

Ultimate Edit Example

To a very large extent, through much of her career, Sylvia Plath used the writing of poetry to declare articulate all her the anger and frustration which arose from her difficult relationships with the male figures in her life, and most frequently with her father. In no place can this be seen more is this more obvious than in what is perhaps her poetic masterpiece, 'Daddy', where all her frustration her frustration and anger reaches its absolute peak and the anger that comes with it comes to a nasty head. 'Daddy' is one of the most significant poems from Plath's most significant collection, the posthumously published *Ariel*, and in many ways enacts the origin of her often crippled emotional state.

Sylvia Plath's feelings of suppression are evident from the poem's opening line:

You do not do, you do not do
Any more, black shoe
In which I have lived like a foot
For thirty years, poor and white,
Barely daring to breathe or Achoo.¹

Plath's relationship with her father is graphically demonstrated through the absurd yet terrifying image of a situation in which even sneezing is conceived an act of defiance, or a guarantee of unwanted attention. The stark contrast between the 'poor and white' poet (white being commonly symbolic of innocence) and the 'black shoe' of the dad is one of Plath's most vivid images. The black shoe is also a horrifying image that introduces the Nazi theme which recurs throughout the poem; transforming to a 'boot', possibly the jackboot of an SS officer, in the tenth stanza. The Nazi imagery is used by Plath to show the evil and the will for dominance inherent in her father and transforms the poem into a powerful psychodrama, with her father cast as a Nazi soldier or dictator and Plath as a persecuted Jew (she states in the seventh verse "I began to talk like a Jew. // I think I may well be a Jew"). It must be remembered, however, that this is a purely metaphorical conceit; Plath's father was not in reality a Nazi; nor was Plath really a Jew. What the poem ultimately shows is that the power relationship between them was, as the French poststructuralist philosopher Michel Foucault would say, one of the oppressor and the oppressed. Jeff Noonan's critique of this Foucauldian power structure insists that 'to be oppressed is to be made into something you are not by forces that you do not recognize to be legitimate.'² Plath realises this oppressive effect in her own transformation into the wartime European Jew, the ultimate symbol of the mistreated and oppressed. In writing this poem Sylvia Plath is using

¹ S Plath, 'Daddy' *Selected Poems* London: Faber and Faber, (2003), 32.34.

² J Noonan, *Critical Humanism and the Politics of Difference* Canada: McGill-Queens University Press, (2003), p.78.

Comment [D1]: Style: Improved authority.

Comment [D2]: New: Added contextual detail.

Comment [D3]: Style: Sweeping statements can sound off-hand and should sometimes be qualified.

Comment [D4]: Style: Individual poems should be placed in single quotations, collections in italics.

Comment [D5]: Style: Improves critical authority, avoids weak words such as 'nasty'.

Comment [D6]: New: Added significant background detail.

Comment [D7]: Mechanics: Poem's punctuation and spelling MUST match that of referenced publication.

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Comment [D8]: Style: This is not the appropriate location for a joke, a drier critical register is generally preferable at all times, and particularly when dealing with a subject as sensitive as domestic abuse.

Comment [D9]: Mechanics: It is preferable to place all quotations from the text in quote marks, even when they are paraphrased in the main body.

Comment [D10]: Style: Improves authority.

Comment [D11]: Style: It is preferable to use a balancing quote here.

Comment [D12]: New: Detail clarifying the Nazi imagery.

Comment [D13]: Style: No need to use 'wicked' and 'evil', they mean very much the same thing. Also, 'father' should be ...

Comment [D14]: Style: Improves clarity.

Comment [D15]: New: Qualification for accuracy.

Comment [D16]: Style: Always use an author's surname; you don't know Sylvia ...

Comment [D17]: Mechanics: In-line quotations should indicate line-breaks w ...

Comment [D18]: Mechanics: Jew is always capitalised.

Comment [D19]: Style: Restructured for authority and brevity.

Comment [D20]: Style: It is preferable to avoid using '/' within literature essays ...

Comment [D21]: New: Elucidation of Foucault's views, as well as an importan ...

Comment [D22]: Mechanics: Missing word.

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poetry to voice her anger as part of a cathartic process, but also to develop a more intelligent approach to the dualistic relationship she held with her father.

At the very end of this poem there appears a shocking verse that goes like this: The poem concludes with an image of great violence and power:

“There's a stake in your fat black heart
-And the villagers never liked you.
-They are dancing and stamping on you.
They always knew it was you.
-Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I'm through.”

