

A NOVEL COLLABORATION: THE ROLE OF EDITING IN 20TH CENTURY
AMERICAN LITERATURE

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By

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ABSTRACT

Editors' contributions to literary creation are too often understated or overlooked. Most of the existing conversation in regards to editors is either purely biographical in nature or else discusses editing as a practice entirely separate from that of authorship. While I acknowledge the different demands of these roles, I argue that they are firmly and complexly intertwined. In this thesis "A Novel Collaboration: Editorial Influence in Twentieth Century American Fiction", I explore the effect of editing on the creation of 20th century American fiction. Analysis of the history of publication and changes to this process enacted during the 20th century provides insight into the active function of editorship on literary creation. Focusing on prominent American novels and how these books developed from collaborative authorial/editorial relationships sheds light on the editor's place within notions of authorship. Rather than relegating the editor to a passive role in literary creation, I argue that editors like Maxwell Perkins and Thérèse "Tay" Von Hohoff play an active role in shaping the texts that inform the American literary identity of the early to mid-twentieth century. Corroborated by manuscript annotations, correspondence, biographies, historical records, interviews, and critical essays, this thesis foregrounds editors as participants in authorship, and grants them a measure of responsibility for the novels that make up the American literary canon.

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Introduction

My initial experience as amateur literary scholar presented me with a rather romantic idea: a solitary author tucked away hermit-like in some remote retreat, hunched over the novel s/he had been laboring over for weeks or perhaps months. I imagined that whatever book I held acted as a direct conduit to this writer's mind. Even if I was aware in some vague amorphous way that some changes occurred during publication, the recesses of my mind relegated such adjustments to copyediting and printing. When, during the course of an American literature seminar, a professor posted some innocuous texts on editing and publishing to the syllabus, I was floored. My image shattered, to be replaced by a new and somewhat startling one:

Somewhere, a *pair* of individuals was hard at work: miles apart, they hunched over separate desks, scribbling frantic notes to one another to be sent in the morning post. Or perhaps they sat at a bar with their heads close together in discussion, voices surprisingly low over their gin and tonics, surrounded by a loose pile of pages covered in markings. One or the other would make suggestions. Occasionally one of them might plead or raise their voice. But in the end they would shake hands, clink their glasses, sign their letters "yours." They'd finished a novel. It took a long time, perhaps years, but after countless late nights, arguments, deliberations and last-minute changes, they were both immensely proud and relieved to have completed the work.

My image faltered after this point. Soon one of these individuals would see their name upon the cover of the published book. The other would likely not—they'd be lucky to find their name on the dedication page. The former individual was the writer: the creative young voice who possessed more than a little bit of genius. The latter, retreating

from the public eye, a proud parent seeing the benefits of their guidance come to fruition, was the editor. I learned, gradually, that one of the earliest exemplars of a bolstered editorial role in American literature was none other than Maxwell Perkins, famed Scribners editor. From there, my fascination with the role of editing in the American literary tradition led me to trace what I discovered to be a few patterns of not just professional partnership, but sincere collaboration¹.

In order to engage in a discussion that foregrounds editing as an active component of authorship rather than an afterthought, I must once again revisit the concept of the “author.” After all, as famous French post-structural literary theorist Roland Barthes suggested in “The Death of the Author”: “once an action is recounted, for intransitive ends, and no longer in order to act directly upon reality — that is, finally external to any function but the very exercise of the symbol — this disjunction occurs, the voice loses its origin, the author enters his own death, writing begins” (Barthes 2). Though Barthes ultimately places the reigns of the text in the hands of the reader, his essay is useful here chiefly for the way in which it separates the act of literary creation from the “genius” of the writer’s own imagination. This crucial separation allows one for an expanded understanding of authorship as a practice not confined to the solitary effort and intention of an individual. *The* author may be “dead” but *authorship* still matters. In this case, symbiotic authorship calls for writer and editor working together in the process of literary creation. The alchemical nature of this process (less magical because of its lack of reliance upon the writer’s pure inspiration to create a perfect masterpiece) demands that

¹ In order to best explore a collaborative authorial relationship, this thesis chooses to remove as many variables as possible that might have impeded author and editor from

both components receive attention in their proper turn: first the component of the story provided by the writer, then the guidance of the editor, combined in a unified vision. Of course nothing transpires without obtaining that essential first component (a workable manuscript), but the process only effectively transmutes lead into gold with the necessary addition of the editor's input. We know this process works because we can trace proof of its effects in particular case studies within American literature.

