than one 1953 article by Jay Leyda—

² See Ryan's discussion of the animal characteristics used to describe Irish immigrants and how the Irish are used as tropes of emphasis in Thoreau's writing. Ward, a granddaughter of Dickinson's friends the Hollands, is expressing common Yankee sentiments.

"Miss Emily's Maggie"—that focuses on Maher, the scholarly lens rarely has been cast on the numerous Homestead employees.

While little has been written specifically about Dickinson's maids, seamstresses, and groundsmen, I found a marker of their significance left by Dickinson herself. The poet chose Tom Kelley as her chief pallbearer, along with five other Irish men who worked the Homestead grounds. Having been raised with Irish Catholic death rituals, I instantly recognized the significance of this honor—as did Dickinson. I also noted the critical silence on the possible meanings of this act. Given the number of studies on every symbol of Dickinson's life and language, the lack of commentary on the symbolic significance of the pallbearers is remarkable.

My "imagining" of Margaret Maher required a circuitous path. I began combing through Dickinson's letters and biographies and supplemented the scant information about the Dickinson servants with secondary literature on service and books by or about domestic servants. I interviewed some of Maher's "descendants" (she never married or had children, so these were descendants of her sister and brother-in-law, Mary and Tom Kelley). I studied Maher's extant correspondence and copies of uncollected Kelley family papers and reviewed the correspondence and account books of Maher's first employers, the Boltwoods. Other informants included a friend who works as a house cleaner and a scholar who grew up in Lisroagh, the next parish over from Kiltinan and Temple-Etney, the Maher and Kelley places of origin in County Tipperary, Ireland.

In 1873, when Amherst's Kelley Square was a thriving multigenerational Maher-Kelley family compound, it did not appear on the Amherst town map. In 1992, with vague directions from Dickinson Homestead curator Carol Birtwhistle, I located what remained of Kelley Square, a few years after the last of its buildings had been torn down. Some bricks that once lined a path through the gardens, a few roof slates, and a watering can stuck hard between two saplings were what I found one late July afternoon. When I traveled to Amherst in 1994 to interview Maher-Kelley descendants, Kelley Square had been included on the town map, long after the buildings were gone. I thought about how the issue of silence and voice is related to who is or is not on the map, and about the importance of who makes the map. I found a resonance with these questions in the observations of writer John Edgar Wideman about his difficult search for his family's African-American ancestral place: "Maybe [the town of] Promised Land lies where it does to teach us the inadequacy of maps we don't make ourselves, teach us the necessity of new maps, teach us how to create them, reimagine connections others have forgotten or hidden" (Wideman 1994, 94–95).

In this article of reimagined connections, I respond to Darlene Clark Hine's call to do "cross over history" (1992, 132) by looking at the intimate class and cultural divide between Dickinson and Maher from both sides and examining how their interaction shaped the lives of both women. I describe some of the reasons that the Dickinson family made the transition in their domestic practices from help to service (i.e., from hiring temporary workers for specific tasks to engaging permanent, live-in servants to work continuously and remain "on call"), which set the stage for the arrival of Maher (and her predecessor Margaret O'Brien). On the basis of historical documents and studies, I imaginatively reconstruct the intertwining lives of mistress and maid in the domestic workday in the Homestead and describe correlations between the presence of a permanent maid and changes in Dickinson's writing and vocation. The piece concludes with my speculations about Maher's critical relationship to Dickinson's literary enterprise, the place where "women" and "poetry" come together.

Wanted

At the urging of his two teenage daughters, Emily and Lavinia, Edward Dickinson placed the following advertisement in the *Hampshire and Franklin Express* on March 8, 1850: "Wanted. To hire a girl or woman who is capable of doing the entire work of a small family. One who can come well recommended, may find constant employment and good wages" (Leyda 1960, 1:170). The Dickinsons were among the most prominent families in the town of Amherst, Massachusetts. Even though they were, for generations, social and civic leaders—and the family had achieved an "aura of superiority"—their domestic practices were governed by principles of self-sufficiency (Sewall 1974, 91).³ In places such as Boston and New York, a woman of Dickinson's class and race routinely managed a retinue of servants, but Emily and her younger sister were expected to labor alongside their mother to perform the many household tasks. Their mother, the former Emily Norcross, had grown up on the Norcross family farm in Monson, a town twenty-four miles southeast of Amherst. If there had been any additional help in the household, it likely was a girl from the same community or a female relative who worked for a few years until she married and formed her own household (Stansell 1986, 12). Accustomed to the continual and varied work of farm life, Mrs. Dickinson, who married in

³ On the family's sense of its social responsibility and elevated class status, see Sewall 1974; Howe 1986; Wolff 1986; Erkkila 1992.

1828, did without a maid-of-all-work for many years. Her eldest, Austin, was born in April 1829, Emily in December 1830, and Lavinia in February 1833. Until the children reached school age, Mrs. Dickinson probably had fairly steady assistance (Leyda 1953, 256). After that, she hired, as needed, a laundress, seamstress, and, seasonally, a maid-of-all-work. On occasion, members of the extended family helped. When Lavinia was born, Mrs. Dickinson became ill and two-and-a-half-year-old Emily was sent to Monson to stay with her Norcross aunt, the first of many extended stays with helpful relatives (Sewall 1974, 323). In an exchange of help for home, a common nineteenth-century practice, Edward's youngest sister, Elisabeth, lived with the family for a period of time in the 1840s (Dickinson 1958, letter 6; Dudden 1983, 19). A girl in her late teens, she would have been a tremendous help when Lavinia and Emily were early adolescents and still housework apprentices. As was the custom among both the elite and laboring classes of the town, Mrs. Dickinson spent time cooking and caring for sick relatives and friends in addition to managing her own busy household.⁴ Even with the help of her two daughters and a laundry worker, Mrs. Mack, the housework was tremendous. Later, the poet wrote many letters home from Mount Holyoke Female Seminary expressing concern for her mother's constant labor.

Following their mother's lead, the Dickinson sisters baked for neighbors and, in their own home, developed the habit of splitting the work during periods when they did not have additional help or their mother was ill. Cleaning fell most often to Lavinia, while the poet was cook and baker. Dickinson once wrote, "I dont keep the Moth part of the House—I keep the Butterfly part" (Dickinson 1958, prose fragment 80). The sheer volume of labor-intensive work in the Dickinson household precluded its being done by one person, even a maid whose time was devoted solely to the task. Edward Dickinson and his wife "were acknowledged social leaders in Amherst, not only for their famous commencement receptions but for the steady stream of visitors, many of them famous or near-famous, who enjoyed their hospitality" (Sewall 1974, 54). Household work in the nineteenth century was always onerous, but even more so in the home of a family who aspired to leadership. Also, Edward Dickinson insisted that each of his daughters perform certain tasks. Thomas Higginson, who maintained a friendship with the poet from the 1860s until her death,

⁴ Karen Hansen describes visiting and reciprocity—forms of alternative economies for laboring classes—as practices that guided other classes in small towns and villages where there was more class mingling (1994, 2, 81, 167, 196). Dickinson's letters and biographies show that the Amherst elite still engaged in these practices (Bianchi 1932, 14, 20; Dickinson 1958, letters 10, 30).

noted, "She makes all of the bread for her father only likes hers, and says, 'and people must have puddings,' this *very* dreamily, as if they were comets — so she makes them" (quoted in Leyda 1960, 2:152).

Throughout her life, Dickinson commented in letters and prose fragments about housework's role in her life, often bristling at the necessary evil it represented. She complained at how their parents "regulated" and "settled" her and her sister Vinnie with housework (Dickinson 1958, letter 182). In the 1840s she describes herself as doing "everything" and details the piles of mending that await her return after a month away with relatives as well as the tasks of cultivating a large number of plants interspersed with her academic studies (letters 5, 9, 14). In the early 1850s, many of the poet's letters to friends address how hard she has to work. She complained to Jane Humphrey in 1850, "Vinnie away — and my two hands but *two* — not four, or five as they ought to be — and so *many* wants — and me so *very* handy — and my time of so *little* account — and my writing so *very* needless" (letter 30). With her sister at Wheaton Seminary, Dickinson could hardly keep up her correspondence and had little time to herself. Once she lit the morning fires, she was fully employed the rest of the day in housework, cooking, and caring for her ill mother (letters 89, 90). At age twenty-one, Dickinson told Susan Gilbert that she was distressed by her appearance, disheveled from housework (letter 73). She ran from the primitiveness and enormity of housework whenever possible. Soon after Lavinia returned from boarding school Dickinson wrote to Susan Gilbert: "They are cleaning house today, Susie, and I've made a flying retreat to my own little chamber" (letter 93). As they became young women, the Dickinson sisters found that housework intruded on their social lives. Emily and Lavinia devised constant amusements with their brother Austin, friends, and suitors. In a letter to Abiah Root, Dickinson writes of an incident when a young man came to ask her to go riding, as she labored washing dishes, and the resulting conflict between desire and duty.⁵ These conflicts — especially

⁵ "When I am not at work in the kitchen, I sit by the side of mother, provide for her little wants — and try to cheer, and encourage her. I ought to be glad, and grateful that I *can* do anything now, but I do feel so very lonely, and so anxious to have her cured. I hav'nt repined but *once*, and you shall know all the why. While I washed the dishes at noon in that little 'sink-room' of our's, I heard a well-known rap, and a friend I love *so* dearly came and asked me to ride in the woods, the sweet-still woods, and I wanted to exceedingly — I told him I could not go, and he said he was disappointed — he wanted me very much — then the tears came into my eyes, tho' I tried to choke them back, and he said I *could*, and *should* go, and it seemed to me unjust. Oh I struggled with great temptation, and it cost me much of denial, but I think in the end I conquered, not a glorious victory Abiah, where you hear the rolling drum, but a kind of a helpless victory, where triumph would come of itself, faintest music, weary soldiers, nor a waving flag, nor a long-loud shout" (Dickinson 1958, letter 36).

when the flirtatious, popular Lavinia returned from boarding school—eventually led Edward to place the ad for a maid.

