Sylvia Plath achieved her claim to fame as a children’s writer posthumously. The It-Doesn’t-Matter Suit wasn’t published until 1996, long after being penned in 1959 (Paul). The writer’s career would span for three children’s books all of which published long after her death in 1963.

She began writing for children on her honeymoon, saying, “Writing for children is a curious occupation” (qtd. Paul). It wasn’t until researchers looking for a new set of poems and short stories at Indiana University discovered Plath’s children’s stories, and sent them to her publisher.

Clarissa Lee writes in Voices of Feminism and Schizophrenia in Plath’s Poetry “Being highly ambitious and gifted, while low in self-esteem and self-confidence, led to her psychological problems and manic depression.” Plath’s main attempt at showing self-image is through the use of color. The first color the reader is introduced to Max’s “green-ness” of his green sweater, green wool socks, and green felt hunting hat. Green is a motif for growth, change, and lack of experience, because Max is the youngest member of the family. The idea of green as a symbol of growth is seen on page 7 when Max is among the town by himself on the lush green landscape with his cat, with the bright yellow sun and Winkelburg town on the backdrop. The reader finds Max alone, with the exception of his cat. When Max puts on the Suit, he does everything the Nix family was intimidated by doing in the suit, such as skiing, fishing, or riding a bike. Max, instead of being alone with his cat, is now surrounded by the town. This is seen visually on the two-page spread when illustrators depict the town sticking their heads out of their windows to see Max in his “wonderful” suit. Every character depicted visually looking at Max with their faces smiling with amazement and happiness at the suit.
One aspect the adult reader knows going into the book is that Sylvia Plath committed suicide in 1963 after a long battle with manic depression. Anne Stevenson notes on Plath’s biography, that around the time she was writing in 1959, Plath was dealing with her suicide attempt at the age of twenty-one, exposing her psyche and the traumatic breakdown. When examining Sylvia Plath’s personal journals, she writes in 1959 that she was learning to “be true of my own weirdnesses” (Plath, *Journals*, 501-502). *The It-Doesn’t Matter Suit* is a subtle nod of hope at Sylvia Plath’s struggle with mental illness. Plath’s damaged personality and wounded psyche are evident in *The It-Doesn’t-Matter Suit* through the use of yellow. Yellow is often the color for joy, happiness, excitement, and confidence. It’s often thought that Vincent Van Gogh would eat the color yellow, because he found it to be so happy. It appears that Plath is sending a message to the child to accept his or her own personality and be true to his or her weirdnesses.

And there in the grey box with a wreath of white tissue paper around it lay a woolly whiskery brand-new mustard-yellow suit with three brass buttons shining like mirrors on the front of it, and two brass buttons at the back, and a brass button on each cuff.
However, not all members of the Nix family feel that yellow is a symbol they can relate to and find happiness or comfort. The greatest example is when the patriarch of the family, Papa Nix puts on the suit and remembers that the other bankers wear dark blue or dark grey suits,” and that “they would think the suit was too gay for a sensible banker” (20). By being the patriarch of the family, Papa Nix sets the example for accepting the queerness of self-identity and self-image. By refusing the suit, the suit becomes a symbol of anxiety for the Nix father and sons. This sense of anxiety is greatly noticed on page 24, when Emil, who races toboggans, imagines wearing the suit during a race. Visually, the reader notices his friends, who wear “brown zipper-jackets and brown pants” look onward at the suit with gazes of awe and shock. His friends and fellow competitors faces show frowning, and on some a wrinkled brow. Because no one else has worn such a suit, Emil must give the suit down the line, stating that it is “too big” (25).
While the yellow-ness of the suit can be read as a symbol of societal acceptance and critique, it can also be viewed under a political lens. Yellow is often the term for racially derogatory terms, given to Asians and other people of color. People who associated with Asians in less progressive times were deemed as having “yellow fever.” In another lens, the yellow suit can be viewed as exotic. *The It-Doesn’t-Matter-Suit* lacks people of color, particularly black and Asian characters. The greatest example of this is seen on the two-fold spread when Max is parading through the town in his yellow suit. The looks on the townspeople’s faces are astonished and on some appear to be excited. What is most interesting about this scene is the man in the full green suit and hat on the right hand side, again showing the stability of the known, and the safety of the old. A green house with a donkey, and another man in green overalls flanks the man.

Little know picture books are a treasure, particularly when they come from the troubled minds and creative genius of writers gone too soon. They become artifacts in the canon of children’s literature, and allow the reader, young and old, a brief lapse back into childhood.
Works Cited


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