

Destroying a Bad Habit: Revision Exhibit

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Kita Kita Thun Thun Dha

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(To the God of destruction who wears the crescent moon on his head, who holds the frivolous Ganga river in his locks, and dances with utmost strength; I pray to thee, Lord Shiva.)

Key:

Claims not supported with evidence- yellow

Added evidence- green

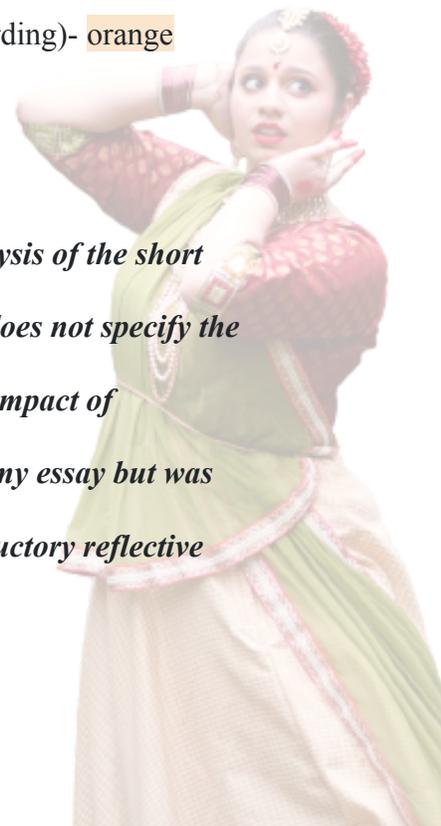
Unnecessary commentary- red

Condensed commentary- pink

Grammar and language issues (such as wrong word choice and confusing wording)- orange

Fixed grammar and language issues- light blue

The following paragraphs are drafts from my second paper; an analysis of the short story "Recitatif" by Toni Morrison. Throughout the short story, Morrison does not specify the races of the two main characters in the narrative. I wished to highlight the impact of Morrison's choice on the reader's interpretation of the characters through my essay but was unable to make a convincing enough argument. As mentioned in my introductory reflective



essay, I struggled the most in this essay with staying focused on my argument and developing a compelling thesis. While the entirety of this paper suffered from the same mistakes, I am including the revisions for this specific section of my paper because it is a clear example of how I include too much commentary without thinking about how it affects the clarity of my argument.

Due to my previous tendency of not planning before writing, I began draft one by writing only the explanations behind what I wanted to argue. As a result, the entirety of the paragraph became commentary without any evidence to support any of my claims. While my ideas may be good, the paragraph was simply a transcription of my thoughts and needs references to the text to validate my claims.

Large claims that need supporting evidence from the text are highlighted in yellow

Draft 1:

The main characters' backgrounds and social classes are revealed early on in the narrative, setting up a basis for the readers' racial interpretation. The start of the short story contains an introduction of Twyla and Roberta, however, instead of talking about the girls themselves, the narrator focuses on their mothers. Twyla's mom, Mary, is a dancer who neglected her child, and Roberta's mother, who remains unnamed, is ill and could not attend to her daughter (Morrison 1). From this brief introduction itself, Morrison establishes the different worlds the girls are raised in. Twyla does not shed a very positive light on her mother's dancing, insinuating it is a disreputable habit she does not enjoy her mother engaging in. By including this aspect of Mary's personality, Morrison is able to suggest that Twyla comes from a less prestigious background. In addition to Mary's personal habits, the way she interacts with

