



JERICO WRITERS

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EXAMPLE MANUSCRIPT ASSESSMENT

Please find below your commissioned Editorial Report from Jericho Writers.

This report has been prepared with care by your editor and will help identify what is working and give you practical and constructive advice on your next steps. We advise you to read the report carefully and then put it aside for a few days. After that time you may have questions so do remember that you have the opportunity to have a follow-up conversation (by email or phone) with your editor in order to understand better any comments made. This is all part of the service.

INTRO:

Thank you for coming back to Jericho Writers with your revised manuscript, *BOOK TITLE*. The earlier version of this was *BOOK TITLE* (under the name X).

In my previous report, I had recommended working on making the two plotlines, the family drama and the hidden art, gel together more; shortening the first few chapters; cutting back on self-reflection and poetic imagery and keeping things as 'real' as possible; cutting back on the art history without losing its importance; giving minor characters more distinctive voices.

I'm really pleased to see how much work you've done on this, and along the lines I'd suggested. The plot is much tighter, with both story arcs intertwining much, much better – we can now see clearly why one matters to the other. You also get to the point much more quickly, and I like that you have interspersed the present events of your central character, George, with flashbacks to the moment he discussed with his son over going to the festival. It gets the reader into the story faster, and without losing any crucial information.

I also think the style is much more realistic now, and consistently so – it feels gritty and authentic, we can picture all of this so much better now. The art history information doesn't feel like an unconnected lecture, as you have worked it into George's learning process about who he is, and who he can be, so much better, too.

So, all in all, this is a huge improvement. There are still some things that need a bit more attention, but we are now getting to the nitty-gritty of specific issues, rather than bigger problems. I'll detail those below.

CONTENT:

The essential content of the story remains unchanged: set in the village of Moon, George is a husband and father whose family situation is perilous, given that he can't work, having lost an arm in a fight, and his son, who has just got a girl pregnant, has gone off to fight in a war. The novel opens with George on his way to kill himself – he's reached rock bottom and can't take any more.

He's stopped by a convoy from London, [REDACTED]. George is asked to help as he knows the place; soon, he is employed there.

At this point we meet Gillian, Philip, Dan, Miles, and Pascal, who will take up important if minor roles. Miles will be revealed by George as flogging blackmarket goods, and blackmailing Gillian over stolen goods – this comes after George is almost killed by an accident engineered by Miles.

George takes Miles's place in Lyon, where he contemplates suicide, when he hears that [REDACTED]. He hurries back to help look for the child, who is soon found.

There are some small plotlines that need to be ironed out and made more seamless, as well as some psychological developments that need to be explored more fully. As the novel presently comes in at 65000 words, though, that does give you room to do that. Ideally, you want to be about 90,000 words for a novel like this. I'll be saying a bit more about this in the rest of the report, as it does give you room to manoeuvre, especially the latter half of the novel.

STRUCTURE

██████████', and the assault he makes on his nephew. I like this connection – it's quiet ('in silence') before the violence erupts. It's a good example of how a connection can work through contrasts, and be even more effective because of it.

What's not so easy is coming out of that – you go from '██████████' on page 12 to '██████████', Gillian said.

This is tricky because you're going from a moment of explosion and destruction (of his relationship with his nephew), to George being in the hands of Gillian. I think you want to make a clearer psychological connection here. You can even get away with stating it. George loses his temper with his nephew because he's lost power over him. Then we see him in the car with Gillian and what's most striking is the he keeps asking for his piece of ██████████ but he can't get it – Gillian has control over him now.

So both instances reek of impotence – you need to stress that ██████████ is George's only way of getting control and keeping it, no matter how utterly pointless that is. He's helpless to affect his nephew's choices, and he's helpless against Gillian's insistence that he go with them.

This is important because the rest of the novel is going to be about how he gets some control back – he'll ebb and flow with it, until he ultimately manages to get control over himself, and negotiates a 'peace' with his family. If you're wanting to show him 'at war' with himself and those closest to him then emphasise that a bit more, so that we know what struggle he has to come.

After this, we will want to know how he's going to manage this job, and that's where you need a bit more psychological input as well. By that, I mean just thinking through the logic of how he feels and its relation to what he does, and vice versa - I like that he feels inadequate because he doesn't know what any of the paintings mean or who the painters are – but his curiosity gets the better of him, and that's what saves him. Plus the fact that he's now earning a wage and can help at home. So we see him moving from a psychological state of dread and despair, to one of hope and confidence – it's that emotional and psychological journey that matters. For example, he's not allowed to talk about his work – what does he think about the impact that's going to have on his ██████████? Is his ██████████ so desperate it won't harm it? He's keeping secrets from Carol – that's a burden to carry, and you could explore that a bit more in their relationship, too.

PLOTTING & PACING/TENSION

This is where I want to look a little more closely at how you've plotted the two developing story arcs.

