

JULIA ALVAREZ

***Dusting* 1981**

Each morning I wrote my name
on the dusty cabinet, then crossed
the dining table in script, scrawled
in capitals on the backs of chairs,

practicing signatures like scales
while Mother followed, squirting

linseed from a burping can
into a crumpled-up flannel.

She erased my fingerprints
from the bookshelf and rocker,

polished mirrors on the desk
scribbled with my alphabets.
My name was swallowed in the towel
with which she jeweled the table tops.
The grain surfaced in the oak
and the pine grew luminous.
But I refused with every mark
to be like her, anonymous.