

The Unnaming

EDWARD HIRSCH

Amherst, 1860

She walked through the house, taking away its names.
The high ceilings will no longer be called ceilings,
She thought, and the parlors will no longer be parlors.

There will be no more bedchambers or sitting rooms,
No more Sheraton bureaus, Franklin stoves, cherry-wood tables.
There would be no more time for commonplace aspirations

As she moved through the halls in a rapture of unmaking,
Withdrawing the designations, taking down doors and windows,
The heavy stairs she had climbed so many times before,

Holding the banister and dreaming of a carpenter
Who had carved the boards from a sacrificial tree
So she could go back and forth to a white study.

She took courage from Eve's deleting of the names
Adam had given the beasts, haunting Eden
By returning the animals to their first splendor

And treating the garden as a page for revisions.
She took heart from a snowfall blanketing the earth,
An oblivion outside matching the oblivion within.

She, too, moved through a garden of cancellations
(*No more monarchies of Queen Anne's lace, she chanted
To herself, no more dead elms branching into heaven*)

And that was when she felt the dizzying freedom
Of a world cut loose from the affixed Word or words,
Appallingly blank, waiting to be renamed.

Visiting Emily

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