After the advertisement was placed (on International Women's Day), a succession of Irish immigrant women found work in the Dickinson household alongside seventeen-year-old Lavinia and twenty-year-old Emily (Leyda 1953, 257). Mrs. Mack is mentioned in Dickinson's letters, and she may have done the laundry on a weekly basis until a maid-of-all-work was secured (Dickinson 1958, letter 285). By the mid-1850s Margaret O'Brien had come to work for the family. Leyda believes she may have been in their employ while the family lived on North Pleasant Street and moved with them in November of 1855 when the Dickinsons moved back to the Homestead, built by the poet's grandfather, Samuel Fowler Dickinson (Leyda 1953, 257–58). It was a meaningful move. Samuel had spent the family fortune in founding Amherst College, the mansion had been sold in part because of his debts, and now Edward was restoring the fortune and returning the family to their Main Street home. The size and formality of the Homestead suggest that, if they didn't have a maid on North Pleasant Street, they "needed" one after the move. When O'Brien married Stephen Lawler, on October 18, 1865, she left the Dickinson kitchen for her own, and no regularly employed maid-of-all-work is mentioned in the poet's letters until 1869 (Dickinson 1958, letter 337). Leyda speculates that a series of trial maids found employment in the Dickinson kitchen until Maher arrived three and a half years later (Leyda 1953, 258). In March 1869, about to turn twenty-eight, Maher expected to stay with the Dickinsons just for a few months, until she left for California. Instead, she worked in the Homestead for over thirty years. She saw to the burials of all of the Dickinsons, including Emily and Lavinia, who did not marry and remained at the family home their entire lives.

When the Dickinson family, and others of their class, turned to the laboring community of the town for servants, they drew primarily on a pool of recent Irish immigrants.⁶ Irish immigrants' "differences"—of culture,

⁶ The majority of known Dickinson servants appear to have been Irish immigrants: Julie Costello, Margaret Kelley, Mrs. Mack, Margaret Maher, Mary Moynihan, Margaret O'Brien, Margaret Purcell, Dennis Cashman, Owen Courtney, Thomas Kelley, Daniel Moynihan, Dennis Scannell, Timothy Scannell, Stephen Sullivan, and Patrick Ward. English immigrants Richard and Ann Matthews and their large family inhabited a small house on the Dickinson property while Richard was a stableman (Dickinson 1958, 3:959), and an African-American boy, Austin Grout, is mentioned as harvesting cherries on the Dickinson farm (letter 45). Yankees appear to have been employed by the Dickinsons in higher-paying or more skilled jobs: Horace Church as gardener, a series of seamstresses who made seasonal clothes (Misses Aiken, Baker, Bartlett, Bangs, and Leonard), and town blacksmiths, such as Moody Cook, who attended to Edward Dickinson's thoroughbreds. Johnny Beston, William Kelley, and

religion, language, and belief—were a subject of great amusement to the Yankees and “dominated the fashionable thinking and publishing of the day” (Ryan 1978, 58). Emerson resorted to calling the new immigrants “shovel-handed Irish” and “semi-brutes,” yet on more than one occasion Maher must have provided him food and comfort when he visited her employer, his Amherst cousin, Fanny Boltwood (Ryan 1978, 58). Tragedies that befell the local Irish received “jocular” reporting in even “advanced” and nationally recognized newspapers like the *Springfield Daily Republican*—which was read by the poet and edited by her close friend Sam Bowles (Leyda 1953, 259–60).

The words of such descriptions were matched by deeds. Irish Catholics and their religious institutions were frequently attacked, often as targets of American nativist hostility (Takaki 1993, 9). In 1834, a mob of people—allegedly incited by Lyman Beecher’s anti-Catholic sermons in a Boston Congregationalist church—terrorized nuns and students in a nearby Charlestown convent, desecrated the chapel and graveyard, and burned the convent to the ground (Fanning 1990, 22–24). In 1850s Amherst, when the Kelley and Maher families were settling in Irish enclaves within “Yankee Country,” community leader Austin Dickinson was a supporter of the Know-Nothing or Native American Party, noted for its bias against both Catholics and immigrants (Evans and Moran, interview with the author, Sunderland, Mass., July 24, 1994).⁷ Twenty-year-old Emily Dickinson was representative of her class and culture when she wrote, in 1851, to her brother, who was at the time a school teacher of Irish boys in Boston: “Vinnie and I say masses for poor Irish boys souls. So far as I am concerned I should like to have you kill some—there are so many now, there is no room for the Americans, and I cant think of a death that would be more after my mind than *scientific destruction, scholastic dissolution*, there’s something lofty in it, it smacks of *going up!*” (letter 43).⁸ In spite of these general

James Kelley were boy messengers for the poet. Later, William apparently worked for Lavinia (*Amherst Directory* 1896–97, 93), although his two granddaughters know nothing of this employment. He was a man “of few words” (Eleanor Evans and Sheliah Moran, interview with the author, Sunderland, Mass., July 24, 1994), so perhaps the work was only short-lived and not worthy of mention.

⁷ Austin’s xenophobia and sense of class superiority may have been a result of the infamous Dickinson snobbery. He not only “despised the common herd,” but “it was said he looked down on almost everyone—except his sister Emily” (Sewall 1974, 299, 91–92).

⁸ There are several other mentions of race and class distinctions in her early letters. In another 1851 letter to Austin, she writes of the comfort experienced by the family in calling the name of Austin Grout, because of its “vague association” with their absent brother and son. “I do wish you were here despite the darkened Laddy—They are bad enough in darkness, I really dont feel willing that they should come to light thro’ such a daring medium”

attitudes, it seems that many of Amherst's elite hired Irish servants and laborers. The Dickinson family did not take easily to strangers, but once admitted to the family domain, their servants were allowed quite a bit of latitude. O'Brien determined how hot or cold the house could be kept, at times contrary to the wishes of her mistress (letter 285).⁹ If Dickinson's choice of pallbearers is any indication, her early hostility to the Irish appears to have eroded by the end of her life. Many years after the deaths of the poet and her maid, Dickinson's niece recalled Maher's presence in the Homestead kitchen: "Here the supremacy . . . was rightly that of Maggie in calico—described by Aunt Emily as 'sensational in temperament'" (Bi-anchi 1932, 19).

From the Hill of the Women to a city on a hill

After surviving the famine, Margaret Maher emigrated from the southern part of County Tipperary, Ireland, in the mid-1850s. She was the third child of four, born in Kilusty, Parish Kiltinan, on March 23, 1841, in the western shadow of the Hill of the Women, or *Sliabh-na-mBan* (or Slievenamon). According to Leyda, she emigrated at age fourteen with her siblings Michael, Mary, and Thomas, and, soon after, the family gained an immediate economic foothold with Mary's marriage to Tom Kelley. Tom was a recent emigrant from the nearby parish of Temple-Etney, which lies on the southern slope of *Sliabh-na-mBan* in South Tipperary. While their descendants no longer know what specifically led them to emigrate when they did, deteriorating conditions in Ireland, including massive evictions by the British, coupled with a surge of railroad building in western Massachusetts and expanded economic opportunities in America for Irish women, were probably among the inducements (Dangerfield 1976, 15–16; Miller and Wagner 1994, 71–72).¹⁰ The youngest Maher sibling, Thomas, about age seven, may have emigrated with his older siblings or

(letter 45). Some months later she writes, "How funny it seems to me to have you live in Boston, and be having calls from our country tradesmen!" (letter 54).

⁹ In an 1863 letter to Louise and Frances Norcross, Dickinson writes, "Margaret objects to furnace heat on account of bone decrepitudes, so I dwell in my bonnet and suffer comfortably" (letter 285). Laboring hard, O'Brien would have been more sensitive to the heat.

¹⁰ The transition from help to service (with the rise of industrialization) roughly coincided with an enormous influx of immigrant women, especially from Ireland, who flooded into the new jobs (Dudden 1983, 60, 107). Dangerfield notes that between 1849 and 1852 the British evicted nearly fifty thousand families in Ireland. The number of small farms decreased and those put off the land faced emigration or death (1976, 15). See also Diner 1983; Miller 1985.

come later with their parents, Michael and Mary Dunn Maher. According to Leyda, once the Maher siblings were settled, Margaret returned, "perhaps alone," to Ireland to bring her mother and father (forty-nine and sixty years of age, respectively) to the new home in America (1953, 261).¹¹

Family tragedies and the intention to "start over" in California led Maher to take what she considered a temporary post in Amherst with Edward Dickinson (Evans and Moran, interview with the author, Sunderland, Mass., July 24, 1994). During the winter of 1868–69, she held several temporary jobs—with the junior Boltwoods in Hartford, with Mrs. Tolcott in Amherst, and then with the Dickinsons—while waiting to join her brother Thomas in California. Elder brother Michael had probably already left, lured by the promise of gold. Their mother had died in the fall of 1866, and in June of 1868 their father followed. In the same month, her brother's marriage plans fell through, and then, days after their father's burial, brother-in-law Tom Kelley experienced a nearly fatal fall while working on the construction of the Hills hat factory. After months of being nursed around the clock—with Maher and her sister, Mary, alternately working in shifts—Tom got up for the first time at the end of the summer. By then, even with the loss of one arm, it was clear that this father of seven would be able to support his family again. In early October, Thomas Maher sailed for California, and Margaret made plans to meet him in Panama, considered the half-way point. Her departure was delayed, first by sickness and then by indecision, and her brother urged her to stay in her good job in Amherst. According to Maher, he even wrote directly to Edward Dickinson "telling him he wished I would stay for the Preasant" (letter, April 6, 1869). Maher was incensed by this paternalism. However, coupled with pressure from her sister, it may have been the last straw (Maher, letter, June 22, 1869).¹² Although she made at least one

¹¹ Kelley descendants whom I interviewed in 1994 had not heard of Maher's return journey. In the 1950s Leyda interviewed members of an older branch of the family (now deceased) and Fanny Boltwood, who may have related this story to him.

¹² Unless otherwise noted, all of Maher's and the Boltwoods' letters cited in this article appear courtesy of the Boltwood Family Papers, 1867–69, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Free Public Library, Detroit, Michigan. In the April 6, 1869, letter, Maher also writes, "I told Mr B[oltwood] that I would go to live with him the first of September I would but Sister would not be plased to it all She would not give me any consent to go from her she have So much to do and Bare that I dont know how to lave her as she have no other comfort but me I must do all that I can for her you must not blame me." My quotations from Maher's letters reproduce her originals as closely as possible. Often her "errors" of spelling provide a sense of her Hiberno-English pronunciation; e.g., "I mane" is her version of "I mean," and she writes "true" for "through."

subsequent attempt, in 1873, to move to California, in the end Maher remained in Amherst, her life and language joined with one of the world's most important poets (Dickinson 1958, letter 388).