Roberta's mother also explains that Roberta comes from a more reputable family and class in comparison to Twyla, who comes from a presumably less distinguished background. However, this primarily conveys the type of environment and culture Twyla has been surrounded by. The girls' respective economic statuses are revealed through the difference in the way the characters valued their meals, as Twyla had a much greater appreciation for the humble meal at the shelter. This implies Roberta comes from a more generous background while Twyla has had her own share of economic struggles. With this implication, the readers begin to project their perception of race onto the girls' situations in an attempt to determine which character is of what race. Since it is made clear that one of the girls is Black and the other is white towards the beginning of the story, the readers' interpretation of the characters changes widely as they discover more aspects of the girls' backgrounds. Based on racial stereotypes presented in society today, one may assume Twyla is Black simply because she is evidently poorer than Roberta. Although it is nowhere stated Twyla is actually of this race, placing this stereotype onto Twyla's situation proves the readers' projection of real-life stereotypes onto their interpretation of the story. " While her race may genuinely have a role in her living situation, Morrison is just conveying her economic distress while letting the reader reflect on what their interpretation means in terms of racial discrimination in real life. Twyla's mother's unruly habits, her own social class, and the difference between the mothers' interactions all fall into racial expectations and therefore reach Morrison's goal of making the reader realize racial stereotypes still prevail, without her having to specify which race either girl is.

In my second draft, I added the missing evidence, which helped add some structure to the paragraph. However, after adding the evidence I realized much of my commentary was

unnecessary and seemed too repetitive. What I initially thought was my way of nailing a point with my explanation was actually the reason why my argument lacked clarity.

The added evidence is highlighted in green, and all unnecessary statements are highlighted in red.

Draft 2:

The main characters' backgrounds and social classes are revealed early on in the narrative, setting up a basis for the readers' racial interpretation. The start of the short story contains an introduction of Twyla and Roberta however, instead of talking about the girls themselves, the narrator focuses on their mothers. Twyla's mom, Mary, is a dancer who neglected her child, and Roberta's mother, who remains unnamed, is ill and could not attend to her daughter (Morrison 1). From this brief introduction itself, Morrison establishes the different worlds the girls are raised in. Twyla does not shed a very positive light on her mother's dancing, insinuating it is a disreputable habit she does not enjoy her mother engaging in. By including this aspect of Mary's personality, Morrison is able to suggest that Twyla comes from a less prestigious background. In addition to Mary's personal habits, the way she interacts with Roberta's mother also explains that Roberta comes from a more reputable family and class in comparison to Twyla, who comes from a presumably less distinguished background: "Mary, simple-minded as ever, grinned and tried to yank her hand out of the pocket with the raggedy lining-to shake hands, I guess... [Roberta's mother] didn't say anything, just grabbed Roberta with her Bible-free hand and stepped out of line, walking quickly to the rear of it. Mary was still grinning because she's not too swift when it comes to what's really going on. Then this light bulb goes off in her head and she says "That bitch!" really loud..." (Recitatif 5). Mary's disgraceful language and the "raggedy lining" in her clothes both come across as lower-class characteristics,

and clearly paints an image of Twyla's upbringing. Her slow realization of the situation is also suggestive of a lesser nurturing of intellect. However, this primarily conveys the type of environment and culture Twyla has been surrounded by. The girls' respective economic statuses are revealed when Twyla describes their meals at the shelter and says, "The food was good, though. At least I thought so. Roberta hated it and left whole pieces of things on her plate...Mary's idea of supper was popcorn and a can of Yoo-Hoo. Hot mashed potatoes and two weenies was like Thanksgiving for me" (Recitatif 2). Through the difference in the way the characters valued their meals, Morrison implies Roberta comes from a more generous background while Twyla has had her own share of economic struggles. With this implication, the readers begin to project their perception of race onto the girls' situations in an attempt to determine which character is of what race. Since it is made clear that one of the girls is Black and the other is white towards the beginning of the story, the readers' interpretation of the characters changes widely as they discover more aspects of the girls' background. Based on racial stereotypes presented in society today, one may assume Twyla is Black simply because she is evidently poorer than Roberta. Although it is nowhere stated Twyla is actually of this race, placing this stereotype onto Twyla's situation proves the readers' projection of real-life stereotypes onto their interpretation of the story. While her race may genuinely have a role in her living situation, Morrison is just conveying her economic distress while letting the reader reflect on what their interpretation means in terms of racial discrimination in real life. Twyla's mother's unruly habits, her own social class, and the difference between the mothers' interactions all fall into racial expectations, and therefore reach Morrison's goal of making the reader realize racial stereotypes still prevail, without her having to specify which race either girl is.

