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Dusting  
By Julia Alvarez  
Interpreting Poetry  
Revision

Julia Alvarez's poem, "Dusting," portrays the lives of a mother and daughter who, figuratively speaking, don't speak the same language.

The word, "dusting," has a double purpose:

- It informs us that the mother's main activity is to clean.
- It emphasizes the daughter's obvious intention to break clean from the family's tradition.

The mother's simple lifestyle and standards don't hold any interest for her daughter—who literally leaves her marks everywhere possible: "I wrote my name/on the dusky cabinet, then crossed the dinning table in script, scrawled/in capitals on the back of the chairs" (721). The use of capitals letters is not accidental: the letters try to match the importance of her aspirations. We can also sense her strong dedication to fulfill her dreams from the use of the words "each morning"—words that allow the reader to realize how dedicated she can be: "Each morning I wrote" (721).

The daughter believes that her mother's identity is being slowly erased each day—as her mother continues to perform meaningless activities. The only interest the bookshelf seems to hold for her mother is to dust it.

I think that the daughter is being a little bit unreasonable, because she fails to acknowledge the fact that her mother, by doing all the household chores, allows her the time to explore herself. She also has the opportunity to realize that her mother's hard work is not a pleasant activity. Therefore, the daughter will choose a different approach to life: to leave fingerprints on the bookshelf. We sense the daughter's frantic attempt to create an identity for herself: "But I refused with every mark/to be like her, anonymous" (721).

Aren't we all trying, somehow, to be different from and better than our parents? I hope—at least.

## Works Cited

Alvarez, Julia. "Dusting." *Angles of Vision: Reading, Writing, and the Study of Literature*. Eds. Arthur W. Biddle, and Toby Fulwiler. New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1992. 721.