

EMILY AND I
PAMELA PORTER

Together in her drafty attic
we write our letters to the world.
Her lamp sputters, the light poor.

In the frame of her window the sun's last
spreads over Amherst's houses.

She let me in when I bragged I was nobody
and now sends me downstairs
to scrounge more paper –
envelopes, she insists – envelopes.

I creep down the creaky stairs.
Try to silence the swinging kitchen door.

Everyone's out but her pipe-smoking father
who won't spend a penny on paper.
He doesn't see my hand lift the wooden box
where he tosses the trash.

I sift out all the envelopes.
Take them up to Emily
and our fevered unfolding begins.

How she cringes when I make the tiniest tear.
This part takes time – the careful unHINGing,
the smoothing.

She hands me a pen, an ink pot.
We go to work.

What I'll remember most
is her shadow on the wall –
her hand, and the pen large, swift,

and her hair -- not pulled tight,
but down, free -- almost, I would say,
wild.