PART I
Biography – The Myth of "the Myth"

1
Architecture of the Unseen

Aífe Murray

Emily Norcross Dickinson was pregnant with the future poet and arrived at 280 Main Street in Amherst, Massachusetts with her one-year-old son Austin in tow. She surveyed the brick "Homestead" which commanded a rise and took in a view of the Pelham Hills. The west side of this house was to become her family's new quarters. A gracious Federalist-style home, the place was considered "over the top" when it was commissioned seventeen years earlier by her father-in-law Samuel Fowler Dickinson who, by local standards, had achieved a small fortune as lawyer and businessman. Her husband Edward had just bought the west half of the house to staunch the bleed of his father's ruin. To accommodate the young family, Samuel Fowler and his wife and daughters compressed themselves into the east half. An impetuous and passionate man, decidedly reckless, Samuel Fowler had committed his entire fortune in founding Amherst College aimed at preparing young men for the Congregationalist ministry. He also established Amherst Academy to educate local youth. His great granddaughter would later refer to him as a "flaming zealot for education and religion" (Bianchi 76–77).[1]

Four of Samuel Fowler's sons quit the town in order to separate themselves from their father's financial debts – a disaster that the eldest, Edward, hoped to forestall by buying half the house, paying his father's interest on the Homestead mortgage, and disentangling his father's debts (Wolff 29). A former legislator and town clerk, once active in town committees, and a famous orator, Samuel Fowler was, by the 1820s, financially and politically bankrupt. Those failures would loom over his children like a foreboding alter ego.

Emily Norcross packed up kitchen, furniture, and clothes while her one-year-old toddled amidst the dismantling of one home and reconstruction of another. The one she was leaving was a tenuously possessed (because of her father-in-law) portion of the widow Jemima Montague's house – and she was about to step again on terra infirma. These were assuredly tense times for the young couple setting up housekeeping next to the source of trouble. The central hallway bisecting the house front to

back was surely not as ample a division as Emily Norcross Dickinson would have liked.

Austin was almost four and Emily just two years old when Lavinia, the youngest, was born. The day after "Vinnie's" birth, the mortgage on the Homestead was foreclosed. Two months later the entire house was sold to General David Mack Jr, who had arrived to manufacture palm leaf hats for which Amherst was to become the national production center. Samuel Fowler left the Homestead in disgrace, moving his remaining family to Ohio where Lyman Beecher had offered him a post at Lane Theological Seminary. Edward and family, however, stayed on as renters and moved to the roomier east half vacated by his father. For about six years the Macks and Dickinsons continued this intimate, "pretty perpendicular" living arrangement until Edward purchased a house with two acres around the corner on Pleasant Street, allowing the family home to pass out of Dickinson hands (JL 52).

Driven to restore the family fortune and what he saw as his rightful place in the Amherst pantheon, attorney Edward Dickinson embarked on a scheme to buy back his father's house when it came on the market in 1854. To consolidate his wealth Edward may have engaged in questionable practices (such as dipping into his wards' inheritance) to raise the $6,000 necessary to purchase the place and another $5,000 to "repair" it.[2] In the spring of 1855, fifteen years after he had left, Edward reclaimed the Homestead – a symbol of his regained status and an act that marked the "zenith of his career" (Mudge 77). A central piece of the Homestead remodeling scheme was a reordering of the family's spatial boundaries. The Pleasant Street house, where the family had spent fifteen happy years, had been dominated by a central stone chimney. Intellectual life had found a center in the kitchen where a table facing a north window was always "burdened with books, including Webster's *Dictionary*, pen, and ink paper" (Mudge 46–47; JL 129). Instead of the "*kitchen stone hearth*" where the teenagers gathered to do homework and talked long into night "when the just are fast asleep" – and where the reproduction of everyday life was central – this former heart of the household was reassigned, in the Homestead, to its own distinct area (JL 118). The Main Street "mansion" was grander and a much more formal abode that "required" the ongoing assistance of a maid-of-all-work. In quick order the Dickinsons hired Margaret Ó Brien, their first "permanent" maid.

Before hiring a permanent maid, the family got by on their own labor. Austin was responsible for the chickens and horse, with general oversight of the grounds and laborers, while the two girls were trained in sewing, baking, and other domestic arts. As was the common practice and family preference, temporary help was hired seasonally or for specific tasks such as laundry and dressmaking. While the children were young, helpful relatives pitched in and Delia (surname unknown) was most likely one of several long-term (or permanent) helpers hired to keep the household on track until the children were old enough to contribute. But life was to be conducted differently on Main Street; the finer house required grander domestic plans.

"We shall be in our new house soon; they are papering now" Dickinson remarked on the progress in mid-October 1855 (JL 180). The renovations that lasted from May

until November followed the then new architectural premise that "everything in architecture . . . can be made a symbol of social and domestic virtues" (Downing 23; quoted in Fuss 5). A dining room and conservatory were added to the eastern side of the house. The new domestic wing, consisting of kitchen, washroom, and shed, jutted from behind the dining room out toward the barn. With its own staircase to the second floor, there were three rooms above designed for live-in or temporary servants who could be segregated largely to their own wing except when serving at table, cleaning, or sewing (McClintock 149). This configuration, in which Dickinson would do the bulk of her writing, was a house where divisions between people and functions could be achieved through smaller, highly specialized rooms within a "geometry of extreme separation" (McClintock 168). In this setup, the maid is not supposed to be seen and yet, paradoxically, she must be seen in order to confirm "that class is there and negotiable in stable and unthreatening ways" (Hitchcock 21). Segregated from the family's living quarters, servants and visible signs of their labor were absent. To go from the Homestead's double parlor to kitchen, one now passed through four doors and three passageways; it was much simpler to enter the kitchen from the yard.

I Thought that Hope was Home – a Misapprehension of Architecture (JL 600)

The triumph of what's best described now as the family's "class" change was symbolized and effected by the move from Pleasant to Main Street – with so much encoded in those two names. Life in the house on Pleasant Street was just that and the move to Main Street soberly underlined the centrality of the Dickinsons' civic role and page in history. They went from the "haves" to the "have mores," securing themselves as provincial elites.[3] Noting the house sale, the local paper concluded: "Thus has the worthy son of an honored sire the pleasure of repossessing the 'Old Homestead'" (Mitchell 71). But rather than glide regally, Dickinson takes a bit of wind from the over-puffed family sails by describing their November 1855 move as a straggling party of western pioneers:

> I cannot tell you how we moved. I had rather not remember . . . Such wits as I reserved, are so badly shattered that repair is useless – and still I can't help laughing at my own catastrophe. I supposed we were going to make a "transit," as heavenly bodies did – but we came budget by budget, as our fellows do, till we fulfilled the pantomime contained in the word "moved." It is a kind of *gone-to-Kansas* feeling, and if I had sat in the long wagon, with my family tied behind, I should suppose without doubt I was a party of emigrants!
>
> They say that "home is where the heart is." I think it is where the *house* is, and the adjacent buildings. (JL 182)

The new house and adjacent buildings made a very different dwelling than one shared along a north–south axis some fifteen years earlier. This new configuration

sanctified "home [as] a holy thing," an "Eden" whose "placid portals," for the middle class and elite, were increasingly seen as defense against what the poor represented: degradation of the "street," an eroticism associated with pre-industrialism (before "taylorization" or the scientific management of work advocated by Frederick Winslow Taylor), and the unruly natural world. These were things the accumulating capitalist had had to give up but still yearned for, projecting these qualities onto the poor as when Dickinson's elder nephew referred to African American waitresses as "Lurid Ladies" (JL 59; Roediger 14). Control was the "central logic" of the nineteenth-century upper-class creation and policing of spatial boundaries. Deference rituals – bowing, backing out of the room, uniforms, silence, "invisibility" – helped reduce the employer's anxiety around boundary confusion and class antagonism (McClintock 33, 71–72, 156–71; Stallybrass and White 150). It was this gesture that underscored the Homestead renovations and the addition of a "permanent" maid-of-all-work.