Maher was emotionally and economically entwined with her sister and brother-in-law, Mary and Tom Kelley, for her entire American life. In an 1863 letter, Maher's employer, Clarinda Boltwood, wrote to her husband that Maher's "father, mother and Brother and herself have hired Thomas Kelley's other house and are going to keep house there—that is, her mother is to keep house for her Brother" (Boltwood 1863). It seems that through this lease arrangement and Tom's laboring jobs the Kelleys were able to purchase, on October 1, 1864, the piece of land with several dwellings that the two families had been occupying. The parcel, for which they paid \$1,216 to Edward Dickinson, became known as Kelley Square. It was situated near the Dickinson meadow, by the Amherst train depot and within sight of the Homestead and eventually grew to encompass a third house, a barn, and sheds surrounded by fruit trees and flower and vegetable gardens (fig. 2).

Maher's great-niece, C.K., believes that her aunt helped fund the building of a third house at Kelley Square, which was used as a boarding house for new Irish immigrants, a business that Maher ran with the Kelleys (interview with author, Amherst, Mass., July 26, 1994).¹³ She was able to do this not only because she received higher wages from the Dickinsons (than she had from her previous employers, the junior Boltwoods) but because "domestic service, unlike needle or factory work, could yield a cash surplus that need not be depleted during frequent layoffs" (Dudden 1983, 60–61). It was this kind of surplus that enabled many Irish servants in America to fund the subsequent immigration of their families. In Maher's case, it allowed her to support the expansion of Kelley Square.¹⁴ Although she probably lodged for many years with her employers, she called Kelley Square home, and it was the center of Kelley family life until the 1940s (Evans and Moran, interview with the author, Sunderland, Mass., July 24, 1994). Provided for in her brother-in-law's will, Maher lived out her days at the Square, where she died at home on May 3, 1924, at the age of 83.

"Home" may have been Kelley Square, but seven days a week, while working and sleeping, Maher was probably under her employers' roof. Their lives, in a sense, became her life. Feeling at home there and claiming it as home marked an important transition for Maher. In many letters to

¹³ C.K. asked that only her initials be used.

¹⁴ See Diner 1983; Dudden 1983; and Miller 1985 on the phenomenon of servant girls funding the emigration of family members from Ireland.

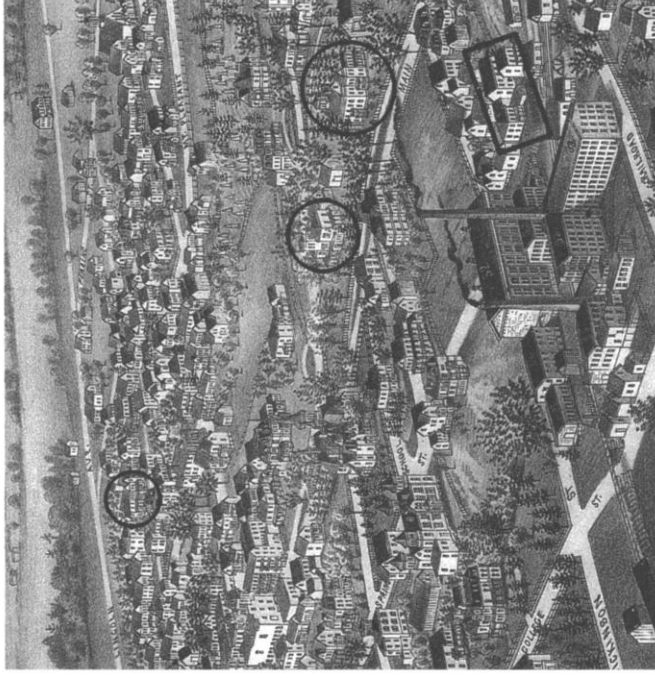
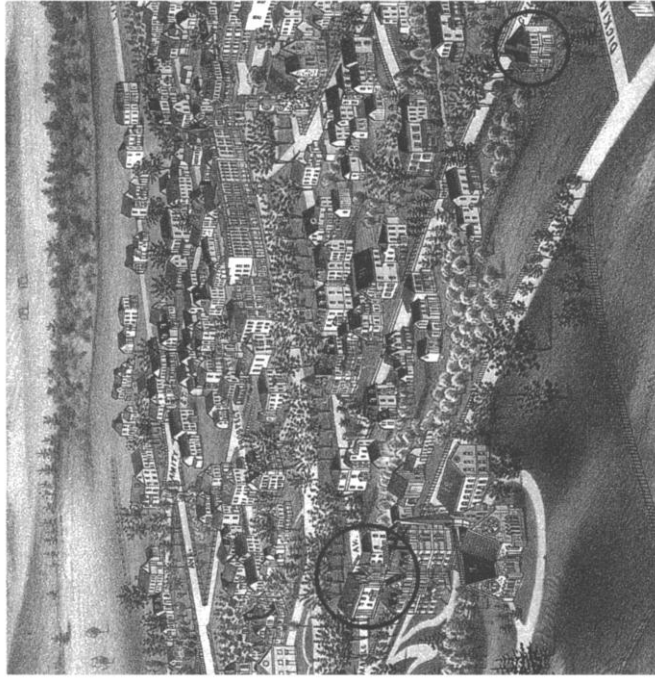


Figure 2 Burleigh lithograph of Amherst, Massachusetts, 1886, adjacent details, left and right. Circled are five of the homes where Maher worked, with and without compensation. From left to right: the Boltwood mansion, the Dell, one of the junior Boltwood residences, the Evergreens, the Homestead. In the rectangle below the Homestead is Kelley Square. Courtesy of the Jones Library, Amherst, Massachusetts.

her previous employers, the Boltwoods, she wrote that her real home was with them. Early in her Dickinson tenure, she wrote: "I like it very well But it is not my home my home is with you I am as strange here as if I came here te work yester" (letter, Spring 1869). A people not entirely comfortable with outsiders, the Dickinsons would have expected Maher to seek her own comfort. She did, for later she was described by the poet as "warm and wild and mighty" (1958, letter 907), and, in her last known letter, Maher wrote of the Homestead as a "dear old home" (Maher 1891). When she wrote this, Maher was employed at the Homestead, running a boarding house at Kelley Square, and, for months at a stretch, working for Mabel Loomis Todd, who was preparing the first volume of poems for publication. Throughout her life Maher was a person divided, with a home in at least two places; "home" was a movable place of her emotional attachment to the people therein.

In her last known letter to Clarinda Boltwood, those shifting uncertainties are best expressed in her description of her sister's move to a new home. Twice she included herself in the move and then corrected herself: "we have a New house / that we will go to live in / [soon] I mane sister and / her family the are getting / along first rate we will / move in it the first of June / it is the small house that the / are fissing up for them selfs" (letter, April or May 1871).¹⁵ After relocating six thousand miles from the contested turf of Ireland—with several centuries of collective memory of British evictions—"home" was not a firm category. This ambiguity was exacerbated by live-in domestic work in America. Maher's desire to bring her parents from Ireland may have been not only to care for them, in illness and old age, but to make the new country *home*.

Work as a live-in servant meant that one's people and culture were at a distance. Adopting her employers as fictive kin and forming deep emotional attachments also meant adopting, to some extent, their foreign culture. Because the home is the workplace for a domestic servant, the work often becomes the identity.¹⁶ In her first extant letter (October 2, 1867) Maher signed her name "Margaret Margher," a spelling that approximates Meagher, another version of the Irish Gaelic name Ó Meachair (Ó Néill 1996, 16). By her next letter the *g* is no longer present in the spelling, and

¹⁵ During my 1996 visit, I found that this letter had been dated "[1869?]" by the archivist, but biographical evidence indicates that it is from 1871.

¹⁶ Service facilitated acculturation for some but impeded it, through isolation, for others. Some aspired to middle-class standards while others were made to feel inferior (Dudden 1983, 228). The maid, in both her silence and her care of the possessions of the household, becomes associated with their *thingness*, fading to background (see Lawton 1925; Stanley 1984; Holt [1906] 1990; Parker 1992).

in subsequent letters she becomes “Magy Maher,” then “your unworth but true Maggie Maher,” and finally “Miss. Emily.^s and Vinnia.^s Maggie” (letters, June 25, 1868, and March 2, 1869; Maher 1891).¹⁷ In a period of seventeen years, the underpinnings of her Irish identity were pulled away such that she began identifying her self in terms of her employment and possession by her employer.¹⁸

“If I be poor and working for my living I will always try to be right”

The character of the person the Dickinsons were lucky enough to woo away from the Boltwoods is revealed in the nearly two dozen letters she sent to Clarinda Boltwood from 1867 to 1871 that were preserved by the Boltwood family.¹⁹ They were written when Maher was caring for ill members of her own family or was separated from the Boltwoods in the course of relocating them to a new city. The texture of Maher’s speech and personality are amply evidenced, and the letters reveal that she was a hard worker, responsible and dedicated, in addition to being a skilled nurse. She was devoted to the three Boltwood boys and adopted their parents and grandparents as surrogate kin. Her employers, in turn, apparently dispensed advice and critical guidance.²⁰ She was loyal despite their criticism, the heavy work of their increasing numbers, and their many moves among Amherst, Goshen, Hartford, and Washington, D.C. Packing up houses, checking on stored items, arranging the transport of belongings, comparing prices, preserving foods, helping the senior Boltwoods (when their own maid was called away), and caring for the ill kept her steadily occupied. One can surmise the difficulty of her domestic work, for although she was in her mid- to late twenties, she wrote frequently about trying to regain her strength so that she could return to work. Her letters evidence

¹⁷ Idella Parker, who was a maid to Pulitzer Prize-winning author Marjorie Rawlings, titled her autobiography *Idella: Marjorie Rawlings’ “Perfect Maid.”* Like Maher, she refers to herself (albeit ironically) in the possessive, by her first name and her occupational identity.

¹⁸ “Peggy” is the usual Irish nickname for “Margaret.” “Maggie” appears to be the nickname the Dickinsons gave to Maher; she was called “Margaret” by the Boltwoods. I surmise that the Dickinsons used “Maggie” to differentiate her from her predecessor Margaret O’Brien, of whom they were less fond. For a discussion of the ways servants are stripped of identity, see Stanley 1984, 32.

