

Critique Essays

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Checklist:

- ✓ Annotate the story using Microsoft Word's insert comments function.
- ✓ At the end of the story, append a short, 300-500 word critique essay on each story.
- ✓ At the beginning of your critique essay, tell the writer what your favorite sentence was in the story.
- ✓ Use the "Praise Sandwich." Description. Prescription. Strengths.
- ✓ Address the five skills we've been focused on in this class: Scene and Summary, POV, Setting, Plot, and Readability.

Remember, this is a digital, transparent workshop. All critiques, all annotations, including mine, will be transparent to the writer and to the entire class. **Critiques are worth 50 points each for a total of 20% of your grade.**

EXAMPLE

(this faux critique is approximately 500 words)

Favorite Sentence: "She smelled like the sea—and by that, I mean like barnacles, like wet wool—and I loved it."

[TITLE OF STORY REMOVED] is told in first person, present tense, and mostly in summary. There are very few dramatized scenes. It's not strictly realism; there's a strange, fanciful quality, a bit like the "wacky mode" of Barthelme's "The School." The plot concerns a squeamish young man who dates an over-sized, sailor mouthed woman he meets in a bar. She is emotionally unavailable and taunts the boyfriend—who she nicknames Christopher Robbins—quite a bit, but in many instances Robbins interprets these gestures as tenderness and grows to love his female companion. He can't leave well enough alone, however, and decides that he has to figure out her past—which he believes is connected to the sea. He takes her to a small boat off a dock in New York City and when pushed, Mary lies to him prompting CR to trick her into falling into the ocean. Then he sails away but remembers he can't.

I'm going to echo [NAME OF CLASSMATE REMOVED]'s sentiments. We don't know CR well enough and that makes some of the story fall relatively flat. When CR gives up his previous life to follow Mary everywhere, it doesn't have much impact because we have no idea what he's giving up. Is he some little rich kid—he implies otherwise when Mary accuses him of having Harvard hands? Is he right out of college? Does he have some office job? Does he live in Hoboken and eat canned soup? We need the details of his life before-Mary to understand how his life post-Mary is so different and strange, and at times, wonderful. Getting "inside" the character more deeply is needed.

Secondly, the story's plot makes a big leap in logic when CR definitively decides that his girlfriend's past is tied up with the sea. We need more concrete hints from Mary to buy into this. And why does he want to know about her past so much in the first place? Is he inherently an inquisitive person? Does he need to solve everything he comes across? Up until this point in the story, CR seemed so utterly passive. Why the change in demeanor? Also, the boat plot at the end seems a little half-baked. He thinks something terrible happened to his girlfriend at sea, so his solution is to tell her he has a surprise for her, then he brings her to a boat. That's kind of crazy and out-of-character. It almost makes it seem like he's getting back at her for all the little pot shots she's taken but I don't think that's your intention. The final image of CR sailing away from Mary is a compelling ending, but it does not (yet) feel earned.

The principal strength of the story is that it's very readable. The prose is quite beautiful in places and has a really sweet lyrical tendency despite the crazy subject matter and frequent cursing. The sentences move. Also, the character of Mary is quite strong. She's an enigma to CR, and she's an enigma to the reader. I don't want her backstory, and I don't think the writer should be talked into giving it to us. Mary is a puzzle inserted into fiction. She doesn't need to be solved.