Interestingly, the 1855 move back to the Homestead coincides with a division in Dickinson's writing, for the most part separating Dickinson's pejorative letters about the working class as a group from both her later defense of her servants and the anomalous ways she talked about them – using them as tropes – to underscore a point or advance a plot; both of which I shall describe below. Many things were changing at this time so the division might be coincidental, not simply ascribable to architectural shifts of home life. Dickinson, whom many think of as living outside the tide of events, was privy to the nation's politics and progress. The family subscribed to at least a half-dozen periodicals and discussion of local, regional, and national events was daily mealtime fare (Wolosky 35; Pollit 211–32). Key players in those political dramas were often guests at supper or tea during her father's lifetime. As a young person, Dickinson was vulnerable largely because of her grandfather's fantastic failure and her mother's uncertain health. She despised the Irish and loathed the general grab for the "almighty dollar" even as her father wrested his successfully. Although the encoded fear about ruin was seemingly abated by the move to Main Street, the need to denigrate the poor through differentiation or the impulse to shore-up identity would never be as strong as it was in her early twenties. Like Thoreau, she softened on these topics as she became familiar with and dependent on those not just like her and, in maturing, deepened her understanding of the world. While she never championed causes, and even disparaged those who were bent on "extricating humanity from some hopeless ditch," Dickinson's writing becomes a map of changing tides on class and race (JL 380). They chart the ways identity is formed through a type of humor or commentary that underscores social differences – or what I will call Dickinson's "literary rituals of recognition" – and how race, which was used as a descriptor earlier in her life, becomes a pejorative in later correspondence.

In many ways 1855 was a watershed year, a coalescing point from which to look forward and back. On one side of that date the roles of stableman and gardener seem to have been dominated by African Americans. On the other side those posts came to be largely filled by Irish and English immigrants. On one side, the family managed with the assistance of relatives and alongside help hired for specific or seasonal tasks

but, on the other side, an Irish maid-of-all-work became a domestic mainstay. Tasks that had once been Austin's – care for the animals and grounds – were shifted permanently to hired hands.

The 1855 return to the Homestead was definitely an important moment for the family. Her parents met the change eagerly, but it was with mixed feelings that Dickinson registered the move to the "ancient mansion" (JL 52). As it turns out, the formality and new stiffness of life in the "old castle" would have some positive consequences (JL 52). With architectural divisions operating like an invisible handler and the addition of a maid as a buffer between writer and intruding world, Dickinson was able to give flight to her imagination and create her identity as a writer. With Irish immigrant Margaret Ó Brien at the stove, Dickinson's contributions decreased to wiping the plates her maid washed or baking all the breads and puddings (JL 311; Leyda 1: 152). While people do not necessarily live in rooms exactly in the ways prescribed by architects, one might safely conclude that spatial formalities were largely adhered to while Edward and Emily Norcross Dickinson ruled the roost. By the time household management passed to their daughters, the organization of daily life shifted. Dickinson was spending more of her day drafting poems in the kitchen and nearby writing table. Class strictures about time and place increasingly eased by the time the "good and noisy" Margaret Maher joined the fold as maid-of-all-work (Holland 170; Murray 697–732; JL 690). Deference was not in their parlance, for Maher spoke to her mistress as "Emily" (JL 610).

Dickinson's correspondence maps dominant issues spanning the nineteenth century from the War of 1812 to the Civil War, when there was a great deal of apprehension, among all classes of people, about the profound societal change they were experiencing, driven in part by new accumulations of wealth. The taylorization of time was so painful that people both scorned and yearned for a more natural, chaotic and erotic, past (Roediger 95–96, 14). Manifestations of apprehension included the associations of alcohol use and dirt with the working class, and a middle-class effort to monitor those issues through the temperance movement, a nativist response to Irish immigrants, the burgeoning evangelical Protestantism, and anxiety around "whiteness" and social position. As Betsy Erkkila and other critics of the mid twentieth century have framed it, many of Dickinson's poems are concerned with distinctions (Erkkila 8–12). Her letters also focus on distinctions marked by color, education, nativity, and space. However, there was a shift in epistolary focus as she matured and consolidated her identity as a writer, the home environs became a writing workshop, and she developed a daily and deepening relationship with her maid and stableman. In time she seemed to gain some appreciation of the nature of those lives intermingled with hers, the lives of poor people.

This essay examines household life before and after the move, first describing the outdoor work, followed by indoor domesticity, weaving in what I know about the servants and their communities. Here Dickinson's correspondence serves as a barometer of her time around such issues as fear about social position, negative response to the Irish, class differentiation, class as a rhetorical device, anxiety monitored through

B1

pigmentation, reaction to alcohol, and racial hostility. Analyses of the meaning of the later years and the impact of servants on her writing life conclude this perspective on Dickinson's daily life.

Abetting the Farm

James, surname and background unknown, was among the earliest laborers to stack Dickinson wood. In Edward's absence, an eight-year-old Austin was given to direct James to put up wood in the family's "keeping room" and Edward's law office (Leyda 1: 40). The boy rapidly assumed many outdoor tasks from care for livestock to landscaping, in part because of the aptitude he showed for it. Even while away at boarding school and later law school, Austin would continue his oversight of the grounds and those who worked there, with his sister remitting reports and requesting that he render decisions to "do as you think best" (JL 156). When Austin left home as a thirteen-year-old to attend Williston Academy in Easthampton, neighbor William Washburn took over care of the Dickinson chickens and Edward looked after the horse. In spring they'd usually get seven eggs a day, but occasionally as many as eleven, and would send some home to Mrs Washburn in exchange for William's efforts (JL 1, 2). This type of neighborly exchange, of labor for goods, still governed much life in the village during Dickinson's childhood. Years, even decades, would pass before the purchase of goods and services would predominate. When that became the case, Austin's chickens devolved to maid-of-all-work "Maggie's hens" (JL 690).

By the early 1850s, with Austin in Boston and Cambridge, several African-American men were employed in managing the Pleasant Street stable and grounds, including Old Amos who "weeds and hoes and has an oversight of all thoughtless vegetables" (JL 49). Amos Newport was grandson of a man who had been caught as a young boy by slave traders on the coast of Africa, brought to Springfield, Massachusetts, and who later successfully sued for his freedom (Smith 101). It was surely Newport's presence that put Dickinson in the mood of using the term "Massa" for her brother's overseeing of the grounds just as she commenced describing Newport's vegetational duties. He was a very old man when he worked alongside his son, Wells, who was employed in the Dickinson barn, probably on the heels of Dwight Cowan who looked after the horse for a period in 1851 (Smith 101–02; JL 43, 44).

Dickinson could not have grown up in Amherst, the daughter of Edward and Emily Norcross Dickinson, and been unfamiliar with African Americans and the dominant national issue of slavery or its fissures close to home. Throughout her life, Dickinson seems to have had some contact with members of Amherst's small African-descent community, which made up about 2.7 percent of the town's population for much of the mid nineteenth century (prior to the end of the Civil War). Poorer than their white neighbors, they were Protestants, mostly Massachusetts and Connecticut natives, many of whom worked as day laborers and domestics, although there were also barbers, butchers, teamsters, and hostellers in their ranks and always a large number

of paupers (Smith 36). As the child of the college treasurer, there's a good chance Dickinson attended the chapel and Sunday school offered by Amherst College students to faculty offspring, which the children of African-American servants "were allowed to attend" (LeLecheur 7). In 1840, Dickinson would have been privy to dinner talk about the famous Angeline Palmer abduction case, in which her father successfully defended three African-American men who whisked Palmer to a safe-house after it was learned that her employer secretly planned to sell her into slavery when the family visited Georgia (Smith 23–27). Dickinson's interest in the case might well have been piqued by the fact that Angeline was eleven years old, just a year older than herself.

