

EMILY/EMILY

"Like a panther in the glove," Dickinson wrote,
probably after another manuscript's return
from her mentor, also blind behind the eyes.

Whitely expectant, I open my poem
and your critique, my blood rushing somewhere
beyond help. On Tuesday evenings
you skim my lines and twist me skinless
in fluorescent light precision, a class specimen.
Again you ask for "a painful revelation
in neoclassical idiom." I search
the empty margins for something more.

You open the session with a quote of hers.
You are not fluent in the idiom of silence.
Or the afterbeat of metaphor trembling a page.

You dream of her, that other Emily,
late nights by your cold hearth, heaving
academic sighs into your sherry when you see
my like name among the poems you must read.
You hoard your red coals to ignite ghost fire,
you in her batiste milieu--or her aloneness
lighting your leather-stale privacy,
believing you know her as a lover should.

Your passions don't mesh with hers, professor,
defender of the form, the faith, the fifth
of old Southern whiskey tucked under
your crumbling inheritance.
You aren't an overthrower. You've never grasped
the wildcat in tight quarters. She would
devour you from blue willow bowls.

Despite parallel lines, beyond
the parallax of understanding, I keep vying,
repetitious as sin. Already widely
published while I live is not enough. In any idiom
my most painful revelation will surprise you.

--Glenna Holloway