

1991

To Emily Dickinson in New Orleans

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Recommended Citation

Cooley, Peter. "To Emily Dickinson in New Orleans." *The Iowa Review* 21.3 (1991): 192-192. Web.
Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0021-065X.4075>

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Two Poems · *Peter Cooley*

TO EMILY DICKINSON IN NEW ORLEANS

Of course, you knew you were the first.
Remember? We were in Detroit, the city of my birth,
I was thirteen, just over erecting model cars
and lovesick on myself when I found you after school
in the cool of the library alone. What we touched in each other
I heard in a blizzard of words afterwards all year,
scrawling notebooks full of it until my friends
caught me, taught me: you were an old maid, stuff for girls.
And when the girls assumed your place and I found lines
so lightweight to attract them I couldn't write one down,
you sighed. You said I hadn't been the first for you.

This afternoon you scrawled your note in amethyst
disks of rain dotting my window, your address
in Jackson Square, where it's pouring now, midnight.
The cafés, the horse-drawn carriages, the pastel flower stalls
all stand at attention. The rain lifts, falls. Everything is preparation.
How lonely I would look to anyone but you
in your window of the Pontalba Apartments where you watch,
the same taffeta you pressed for me years back
corseted tight about your waist. And I here, bouquet in hand,
wilted and wet like these wild roses, meet your stare,
forbidden by your immortal soul to come up to you.