When Dickinson stableman Wells Newport left – or "disappeared" as Dickinson put it – in March of 1852, he was succeeded by Jeremiah Holden (JL 80). Subject of Dickinson's most extensive exchange on an African-American servant, Holden managed the stables for the next two years. Soon after his arrival, Dickinson shared with her brother that the new stableman "seems a faithful hand" (JL 80) and "takes good care of the horse" (JL 152). Said to have been an illiterate laborer born about 1820 in Enfield, Connecticut, he was thirty-two years old when he took charge of the Dickinson barn and appears to have been genuinely fond of the twenty-four-year-old Austin, if not, as Dickinson thought, a bit in awe of her brother (Smith 80, 93). In her June 13, 1853 letter to Austin, a student at Harvard Law School, she claimed Holden felt some esteem in his service to Austin. In a literary ritual of recognition, meant to italicize distinctions, Dickinson sets herself and her brother apart from those laboring for them:

> I gave Jerry your messages, at which his teeth increased, and his countenance expanded – he laughed also for some time, as if taking the joke moderately and wasting none of it.
>
> Austi – there's nothing in the world that Jerry wont do for you. I believe he thinks you are finer than anybody else, and feels quite consequential to think of serving you. Send him a word sometimes, for it affects him so. (JL 127)

Holden's loyalty to Austin Dickinson was surely in part loyalty to a good job – and whatever protection such a powerful employer could yield – at a time when northern African Americans were beginning to be pushed out of jobs they had traditionally held and lived with the intensified threat posed by the Fugitive Slave Act (Pierson 1987). The Act was part of the Compromise of 1850, supported by congressional representative Edward Dickinson, whereby escaped slaves could be hunted down in free states. Licensing such violence against persons unleashed what eyewitness and escaped slave Harriet Jacobs described as a "reign of terror" in which the "bloodhounds" of the north cooperated with the "bloodhounds" of the south and, consequently, upward of 20,000 African Americans fled to Canada from the "free" north (Jacobs 191). Though Edward Dickinson voted for the Act, no evidence suggests that the Dickinsons forced African Americans out of their posts; nor is it clear whether their replacement by white workers occurred through attrition. Perhaps some of both, but not in the case of Holden, for when he gave notice Dickinson commiserates with

her brother: "Jerry is so kind and pleasant that I cant bear the thought of his going away" (JL 157). Cobbling together a livelihood was a challenge; poor families, both white and black, moved up and down the Connecticut River seeking work. Holden, with his wife Adaline Pharoah and those of their six children who survived infancy, wound up in New Haven, Connecticut following his Dickinson stint before some of the family migrated back to Massachusetts (Pierson 154; Smith 80–81).

Another family racked by poverty was that of English immigrant Richard Matthews, who replaced Holden in the stable by June 1854, possibly the first of a succession of white stablemen. Perhaps Dickinson "immortalizes" Matthews in this summer scene:

> 'Twas just this time, last
> year, I died.
> I know I heard the Corn,
> When I was carried by the Farms –
> It had the Tassels on –
> I thought how yellow it would
> look –
> When Richard went to mill –
> And then, I wanted to get
> out,
> But something held my will.
> (Excerpt FP 344, about summer 1862)[4]

Matthews may have stayed on staff for a decade or more with his wife Ann in a small house behind the Dickinson's where they watched nine of their sixteen children die young. Matthews himself died in the alms house (JL Appendix 2, p. 959). Dickinson was particularly fond of the family and on more than one occasion supplied them with necessary provisions – in Dickinson's surviving letters there are several mentions of Matthews and his son "Little Pat" (who with Vinnie was "abetting the Farm in Papa's absence" (JL 412). Her February 1863 note to her recently orphaned cousins, Francis and Louise, is typical of how Dickinson wrote about her servants after 1855:

> [E]ven Dick's wife, simple dame, with a kitchen full, and the grave besides, of little ragged ones, wants to know "more about" you, and follows mother to the door, who has called with bundle.
>
> Dick says, in his wise way, he "shall always be interested in them young ladies." One little young lady of his own, you know, is in Paradise. That makes him tenderer-minded. (JL 279)

In 1869 Matthews and "Little Pat" were succeeded by Irish immigrant Timothy Scannell, and then his son Dennis. Other Irish immigrant laborers followed them in barn and on grounds, including Pat (possibly Patrick Ward), Stephen Sullivan, "gracious boy at the barn," and a host of seasonal laborers and messengers, many of whom

were immigrants or of Irish descent (JL 907). Massachusetts-born white Yankee Horace Church took over the Dickinson gardens after Amos Newport in 1854 and seems to have been followed in the post, after a thirty-year tenure, by an unnamed African-American man, possibly the family's first "permanent" laborer of African descent in decades. Although what task he may have done at the Homestead is unclear, Irish immigrant Tom Kelley was a clear Dickinson favorite. He had the entrepreneurial spirit of Edward Dickinson, and not only was he the first to comfort her when a dear friend was mortally stricken – "I ran to [Tom's] Blue Jacket and let my Heart break there – that was the warmest place" – but Dickinson also selected him to be her chief pallbearer (JL 752). His sons became messengers for the poet, often rewarded with a pat on the head ("What a good boy, Willie") and baked goods, but as James Kelley told his children, if Lavinia was there, he and William wouldn't get any (Murray 723).

Queen of the Court, If Regalia be Dust, and Dirt

While this was going on outside on the grounds, inside women and girls busily wielded spoons and knitting needles. In those early days of the nineteenth century women in agrarian communities got by with "helps" – often young, unmarried women from the same community who, if their families could not support them, traded their help for a home, albeit temporary. Or families hired a woman for a specific task or event, such as during confinement when a new baby was born, or in illness when women of the family nursed the sick family member with the hired girl managing some of the housework. This is the pattern followed in the first years of Edward and Emily Norcross's marriage. In 1836 Delia, surname unknown, was managing so capably when Emily Norcross Dickinson was absent in Springfield that Edward wrote that "Delia is pleasant and gets along very well" (Leyda 1: 32).

Delia appears to have been replaced around 1838 by Edward's twenty-four-year-old sister Catharine in an exchange of help for home. Through assisting her sister-in-law in the gabled house on Pleasant Street, Catharine learned how to manage a household in preparation for her own married life (her younger sister Elizabeth followed suit in the early 1840s). Catherine was not always consistent, though, and Edward instructed his wife to "tell Catherine to be steady, and do all she can to help along pleasantly, and she will lose nothing by it." (Leyda 1: 38). Despite such false starts, Catherine must have in some way aided the process whereby Lavinia and Emily were trained in the domestic arts, for by age ten Dickinson appeared to have been happily assisting mother in "household affairs" (JL 10).

Dickinson's letters throughout the 1840s are what one would expect from a young woman: they recount her social and academic life, news of her family and friends' comings and goings, and how much she misses her correspondents. She was also racked by the question of electing god in a period when religious revivals continued unabated. Letters acknowledged how often household cares delayed or prevented replying.

Otherwise little is said about housekeeping until January 1850, when Dickinson's first complaint is registered. She was "very lonely" and "*alone* – *all* alone" with her sister at boarding school and doing the housework of two and sometimes three, while a sense of vocation nudged:

> . . . we *are* at home – 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 – and really I came to the conclusion that I should be a villain unparalleled if I took but an inch of time for so unholy a purpose as writing a friendly letter. (JL 30)

Dickinson didn't respond well to notions of her social role and railed against her parents' efforts to "regulate" the sisters and "settle" them with housework (JL 182). The dog her father brought home for her, in response to the self-pitying, could not dispel a deep distress; subsequent letters that year reveal ongoing anguish. With two disgruntled daughters of marriageable age who were vexed by their mother's incapacitating neuralgia, the family needed a domestic plan. But more than that, their peers and relatives had hired "girls" – and not just in cases of family life changes (e.g., new baby or a mother's death) or for seasonal tasks. Social habits of employers were altering, and the transition from "help" to service made that apparent (Dudden 179–80). Business and college leaders – many of whose children were close friends with Austin, Emily, and Lavinia – employed at least one "permanent" domestic servant at mid-century. The Boltwoods, Merrills, Fiskes, Howes, Hitchcocks, and Sweetsers each had a maid, a good many of whom were African-American women from the local community (1850 census). With self-mocking glee Dickinson described herself as "queen of the court, if regalia be dust, and dirt" but she was through with that title and her will prevailed so that on March 8, 1850 Edward placed an ad for a maid-of-all-work (JL 36; Leyda 1: 170).

The first known regularly employed domestic worker, hired after the ad appeared, was Mrs Rosina Mack, an Irish immigrant who worked weekly for the family during at least 1851–54. Along with her, or perhaps in her absence, a Mrs Scott was observed at the Dickinson ironing board in 1853 and may have been the African-American Sally Ann Brown Scott who was employed as an Amherst housekeeper from 1843 to 1870 (JL 114; Smith 112). The family appears to have limped by without any maid lasting long, so that by July 1854 Dickinson registered dismay when the family was descended upon by visitors, they had "not a girl," and "this irresolute body refuses to serve sometimes, and the indignant tenant can only hold its peace –" (JL 166).

