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Literary Critique: *White Clouds*

The author could do their manuscript justice by just giving it a single read-through for obvious errors. For instance, in the very first paragraph, they write: “at times frightening, but as the rain relented, there was relatively a bleak since of calm beneath the darkened heaven” (page 5). These simple errors continue throughout the piece, with sentences such as “I had often heard my father quote a familiar scripture in my hearing when I was a young boy” (page 54). Finally, there are quite a few changes in tenses that need to be addressed, such as a sudden introduction of the present tense with: “Mr. White is disgusted at what he hears. He walks away from the table...” (page 76). These various grammatical errors can be solved by carefully combing through the piece a couple times.

Stylistically, at the very start of the story, the change from third person to first person is startling. I would suggest that the author open up with first person and stick with it. Also, despite the fact that *White Clouds* is in first person, the author occasionally jumps out of Franklin’s perspective to give the reader an eye into what the other characters are doing. While this is unconventional, I didn’t actually mind it, but I would suggest making clear breaks (either a line break or a chapter break) in between the different perspectives.

On another note, when Jason narrates his story (page 42), it feels like the narration breaks off into a script-like format, giving the readers a very visual

flashback. While this method works in film, I don't think it's really applicable for a first person narrated novel, and that scene would be much better served with either a simple retelling of the event by Jason or a line break and a flashback. I would stick with one or the other, rather than trying to force both.

On the subject of the progression of time, I found the "crystal ball" moments in which Franklin the narrator knew more than Franklin the character took me out of the forward motion of the story. An example of the moments in which he breaks out of his current state to give preemptive forebodings would be: "She enjoyed the perks and the success that came along with work. But little did she know that my success would ultimately come at such a high price for her" (page 23). This reads more like a back blurb than part of the novel. I would suggest that the author drop these bits and show the building tension (as they did with the images of the impending storm), instead of telling it.

As for the characters, it's an interesting concept to have an open-minded white man in 1967 as the main protagonist. However, considering how racially divided the time is, the author has to give the character a reason to go against the grain of the white male mindset of the time so he doesn't appear quite so anachronistic. The fact that Franklin is a paraplegic definitely puts him in an interesting place—he understands what it means to be a second-class citizen as he himself is disabled. There were a couple points in which the author made interesting social parallels there. Still, it could have been pushed further, especially considering the fact that he is so successful despite his disability.

Nonetheless, I will add that I think the author nailed the tone of a period piece at the start of the novel. Franklin had an almost murder-noir style way of speaking, as did the people around him, and it keeps me in the feel of the time period. As the novel continued, it lost a little bit of that hardboiled style and I'd like to see it resurface again. Likewise, all the women have something of a Dashiell Hammett feel to them—beautiful, sassy, and devoted to their men.

As for the supporting cast, as nice as it is to see powerful black characters in a period piece, there are times when they go a little outside the comfort zone of what would be appropriate at the time. For example, for Elizabeth, as not only a black person but also a woman, to tell the white businessman Percy to “shut up” (page 59) and that she’s “not in the mood” for his kind of talk (page 60) seems a little *too* empowered. The piece appears to revolve around the racial struggles of the time, yet the characters themselves seem to have no real problem taking control of their identities and talking back to the privileged white characters. Conflict is solved all too easily, and very often with a single word from Franklin. The more the characters wrestle with their issues, the more tension the story builds.

The main issue with this piece is the direction. There are multiple little stories, but the main arc itself is muddled. What I'd suggest is this: focus on the main story of a white banker who, after his wife dies, goes on a mission to find his maid's son, a mission that was important to his wife. This would give him the underlining motivation of making peace with his wife's death and finding some sense of closure. Not to mention, it gives the author's story a nice background of a white disabled man in a 1960s black city. It's a setting ripe for social and political commentary.

I would get rid of the fact that he hides his identity and works as a grocery store man simply because it does not seem appropriate for a banker. I also would advise the author not to be afraid to make Franklin a little less open-minded initially—the more the character grows throughout the piece, the more interesting the story is. So if he starts off as a rich white man with an edge of superiority, it might be interesting to see how he reacts when he's "downgraded" to a poor society, and to watch his transformation. The author should take into consideration Franklin's backstory of being attacked by two black men and ending up in a wheelchair. With the tense time period and that time of trauma, the readers may find it hard to believe that he wouldn't have any sort of racial complex.

*White Clouds* would be a stronger story if the author very clearly identified Franklin's singular motivation. The main focus of the novel should be a singular, very concise desire on Franklin's part. That desire can be Franklin's need to find God, or his need to find closure with his wife. Whichever the author chooses, they should use the main arc as the backbone of the story and as the singular drive for Franklin. Otherwise, it seems as though Franklin has multiple, disconnected issues which all solve themselves one way or another in the end. It would be a stronger and more satisfying ending to see Franklin complete a single arc, whether the focus is on the romantic or religious aspect of the novel.

In terms of marketing, I would say that one of the main strengths of *White Clouds* is that it is such a quick and engaging read and would make for a good summer book. The pace of the novel is very quick and keeps the reader's attention, which is a real credit to the author. Overall, it would appeal mainly to a religious

audience. As it stands now, I believe there is a good deal of editing to be done in terms of structure and character development. Since it is a very light read, I would recommend publishing it as an ebook.