¹⁹ The archivist for the Boltwood Collection dates the letters 1867–69. However, based on genealogical and internal evidence, I believe that they extend at least to 1871.

²⁰ Boltwood’s invasive commenting on her servant’s “Bad habets” is a common practice for employers. Judith Rollins describes a radius of privacy whereby the employer limits and de-limits privacy: the employer has inroads to the domestic worker’s life—feeling free to ask private things—but the reverse is not allowed (1985, 164).

her patience and sense of self-worth. Maher refused to be manipulated; she would, however, manipulate a situation to her own ends to preserve her job and dignity (letters, March 2, 1869; March 24, 1869).

Clarinda Boltwood must have implored her maid to return to work during the terminal illness of Maher's father. Her self-possession is evident in her reply: "I cant tell you when to come home for i dont know When I can as of corse I must tend to my father death bed you Will not Blame me" (letter, June 4, 1868). This apologetic ending phrase is common to Irish and Hiberno-English usage and expresses a reluctance to be too blunt (Joyce 1910, 9, 192; Ó Néill 1996, 26). In Maher's handling it also acts as an indirect reprimand, as if to say, "you had better not blame me." In another incident that shows Maher's spirit, the senior Boltwoods hoped to hire her temporarily before her intended departure for California. When they learned that she had already been engaged by Edward Dickinson, they ceased to speak to her and said that if she came to their house they would order her out like a stranger. Maher, distressed, reports to their daughter-in-law:

I was not in to father Boltwood sence I went to see you only once and then no one spok to me father went true the kitchen But he did not spak to me it was when Mr. shephard was sick and often sence I met Mother and father in the street and the did not spak the reason I was told they have to me is when I left Mrs: tolcott they came down after me to go to work there But I could not go for I was injaged to Mr Dickenson 2 weeks before I could go there and you know that I dont want to disapoint any person or Brake my word if i be Poor and working for my living I will always try to be rite if can [let] me be blamed as I will they said that I did not care for any of there family and that when I would go in to the house that I would be ordered out as any was But I am sorry that I had to make so much trouble to any person if it was the will of the lord not inflect me with so many troubles as I had I would be in hartford with you where I will always call my home. (letter, March 2, 1869)

The brunt of the senior Boltwoods' anger was evidently meant for Edward Dickinson. Instead it fell on Maher. Although she does not write of her own anger, her report of the incident to their daughter-in-law was a way to communicate her feelings and make sure that the story came first from her.²¹ The ill will of so important a family as the Boltwoods was not to be taken lightly. Maher had adopted them as surrogate family, had recently

²¹ Elizabeth Haiken and Jack Pressman aided me in this interpretation of the letter.

lost both of her own parents, and was making preparations to leave her sister indefinitely. The behavior of the senior Boltwoods was hurtful and threatening.

In her letter about the incident Maher held out hope of returning to Clarinda Boltwood, but she knew it was false hope: "if Ever get Back to live with you I hope I will be a grate dale kinder to you there I used to be" (March 2, 1869). It may have been an offering to soften the truth that both knew. A year and a half later Maher still evoked an idea of her return in a warm image of Boltwood and the newest baby, Fanny, that turns on her labor: "How glad I would to do the Work in the kitchen and you and Baby in bed taken a nap" (letter, November 2, 1870).²² Maher had earlier written to Boltwood that Edward Dickinson had offered her more money, and she concluded her November 1870 letter by mentioning the money she had saved and the silks and furs she was buying. By then it was obvious to both Boltwood and Maher that the latter was not leaving for California and would stay with the Dickinsons. Not only was she making more money with them, but, through her own admission, the work load was lighter: "All that is in the house is very fond of me and does every thing for my comfort in fact the are to[o] kind to there help . . . there is one grate trouble that I have not half enough Work so that I must play with the cats to Plase Miss Vinny you know how I love cats" (letter, April 6, 1869).

Maher's decision to remain at the Homestead and shift her strong loyalties to that family can be attributed to a host of advantages. Although she was deeply attached to the Boltwood children, they may not have been sufficient comfort against the loneliness she experienced first in Washington and then in Hartford. Against the loss of the Boltwood boys, though, she gained proximity to her eight Kelley nieces and nephews. Even with the financial help they received from Lucius Manlius's parents to supplement his librarian's salary, the junior Boltwoods could not compete with the wages Edward Dickinson was capable of paying.²³ The Dickinsons were permanently settled in Amherst and past child-raising years, which eased Maher's workload. Not having "half enough Work" may have been a result of not laboring alone; there were other servants who could help haul fuel or lift washtubs. The larger Homestead staff on whom Maher might rely, the particular style of the Dickinsons as employers, and the number of Homestead adults engaged in household duties seem to have

²² During my 1996 visit, I found that this letter had been dated "[1869?]" by the archivist, but internal and biographical evidence indicates that it is from 1870.

²³ Dudden notes that the differential between servants' wages in middle-class and elite homes was as much as 70–200 percent in the early twentieth century and surmises that it would have been similar in the nineteenth century (1983, 323).

resulted in less critical surveillance and a less singular burden.²⁴ These combined factors conspired to keep Maher in Amherst despite the initial strangeness of the Dickinson household and the lure of California gold that had drawn her brothers, and so many other immigrants, west.²⁵

Daily work

It is difficult to reconstruct the life of a nineteenth-century domestic servant in America. Many could not read or write, and the occupation left so little personal time that, in most cases, it precluded the writing of diaries even for those able and so inclined (Holt 1990, 88–89). Diaries and books are few, but some letters have been preserved.²⁶ The nature, too, of servants' work discourages history: rather than leave marks behind, each day brings the wiping away of traces. The silence of the work's aims and modes challenges those who seek to decipher the workers' lives a century later. One must usually rely on the employers' primary materials—diaries, letters, account books—or on recollections of the servant's descendants.²⁷ At times, even the accounting records prove inadequate. Often a hired person was listed only by first name or the task performed. It is unusual for anyone outside the family or community to know even the names of domestic

²⁴ This is not to say that the work was light in the Homestead. When the *New York Express* deplored women who stayed in the wretchedness of the needle trades rather than take up the "light work and kind appreciation" of domestic service, Parker Pillsbury replied, "The work is never 'comparatively light' in genteel households. Never" (Dudden 1983, 195).

²⁵ However, Maher may not have been completely content to remain at the Homestead. A great-niece believes that she intended to go west, and Dickinson knew of at least one decision, in the spring of 1873, not to relocate to California (C.K., telephone conversation with author, April 24, 1997; Dickinson 1958, letter 388).

²⁶ Books by domestic workers seem to have been written largely after retirement unless they stem from the slave-narrative tradition, as in the case of Harriet Jacobs ([1861] 1987). See also *An Old Servant* 1917; Lawton 1925; Holt [1906] 1990; and Parker 1992. Holt's book includes "The Life of an Irish Cook" (88–92) and "The Life of a Japanese Servant" (159–73). There are exceptions; some servants kept diaries (see Stanley 1984).

²⁷ In July 1994 I interviewed two granddaughters of William Kelley, who raised his ten children at Kelley Square while his Aunt Margaret and parents Tom and Mary were in residence. I continue to exchange materials and phone calls with one of the granddaughters. I also interviewed Tom and Mary Kelley's youngest granddaughter, daughter of James. The latter family primarily resided in Springfield, but William's clan continued to live as neighbors to the Dickinsons until Martha Bianchi (the last of the line) died. Although we discussed family events that occurred about one hundred years ago, I find their stories to be consistent with the Dickinson literature (see Bianchi 1932; Bingham 1955; Sewall 1974; Howe 1986; Wolff 1986).

servants—except, perhaps, as an accident of an employer’s renown, when they may figure in the employer’s biography in footnotes or an appendix. With such scant documentation, even the simple question of where Maher slept—the location of her “home”—defies an easy answer.

Nowhere is it specifically stated that Maher was a live-in maid, but it seems likely from the circumstantial evidence. The literature on service suggests that such a maid would live in, and the Homestead’s floor plan supports this possibility (fig. 3).²⁸ There were three small undesignated rooms on the second floor of the kitchen wing, with a staircase between, and an unfinished attic on the Homestead’s third floor (Sewall 1974, opposite 143). Three small rooms above the kitchen would be the least desirable in the house. Most likely, these hot, noisy rooms were designed for and occupied by servants.

Neighbor—and, later, Dickinson scholar—Millicent Todd Bingham recalled that in the last four years of Lavinia’s life, Maher spent mornings working at the Homestead and afternoons in her own home in “No Man’s Land” beyond the railroad tracks, and then returned in the evenings to sleep at the Homestead (1955, 477). According to Kelley descendants, Maher had her own apartment in the four-family house at Kelley Square (C.K., interview with author, Amherst, Mass., July 26, 1994), but the Amherst town censuses for 1870 and 1880 list her as a resident of the Homestead (Leyda 1960, 2:149, 324). In the *Amherst Directory* for 1895—when she was still a Homestead servant—Maher’s residence is listed as Kelley Square or “house Depot opp. freight house.” Teamster Thomas Maloney is noted as her boarder (*Amherst Directory* 1895–97, 84). If Bingham is right that Maher returned to sleep at the Homestead, then perhaps she went home each afternoon to cook for her boarders first. On Lavinia’s death in 1899, Maher, at the age of fifty-eight after about forty-five years of service, would have slept under her own roof in Kelley Square (Sewall 1974, 610).

Providing heat, light, and water was at the heart of daily chores in the nineteenth-century household, according to Bingham, who recalls that most New England houses were heated by open fires, alone or in combination with wood stoves (1955, 113). In Dickinson’s childhood, the family made the transition from an open hearth to a woodstove (Brose et al. 1976, 6–7). Bedrooms and other rooms were heated by Franklin stoves. Throughout the day, particularly in winter, all of these fires had to be fed and adjusted, fuel carried in, and ashes hauled away. The constant tending

²⁸ On service in nineteenth-century America, see Lawton 1925; Beecher [1841] 1970; Katzman 1978; Diner 1983; Dudden 1983; Jacobs [1861] 1987.

of fires may have been one of the reasons, along with convenience to employers, for having servants live in.²⁹ The subject of numerous household guides, the making of a hard-coal stove fire was an exact science that required great skill and “must be on the cook’s mind during the day” (Katzman 1978, 124). A wood-burning stove was nearly as daunting. When Dickinson baked, she had to pay continual attention to wind movements and “other atmospheric vagaries” in addition to adjusting the stove for the wood’s hardness or dryness, which determined the rate of combustion (Bingham 1955, 114). To determine heat levels, the cook put her hand in the oven and counted until forced by the heat to withdraw it, and then made temperature adjustments accordingly. Not only was stove management primitive and complex, but the demands of stove upkeep were constant, causing one woman to declare the cook stove the “black beast of despair” (quoted in Dudden 1983, 131).