After the move to Main Street the household would fall into a regular routine upon the securing of Margaret Ó Brien, who was a mainstay for about nine years until she married on October 18, 1865. Dickinson wasn't especially fond of Ó Brien, mentioning her rarely in comparison to her successor, the "warm and wild and mighty" Margaret Maher (JL 907). But of course Dickinson was also preoccupied. In this period Dickinson's greatest output as an artist was achieved (at least as far as the number of

poems copied out into manuscript books goes) and then all but stopped with Ó Brien's departure. Dickinson was angry about losing her maid because she "was in the habit of her" and confided that wielding a rolling pin again was "embarrassing" (JL 311). Even with temporary help from Hannah (surname unknown) and others, she appears to have written little for the next three to four years as she managed meals for her family and their guests (JL 320; Murray 724–25). Dickinson's powers of persuasion achieved a high point when she successfully retained the services of the mighty Margaret despite Maher's prior occupational and emotional claim by another employer and her own desire to start over in California. The "invulnerable" Maher worked in the Homestead on Main Street for thirty years, 1869–99, overlapping with Dickinson's last seventeen years, when life for the Dickinson family was more stable and secure (JL 542). Steady security is hardly what the Dickinson family felt in the 1840s and 1850s, as it took a decade and more for Edward and Emily Norcross Dickinson to claim wealth through political office and savvy investments. Meanwhile, the anxiety that goaded their drive for power was expressed awkwardly and even viciously in their elder daughter's correspondence.

Today's Pauper is Tomorrow's Merchant

In the 1840s and 1850s scholars, legislators, journalists, reformers, and writers "ventured their opinions about the nature and ramifications of class in America" (Lang 129). The concept of "wage earner" emerged in the 1850s when, for the first time in US history, the number of people dependent on wages exceeded those who either worked for themselves or had other means of support (Taylor 26–27 cited in Schocket 47–48). Unlike caste or rank, which were considered forms of enduring natural order, class was purported to be a stage through which one moved on the road to wealth. In magazines to which her family subscribed, Dickinson would have read numerous stories about class mobility and "today's pauper" becoming " 'tomorrow's merchant – the man who labored for another last year . . . this year labors for himself, and next year he will hire others to labor for him' " (Lang 128). But Edward Dickinson, whose father's failure sculpted his adult life, wouldn't tolerate his own family's slide backward while any " 'mere Jacanapes' were 'getting their tens of thousands & hundreds of thousands' " (Erkkila 12). Not immune, such apprehension found its way into his daughter's dream life. On October 21, 1847, when the country was in the midst of another depression, Dickinson wrote to her brother:

> I dreamed a dream & Lo!!! Father had failed & mother said that "our rye field which she & I planted, was mortgaged to Seth Nims." I hope it is not true but do write soon & tell me for you know "I should expire with mortification" to have our rye field mortgaged to say nothing of it's falling into the merciless hands of a loco!! (JL 16)

Not only were people like Jacksonian Democrat Seth Nims getting ahead and challenging the "natural" place of provincial Whig elites like the Dickinsons (Erkkila 10),

but Massachusetts was "overwhelmed" by Irish immigrants. Ireland's hemorrhage framed the emergence of a US working class in which ethnicity, race, and nativity reinforced divisions of labor (Bridges 191–93). At least two things were operative. First, what people don't understand they often fear. Second, there's an impulse to construct an image of "other" for that which one fears becoming – and yet desires. Thus the new Irish Catholic immigrants – along with those of African descent and others not of the "Caucasian race" as Emerson would have it – became that "other" for white elite Yankees (Ryan 58–59). For white workers, made anxious by social upheaval and industrial discipline as well as fears of dependency (in the form of slavery or indenture), the African-American population became "other" – the white workers' complicated receptacle for what they had given up but still yearned for (Roediger 95, 14).

Mimicking her elders, at age fourteen Dickinson professed to hate being thought "common" and shrank from those whose manners she found "rough & uncultivated" (JL 5, 18). Already the local community was parsing itself into attendees at temperance dinners, the "Ladys Society" that met at the Dickinsons' in 1844, and the "Sewing Society" that she disdained in 1850 when it recommenced meeting (JL 1, 4, 30). In a letter to friend Abiah Root, Dickinson remarked about an 1846 revival at Amherst College in which "many hearts have given way to the claims of God" (JL 11). All through the mid-century period, religious revivals were ubiquitous and Dickinson, her family, and friends grappled with electing Christ as their savior as a clear certainty in tumultuous times.

With Irish immigrants locating to Western Massachusetts, Dickinson's Congregationalist minister took pains to detail the "startling facts" of the "Roman Catholic system" and the Irish became a lightning rod for Dickinson's vituperative comments about class (JL 96). The family came face to face, so to speak, with a large mass of Irish immigrants for the first time through Austin's descriptions of his teaching experience in Boston schools. They became the repository for the family's unlovely and discomforting adjustment to a rapidly changing New England. Although nativity data was not collected in the 1840 census, Irish people comprised 3.27 percent of Amherst's 1850 population, or 100 of the 3,057 residents (Reagan 113). A decade later they grew to almost 8 percent of the population (peaking at 15.3 percent in 1900) because of increasing job opportunities, including those projects, such as new rail lines, made possible by Edward Dickinson's civic enterprise. The immigrants settled at the north end of town, where the agricultural college would undergo expansion, and in the East Village, centered around the railroad depot and burgeoning industrial district that threatened to outstrip the importance of the main town of Amherst. Snug between his rye meadow and the train depot stood two buildings that Edward Dickinson leased. By the early 1860s they were occupied by newly arrived immigrants Tom and Mary Kelley, their children, and Mary's parents and three siblings, one of whom was to become Emily Dickinson's "courageous" Margaret Maher (JL 668).

B1

All the Little Irish

After graduating from Amherst College at the age of 21, Austin Dickinson decided to try his hand at teaching. After a brief stint in the nearby town of Sunderland, Austin headed to Boston, where his uncle served on the school board, and by summer 1851 he had found work at the Endicott School. Each morning he stood before "four and twenty Irish boys – all in a row!" (JL 42), many of whom had fled the famine that devastated Ireland in and around 1847. They were a rambunctious lot cooped up in the classroom and Austin registered some difficulty reining them in, as evidenced by his sister's encouraging letters. His contempt for them was surely little concealed, for Austin is remembered as "despis[ing] the common herd" (Sewall 297, 299). Austin's pupils gave as good as they got.

The predominant opinion of the day, among people like the Dickinsons, was that the Irish were little better than animals; according to Ralph Waldo Emerson, a family visitor, the new immigrants were "semi-brutes." His notion that Africans, Native Americans, the Irish, and Chinese would never "occupy any very high place in the human family" was widely held (Ryan 58–59). Along with these other constituencies, the Irish were the subject of scorn and humor in the major parlors of the day. Their national stereotype, imported whole cloth from British media, left the Irish at the receiving end of vicious editorials claiming space in even such "advanced" publications as the *Springfield Republican* edited by close family friends Samuel Bowles and Josiah Holland (Leyda 259–60).

Holland's granddaughter, Theodora Ward, undercut her own compliment by comparing Margaret Maher to an "awkward but faithful watchdog"; similarly Dickinson's contemporary Thoreau likened an old Irish immigrant woman to a ground squirrel (Ward 96; Ryan 59). Developed in British colonial discourse of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the frequent association of the poor with animals, or as subhuman and savage, created boundaries around the "civilized" body of the English, justifying colonization (Stallybrass and White 130–33). Massachusetts was a stronghold for the Know Nothings – the dominant anti-immigrant and anti-Catholic movement in the US – where the party controlled state government (McCaffery). Austin was apparently a sympathizer and he passed the infection along to his children. That the Irish immigrants had a strong pattern of identification with the Democratic Party did not endear them to Whig leader Edward Dickinson, who was associated with two anti-working-class and anti-Catholic movements: temperance and the evangelical Protestantism that claimed Edward among the "saved" as it tented its way across Amherst (Roediger 141; Bridges 178).