In my second draft, adding evidence was necessary to sculpt my argument. Without any reference to the text, I not only lost my credibility as a writer but there was no standing to my argument; no matter how I explained it. However, I was still lacking the correct balance between my evidence and commentary. Therefore, for my final draft, I worked towards removing all overbearing explanations and condensing any commentary that seemed repetitive.

In addition, while revising my work for the portfolio, I realized that many of the claims I ultimately kept in my final draft still had room for improvement; whether it be in the word choice, structure of the sentence, or the wording.

Condensed commentary is either highlighted in pink or removed from the paragraph altogether.

Grammar and language issues (such as wrong word choice and confusing wording) are highlighted in orange.

Final Draft:

The main characters' backgrounds and social classes are revealed early on in the narrative, setting up a basis for the readers' racial interpretation. The start of the short story contains an introduction of Twyla and Roberta however, instead of talking about the girls themselves, the narrator focuses on their mothers. Twyla's mom, Mary, is a dancer who neglected her child, and Roberta's mother, who remains unnamed, is ill and could not attend to her daughter (Morrison 1). From this brief introduction itself, Morrison establishes the different worlds the girls are raised in. Twyla does not shed a very positive light on her mother's dancing, insinuating it is a disreputable habit she does not enjoy her mother engaging in. By including this

aspect of Mary's personality, Morrison is able to suggest that Twyla comes from a less prestigious background. In addition to Mary's personal habits, the way she interacts with Roberta's mother also explains that Roberta comes from a more reputable family and class in comparison to Twyla, who comes from a presumably less distinguished background: "Mary, simple-minded as ever, grinned and tried to yank her hand out of the pocket with the raggedy lining-to shake hands, I guess... [Roberta's mother] didn't say anything, just grabbed Roberta with her Bible-free hand and stepped out of line, walking quickly to the rear of it. Mary was still grinning because she's not too swift when it comes to what's really going on. Then this light bulb goes off in her head and she says "That bitch!" really loud..." (Recitatif 5). Mary's disgraceful language and the "raggedy lining" in her clothes both come across as lower-class characteristics, and clearly paints an image of Twyla's upbringing. Her slow realization of the situation is also suggestive of a lesser nurturing of intellect. The girls' respective economic statuses are revealed when Twyla describes their meals at the shelter and says, "The food was good, though. At least I thought so. Roberta hated it and left whole pieces of things on her plate... Mary's idea of supper was popcorn and a can of Yoo-Hoo. Hot mashed potatoes and two weenies was like Thanksgiving for me" (Recitatif 2). Through the difference in the way the characters valued their meals, Morrison implies Roberta comes from a more generous background while Twyla has had her own share of economic struggles. With this implication, the readers begin to project their perception of race onto the girls' situations as an attempt to determine which character is of what race. Based on racial stereotypes presented in society today, one may assume Twyla is Black simply because she is evidently poorer than Roberta. Although it is nowhere stated Twyla is actually of this race, placing this stereotype onto Twyla's situation proves the readers' projection of real-life stereotypes onto their interpretation of the story. Twyla's mother's unruly habits, her

own social class, and the difference between the mothers' interactions all fall into racial expectations and therefore reach Morrison's goal of making the reader realize racial stereotypes still prevail, without her having to specify which race either girl is.

After reducing the commentary by removing any redundant sentences, I was able to make my argument much more coherent. Condensing these statements also created a better balance between my evidence and explanation, which in turn made it easier for the reader to understand my points.

For my final product, I continued to clean up any areas of confusion by rectifying sentences, words, or phrases that were either inappropriate in the context of the claim or puzzling to understand.

These changes are highlighted in light blue.

