

Early Elegy: Headmistress

By Claudia Emerson

The word itself: prim, retired, its artifact
her portrait above the fireplace, on her face
the boredom she abhorred, then perfected,
her hands held upward—their emptiness
a revision, cigarette and brandy snifter
painted, intolerably, out, to leave her this
lesser gesture: *What next?* or shrugged *Whatever*.
From the waist down she was never there.

Source: *Poetry* (June 2012)