This is the milieu in which the Dickinson young people conducted their exchange about the "little Irish" whose presence helped Austin and his sister shape their social class identity. The siblings' anti-Irish exchange was fueled by the family's air of superiority – which took on a class flavor. Austin thought nearly everyone but his sister

Emily was beneath him (Sewall 299). So marked were his attitudes that descendents of long-term Dickinson servants shared their family's understanding that his sisters Emily and Lavinia "valued the service they got from their servants . . . But not Austin" (Murray 723).

For his welcoming ears his sister wrote in June 1851 about systematically doing away with the Irish:

> . . . 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*! (JL 43)

Written likely to amuse and make herself sound smart to her older brother, her request for help in doing away with the new immigrants was just the antidote for Austin's frustrations. In over his head with his classroom charges, he found his correspondence with Emily an outlet. Throughout the summer, fall, and winter she kept up the banter. What she repeated for mutual amusement was "a form of humor which reinforces social difference" (Davidoff 183). In reply to his concern about the visit of an evaluative committee to his classroom, she urges Austin to "keep your courage up and show forth those Emerald Isles till School Committees and Mayors are *blinded* with the dazzling!" (JL 48). Dickinson concludes her next letter, at the end of July, with the disparaging comment: "Wouldn't I love to take a peep at Old Fanueil and all the little Irish, the day of the city fair?" (JL 49).

Before long Austin clamored to get out of there, but he hung on for about eight more months, until the school term was over, much to the dismay of his family who missed him terribly and urged him to "turn the schoolroom key on Irish boys – *Nurse* and all, and walk away to freedom and the sunshine here at home" (JL 57). Up to her arms in soapy water, Mrs Mack was privy to more than she would have liked as the Dickinsons freely expounded on the "Poor little Sons of Erin" (JL 48). "Little" has a despising tone, as when Dickinson writes:

> Little *Emerald Mack* is washing, I can hear the warm suds, splash. I just gave her my pocket handkerchief – so I cannot cry any more. And Vinnie sweeps – sweeps, upon the chamber stairs; and Mother is hurrying round with her hair in a silk pocket handkerchief, on account of dust. (JL 85)

Funny Accidents

With one hand Edward Dickinson gripped cultural conformity as a lifeline and with the other he redesigned the pulse of the region, bringing an influx of new Irish immigrants and a flood of dollars to his coffers. Where in the first quarter of the nineteenth century local farmers had volunteered with evangelical zeal to build Amherst College,

they left it to the new wage workers to expand the railroad and agricultural college, populate the new factories, and staff the households of industrialists and college faculty – the kinds of jobs that were previously the domain of local African Americans and poor whites, often "transients" from Vermont (Smith 2000).

In February 1852 Dickinson was able to report on the general jubilation over the railroad spur joining Amherst to the rest of the world. She claims that the efforts of the Irish immigrant workers would bring glory to Edward and his peers, which quickly brought Emily Dickinson in close proximity to a large population of those she had disdained:

> Since we have written you, the grand Rail Road decision is made, and there is great rejoicing throughout this town and the neighboring . . . Father is really *sober* from excessive satisfaction, and bears his honors with the most becoming air. Nobody *believes* it yet, it seems like a fairy tale, a most *miraculous* event in the lives of us all. The men begin working next week, only think of it, Austin; why I verily believe we shall fall down and worship the first "Son of Erin" that comes, and the first sod he turns will be preserved as an emblem of the struggles and victory of our heroic fathers. (JL 72)

By summer 1852 Dickinson seemed to have come to terms with the Amherst newcomers, perhaps simply because folks in the town lived cheek by jowl, meeting each other in Duell's buying ribbon or getting off the train at "The Crossing." The anti-Irish hostility that animated correspondence with her brother appears to have shifted to comments on encroachment by the new working class – without reference to nativity or race. She found it odd enough to comment to her brother in October 1851: "How funny it seems to me to have you live in Boston, and be having calls from our country tradesmen!" (JL 54). Where before a tradesman would come calling at the home of a country lawyer, even stay to tea as blacksmith Moody Cook was known to have done, Dickinson was more sensitive to social "place" (JL 45).

Dickinson and her sister were amused by the "jocular" reporting of tragedies that befell local factory workers, and the poet pleaded with her friend Josiah Holland, editor of *The Springfield Republican*, to publish more in that vein (Leyda 1: 259–60; JL 133). Writing in the autumn of 1853 to Holland, she again used a form of humor that operates as a ritual of (social class) recognition for writer and recipient when she flippantly requests more reportage of amusing fatal accidents amidst factory hands and the train-riding hordes:

> Who writes those funny accidents, where railroads meet each other unexpectedly, and gentlemen in factories get their heads cut off quite informally? The author, too, relates them in such a sprightly way, that they are quite attractive. Vinnie was disappointed to-night, that there were not more accidents – I read the news aloud, while Vinnie was sewing. *The Republican* seems to us like a letter from you, and we break the seal and read it eagerly. (JL 133)

B1

A twenty-two-year-old Dickinson complained in June 1853 to her brother about their house being crowded daily with the "high and the low, the bond and the free" in pursuit of better fortune, all of which she professed to not understand. In her hope that the crowds would disperse swiftly like locusts and leave the family to reap an ample harvest, she articulated a disjunction between her own father's fiscal reach and accumulation resulting in his children's ability to lead a more edenic life. Too, she sounded dismayed by those arriving by train in search of better opportunity while her own father and his peers similarly sought financial gain in southern and midwestern markets:

> The cars continue thriving – a good many passengers seem to arrive from somewhere, tho' nobody knows from where – Father expects his new Buggy to come by the cars, every day now, and that will help a little – I expect all our Grandfathers and all their country cousins will come here to pass {Amherst College} Commencement, and dont doubt the stock will rise several percent that week. If we children and Sue could obtain board for the week in some "vast wilderness," I think we should have good times. Our house is crowded daily with the members of this world, the high and the low, the bond and the free, the "poor in this world's goods," and the "almighty dollar,{"} and "what in the world are they after" continues to be unknown – But I hope they will pass away, as insects on vegetation, and let us reap together in golden harvest time – that is you and Susie and me and our dear sister Vinnie must have a pleasant time to be unmolested together, when your school days end. (JL 128)

What does Dickinson mean by the high and the low, the bond and the free? Speaking extravagantly though she may be, no one in slave bondage crowded the house. Those bound to wage work, however, could have done so, jockeying with the "high" for the next great chance at the almighty dollar – all of whom were perturbed about the idea of bondage and dependency. She misguidedly distinguished herself as outside these hierarchies, untainted by what would ensure her a high and fixed place, but undoubtedly worried about an opposite outcome. When she tried to make light of these seekers she used the lexicon of abolitionism, by addressing notions of bondedness and freedom, and invoked popular resistance, by the working class, to the degradation of "dependence" or slavery and indenture (Bridges 175, 186; Roediger 68–69; Friedlander 1998). Five years later Dickinson came at it slightly differently when using the term "serf" in reference to stableman Dick Matthews. Both "serf" and "servant" had a sting in the nineteenth century; the latter was used interchangeably with "slave" (e.g., indentured servant) as early as three decades after the war of independence (Roediger 25, 47, 70):

> Good-night! I can't stay any longer in a world of death. Austin is ill of fever. I buried my garden last week – our man, Dick, lost a little girl through the scarlet fever. I thought perhaps that *you* were dead, and not knowing the sexton's address, interrogate the daisies. Ah! dainty – dainty Death! Ah! democratic Death! Grasping the proudest zinnia from my purple garden, – then deep to his bosom calling the serf's child! (JL 195)

This seemingly heartless equation of the loss of the child with flowers was nevertheless qualitatively different from her delight about factory and train accidents. In this case, Dickinson used a working-class figure rhetorically to express an idea with more force and specificity (Ryan 66). That mode of expression represents a shift to a new way of speaking about the servants. No longer just conveying news and incidents of them – such as "then walked round to Jerry's [Holden] and made a call on him – then hurried home to supper" – Dickinson began using servants and working-class figures as tropes (JL 156).