Water for the nineteenth-century household normally came from an outside well, although some homes had a well beneath the kitchen (Bingham 1955, 113). When the Dickinsons returned from nearby North Pleasant Street to the Main Street mansion in 1855, the move was accompanied by renovations and expansions, including the addition of a kitchen wing with both an indoor water pump and a brick hearth for heating water (Sewall 1974, 322 n). Water pitchers in every bedroom would have been refilled daily and indoor plants watered by Maher. In fine weather, potted ferns filled the Franklin stoves. The poet maintained a conservatory attached to the house’s east wing that required daily tending. During the day, an out-house probably accommodated servants and employers, and, until indoor plumbing was installed in the 1880s (Holland 1994, 178), Maher had to carry down slops each morning (from chamber pots or commode chairs).

Lighting was provided by whale-oil lamps or tallow candles made at home. Lamps were cleaned and filled daily, a task that demanded a great deal of time and attention because carelessness could be fatal (Bingham 1955, 113; Dudden 1983, 128–29). Soot created by oil lamps and open fires had to be cleaned away each day. The Dickinson home was filled with marble-top tables and mantles, finely carved mahogany furniture, and Brussels carpets, and white patterned wallpaper adorned the parlor (Bianchi 1932, 34). The family entertained or read into evening, and the poet was known to burn a lamp through the night. The Homestead on Main Street, where Maher spent thirty years of her work life, was enormous, with a double parlor and entrance hall that ran the length of the house, a

²⁹ Dudden quotes scholar Bettina Berch’s argument that “from the servants’ point of view, living in was a fringe benefit for the *employer*, rather than the *employee*” (1983, 221).

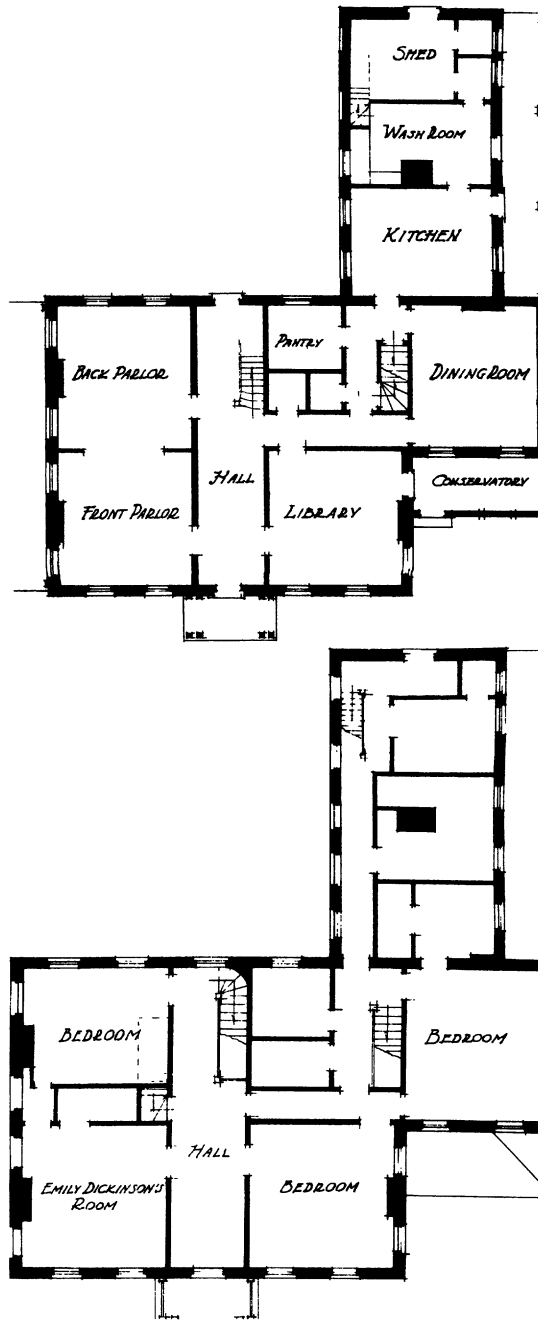


Figure 3 Dickinson Homestead, May 1916. These plans of the first floor (top) and the second floor (bottom) depict the house as it was during Maher's tenure. Courtesy of the Jones Library, Amherst, Massachusetts.

formal dining room, two staircases, and four large bedrooms on the second floor (see fig. 3). Maher would have been constantly employed removing dust and soot. In May 1874, Dickinson wrote, “Vinnie says Maggie is ‘Cleaning House’” (Dickinson 1958, letter 412). Given the home’s size, however, Maher must *always* have been cleaning house.

Most items used or consumed by the family were produced at home, and meals were prepared from scratch. In the Dickinson household, three meals were served each day at set times—and when times were not set, a maid would prepare as many meals as there were family members. (In the periods when there was no maid, cooking meals and cleaning up was primarily Dickinson’s responsibility.) Breakfast—consisting of such fare as meat, potatoes, and brown bread—preceded or followed “morning devotions” when the family prayed together (Dickinson 1958, letters 42, 58). In addition to cooking for the four Dickinsons and their guests, Maher often prepared breakfast for Austin, even after he moved with his wife into their own home next door in July 1856 (Leyda 1953, 266). She also often “put up a lunch” for him when, after 1883, he took long drives in the country with his lover, Mabel Loomis Todd (Maher 1897, 9–10).

“I was making a loaf of cake with Maggie,” wrote the poet to her cousins in August of 1884 (1958, letter 907). Even with the arrival of a permanent domestic servant, Dickinson continued as the principal family baker.³⁰ To bake bread, crackers, a half-dozen pies, several loaves of cake, and a dozen tarts was one day’s baking (Bingham 1955, 118). Dickinson’s duties also included the making of puddings, jellies, and currant and malmsey wines (Brose et al. 1976, 9). Throughout the day maid and mistress worked in steady proximity. Maher helped Dickinson with baking, and Dickinson dried the plates that her maid washed (Dickinson 1958, letter 311). Sewall imagines a scene in which he “can hear them chattering as they did the dishes together—quick remark after quick remark. . . . After all, what brings two minds closer together than dish washing at the same sink?” (letter to the author, February 9, 1996).

³⁰ Edward Dickinson’s stated preference for his daughter’s bread was probably a choice not between her bread and a bakery’s but between hers and a maid’s. Katzman notes that in the mid-nineteenth century bakeries were uncommon, even in large cities. In 1850, less than 10 percent of the bread consumed was made in bakeries and that figure had only risen to 25 percent by 1900 (a figure that varied widely from urban to agrarian settings, elite to poor households). It wasn’t until 1870 that commercially made crackers and biscuits became available (Katzman 1978, 129). Strasser seems to disagree with Katzman (see her first chapter, “Daily Bread” [1982, 11–31]). Given the agrarian nature of the Amherst environs, I speculate that bakeries were few and that baked goods were produced at the Homestead during Dickinson’s lifetime. See also Cowan 1989 on the changes in commercial milling that led away from quick breads to those more time consuming to produce.

The most arduous task of the nineteenth-century household was laundry and ironing. Because it was so wearing, domestic workers frequently negotiated lower wages in exchange for having the laundry hired out to someone else (Stansell 1986, 13).³¹ Laundering in the Homestead was conducted in a washroom behind the kitchen, where water could be pumped and heated in a copper kettle (Beecher [1841] 1970, 292). A full day would be devoted to at least four separate washes (white, coarse white, flannels, and colors), with enough fuel, water, and tubs for the wash, rinse, "bluing," and starch cycles. White fabrics were put up to soak in warm water the night before, and all items were wet down, scrubbed, boiled for approximately thirty minutes—while the maid turned the fabric so it would not scorch or yellow—and rinsed twice in cold water. Extra hands would be needed to wring out, shake, and hang the laundry (Parker 1992, 31–32). Catharine Beecher's 1841 *Treatise on Domestic Economy* devotes thirty pages to all aspects of washing, including soap making, stain removal, dyeing, and hanging and pressing laundry (308–37). A second day was spent ironing, which necessitated lifting heavy, hot irons, and a third day was occupied with mending (Katzman 1978, 122–25). When she was younger, Dickinson was responsible for piles of mending in addition to doing fine needlework. Once a maid-of-all-work was in place, she may have given up mending but continued her needlework as part of an elite woman's duties.

A domestic servant's day and week, in an elite household, had a certain routine. As soon as the first of the day's three meals had been cooked and served, the table was cleared and plates and pots washed, dried, and put away. Fuel was carried in and ashes removed in anticipation of feeding stove fires for the next meal's preparation. Throughout the day baked goods were made, furniture dusted, floors swept and washed, slops emptied, beds made, water drawn for cooking, plants watered, lamps cleaned and filled, doors answered, visitors greeted, and errands undertaken. Weekly chores included the thorough cleaning of bedrooms, parlor, library, entrance hall, staircases, kitchen wing, and dining room. Mattresses were turned and aired, stove and fireplace flues cleaned, silver and glass polished, butter churned, and soaps made. And, of course, laundry, ironing, and mending took three days. Seasonally, other tasks were added, such as food preservation at harvest and preparations for Thanksgiving. Edward

³¹ It was easiest for household workers in large urban centers such as Boston and New York to negotiate with their employers about having the laundry hired out (Stansell 1986, 13). In her 1901 diaries, Inez Godman writes of taking a seventy-five-cent reduction in pay (reducing her weekly salary to \$2.75) to have the laundry hired out (Katzman 1978, 85).

Dickinson's commencement tea was an annual social rite, and he is known to have hosted at least one family reunion, in 1883, for about five hundred people (Sewall 1974, 42 n). To keep up such a routine, a woman needed robust health. Former servants frequently cited physical exhaustion as a reason for leaving the occupation (Dudden 1983, 194–95).