Part of the family story is that [REDACTED], but [REDACTED]. He goes off to fight alongside his friend, Dennis. Meanwhile, George makes it clear that he thinks Dennis is [REDACTED], and we find out later that he saw [REDACTED] once.

This changes the family drama quite a bit from your original, which was more about the ongoing fight between Mrs Smith, [REDACTED] and Carol, [REDACTED]. Carol thought that Mrs Smith had had an affair with her nephew, because they had been seen together.

You still have that latter story, as a basis for the confusion between Carol and Mrs Smith, which is fine. But the storyline with Emil isn't quite there yet, because if George was so appalled at his son and Dennis, he'd more likely be pleased that he's [REDACTED], and thus proving that he's [REDACTED], wouldn't he? Psychologically, this isn't quite working. I like that Philip is challenging George about his attitudes, and that you have Philip and Emil go off together at the end, but it feels too shoe-horned in at the moment, and too psychologically superficial. You need to thin more deeply about this without unnecessarily complicating the story line. Which is George more angry about? His nephew's [REDACTED], his son getting [REDACTED], or his neighbour [REDACTED]?

I think if you could give George more insight into his nephew's behaviour – for example, if George realises he is just going off to [REDACTED] in order to *run away* (from [REDACTED] – [REDACTED], so he could be in real trouble), maybe that's what *really* makes him angry. He can't force him to face up to anything – this underpins his feeling of impotence, too – and he can't talk to [REDACTED] about it, either.

All of this is already there in the novel's plotting, you just need to be sure of the questions the novel is asking, and what answers it's giving, so that you don't have contradictions flying around, or motivations that don't add up.

In the [REDACTED] storyline, it's Miles who will cause problems. But there's still an issue with defining the minor characters more, in order for this plotline to develop fully so I'll say more about that below.

CHARACTERISATION & VOICE

There are several elements of the [REDACTED] plotline – [REDACTED] [REDACTED] – that dominate the earlier part set in the [REDACTED] and then in the big house in Dorset. These elements have to lead up to the 'action' in Lyon,

where George will try to kill himself again, he'll meet up with his nephew and Joe, and [REDACTED].

Do you see the disconnect here? The only thing from the early part of the [REDACTED] plotline that has real relevance for the later part is that Miles will be unmasked as a [REDACTED] and so George takes his place when they take some [REDACTED] up to Lyon.

It's important because this final stage is where the [REDACTED] and family drama really need to become mixed up in one another, but so far one is really outweighing the other. I'm also not really sure what the reason is for George wanting to [REDACTED]? I understand that he realises he's messed up badly with [REDACTED], but why doesn't he want to try and patch things up?

Two years pass when Joe appears with [REDACTED], and it doesn't feel as though George has been working with [REDACTED] for two years, partly because they're still short of money (wouldn't his pay have solved that issue over the last two years?), but also because he hasn't got in any deeper with the men he works alongside. I'd suggested previously that you make Miles befriend George more – we need to see that, so we feel the betrayal when Miles tries to [REDACTED], and then when he tries to reveal that [REDACTED], not in the [REDACTED]. At the moment, he's still just one of the men who's not singled out nearly enough. Philip is identified visually (through [REDACTED]) as well as psychologically (George discovers he's [REDACTED], but he doesn't really hide it), but the other men aren't conveyed that way.

I think if you can develop the men more, you might find your plot link to the family drama in the final scenes works more organically and naturally – you have a good 20,000 words you can use for this, so that it feels less rushed and you're not having to force connections.

Even after this revised version, I still can't really tell Pascal and Dan apart, so it might be worth combining them. What they all need though is a strong reason to be there, and for their part in the story to be noticeable. Consider secrets more – Philip has a 'secret', although he makes it obvious. Miles has a secret ([REDACTED]) that will even push him to kill; Pascal has no secrets?; Gillian has a secret ([REDACTED]) Dan is [REDACTED], but that's not crucial to the plot?

The men operate like a kind of family. They mirror the family George has at home, which is highly dysfunctional and full of people who don't trust one another. What George needs, therefore, is to mend his family, somehow. He needs the job in order to pay for things, but what else does he need from his [REDACTED] family? Philip will open his mind so that he's more understanding of his son, perhaps. Gillian will open his mind to [REDACTED] and why it matters. But what about Miles and Dan?

The [REDACTED] in Lyon stops him from [REDACTED], and it sparks his newfound devotion to his family when he realises Joe and Emil have survived it, too. Back home,

they find a neighbour has taken the [REDACTED], and there's a confrontation between Mrs Smith and Carol. The source of the dispute between the two women is Emil – Carol thinks [REDACTED], when in fact he told Mrs Smith about [REDACTED].