The Surprised Air / Rustics – Wear

In both poems and letters, Dickinson employed servants in generalized and nameless ways to state something more dramatically; this is most especially true at mid-century, in her early twenties when her correspondence became a literary practice ground. Servants helped her reflect on the seasons, as when she wrote to Joseph Sweetser in early summer: "Our man has mown today, and as he plied his scythe, I thought of other mowings, and garners far from here" (JL 190). The end of summer was filtered through "Men . . . picking up the apples to-day, and the pretty boarders are leaving the trees, birds and ants and bees" (JL 656). In a May 1877 letter to Elizabeth Holland she wrote, "Dear Friend I hesitate where you are, but decide to indite my letter to my Sister in 'Alexandria Bay,' as the Irishmen does to his 'Mother in Dublin.'" (JL 502). By 1877, an Irishman's maternal devotion had such cultural currency that Dickinson used it to underscore the strength of her feelings. For her cousins and sister in April 1859, she achieves specificity by taking advantage of the expressive face of her stableman's son: "[t]ell Vinnie I counted three peony noses, red as Sammy Matthews's, just out of the ground, and get her to make the accompanying face" (JL 206).

Early in June 1854 Dickinson wrote to her brother about laborer "Little Pat" – probably Francis Joseph Matthews, son of stableman Dick Matthews. Little Pat was expected shortly to follow his many siblings to the grave. It was education by which Little Pat intended to escape poverty:

> Little Pat holds on yet, tho' I expect every morning he'll be bound out for life, and we shall be in the lurch again. He asked me tonight if I had a newspaper – Why, said I, "Pat, can you read"? "Yes marm" he answered – I asked him what kind of a one he thought he should like – "Oh" said he with the utmost gravity "I want to read the newses." I gave him two Lawrence Couriers, at which he seemed quite overcome – I presume it was a munificence very grand to him – Horace [Church] works finely, and seems to feel just as much interest, as if it was all his own. (JL 165)

Even as she was bemused, she acknowledged how seriously someone like Horace Church applied himself to her family's gardens. Church is Edward Dickinson's

opposite. His simple contentment and satisfaction – where someone else will reap a major benefit – must have seemed quite alien to her. Dickinson found it "pleasant to be liked by such folks, and I love to hear them speak of you with interest" and noted that the "hearts of these poor people lie so unconcealed you bear them with a smile" (JL 127, 337). With such condescending comments she literarily structures difference and identity for writer and reader. Such tropes also show up in poems, as when the speaker figures the visual response of a peasant – a metonym she apparently "reads" and expects her audience to – in the concluding lines of "I'm saying every day":

> Meet me in Arragon –
> My old Gown – on –
> And the surprised Air
> Rustics – wear –
> Summoned – unexpectedly –
> To Exeter –
> (FP 575)

"Afraid! Of Whom am" (dated 1862 by Franklin) uses a male working-class figure to convey temporal fear and fierceness. The porter is a threshold figure whose strength in policing the boundaries of the speaker's home inspires more awe, and is more inevitable, says the speaker, than death. The porter or working-class figure dramatically advances the "plot" not unlike the way Toni Morrison identifies an African-American presence igniting moments of discovery in works by white American writers (Morrison vii–viii, 17, 64). Morrison is simultaneously talking about class but that aspect becomes subsumed by race whereas, with Dickinson's porter, his inferior class status is most visible:

> Afraid! Of Whom am
> I afraid?
> Not Death – for who is He?
> The Porter of my Father's Lodge
> As much abasheth me!
> Of Life? 'Twere odd by fear
> a thing
> That comprehendeth me
> In one or two existences –
> Just as the case may be –
> Of Resurrection? Is the East
> Afraid to trust the Morn
> With her fastidious forehead?
> As soon impeach my Crown!
> (FP 345)

In another poem, the porter's female counterpart is an Irish maid-of-all-work, who is represented as not having the sensibility to recognize a spider's artistry. In her

overzealous efforts to police boundaries between the ordered and the encroaching unkempt world, the maid – a stereotypical buffoon – whisks away ephemera that is a thing of beauty and mastery. The speaker – presumptively female because of the subject matter – may share gender intimacy with "Bridget," but class estranges them (McClintock 140):

> The Spider as
> an Artist
> Has never
> been employed –
> Though his
> surpassing Merit
> Is freely
> certified
> By every
> Broom and
> Bridget
> Throughout a
> Christian Land –
> Neglected Son
> of Genius
> I take thee
> by the Hand –
> (FP 1373)

Darkened Laddy

Stepping back again to the siblings' 1851–52 exchange on classroom battles, and the process by which the working class becomes "unseen," Dickinson wrote to her brother about another Austin hired to pick the family's cherries and the pleasure their mother received from calling the boy-laborer with the name of her sorely missed son. Up in the tree reaching for plump cherries, twelve-year-old Austin Osgood Grout, a white Yankee, was getting brown in the summer sun pouring into the Dickinson orchard behind the Pleasant Street house. But when Dickinson referred to him on June 29, 1851 he's easily mistaken for being of African descent:

> 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. (JL 45)

This is one of a few "racially" inflected comments in Dickinson's letters, and here she conflated race with class. To talk about Grout as a "darkened laddy" was to talk about class using the coinage of the time, associating him with African Americans whose place was "naturally" fixed and depicting those who labored as dark (or brutish,

animal-like). Dickinson's social position in relation to African Americans was never in question. An underlying concern for Dickinson is that if the Grout child could *become* black through laboring in the sun – made startlingly more visible in daylight – then the construct of class, here envisioned racially, could not be taken firmly for granted. People could not be depended on to remain "white" – either free or free from worry about their place. What she hoped for as firm was challenged by Austin Grout's unstable and transitory demarcation (Schocket 47). Who was "white" in this era was in question and transition but whiteness had high value: it was the state that separated one from bondage.

Laborers made "visible," trying to rise above themselves, called into question Dickinson's own precarious place of privilege as a white woman fastened to the provincial elite by virtue of her father's position. But to hinge Dickinson's response to the cherry orchard scene solely on her very real gendered dependency would mean losing sight of the issue of class. Both gender and class tend to be obscured by race because whiteness was a way for people to come to terms with both gender and class: "the formative ambiguities of gender and class were managed and policed by discourses on race, so that the iconography of imperialism entered white middle- and upper-middle-class identity with fundamental, if contradictory force" (McClintock 77).

Same Effect as a Big Mug of Cider

In 1850 Dickinson exhorted her brother to "turn aside as from the *Bottle* snake" (JL 31) and three years later her only negative word about stableman Jeremiah Holden comes in an 1853 parting shot regarding drink:

> Jerry gets along nicely, takes first-rate care of the horse, and seems unusually grand after having a message from you. It has the same effect as a big mug of cider, and *looks* a good deal better. (JL 128)

Because the poor and working class were associated with drink and dirt, Mrs Mack, in vouching for John White, who wished to rent a Dickinson property, appealed on both those counts. Dickinson quoted Mrs Mack's intercession verbatim in a March 14, 1854 letter to Austin, who would have the final word:

> John White is a nice man to be in the house – neat, orderly, clean, and so is his wife – does not drink, she says, and "has took the pledge." Mrs Mack says the only thing is whether he can pay the rent, and he *thinks* he can pay. Mrs Mack would like to have him there – "a great deal better than Morrison." You must do as you think best. (JL 156)

Mrs Mack was quite insistent about the virtues of John White and approached Dickinson a week later about his suitability as a tenant: "wont you write soon about

John White – He is anxious to know, and Mrs Mack wants very much to have him come in there" (JL 158). In no epistolary instance, other than when Dickinson describes her as "Little *Emerald* Mack," does the laundry worker appear to have come in for the contempt Dickinson felt about the Irish as a group. Not only does that group vehemence disappear but so, apparently, does her disdain regarding alcohol. Compare Dickinson's comments about the effects of cider on Holden with her response some fifteen years later, when she observed stableman Dennis Scannell one evening in 1879:

> Dear Ned –
> Dennis was happy yesterday, and it made him graceful – I saw him waltzing with the Cow – and suspected his status, but he afterward started for your House in a frame that was unmistakable–
>
> You told me he had'nt tasted Liquor since his Wife's decease – then she must have been living at six o'clock last Evening –
>
> I fear for the rectitude of the Barn –
>
> Love for the Police – (JL 605)

Tawny Girl

African Americans and Native Americans have largely been invisible in the scholarly narrative of Dickinson and her family. This may be in part because they did not, as groups, suffer her epistolary flares and did not threaten the Dickinson position; any on staff had been largely supplanted by Irish immigrants when Dickinson turned to her servants for company and comfort, especially after 1870. There are few explicit references in her letters to African or Native Americans; she mentions in 1846 the funeral of a "Negro baby" passing the house, twenty years later notes that her sister is in the kitchen trading "Blackberries with a Tawny Girl," and in 1880 describes an "Indian Woman with gay Baskets and a dazzling Baby, at the Kitchen Door" when a community of Native Americans made camp in town (JL 9, 320, 653). Here tawny may refer to a Native American girl or, as with Austin Grout, might describe a white girl whose color has darkened through outdoor labor – essentially referring to class. Her comment about the effects of cider on Jeremiah Holden should probably be read in terms of class negativity, although the remark is very much in keeping with pejorative comments Dickinson made almost twenty years later when an African-American gardener was hired – the "new Black man."