"This moment the sun shines, Maggie's hens are warbling, and a man of anonymous wits is making a garden in the lane to set out slips of blue-bird. The moon grows from the seed," wrote Dickinson in the spring of 1881 (Sewall 1974, 633). The Dickinson Homestead was a self-sufficient property straddling Main Street, which the poet described as a farm (Dickinson 1958, letter 412).³² On the north side stood the house, a large barn, an ice house, other outbuildings, and acreage for a vegetable garden, apple orchard, and fruit trees. The barn housed horses, pigs, and a cow, while chickens, dogs, and cats roamed the yard. Maher was responsible for the chickens and for Lavinia's innumerable cats, each with its own milk dish (Sewall 1974, 633). Across Main Street, there was a 17.5-acre meadow often planted with rye (Brose et al. 1976, 6). The Dickinson orchard and garden may have sustained the family with fruit and vegetables through the year, and extra hands were hired during harvesting of the orchard's cherry, quince, peach, and apple trees and to bring in the oats and rye (Dickinson 1958, letters 45, 49, 60).

Care of the sick normally was shouldered by the women of the house, and temporary help hired to manage the housework for the duration. In the Homestead the enormous physical and mental strain of nursing was shared with servants (Dudden 1983, 130–31). Maher showed a talent for nursing and was summoned by all of the Dickinsons when a health crisis arose in either of the two houses (Leyda 1953, 266). She shared in the nursing of Mrs. Dickinson—an invalid much of her adult life—including "sitting with her" through the night in the years after she suffered a stroke (Dickinson 1958, letter 610). Maher also took care of the poet when she suffered her eye ailments and nursed both Lavinia and Emily in their last illnesses (Sewall 1974, 256).

³² "Vinnie and 'Par' [Ward] are abetting the Farm in Papa's absence" (Dickinson 1958, letter 412). Although Dickinson still was calling it a farm in May 1874, after the late 1830s Amherst began shifting away from self-sufficiency in food production to reliance on outside markets (Erkkila 1992, 4). However, many families hung onto the old ways of self-sufficiency and household exchange as protection against the "vagaries of the market" (Holland 1994, 154). Fiscally shrewd Edward Dickinson hedged all bets. The Dickinsons, and others of their class, had never relied solely on farming. Edward dealt in real estate, was an insurance agent, and practiced law, as did his peers (Lucius Boltwood, e.g.). His father-in-law, Joel Norcross, a Monson farmer, was known as a shrewd entrepreneur. For these men, building town, college, and government were compatible with the management of relatively self-sufficient households.

When Dickinson described Maher as “warm and wild and mighty,” she was naming another important healing function her maid performed: tending to the spirit of the Dickinsons, providing a calming force and an emotional salve as needed by the various family members (Dickinson 1958, letter 827). That Dickinson was highly excitable and apparently in need of a “genial influence” is well documented in her own letters and biographies, although she often chafed at the remedies devised by her concerned parents (letter 36). Her father may have insisted on Dickinson as family baker not only because of her skill at it but also because he observed its positive effect on her. Sewall suggests that “for a person of her sensitivities, no encounter would have been trivial” (1974, 533), and Maher’s temperament was a crucial antidote for Dickinson’s sensitivities. Four months after Maher’s arrival, Dickinson noted, “I do not cross my Father’s ground to any House or town” (1958, letter 330). Maher’s protective presence seems to have made Dickinson’s retirement from public society definitive. There are countless stories of uninvited visitors who received flowers and kind words from Dickinson through Maher before being sent on their way (Leyda 1953, 266). Dickinson used Maher not merely as a screen or social buffer—a frequent role for domestic servants—but to maintain her invisibility and her complete separation from the social world of town, as she neither paid nor received calls (Dudden 1983, 115–16).

In time, Maher came to play a similar role for Lavinia too, a situation that blurred the distinctions between skilled domestic labor and emotional work (Romero 1992, 21).³³ She wrote to Dickinson cousin Clara Newman Turner that Lavinia “cant get a long with things that she have no write to be troubled with it will always be so as far as I see” (Maher 1891). Throughout the tense 1897 Dickinson-Todd lawsuit over land that Mrs. Todd alleged had been promised to her by Austin, now deceased, Maher sat beside Lavinia while her niece and nephew sat behind (Bingham 1945, 369). Leyda describes Maher as a pillar of the Homestead and “a protective bulwark—keeping intrusion from the poet, and pain from the poet’s sister. Emily Dickinson’s letters show a more active function for Maggie, too—a fount of stubbornness and decision and invincible belief. Her healthy presence made her as vital to the skeptic poet as any member of ‘the peculiar’ race of Dickinsons” (1953, 261). Thus Maher cared not only for the house but for the other “needs” of its occupants as well.

Domestic workers had a seven-day workweek, putting in at least ten hours a day, with a full working day averaging eleven to twelve. Even with the customary two afternoons off, the domestic worker served at least

³³ Catharine Beecher’s *Domestic Receipt-Book*, e.g. suggests that making good bread is about *good care* (Dudden 1983, 174–75).

seven to eight hours before leaving. With the transition from “help” to service and the changing social habits of employers, not only did the domestic worker’s day stretch late into the evening, but she remained on call regardless of the day or hour (Dudden 1983, 179–80). Although Homestead mistress and maid shared many tasks, the formality of the Dickinson routine, the constant flow of visitors, and an invalid mistress meant that Maher’s hours extended into the evening and, at times, through the night. With no written contracts, domestic servants could be given additional duties without warning, including assignments outside the employer’s home. When her nephew was born, Dickinson offered the services of Maher to her sister-in-law (Dickinson 1958, letter 443), and Lavinia assigned Maher on more than one occasion to do “general housework” for Mabel Loomis Todd, when Todd was preparing Dickinson’s first volume of poems for publication. For one of these assignments, Maher went from her duties at the Homestead to the “Dell,” the Todds’ home, where she worked from 3 P.M. until 8 P.M. every day for three months. She received no additional compensation (Maher 1897, 3; Longworth 1984, 412–13).

In nine years of service, Lavinia remembered O’Brien having one good dress (Bingham 1955, 413). O’Brien must have been without the kind of family network so crucial during illness and old age, and the marriage that enabled her to leave service represented a significant social and economic gain. Service was an occupation of last resort for those without skills or other options “who struggled to find ways to support themselves along the fringes of destitution and dependency” (Dudden 1983, 203). Thus, turnover was high, and women sometimes rushed into hasty marriages to escape service and made sure, whenever possible, that their daughters worked at other occupations. However, both O’Brien and Maher remained in the Dickinsons’ employ for uncharacteristically long tenures (nine or ten and thirty years, respectively), which may say as much about the lack of options for poor women in the Connecticut Valley as it does about Edward Dickinson’s ability, as a senior member of the Amherst elite, to offer steady employment when others could afford to hire only seasonally.³⁴ Their long Homestead tenures also may have had something to do with the latitude of power allowed them there. The strain of deference rituals—a growing feature of much service and contributory reason for the high turnover—did not seem to characterize Homestead employment (Katzman 1978, 178–79; Rollins 1985, 168).³⁵ The descendants of William Kelley and his

³⁴ Some families hired servants seasonally, as finances allowed, to help with canning, spring cleaning, or a new baby. This is the type of casual employment practiced by the junior Boltwoods in the late 1860s.

³⁵ Dudden points out that “since the ‘product’ in housework was ill-defined and differed from one employer to the next, ‘errors,’ in any case, might be merely differences in taste or

father, Tom, both Dickinson employees, claim that the two men (and likely their great "Aunt Mag" too) "liked [Emily Dickinson's] attitude because she was the same with everyone. She was not standoffish. She was not conscious of class distinctions," but "Austin and the father and mother were a different story. [Emily and Lavinia] valued the service they got from their servants. But not Austin" (Evans and Moran, interview with the author, Sunderland, Mass., July 24, 1994).

The art of service

With its three doors, bright yellow casements, and pale green walls, the Dickinson kitchen was the social hub for family, servants, and visiting neighborhood children. Austin studied there as a boy and college student, and it was by the stone hearth that Emily and Austin talked long into the night, while "the just are fast asleep" (Sewall 1974, 96). At evening time, pails of milk were brought to the kitchen by Timothy Scannell, who worked in the barn (Bianchi 1932, 19). Once Lavinia and Emily began to split the work of the household, and the poet took on the baking and cooking, this heart of the house became her domain. Later, when Maher managed the kitchen, her nephews, William and James, would come up the hill to visit. They frequently encountered "Miss Emily" there and conveyed private messages to her correspondents. They were rewarded with warm pieces of her cake—"but if Lavinia was there, they wouldn't get any!" (C.K., interview with the author, Amherst, Mass., July 26, 1994).

As Judith Rollins learned in her study of contemporary domestic work, it is not uncommon for employers to hire a domestic worker for one reason—cooking or help with a new baby, for example—but find that their needs change over time to companionship (1985, 121). Emily and Lavinia initially had the same needs for a servant. In 1850, when Edward Dickinson advertised for a maid-of-all-work, the poet and her sister were young women with busy social lives whose parents hosted great numbers of visitors. They needed, then, someone with whom to share the volume of work. For Lavinia, housekeeping continued to be the primary need for a good many decades. She found cause to write thirty years later, "Maggie is not quite so strong as I wish" (Leyda 1960, 2:326).³⁶ Emily, however, was

habit . . . but domestics might find their employers' versions . . . enforced as not merely preferred but correct" (1983, 175). According to Sewall, some of this exactness and the accompanying strain for employees describes conditions at the Evergreens, Austin and Sue Dickinson's home, where servants apparently were ordered to back out of the room (letter to the author, October 25, 1993).

³⁶ However, Maher's role for Lavinia did change at some point. In the Dickinson-Todd lawsuit in 1897, Lavinia's testimony went as follows: "Q: Miss Dickinson, did you ever

going through profound changes that altered her needs. The arrival of a permanent maid-of-all-work was critical to her defining herself as a poet.

Scholars believe that the poet's vocation was clear to her by the late 1850s. A few years into the steady employment of O'Brien, Dickinson began grouping her poems and making books. During the critical and highly productive years 1858–62, Dickinson sewed her small stab-stitched books, each with about 20 poems (Dickinson 1979, x–xii). With the help of her Norcross cousins, she was placing orders for highly academic books, and, for perhaps a year, writing a poem a day (Sewall 1974, 537–38; St. Armand 1984, 19). Of this period, poet Robert Creeley has said “that’s when she goes for broke and writes Higginson. That’s when the authority of her ability must have utterly been possessed, possessive. . . . And that’s of course the time too when she begins to make decisive changes in her whole proposal of herself to the world” (Creeley 1986, 50).

