

FM REVIEW 2016 13 COMMENTS

COMMENTS TO EDITOR: This is a strong piece of writing from a medical student perspective about experiences on her Ob-Gyn clerkship. I would categorize it as a prose poem. Reviewer 2 did a magnificent job of line editing, clarifying and refining. In particular, she caught a certain judgmental tone in places which I'm sure was unintentional, but which needs to be addressed. Reviewer 1 felt the author could have gone deeper, and I make a suggestion below as to how this might happen. Overall, this piece is a celebration not only of babies, but also of the author's experience and growth as a student as a result of being exposed to these babies, and I'd like to see the author rework the piece to express more of this.

COMMENTS TO AUTHOR: This prose poem (?) is a strong piece of writing about your experiences on your Ob-Gyn clerkship. The images are extremely well-observed and very moving. The tone generally is very well-suited to your descriptions. Reviewers have made some excellent comments, and we would like you to consider these carefully. In particular, Reviewer 2 took the time to do line edits which should help you recast the work. In addition to minor word alterations, please address these contextual issues:

1) In a narrative essay, the voice of the storyteller is particularly important. Reviewer 1 expresses concern that you do not delve deep enough into your own experience of all these events. You can see in Reviewer's edits her attempt to bring your experience more to the fore. This essay is not really about the babies - it is about you and how you reacted to each of these situations. Please think about how to bring that out more. We suggest that before the final Kurt Vonnegut quote, you add some lines summing up what seeing all these babies under all these circumstances meant to you as a student and future doctor.

2) Reviewer 2 noticed that at times your choice of language might convey a judgmental attitude toward the mother being described. We understand that this was not your intent, but please pay special attention to these examples and revise so that, based on limited knowledge of these women, you are not making assumptions about them.

3) The anecdote about the mother giving up her infant for adoption is too long with too much detail. It breaks up the flow of the narrative to no purpose. It is not the centerpiece of the story, not the climax you are building toward. It is simply one other instance you encountered. Please look for ways to bring this story more in line with the other examples you offer.

4) I agree with reviewers about the Vonnegut quote. The profanity at the end is not necessarily inappropriate, but the phrase that follows is ambiguous. Is it meant to imply that all these babies deserve kindness? This is a great message, and one you might put into your own words (again, we want to hear your voice more than Vonnegut's). I love the opening lines "Happy Birthday babies. Welcome to Earth." You might stop there with the quote, and share something of your own thoughts. "In the end, I came to no profound conclusions. But paraphrasing Vonnegut, I knew that each of these babies deserved kindness from the world, and from their physicians." In any case, think about a clearer message for the conclusion that is in your voice.

COMMENTS TO EDITOR II: The author benefitted from excellent reviewer suggestions, and this prose poem shows significant improvement. Still there are problems. In particular, one of the examples makes inappropriate assumptions about "race" that could be misconstrued. Also, the final example is not focused and does not follow the format of the others. The writing is quite beautiful and conveys the complicated impressions of a student on Ob-Gyn. I'd recommend we give the author the opportunity to continue to work on this piece.

COMMENTS TO AUTHOR II: Thank you for the numerous changes you've made in this essay in response to reviewer comments. The re-ordering of the narratives is compelling, and they now build in an effective way. Thank you for removing the Vonnegut quote - sharing your own thoughts and feelings seems more consonant with the essay as a whole. The piece is much improved and moving in the right direction.

We still have a few concerns that need to be addressed.

1) The example of the "black" baby and "white" parents makes assumptions about the nature of race that are not scientific and perpetuate inaccuracies about the entire construct. Can you rework this so that the focus is not on assumed infidelity (which might not actually be the case), but on the nurses' (and possibly society's) racist assumptions and the pain these may cause the child in the future.

2) The final example is a moving one, but has two problems. One is that it still seems to me too long - moving that baby through every developmental stage of childhood detracts from the momentum of the overall piece. More seriously, the sweetness of the piece derives from the advice/encouragement you give each of these babies - and you do not do this for the last one. Think about how to focus this final example more succinctly while concluding with a direct communication to the baby.

3) As above, I very much like how you rewrote the final section. You as narrator are more present and "visible." One small suggestion in that regard - what would you think about substituting the word "kindness" for the word "beauty" in a nod to Vonnegut? This suggestion is at your discretion. Also, you may wish to provide a footnote referencing the Vonnegut source for the final sentence.

4) Please consult the attached document for recommended revisions. Please note that this editorial revision leaves you with about 220 words. This should be sufficient to revise both the race example and the final example, but try to keep the piece as a whole within the 1000 word limit.

You've written a poignant piece that probes beneath the simplistic surface of a baby's birth yet ends up celebrating new life. Seeing this experience through the eyes of a student will help remind our readers of all that lies behind, around, and in front of the arrival of a new child on this earth and how important it is to welcome them no matter what.