After the Civil War, former slaves from the south scrambled to make a life in the north, but many were destitute and their arrival doubled not only the size of Amherst's African-American community but also its alms house (J. A. Smith 36). New England in the 1880s also experienced a large wave of immigrants fleeing French Canada and Europe and, as Joseph Conforti comments, the "quickened tempo of ethnic transformation began to stir the crude nativism that had flashed in the antebellum decades

of the Know-Nothing reaction to Irish Catholics" (Conforti 209). Perhaps it was these pressures that led Dickinson to write in August 1881:

> We have a new Black man and are looking for a Philanthropist to direct him, because every time he presents himself, I run, and when the Head of the Nation shies, it confuses the Foot –. (JL 721)

She referred to the new laborer as a "what" and with a derisive epithet that was apparently in family parlance but which she attributed to her six-year-old nephew Gilbert. Dickinson asked George Montague to stop by for a missive: "will Cousin, if walking today, please call, as I have a trifle for Cousin Sarah, which I fear to entrust to what Gilbert calls the 'Cloudy Man'?" (JL 716). What's disturbing in Dickinson's letter, though, is her apparently easy repetition of this contemptuous description and her amusement at her nephew's turn of phrase. Cloud (and dark cloud, black cloud, or cloud up) was used derisively about African Americans from the Civil War up to World War II (Logue 339; Lightner 176, 438, 559).

What is tragic about this late letter on the unnamed African-American gardener is that otherwise Dickinson's attitudes about the working class by this time had significantly improved, probably through sustained association – and, perhaps, by virtue of the architectural borders that made clear what "country" the Dickinsons inhabited. She not only largely ceased parroting English colonial discourse in her correspondents around the time of the 1855 move, but even exhibited an understanding of the deep claims poverty made on the lives of the people laboring at the Homestead. Of an unnamed seamstress, Dickinson remarked, around summer 1883, that "the support of a Mother, and almost imbecile Husband and two very sweet little Girls, hangs upon her Needle, so her sight is no luxury, but necessity –" (JL 833). By her life's end she had drawn close to members of the white working class, especially the Irish, although place-holding (or distancing) adjectives still slipped out to explain the "recycling" of a gift: "[Sue] sent me a lovely Banquet of Fruit, which I sent to a dying Irish Girl in our neighborhood –" (JL 790). Her later correspondence, about the new gardener, seems to prove the dictum that northern whites do not mind how "high" African Americans get, as long as they do not get "too close."

> We felt how
> neighborly a thing
> Was the
> invisible
> (FP 1225)

Toward the end of her life, Dickinson's "simple Realm" was composed of her sister, stableman Stephen Sullivan, and maid Margaret Maher, with her brother visiting daily from his home next door (JL 807). As she put it in 1884, of her sister's recitations about a happy visit with the Hollands: "Vinnie still rehearses it to admiring throngs

B1

of which Stephen and I are the thrilled components" (JL 888). By 1870 Dickinson circumvented Victorian architectural prescripts to spend a significant portion of her day in the servants' realm, companionably "making a loaf of cake with Maggie" and, as her cousin noted, composing lyrics in the "cool and quiet pantry, while she skimmed the milk" (JL 907; Norcross 98). She drew particularly close to Margaret Maher, who was a mainstay for the last seventeen years of the poet's life and who had a "temperament" Dickinson described as "sensational" (Bianchi 19). Blurring the distinctions between skilled work and emotional work, Maher was the antidote for a highly strung poet and a salve for the entire family (Romero 21). She was a gifted healer and, though it was normally the job of the women in a family to nurse their ill, this maid stepped into that role (JL 390, 520). Some three dozen letters mention Maher in small and large ways, describing maid and mistress happily "fighting" over giving a gift to a Dickinson family friend and Austin's readiness to make her his sole heir after a "happy egg and toast" one morning (JL 394). And so it was with enormous relief that Dickinson reported in April 1873 – alluding to Bret Harte's *The Luck of Roaring Camp* – that "Maggie preferred her home to 'Miggles' and 'Oakhurst' so with a few spring touches, nature remains unchanged" (JL 388). What stopped Maher from joining her brothers in the California gold fields isn't known. How big a role Dickinson played in foiling her maid's departure cannot be assessed but that she did so is guaranteed.

Margaret Maher not only "came to hold a place of her own in contributing to the vital atmosphere of the house," as the Hollands' granddaughter noted, but looks to have a played a role in saving Dickinson's poems from planned destruction – the poems Maher remembered as being "done up in small booklets, probably twelve or fourteen tied together with a string" that Dickinson stored in the maid's trunk (Ward 96; Murray 726). Dickinson not only depended upon Margaret Maher; that relationship – and surely the close connections she made with Maher's brother-in-law Tom Kelley and other servants – seems to have dramatically shifted her outlook and behavior, about class if not about race. Tom's great-granddaughters, the great-great-nieces of "Aunt Mag," claimed that their forebears "liked [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" (Evans and Moran 1994).

When Emily Norcross Dickinson, pregnant with the poet, arrived at the brick Homestead on Main Street, she could not have predicted how she and her husband would alter the geopolitical compact of the region and nation. Raised by a shrewd businessman father with a large but practical vision, she was reluctant to leave her parents' home in Monson for marriage in Amherst. Seventeen years later she was photographed in black bombazine, garb of a well-to-do Victorian matron. Less than a decade after that would find her ensconced in the enlarged brick house that looked down on Main Street and just about everyone else. Those low and high tides in the family story affected her children, as is most clearly demonstrated in the writing of her elder daughter. Consciously or not, Dickinson engaged on some level with issues

of class and race in her writing. Poor men and women moved in and out of her life, affected her ability to work, worked with her in kitchen and scullery where her servants operate largely unseen, and influenced her life. Even when Dickinson swept herself from the view of Yankee Amherst and into the confines of the Homestead property, traders and tinsmiths knocked at her door, the gardener brought clippings, her maid addressed her envelopes, stablemen daily brought in warm pails of milk, and she dried the plates her maid washed. She was affected by the changing race and class issues of her time and theirs. In large and subtle ways her servants and working-class figures people the fabric of her poems and letters.

Many of the maids', stablemen's and laborers' names have been erased, but a few have been recovered. At the Pleasant Street house and the side-by-side Main Street mansions, these men and women included: seamstresses Mrs Aiken, Miss Baker, Miss Bartlett, and Miss Bangs; Betty, maid; Johnny Beston, laborer; Dennis Cashman, laborer (Dickinson's pallbearer); Cenith, household helper; Horace Church, gardener; Moody Cook, blacksmith; Miss Cooly, household helper; Dwight Cowan, stableman; Delia, maid; "Irish girl," maid; Mrs Godfrey, seamstress; Austin Grout; laborer, Mr Harrington; Henry Hawkins, laborer; Jeremiah Holden, stableman; Miss Humphrey; Mr Hunt; James, laborer; Judah, household helper; James Kelley, messenger; Margaret Kelley, Austin's and Susan's maid; Thomas Kelley, laborer, college night watchman (chief pallbearer); William Kelley, messenger and laborer; Miss Leonard, seamstress; Mrs Mack, laundry worker; Margaret Maher, maid; Marcia, household helper; Francis Matthews, stable boy; Richard Matthews, stableman; Mr Miller; Daniel Moynihan, laborer (pallbearer); Mary Moynihan, Austin's and Susan's cook; "new Black Man," gardener; Amos Newport, gardener; Wells Newport, stableman; Mrs Noyes, seamstress; Margaret Ó Brien, maid; Mr Pierce; Margaret Purcell, Austin's and Susan's maid; Mr Root; Dennis Scannell, laborer (pallbearer); Timothy Scannell, stableman; Mrs Scott, maid; Mr Shaw, laborer; Polly Shaw, seamstress; David Smith, laborer; Stephen Sullivan, stableman (pallbearer); Charles Thompson, laborer, college janitor; Eliza Thompson, household helper; Patrick Ward, stableman (pallbearer); and Mr Whipple.