The problem with this is that it doesn't feel related to the [REDACTED], or the [REDACTED] [REDACTED], and as such, it doesn't feel necessary. If you took Mrs Smith out of the novel altogether, would it all fall apart? Probably not. She's not the catalyst she needs to be to justify her position in the story – it's not as though Carol realises her nephew is [REDACTED] from the confrontation. She's still in the dark at the end, when Joe reveals [REDACTED].

It's crucial for you to get this part of the novel right, so it's worth taking some time with it, both in thinking through it, as well as on the page. As I've said, you've got the space to do it, to build up properly to George's second [REDACTED], to make it convincing enough, and to tie the two story arcs together. Think of them as two halves of a bridge – they've got to meet in the middle to keep the whole structure up. And what connects them in the middle is your characters and what they do, the impact they have on one another.

STYLE

Your prose style here is great – realism suits your story and your writing is so much more confident now without the repetition and self-questioning that was taking up so much of the previous manuscript. As I said above, this is authentic and real and gritty, and that's so important. A couple of very minor style points – you use '[REDACTED]' a lot, especially in connection with Carol. I don't know if it's a subconscious connection with an actual [REDACTED]! Or if you are trying to make a real connection there, but it's overworked. You can get away with one '[REDACTED]', but even then, it will always sound melodramatic and anything like that disturbs your realism. Keep that realism in your mind at all times – anything that looks to be too dramatic, go the opposite way and dampen it down.

You have some punctuation issues and your dialogue sometimes begins and ends in the wrong place in the paragraph, but again, that's me nit-picking, and is really for when you're giving the manuscript that final polish. Watch out for too many filtering terms in your first couple of pages (quite a lot of 'I saw' etc).

Otherwise, this is a strong, identifiable style of your own and that's a great thing to have. It's highly readable and publishable, too.

MARKETABILITY

As I said in my previous report, this is an area of historical fiction that is popular which means more competition. I also said that the theme of secrets, of 'hidden lives' being brought out more, could help where commercial ability is concerned. I think now that the realism in your novel is coming out more, so you want to play to your strengths. This is still a book about art helping to heal a wounded soul, but it's also more now in this revised version about *damage* – living with damage, hiding things from potential damage, stopping damage from doing worse - bodily, psychological, artistic, national damage. That's what war does; that's what poverty does; that's what intolerance does.

Damage as a theme in itself isn't exactly a huge one, but it might give you room to situate yourself in the historical war fiction genre. There is still interest in this era, and although your wartime story isn't one of the 'big' ones, like stories about concentration camp survival (like John Boyne's *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, or Heather Morris's *The Tattooist of Auschwitz*), for example, which are still hugely popular, it's still got more than enough to say something that's worth hearing.

So I do think now is the time to be thinking seriously about how your book finds its market. That means thinking about this while doing your revisions – how does it sit alongside other novels set during this era? Does its realism set it apart? If so, in what way – and by 'what way', I mean, in commercial terms. This isn't a 'romance' as such – you're offering something tougher and grittier than that, without it being a 'war' novel about battles, or about espionage – and you're not writing about parted lovers.

That makes it harder to find your place in the market, but it's not impossible. This is serious historical fiction, so start investigating what exists like this in the market. It might need you to mix different writers and their styles and subjects – for example, you might describe your novel as a mix of Rachel Seiffert's realist prose style with a subject matter closer to *The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Society* – that's just a crude example, you're mixing a home-based [REDACTED] with a realist prose style, and very often the former is aimed at women readers, and the latter at men. You've got something that might just appeal to both, so emphasising that would be helpful.

SUBMITTING TO AGENTS/PUBLISHERS

When you're ready to approach agents, you will want to be able to show some precedent for what your novel. It's a war novel that's set [REDACTED]; it's not about [REDACTED]. It's not about [REDACTED] but it is about secrets.

There are lots of non-fiction books about [REDACTED], and I'm sure there are histories about the [REDACTED] here. But there is also the setting that counts – set in [REDACTED], it might be seen in the same way a novel

set in ██████████ would be (by that, I mean, 'provincial' to a certain degree – it's almost anti-metropolitan in George's attitude to ██████████, etc). There are novels like that which would give you a sub-genre of your own. They tend not to be the big hitters, but this is the sort of setting that independent publishers would be more interested in. Have a look at independent publishing houses and see what they have already in this genre, and what you could offer them if you were approaching them.

CONCLUSION AND KEY POINTS ROUND UP

To conclude then, I think you're substantially closer to publication than you were before, and you should feel pleased with this revised version. You have rushed the end of the novel, I think, and that's where you probably need one last push, to really get that right. So, I'd recommend:

1. Thinking through your minor characters more, and developing them further.
2. Linking up the two story arcs, the family drama and the hidden art, more substantially in the final chapters
3. More psychological development with regard to this latter half of the novel
4. Watching links when using flashbacks, and looking out for some stylistic tics (like overuse of certain words like 'spat' etc)
5. Thinking about where your book will fit in the market