

A NOTE ABOUT THIS FEEDBACK SAMPLE:

This is a sample of feedback from a work-in-progress (a novel) from a student the tutor has been working with for a while. The comments build on previous sections and feedback discussions the writer and tutor have had about the piece.

Aidan jumped at the rap on the door. A person with a bold hand but a quiet approach; a person who had managed to climb the staircase to his booth without one steel clatter. He grabbed at the smoking cigarette on the saucer, pinched the tip and dropped it into his stale cup of tea.

‘Yes?’

‘I’ve brought you a fresh brew,’ a woman’s voice called.

Aidan combed back his hair with his fingers and opened the door.

‘You like it with a good splash of milk?’ A strawberry mouth smiled at him. A hand jabbed the cup of grey tea towards his belly. Veronica Doyle always acted awkward around him.

‘Thanks,’ he mumbled, taking the cup and placing it on the long trestle table amongst the clutter of paper and teacup-ringed hardbacks.

She craned her head through the doorway and glanced about the room. She would think it was a pigsty. Canned reels stood in precarious columns against the walls. Film cuttings lay scattered on the floor, curled up like scraps of alphabet. A stack of yellowing newspapers leaned towards the projectionist’s stool. An empty Brylcreem tin winked from a ledge. A black and white poster of Lana Turner drooped on the far pale blue wall.

‘It’s rather a burrow, isn’t it?’ she said.

‘I suppose,’ Aidan shrugged.

EK Reeder 27/7/10 18:49

Comment: A really good extract. Well chosen details and descriptions. The scene is well framed by her arrival and departure. We are with Aidan and that works well, from action into his internal thoughts, well integrated and good smooth movement between. Some lovely sentences, as usual. In the piece there are a few moments which raised questions in me about the perspective held, quietly, in a few descriptions. I’ve marked them. Feels like it will fit well into the story. Good to see more of Aidan, Veronica too.

EK Reeder 27/7/10 18:26

Comment: lovely detail, well written. Says something about him too—that he listens for people approaching, knows his environs

EK Reeder 27/7/10 18:46

Comment: Does he know who is at the door yet? Can you talk about why you chose not to name her? I’m not sure this description best serves your purpose. ‘Strawberry mouth’ is awkward. Perhaps clichéd.

EK Reeder 27/7/10 18:28

Comment: Good, you might, if you decide to identify her in the first sentence, change the ‘a’ to ‘her’

EK Reeder 27/7/10 18:47

Comment: this construction makes it almost sound like the table is amongst the clutter, rather than the cup. ‘accepting the cup and placing it on the long trestle table already cluttered with papers and teacup-ringed hardbacks.’

EK Reeder 27/7/10 18:29

Comment: strong detail, good use of the internal dialogue. Here and above too.

EK Reeder 27/7/10 18:30

Comment: this phrasing is a bit awkward, formal. Maybe of the time? On consideration, how does it sound to you? Like Veronica? Is there another phrasing that might work better?

'Old Lynch gone home again, has he?'

Aidan blushed and said nothing.

She trotted into the room. 'I've never been up here before, you know. Old Lynch—he doesn't like the lower orders snooping up here.'

EK Reeder 27/7/10 18:31

Comment: I agree you need a good action verb here, but I'm not sure trotted works, it trivialises her. This could be true to his POV but I'm wondering if it's not quite the way he sees her.

'The lower orders?' he frowned.

'Of course, that's what he thinks of us—the ushers and the usherette.' She always made a point of her singularity, the only usherette in the Pavilion, the only usherette in all Dublin city she would like to think.

'He doesn't think that way at all,' he said. But he wondered a moment how that felt for Veronica Doyle: the implication of inferiority, that lukewarm jabbing towards her stomach. She spoke as though it amused her. It was a strange idea to her and its strangeness only proved its untruth. Nobody else, in her mind, would think like Lynch. He was just a fool, a doddering fool blind to the hierarchy of street and school and family. A man who did not see that the Doyles were a class above the Caseys.

EK Reeder 27/7/10 18:31

Comment: ? I not sure what this means

EK Reeder 27/7/10 18:32

Comment: ? a bit awkward here in this paragraph because it is him imagining what she's thinking, and perhaps becomes a bit thin as a result.

'We're just skivvies as far as he's concerned,' she went on.

'That's not true.'

'Not you, though. I don't mean you. You're his apprentice. Of course, that's different.' He should have known Tom Doyle's sister came only to mock.

'Thanks for the brew,' he said, turning back towards the projector, which still buzzed heat. He reached forwards and slapped its warm grey flank like a jockey reaches out after a good tiring race. It was a habit with him, after the showing of a film.

EK Reeder 27/7/10 18:35

Comment: with heat

EK Reeder 27/7/10 18:35

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EK Reeder 27/7/10 18:48

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EK Reeder 27/7/10 18:48

Deleted: He would reach out his reassuring hand as a jockey reaches out after a good tiring race.

EK Reeder 27/7/10 18:48

Deleted: still she

'Pleasure,' she mumbled, but did not leave.

Her silhouette hovered now in the black window nearest to him. She hesitated, moved into profile and then walked towards him and her own reflection.

EK Reeder 27/7/10 18:36

Comment: slightly awk description, although the next sentence is lovely, works well. Highlights her self-interest

‘So how’s your brother doing? Frank... I saw him the other day.’ Veronica leaned closer to the window and peered into the darkened auditorium. ‘Settled back in, has he?’

‘He’s fine, so.’

Aidan crouched down beside the projector and lifted the take-up reel from the magazine. Veronica's business was Frank, after all. Her splash of milk, her museum-like wandering, it was all for Frank. He'd been across the sea to London and she thought he might have brought back gold dust in his pockets. Stupid fairy tales. She still believed in frogs and princes and stupid little brothers.

EK Reeder 27/7/10 18:37

Comment: strong, really strong. Good details, the anger and pettiness of his voice comes through.

He rushed back to the table and slammed the reel into the can.

EK Reeder 27/7/10 18:38

Comment: This feels a bit overdone. There's something about a slight POV shift. It made me wonder who would use rushed/slammed. It feels like Veronica would.

‘He’ll be staying here now, will he?’

His palm jammed the can lid shut.

EK Reeder 27/7/10 18:37

Comment: This is good.

‘Course.’

‘Really?’

‘Course! He won’t ever leave us again.’

He knew without turning to look at her, that her eyes were glittering. She had teased something out of him, a feeling he had not meant to show, and she was enjoying the moment of capture, the friction of his resisting shoulders.

EK Reeder 27/7/10 18:43

Comment: Great last paragraph, but I'm not sure of this last sentence. Again, the slight duality of POV, both her and him. His awareness of her view of him, so specifically.