Dickinson's phenomenal literary industry in this period depended on the presence of a maid. When O'Brien married and left Homestead service after ten steady years, Dickinson commented on her departure's effect: “Besides wiping the dishes for Margaret, I wash them now, while she becomes Mrs. Lawler, vicarious papa to four previous babes. Must she not be an adequate bride? I winced at her loss, because I was in the habit of her, and even a new rolling pin has an embarrassing element, but to all except anguish, the mind soon adjusts” (1958, letter 311). Dickinson wrote spitefully of O'Brien's improved circumstances, which must have immediately, if temporarily, created domestic upheaval and thrust Dickinson once again into long hours of cooking and cleaning. Saddled with more responsibilities and less time to write, she complained, “‘House’ is being ‘cleaned.’ I prefer pestilence. That is more classic and less fell” (letter 318). However, Dickinson's grumbling eased when a regular maid was installed at the Homestead and her own domestic load was shifted and lightened.³⁷ Her practice of making bound books commenced in 1858, and she ceased binding them in 1864, a period framed by O'Brien's tenure (Dickinson 1979, xi). This increased productivity declined at the time of O'Brien's departure, leading scholar Ralph Franklin to claim that Dick-

employ labor? A: No. Q: Do you mean that you never hired any servants? A: Does he mean Maggie?” (Bingham 1945, 359). By Lavinia's own admission, Maher had become more of a companion to her by 1897.

³⁷ In *The American Frugal Housewife*—a well-used manual in the Homestead—Lydia Maria Child “tried to distinguish between a woman's legitimate hiring of assistance and her immoral purchasing of leisure” (Dudden 1983, 125). This seemed to be a governing tenet in how the Dickinson family approached household work, insisting on carrying so much responsibility when many of their peers had shunned such hands-on work.

inson's poetic drive was "somewhat spent" in the late 1860s (Dickinson 1979, xii–xiii). Dickinson was without steady service for three and a half years, until March 1869, when Maher's services were engaged. Not long afterward, her book making recommenced.

Dickinson's correspondence also dropped dramatically in the 1866–69 period. Editor Thomas Johnson comments that the number of known letters for this period is by far the smallest of her mature years. "Psychologically she was dormant. The great poetic drive was suddenly at an end" (in Dickinson 1958, 448). Between O'Brien's departure and Maher's arrival, Dickinson wrote twenty letters, about a third of the number she had produced in the decade of O'Brien's employ. The only other period in which Dickinson's correspondence dips this low is in the late 1840s, when her sister was living away from home, their mother was bedridden, and Dickinson managed the household alone. With Maher's arrival in 1869, Dickinson's letter writing returned to its levels during O'Brien's tenure and steadily increased over the subsequent years.

A number of factors may have influenced Dickinson's decreased literary output in these periods. Her eye ailments, for instance—particularly troublesome in 1864 and 1865—could have had a debilitating effect on her ability to read and respond to her correspondence or write poems (Dickinson 1979, xii–xiii). Clearly, though, being the household cook of three daily meals cut dramatically into Dickinson's time and level of concentration in the years before 1855 and during the three-and-a-half-year gap between O'Brien and Maher. Rather than being "psychologically . . . dormant" or her drive "somewhat spent," Dickinson was busy. She "winced" at the loss of her maid because it affected the "habit" of her writing. The Dickinsons' shift to full-time service had "opened a window" for the poet. Employing permanent domestic workers allowed women of Dickinson's class to "realize new possibilities" and "represented a gain in time, energy, and human possibilities" (Dudden 1983, 240). The ongoing employment of O'Brien and Maher at the Homestead meant more concentrated and dependable writing periods for Dickinson. Their service directly enabled the ongoing activity of a working poet.

Texture of the text

"The quiet weave of the fine linen stationery" (Smith 1992, 16), creamy paper laid out on a small writing table, pin holes, thread: book making. There is a transformative power in turning individual poems into a linked document—in a book's accretion of language and meaning. For a servant working around a table laden with sheets of paper, it would be impossible

not to know a poet was at work. The maid who cleans the bedroom, who holds her employer's most intimate objects (and physical body), knows more about that person than anyone. At times, the two Margarets would have lifted Dickinson's handmade books, the thread to bind, and gently replaced them on the cleaned table. When asked if she had anything to do with Dickinson's poems, where and how they were kept, Maher replied, "She kept them in my trunk. . . . They were done up in small booklets, probably twelve or fourteen tied together with a string" (1897, 13).³⁸ As with her physical body and space, the poet entrusted her "language" to the care of her maid, who was thus fully cognizant not only of the poet's occupation but of the exact nature and sizable output of her literary industry as well.

When Dickinson was bedridden during her final illness, Maher tended to her. Perhaps then, when Maher changed the sheets and tucked pillows behind Dickinson's head, did the poet make Maher promise to burn her poems once she died. Dickinson had asked her sister to burn her correspondence, and this Lavinia did (Bingham 1945, 16–17). The poet's niece writes of witnessing, at age nineteen, a tearful scene when Maher sought the advice of Austin and Sue Dickinson about the conflict posed by her pledge to burn the poems (Bianchi 1932, 59–60).³⁹

³⁸ The trunk that carried Maher's possessions from County Tipperary and later to the Homestead was probably the receptacle for Dickinson's poems. Maher's few possessions may have been stored in a chest of drawers provided by her employer while other items were kept not far away at Kelley Square. When Dickinson's four-drawer bureau overflowed with letters, shawls, and collars, Maher may have offered the use of her empty trunk. After Dickinson died, it would have been Maher's task to sort the poet's possessions, disbursing the clothes and sorting the papers in the bureau. At that point, she may have reclaimed her trunk and moved the poems stored therein to the emptied bureau where Lavinia "found" them. In a conversation with me (Amherst, Mass., April 22, 1997) Polly Longworth speculated that, since Maher described the "finished" documents, or hand-sewn books, among the contents of her trunk, it may have been the loose sheets, the works-in-progress, that were at hand in Dickinson's bureau. I am grateful to Longworth for this discussion and for sharing Maher's deposition with me.

³⁹ "There were copies of poems sent her friends, variants and fragments found lying loosely in boxes and drawers; but inside her own bureau were the little packages tied with all sorts of cotton strings for hinges, with her most cherished correspondences—all marked to be burned at her death. She had seen it coming and had even made Maggie promise to carry out her wishes, as Maggie sobbed out to us, torn by her own conflicting loyalties. This was understood by Aunt Lavinia and my father and mother as no more than the final gesture of her unconquerable mortal shyness—something that had no longer any hold on the immortal Emily within her—and only the letters from others were destroyed" (Bianchi 1932, 59–60). Bianchi has long been considered an unreliable source. However, when queried about Bianchi's correctness and reliability in the above passage, Sewall wrote, "I understood from Mrs. Bingham that ED had told *Vinnie* to burn her letters, etc., but *not* the poems. I'm not

If this indeed happened as described, then the two women who had guarded the poet's writing life had radically different responses to what were probably deathbed promises. Later, however, Lavinia was key in actively promoting her sister's work. She was aided in this, of course, by her maid's disobedience, as the bulk of Dickinson's opus may well have been saved by Maher's independent thought and action. In the end, this does not seem a surprising act for a "warm and wild and mighty" woman, whose supremacy reigned in the Homestead kitchen, who guarded the poet's writing life, and who mediated between Dickinson and the world. The poet, who exerted her own mighty force in the Dickinson clan, seems to have met her match in the indomitable spirit of her maid. In some ways, Maher's "disobedience" may be evidence of her seventeen-year acculturation in that household (Murray 1996, 289). As an extension of the latitude the servants had been given, Maher's spirited act may be one that her poet-mistress would have applauded. Perhaps it is even one that she foresaw when she divided her literary holdings, giving the less important documents to her more obedient sister and instructing Maher to burn the poems.

In many ways, Maher was the perfect guardian for Dickinson's work. Not only did she come from a culture that considers the poet the most important member of society, but the Maher (or Meagher) family had provided poets and scholars to South Tipperary for hundreds of years (Ó Néill 1996, 14–15). The great number of poets in South Tipperary "undoubtedly had a great effect on the taste and literary interests of the people" (15). Taught Latin, Irish, English, and Greek by secret schoolmasters, some nineteenth-century Irish farmers studied old Gaelic manuscripts in the evening or conversed in Latin about the poetry of Virgil and Ovid (11–15; Maher 1954, 12). One might say, then, that on some level Maher knew exactly what she was doing when she refused to burn the poems. Anguished by the seriousness of breaking a deathbed oath, as Bianchi reports, Maher's literary sensibility, shaped in County Tipperary and reinforced at the Homestead, made preserving Dickinson's poems a difficult but inevitable choice.

After the poet's death, Maher continued to abet Dickinson's literary enterprise. She cleaned and cooked for Mabel Loomis Todd while Todd prepared Dickinson's poems for a printed volume. In response to Todd's gratitude for the help, Maher recalled, "I always told her I wanted no compensation: that I was doing it because she was editing Miss Emily's

sure, though, that she had it right. I know nothing about Bianchi's relations w/ Maggie. Bianchi may be right in this instance" (letter to the author, September 19, 1994).

poems for Miss Dickinson” (1897, 4). We are indebted to Maher too for the only known visual image of the poet. The daguerreotype by which she is recognized today was disliked and discarded by the family—but saved by Maher. When the first volume of poems went to press and a likeness was needed, Maher made the photograph available (Bingham 1945, 224–25).⁴⁰ Although she herself is largely erased from the Dickinson narrative, Maher was instrumental in making sure that her mistress was not silenced or “defaced from history” (Gates 1987, 104).

The intimate region of the unsaid

Silence is all
we dread.
There’s Ransom
in a Voice —
But Silence
is Infinity.
Himself have
not a face.⁴¹

Domestic workers were generally instructed to be silent. This expectation encouraged a maid’s invisibility, and the long hours and the exhaustion of domestic work meant that there was hardly time for a maid to inscribe herself through language. Poet Kathleen Fraser notes that “writing *is*, in part, a record of our struggle to be human, as well as delight in reimagining/reconstructing the formal designs and boundaries of what we’ve been given. If *we* don’t make our claim, the world is simply that which others have described for us” (1987, 47). If writing records and defines us against the defacement of silence, Dickinson’s literary work propelled her to the foreground while domestic labor relegated Maher to the background as one more silent, material prop for the poet’s genius. Ironically, it is the roster of such invisible support personnel that “allows the practice of art

⁴⁰ This daguerreotype is now the possession of Amherst College.

