Structural Revision in the Young Adult Novel

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This story started with an idea I had when I was about a group of five teenagers who wanted to build an airship to escape. I had no idea what they were escaping, or why they needed an airship to do it. I wrote and rewrote this story throughout high school, focusing on a boy set to become heir to a crime family, and I completed the first draft of *Impossible Flight* as I completed high school.

Returning to this project, I spent part of the past summer researching crime organizations and reading psychological analyses of wives and children within the Italian Mafia. I then realized I needed to reconsider the power dynamics and characterizations of my novel. My research has primarily informed my protagonist’s relationship with his father. Marie di Blasi’s essay, “Growing in Mafia Territories,” regarding children who grow up within the Mafia structure, presents that these children are forced into a world of strict cultural codes. The primary of these is ultimate obedience to the Mafia’s cultural codes, such as strict gender roles, aggressive censorship and secrecy, and the limitations of social labeling. Often these children struggle with the development of identity and a sense of self, when they have been primarily taught to obey and have their roles and identities pre-assigned by the Mafia structure. My protagonist’s attitude toward his father was dramatically changed from haughty to deferent. I rewrote my story with the aim of portraying a more authentic struggle with morality amid corruption, while still highlighting my protagonist’s search for identity.

I then took the first six chapters to Wesleyan’s Writer’s Conference, received feedback, and wrote them again. The criticism that I received was that the story was hard to follow, as it did not follow the main character chronologically, and suggested I pay more attention to my main character’s emotional journey. I have also received feedback from an informal student writer’s group at Hampshire College; they pointed out a dependence on genre tropes to construct my story, and discrepancies in character’s abilities and priorities based on age and class. To counter this, I have focused on fleshing out motivations and inter-character relationships through flashbacks and dialogue, as well as concentrating on maintaining Xavier’s third-person-limited perspective throughout the narrative.

A major effort I have made in this draft of *Impossible Flight* is coherent world building, implementing my research to create a realistic crime family and corrupt city structure. To this end, I developed a tabletop role-play game set in my world and invited other Mount Holyoke students to wander through it in order to push myself into developing other areas of the city. This has been instrumental in fleshing out the government, political structure, and social codes in my novel.

Works Cited