Acknowledgments

I am indebted to Allan Creighton and Michael Radetsky as close readers and for conversations about class and race these many years. Merle Bachman, Sari Broner, Polly Longsworth, Colleen Lookingbill, and Jane Perry have been unfailingly insightful and encouraging. For clear-sighted editing, opportunity, and support I am grateful to Mary Loeffelholz and Martha Nell Smith. My thanks to Kate Flewelling, Peter Nelson, and especially Kate Boyle for research assistance. I am indebted to the many descendents of Tom and Mary Kelley, but most especially Eleanor Evans, and to Roberta George for our conversations about her ancestor Henry Hawkins and his era. Ellen Louise Hart gave me two opportunities to collaborate in what were especially

pleasing public presentations: a musical and poetry evening to mark *Poetry San José*'s twenty-fifth year and a mixed-media performance and talk at the San Francisco Public Library. A two-year appointment at the Institute for Research on Women and Gender at Stanford University enabled some of this research to be conducted and provided the opportunity to receive responses to these findings from astute audiences at the Graduate Irish Studies Conference held at Claremont Graduate University, and the Emily Dickinson International Society conference in Trondheim, Norway.

Notes

1 For the first five paragraphs, sources include Habegger 58–70, 128–29, 346; Mitchell: 70–72; Wolff 16–29.

2 Polly Longsworth, in conversation, Amherst, April 22, 1997.

3 When asked, by the directors of The Emily Dickinson Museum, to describe the Dickinsons' social position, historian Bruce Laurie dubbed them as "provincial elites" (in conversation, October 2004).

4 Lineation for poems follow the line breaks used in Dickinson's original manuscripts; these can be found in the Franklin variorum edition noted below poems as line "divisions."

Works Cited and Consulted

Beecher, Catherine E. *A Treatise on Domestic Economy.* 1841. Rpt. New York: Source Books, 1970.

Bianchi, Martha Dickinson. *Emily Dickinson Face to Face: Unpublished Letters With Notes and Reminiscences.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1932.

Bridges, Amy. "Becoming American: the working classes in United States before the Civil War." *Working-Class Formation: Nineteenth-Century Patterns in Western Europe and United States.* Ed. Ira Katznelson and Aristide R. Zolberg, Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1986. 157–96.

Brose, Nancy Harris, Juliana McGovern Dupre, Wendy Tocher Kohler, and Jean McClure Mudge. *Emily Dickinson: Profile of the Poet As Cook*. Amherst, MA: Hamilton Newall. 1976.

Child, Lydia Maria. *The American Frugal Housewife.* Boston: Carter, Hendee and Company, 1832.

Conforti, Joseph A. *Imagining New England: Explorations of Regional Identity from the Pilgrims to the Mid-20th Century*, Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2001.

Davidoff, Lenore. "Above and Below Stairs." *New Society* (April 26, 1973): 181–83.

Downing, Andrew Jackson. *The Architecture of Country Houses.* 1850. Rpt. New York: Dover, 1969.

Dudden, Faye. *Serving Women: Household Service in Nineteenth Century America.* Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 1983.

Erkkila, Betsy. "Emily Dickinson and Class." *American Literary History* 4.1 (Spring 1992): 1–27.

Evans, E. and Moran, S. Conversation, Sunderland, MA, 24 July 1994.

Friedlander, Benjamin. "Auctions of the Mind: Emily Dickinson and Abolition." *Arizona Quarterly* 54.1 (Spring 1998): 1–26.

Fuss, Diana. "Interior Chambers: The Emily Dickinson Homestead." *differences: A Journal of Feminist Critical Studies* 10.3 (Fall 1998): 1–34.

Habegger, Alfred. *My Wars Are Laid Away in Books: The Life of Emily Dickinson*. New York: Random House, 2001.

Hitchcock, Peter. "They must be represented? Problems in Theories of Working Class Representation." *PMLA* 115.1 (January 2000): 20–32.

Holland, Jeanne. "Scraps, Stamps, and Cutouts: Emily Dickinson's Domestic Technologies of

B1

Publication." *Cultural Artifacts and the Production of Meaning: The Page, the Image, and the Body*. Ed. Margaret J. M. Ezell and Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1994. 139–81.

Jacobs, Harriet. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl.* 1861. Rpt. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1987.

Lang, Amy. "Class and the Strategies of Sympathy." *The Culture of Sentiment: Race, Gender, and Sentimentality in 19th-century America*. Ed. Shirley Samuels. New York: Oxford UP, 1992. 128–42, 307–08.

LeLacheur, Melinda. *African American Historical Sites: Amherst MA*. Amherst History Museum, 1996.

Leyda, Jay. "Miss Emily's Maggie." *New World Writing*. New York: New American Library, 1953. 255–67.

—. *The Years and Hours of Emily Dickinson*. Two volumes. New Haven: Yale UP, 1960.

Lightner, J.E. ed., *Random House Dictionary of American Slang*. New York: Random House, 1994.

Logue, Cal M. "Racist Reporting during Reconstruction." *Journal of Black Studies* (March 1979): 335–49.

McCaffery, Larry. Personal correspondence. 27 July 1997.

McClintock, Anne. *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest.* New York: Routledge, 1995.

Mitchell, Domhnall. *Emily Dickinson: Monarch of Perception*. Amherst, MA: U of Massachusetts P, 2000.

Morrison, Toni. *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1992.

Mudge, Jeanne McClure. *Emily Dickinson and the Image of Home.* Amherst, MA: U of Massachusetts P, 1975.

Murray, Aífe. "Miss Margaret's Emily Dickinson." *Signs: Journal of Women and Culture and Society* 24.3 (1999): 697–732.

Norcross, Louise. ["L.N."]. Letter to the editor. *The Woman's Journal.* Boston. (26 March 1904), 98.

Pierson, William. *Black Yankees: Development of an African-American Subculture in 18th Century New England.* Amherst, MA: U of Massachusetts P, 1987.

Regan, Alycia Cathryn. "An Untold Story: Irish and Irish-Americans in Amherst, in 1850–1920." Senior Thesis, Amherst College. Amherst, MA, 1994.

Roediger, David. *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working-Class*. New York: Verso, 1991.

Romero, Mary. *Maid in the U.S.A*. New York: Routledge, 1992.

Ryan, George. "Shanties and Shiftlessness: The Immigrant Irish of Henry Thoreau." *Éire-Ireland* 18.3 (1978): 54–78.

Schocket, Eric, "'Discovering some New Race': Rebecca Harding Davis' 'Life in the Iron Mills' and the Literary Emergence of Working-Class Whiteness." *PMLA* 115 (January 2000): 46–59.

Sewall, Richard. *The Life of Emily Dickinson*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1974.

Smith, James Avery. *The History of the Black Population of Amherst MA, 1720–1870*. Boston: New England Historic Genealogical Society, 1999.

—. Conversation with the author, January 2000.

Stallybrass, Peter and Allon White. *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1986.

Taylor, George. *The Transportation Revolution: 1815–1860*. New York: Reinhardt, 1957.

Ward, Theodora. *The Capsule of the Mind: Chapters in the Life of Emily Dickinson.* Cambridge, MA: Belknap P of Harvard UP, 1961.

Wolff, Cynthia Griffin. *Emily Dickinson.* New York: Knopf, 1986.

Wolosky, Shira. *Emily Dickinson: A Voice of War.* New Haven: Yale UP, 1984.