

THE REVENGE OF OLD MEN--General notes

E, here are some things that bother me. 1. Lou, the narrator. Your narrative style is good and alive. But Lou's attitudes are unclear and seemingly contradictory. At times he seems cynical, at other times overly ^{naive} naive. Then again he has sort of a quirkish humor (like when he slaps his own head or talks to himself). He's Candi's lover but he doesn't really talk to her or act toward her or think about her like one who loves her. This really hurts the story a lot. He's a newspaperman and often quite tough-talking. But after the scene between Jim and Gilbert--the two having just made a perfectly common deal between two politicians on the make--he is not only amazed but thinks he's "dreaming." He's a Cajun and apparently a relative of the Fixes, but he doesn't act at all as though he feels at home there. He doesn't seem particularly sympathetic toward anyone (except Beep-Beep), which is ok. But it did turn me off a bit. If he could at least have shown some tenderness toward Candi when she was really low. His main passion seems for football. This is ok. Perhaps you could make him a sports-writer. But that still doesn't solve his lack of feeling about other matters.

2. JayC. In a way he's the central character. The action centers around him--though he himself is very little in evidence. In the beginning and again the end he seems to be a sort of people's hero. They look up to him, follow his advice, etc. However whenever he is shown he is very unlikable. He is forever smiling sarcastically, making set speeches and showing himself to be arrogant, intolerant, and he doesn't say one thing that shows a direct warm contact with a human being, black or white. I understand Lou's dislike for him because of course Lou is jealous (though he doesn't seem to be aware of it). I suspect that you, the author also dislike him and it shows. It shows,

for instance, in the attitude of the sheriff, and in the way no one really says anything nice about him except Candi, of course. This however makes the end very inappropriate. Why should such a fine man as the African die for someone as nasty and half-baked.² And why should all these other people suffer for him. And why should he (who's half-white) be able to tell the black people what do do who have been managing without him for so long any more than a white person should.² His speeches are pretentious and rather boring. His final gesture of carrying the African offstage seems like a parody. Perhaps it is a parody. I don't know, E. What were you trying to say? You've already shown this character better in BLOODLINE, where he was clearly mad. A thought: If you could make JayC a gentle, scholarly type of man--perhaps a professor who is doing research in the South or something like that, then everyone could feel protective about him and it would make much more sense for someone like the African to may^{be} risk his life for him. No to mention Candi.

Is it really necessary for that old man to die? Perhaps you could have a lighter ending. The book is mainly lighthearted--not heavy. Perhaps you could make it still more so (with only the undertones serious). I don't mean lighthearted. Light. Make it move still quicker and lighter and make the ending funny and touching. Which it so easily could be.

E, You have a unique voice (as you know). You don't use it much in this book. When your old men come on, there it is. The only time I really felt that here's your voice back. Now that you've found it again, use it a lot more. No one else can write like that. Can you have the old men distributed over more of the book, and have a bit less of those boring half-dead people in Marshall House (those scenes are not really all that funny or ~~that~~ perceptive, though they will be good with a little more work). You could make it a shorter novel. Especially the first

100 pages or so move too slowly after the good exciting beginning.

It could be a wonderful funny-touching book revealing both what goes on there today and what's been there for generations.

P.S. Another thought If you remove JayC as "leader" you still have Jim left to speak for the new generation. You could make him a really live character. (Though you will still have to figure out how in a light satirical novel you can portray a politician, even a black politician, lovingly. But I don't see why not. (But try avoiding set speeches as much as possible.)