⁴¹ These eight lines end a letter-poem sent to Susan Dickinson in autumn 1873. Hart and Smith’s edition reproduces the entire text with *Dickinson’s* line breaks, as given on her own manuscript (Dickinson 1998a, 194; Dickinson manuscript collection, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass., bms AM 1118.99b). Johnson turned these eight lines into a quatrain in his editions of the poems and letters (Dickinson 1955, 868; 1958, 512), and Franklin retained Johnson’s quatrain in his 1998 edition of the poems (Dickinson 1998b, 1126–27). The phrase “intimate region of the unsaid” is from an essay by poet Kathleen Fraser (1988, 153).

making to appear as the ultimate expression of individual freedom" (Phillips 1995, 172) and perpetuates the myth of the independent artist.

Dickinson entrusted her life and letters to her servants—and trusted them to carry her to her grave. Even so, the servants have remained largely invisible in the story, as if her selection of pallbearers broke such a religious and social taboo that it was unspeakable. At the time, several local Yankees claimed surprise at Dickinson's choice of Homestead workmen Dennis Cashman, Tom Kelley, Daniel Moynihan, Dennis Scannell, Stephen Sullivan, and Patrick Ward. In the Puritan culture of Amherst, funerals were a protonarrative of the deceased person's entire life and spiritual state (Wolff 1986, 230–31). That no one has commented on the significance of this aspect of her funeral—an unusual choice that appears to have broken class and cultural taboos—is one indication that the audience for this final narrative was not the Anglo-Protestant community.⁴² Dickinson chose, in this case, to speak to the Irish immigrant and poor community of Amherst, in an unambiguous gesture of honor and recognition.

Neither the making of Dickinson's poetic art nor the emigration of her servants and their families to stake a claim in this country is an unusual story—now or in the American past. The further one gets in time from the life of the artist, the more her genius appears singular and the less visible becomes the social context of the artwork's production. Through the workings of time, Margaret Maher and her peers have been erased from the Dickinson narrative: what and who were once visible and audible in the poet's life have become forgotten or hidden. The Irish concept of one being a half and two composing a whole describes how the distanced places of "women" and "poetry" come together in this story. It is the doubling of lives, through the joint efforts of Maher and Dickinson, that registers the full text and creates a whole new map to the place of a woman poet—and a maid-of-all-work.

San Francisco

References

- Amherst Directory*. 1895–97. Annuals. Special Collections, Jones Library, Amherst, Massachusetts.
- Beecher, Catharine E. [1841] 1970. *A Treatise on Domestic Economy*. New York: Source Book Press.

⁴² Leyda's *Years and Hours* includes contemporary descriptions and comments on the funeral. Although St. Armand wrote that "every detail of the ritual had as many allegorical resonances as did the emblems in a Rossetti painting," he did not examine the pallbearer choice (1984, 74). See also Sewall 1974; Wolff 1986; and Farr 1992.

- Bianchi, Martha Dickinson. 1932. *Emily Dickinson Face to Face*. Boston: n.p.
- Bingham, Millicent Todd. 1945. *Ancestor's Brocades*. New York: Harper.
- . 1955. *Emily Dickinson's Home*. New York: Dover.
- Boland, Eavan. 1995. *Object Lessons: The Life of the Woman and the Poet in Our Time*. New York: Norton.
- Boltwood, Clarinda. 1863. Letter to Lucius Boltwood, August 17. Boltwood Family Papers, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Free Public Library, Detroit, Michigan.
- Brose, Nancy Harris, Juliana McGovern Dupre, Wendy Tocher Kohler, and Jean McClure Mudge. 1976. *Emily Dickinson: Profile of the Poet as Cook*. Amherst, Mass.: Hamilton Newall.
- Cowan, Ruth Schwartz. 1989. *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave*. London: Free Association Books.
- Creeley, Robert. 1986. "The Girl Next Door." In "Listening for the Invisible," ed. Michael Cuddihy, special issue of *Ironwood* 28 (Fall 1986): 38–50.
- Dangerfield, George. 1976. *The Damnable Question: One Hundred and Twenty Years of Anglo-Irish Conflict*. Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown.
- Dickinson, Emily. 1951. *Emily Dickinson's Letters to Dr. and Mrs. Josiah Gilbert Holland*. Ed. Theodora Ward. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- . 1955. *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*. 3 vols. Ed. Thomas H. Johnson. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- . 1958. *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*. 3 vols. Ed. Thomas H. Johnson. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- . 1979. *The Manuscript Books of Emily Dickinson*. Ed. Ralph W. Franklin. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- . 1998a. *Open Me Carefully: Emily Dickinson's Intimate Letters to Susan Huntington Dickinson*. Ed. Ellen Louise Hart and Martha Nell Smith. Ashfield, Mass.: Paris Press.
- . 1998b. *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*. Variorum ed. Ed. Ralph W. Franklin. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Diner, Hasia. 1983. *Erin's Daughters in America*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Dudden, Faye E. 1983. *Serving Women: Household Service in Nineteenth-Century America*. Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press.
- Erkkila, Betsy. 1992. "Emily Dickinson and Class." *American Literary History* 4(1): 1–27.
- Fanning, Charles. 1990. *The Irish Voice in America: Irish-American Fiction from the 1760s to the 1980s*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky.
- Farr, Judith. 1992. *The Passion of Emily Dickinson*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Fraser, Kathleen. 1987. *Notes Preceding Trust*. Santa Monica, Calif., and San Francisco: Lapis.
- . 1988. "Line. On the Line. Lining Up. Lined with. Between the Lines. Bottom Line." In *The Line in Postmodern Poetry*, ed. R. Frank and H. Sayre, 152–74. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

- Gates, Henry Louis, Jr. 1987. *Figures in Black: Words, Signs and the "Racial" Self*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hansen, Karen V. 1994. *A Very Social Time: Gender, Work, and Community in Antebellum New England*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Hine, Darlene Clark. 1992. "International Trends in Women's History and Feminism: The Juncture of Race and Class." *Journal of Women's History* 4(2):125-33.
- Holland, Jeanne. 1994. "Scraps, Stamps, and Cutouts: Emily Dickinson's Domestic Technologies of Publication." In *Cultural Artifacts and the Production of Meaning: The Page, the Image, and the Body*, ed. Margaret Ezell, J. M. O'Keeffe, and Katherine O'Brien, 139-81. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Holt, Hamilton. [1906] 1990. *The Life Stories of Undistinguished Americans as Told by Themselves*. New York: Routledge.
- Howe, Susan. 1986. "Women and Their Effect in the Distance." In "Listening for the Invisible," ed. Michael Cuddihy, special issue of *Ironwood* 28 (Fall): 58-91.
- Jacobs, Harriet. [1861] 1987. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Joyce, P. W. 1910. *English as We Speak It in Ireland*. London: Longmans, Green; Dublin: M. H. Gill & Son.
- Katzman, David. 1978. *Seven Days a Week: Women and Domestic Service in Industrializing America*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lawton, Mary. 1925. *A Lifetime with Mark Twain: The Memoirs of Kate Leary, for Thirty Years His Faithful and Devoted Servant*. New York: Harcourt, Brace.
- Leyda, Jay. 1953. "Miss Emily's Maggie." In *New World Writing*, 255-67. New York: New American Library.
- . 1960. *The Years and Hours of Emily Dickinson*. 2 vols. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press.
- Longworth, Polly. 1984. *Austin and Mabel: The Amherst Affair and Love Letters of Austin Dickinson and Mabel Loomis Todd*. New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux.
- Maher, James, ed. 1954. *Romantic Slievenamon in History, Folklore, and Song: A Tipperary Anthology*. Mullinahone (Tipperary): Kickham Street; Tralee: Kerryman.
- Maher, Margaret. 1891. MS Am 1118.1, Dickinson papers, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.
- . 1897. Deposition of Margaret Maher, Witness Called by the Plaintiff. Lavinia N. Dickinson v. Mabel Loomis Todd et al., The Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Hampshire County Superior Court.
- Miller, Kerby. 1985. *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.
- Miller, Kerby, and Paul Wagner. 1994. *Out of Ireland: The Story of Irish Immigration to America*. Washington, D.C.: Elliott & Clark.
- Murray, Aife. 1996. "Kitchen Table Poetics: Maid Margaret Maher and Her Poet Emily Dickinson." *Emily Dickinson Journal* 5(2):285-96.
- An Old Servant. 1917. *Domestic Service*. With preface by Mrs. George Wemyss. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin.
- Olsen, Tillie. 1979. *Silences*. New York: Delacorte.
- Ó Néill, Eoghan. 1996. Unpublished manuscript (letter). Collection of the author.

- Parker, Idella. 1992. *Idella: Marjorie Rawlings' "Perfect Maid."* Gainesville: University Press of Florida.
- Phillips, Patricia. 1995. "Maintenance Activity: Creating a Climate for Change." In *But Is It Art? The Spirit of Art as Activism*, ed. Nina Felshin, 165–93, 390–91. Seattle: Bay.
- Rollins, Judith. 1985. *Between Women: Domestic and Their Employers*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Romero, Mary. 1992. *Maid in the U.S.A.* New York and London: Routledge.
- Ryan, George. 1978. "Shanties and Shiftlessness: The Immigrant Irish of Henry Thoreau." *Éire-Ireland* 18(3):54–78.
- St. Armand, Barton Levi. 1984. *Emily Dickinson and Her Culture: The Soul's Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sewall, Richard. 1974. *The Life of Emily Dickinson*. New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux.
- Smith, Martha Nell. 1992. *Rowing in Eden: Rereading Emily Dickinson*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Stanley, Liz, ed. 1984. *The Diaries of Hannah Cullwick: Victorian Maidservant*. London: Virago.
- Stansell, Christine. 1986. *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789–1860*. New York: Knopf.
- Strasser, Susan. 1982. *Never Done: A History of American Housework*. New York: Pantheon.
- Takaki, Ronald. 1993. *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America*. Boston: Little, Brown.
- Wideman, John Edgar. 1994. *Fatheralong: A Meditation on Fathers and Sons, Race and Society*. New York: Pantheon.
- Wolff, Cynthia Griffin. 1986. *Emily Dickinson*. New York: Knopf.