Portfolio Final:

The main characters' backgrounds and social classes are revealed early on in the narrative, setting up a basis for the readers' racial interpretation. The start of the short story contains an introduction of Twyla and Roberta however, instead of talking about the girls themselves, the narrator focuses on their mothers. Twyla's mom, Mary, is a dancer who neglected her child, and Roberta's mother, who remains unnamed, is ill and could not attend to her daughter (Morrison 1). This brief introduction establishes the different worlds the girls are raised in. Twyla does not shed a very positive light on her mother's dancing, insinuating it is a disreputable habit she does not enjoy her mother engaging in. By including this aspect of Mary's personality, Morrison is able to suggest that Twyla comes from a presumably less distinguished background. In addition to Mary's personal habits, the way she interacts with Roberta's mother also explains that Roberta comes from a more reputable family and class in comparison to

Twyla: “Mary, simple-minded as ever, grinned and tried to yank her hand out of the pocket with the raggedy lining-to shake hands, I guess... [Roberta’s mother] didn't say anything, just grabbed Roberta with her Bible-free hand and stepped out of line, walking quickly to the rear of it. Mary was still grinning because she's not too swift when it comes to what's really going on. Then this light bulb goes off in her head and she says "That bitch!" really loud...” (Recitatif 5). Mary’s disgraceful language and the “raggedy lining” in her clothes both come across as lower-class characteristics, and the imagery creates a visual of Twyla’s upbringing. Her slow realization of the situation is also suggestive of Mary’s lack of intelligence, which may stem from the potential inability to receive a proper education. The girls’ respective economic statuses are revealed when Twyla describes their meals at the shelter and says, “The food was good, though. At least I thought so. Roberta hated it and left whole pieces of things on her plate... Mary's idea of supper was popcorn and a can of Yoo-Hoo. Hot mashed potatoes and two weenies was like Thanksgiving for me” (Recitatif 2). Through the difference in the way the characters valued their meals, Morrison implies Roberta comes from a more generous background while Twyla has had her own share of economic struggles. With this implication, the readers begin to project their perception of race onto the girls’ situations in an attempt to determine which character is of what race. Based on racial stereotypes presented in society today, one may assume Twyla is Black simply because she is evidently poorer than Roberta. As it is nowhere stated that Twyla is actually Black, Morrison, thus, forces the reader to notice how easily the members of society project stereotypes onto others. Twyla’s mother’s unruly habits, her own social class, and the difference between the mothers’ interactions all fall into racial expectations and therefore reach Morrison's goal of making the reader realize racial stereotypes still prevail, without her having to specify which race either girl is.

While these changes are relatively minor compared to the abundance of commentary I had to condense, or the necessary evidence I added in my last drafts, they were important in making the claims I did want to keep cleaner and stronger.

My final revised paragraph is not only substantially better than my first in terms of argument, but the revision process showed me that longer is not always better. While putting all my ideas into words is helpful to organize my thoughts, not all of my thoughts need to be included in the paragraph. I completely lost my argument within the ocean of commentary. This, as described in my IRE, was the biggest dilemma I had to overcome.

While analyzing my drafts, I realized that, while it is important to revise throughout, it is considerably harder to write all of my thoughts and condense them later than it is to nip the issue in the bud, at the start of the writing process. Even though my final product is much clearer now, I kept facing issues during my revision process that stemmed from my original incoherent thoughts. While I failed to realize this for this specific paper, the revision process helped me understand that I would have benefited by creating a list or outline of my thoughts first, instead of throwing them into a paragraph. Making a list would have not only forced me to be more concise with my commentary, but a structured outline would have compelled me to find evidence for each of my claims first, and then build my explanations around it. Both of these are solutions to the issues in this paragraph that would help me omit dominating commentary that overshadows my argument.

Works Cited

Morrison, Toni. *Toni Morrison Recitatif* - Cusd80.Com. 1983,

https://www.cusd80.com/cms/lib/AZ01001175/Centricity/Domain/1073/Morrison_recitatifessay.doc.pdf.