In these lines the poet is defaming/defames the memory of her father by claiming that he was unpopular with the entire local community. We only have her word on this, though. This is, however, a highly subjective account, and as the daddies-“daddy’s” voice is conspicuous in its absence/absence, he can't/ is unable to defend himself/ defend himself at all. The final line, in which Sylvia Plath tells/ informs us she is finished with her poem and by implication with her father, leaves a shocking echo of all the hate and vitriol she so obviously feels in writing it: an appropriately vitriolic conclusion to the agonizing process of working through her repressed emotions. But it does. The most pertinent question remaining at the poem's conclusion is to what extent Plath is aiming to convince her readers, and to what extent she hopes simply to convince herself. Leave the impression that she is trying to convince herself more than her readers that she has worked through and resolved all the issues with her father. ‘Daddy’ is one of the most striking examples of Plath’s use of poetry as a coping mechanism, though it is essential to remember that no poem is pure autobiography, and that Plath was more than willing to sacrifice factual accuracy for artistic coherence or effect.

Sylvia Plath’s sheer feelings of being suppressed in this poem can be seen from the poem’s very first verse which starts “You do not do, you do not do anymore, black shoe, in which I have lived like a foot for thirty years, poor and white, barely daring to breathe or Achoo”. The relationship that Sylvia had with her dad must have been pretty awful if she felt she wasn't even able to sneeze for such a long time! The stark contrast between the poor and white poet (with white signalling innocence) and the black boot of the dad is one of the most vivid things Plath ever wrote. The black boot is also a horrifying image that introduces us, the readers, to the Nazi theme that recurs throughout the poem. The Nazi imagery is used by Plath to show the wickedness of her dad, and to show the evil within him and transforms into a powerful psychodrama that casts the dad as a Nazi dictator and Sylvia as a persecuted Jew (she states in the 7th verse “I began to talk like a Jew. I think I may well be a Jew”) But I think we have to bare in mind that the relationship between them as it is displayed in the poem is ultimately a metaphoric one. In other words, Sylvia’s dad wasn’t really a Nazi and nor was she really a Jew. What the poem ultimately shows is that the power relationship between them was as the French poststructuralist philosopher Michel

Comment [D23]: Style: For

Comment [D24]: Style: Edited for clarity

Comment [D25]: Mechanics: Comma improves fluency.

Comment [D26]: Style: Improved for authority and reduced verbosity.

Comment [D27]: Style: Proceeding line removed for non-critical register and pointlessness.

Comment [D28]: Structure: This paragraph order better reflects both the chronology of the argument and the development of the themes.

Comment [D29]: Style: Altered for brevity.

Comment [D30]: New: Heavily altered for tone and fluency.

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Comment [D31]: Mechanics: Long quotes should be indented, with quotation marks removed.

Comment [D32]: Mechanics: Grammar error.

Comment [D33]: Style: Edited for authority.

Comment [D34]: Style: Improves fluency.

Comment [D35]: Mechanics: Grammar error, and colloquialisms lifted from the text should be placed in quotations.

Comment [D36]: Mechanics: Spelling.

Comment [D37]: Style: Improves clarity.

Comment [D38]: Style: Plath is the correct form and must be used at all times.

Comment [D39]: Mechanics: Grammar, added comma.

Comment [D40]: Style: Edited for authority.

Comment [D41]: Style: Improved fluency.

Comment [D42]: Style: Heavily edited for punch and authority.

Comment [D43]: New: More striking ...

Comment [D44]: Mechanics: Poem' ...

Comment [D45]: Mechanics: Long ...

Comment [D46]: Mechanics: Sevent ...

Comment [D47]: Mechanics: In-line ...

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Comment [D48]: Mechanics: Jew is ...

Comment [D49]: Mechanics: Grammar.

Foucault (1926-1984) would say one of oppressor/oppressed. In writing her poem Sylvia Plath using the act of writing verse to voice her anger as a sort of cathartic process but also to carve out a more clever way of negotiating a way out of this twisted dualistic relationship with her dad. What can be a more clever way of doing this than immortalising him and their relationship for ever in a poem?

There is no doubt that Sylvia Plath was clearly a long suffering relationship with her father but there might be more than a little poetic license in her portrayal of him. Within the context of her work as a whole though this poem provides a useful insight into the ways in which writing was a coping mechanism for her.

Comment [D50]: Style: Date of birth-death not necessary in a literature essay.

Comment [D51]: Mechanics: Grammar, missing comma.

Comment [D52]: Mechanics: Altered tense.

Comment [D53]: Mechanics: Spelling, forever is one word.

Comment [D54]: Style: Proceeding sentence weak and unnecessary.

Comment [D55]: Mechanics: Long-suffering should be hyphenated.

Comment [D56]: Mechanics: Grammar, missing comma.

Comment [D57]: Style: Punchier concluding sentence



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