Two such paragons of editorial craft are the previously-mentioned Maxwell Evarts Perkins and the less widely-known Thérèse "Tay" Von Hohoff, who worked neither for nor against but ultimately with their writers to craft a shared legacy. Theirs is a method unique to some of the most prominent novels of the 20th century. Both the quality of the product and the nature of this kind of authorial collaboration could be considered distinctly American in nature. Based in immense professional respect as well as deep personal affection, this collaborative style that I refer to as "symbiotic authorship" thrives on the spirit of working towards a unified goal, with each member of the team contributing towards the needs of the other. The work doesn't necessarily overlap—the editor suggests and revises, the writer writes—but both engage in the process of authorship in a way that exists almost exclusively in works of American literature of the 20th century.

Journalist Jonathan Mahler notes that the conversation surrounding editorial intervention, once it reaches the public's knowledge, is not always an uplifting one:

Publishing lore is filled with stories of famously headstrong editors imposing their will on authors. Maxwell Perkins, the longtime editorial director at Charles Scribner's Sons, told Ernest Hemingway to "tone it down," and cut 90,000 words from Thomas Wolfe's debut novel, "Look Homeward, Angel." Gordon Lish rewrote entire passages of Raymond Carver's stories, and later boasted about it to friends. (Mahler)

In fact, despite Perkins's efforts (or perhaps in part because of his abiding sense of modesty), editorial work remained sidelined in the literary conversation for most of the twentieth century, and with good reason. However, Mahler here misrepresents Perkins's cutting of Wolfe's initial manuscript by implying that the work was not appreciated by the author at the time, or even as if it were done without any input from Wolfe which, as previously stated, is far from the case. Maxwell Perkins himself would have been the last editor to ever presume to impose his will on the author's novel. Gordon Lish, however, is a much more pertinent example: the backlash in response to the widespread knowledge of his work on Ray Carver's stories is notoriously brutal.

Ten years after Carver's death, the *New York Times* writer D. T. Max would find Carver's early edited manuscripts, and with them, evidence of the extent of Lish's editorial intervention. Max published these findings in his article "The Carver Chronicles." This article, however, carries some of Max's own opinions on the subject: he calls out Lish's tactics as "bullying and competitive," (Max 6) for how drastically he changed the landscape of Carver's fiction. The public largely shared this sentiment. In an introduction to his interview with Gordon Lish, Christian Lorentzen informs the reader "it's the custom for editors to keep a low profile and to underplay any changes they may make to an author's manuscript" (Lish 196). This instinct for humility helps editors get to the important work of catering to the author's intent, which often includes a not insignificant amount of reassurance that the writer is indeed capable and talented. But Lorentzen notes that "Gordon Lish is a different animal. Not since Maxwell Perkins has an editor been so famous-or notorious-as a sculptor of other people's prose" (Lish 196).

This fame had a detrimental effect on the reputation of both author and editor: when asked if he felt as if he'd been demonized for his editing of Raymond Carver's short stories, Lish responded "Indubitably... No one who has not looked at the evidence could otherwise imagine what had, in fact, occurred. For all those years." (Lish 206). Of course, editor and author had fallen out long before the nature of Lish's contributions (or interference, if one prefers) came to light. This instance, too, sets their partnership apart from that of Perkins and Wolfe, whose falling out arose as a direct result of Thomas Wolfe's publicized appreciation for Perkins's assistance in improving his novels. But it is useful to understand the professional relationship between Carver and Lish as a counterpoint to the more successful editorial relationships discussed here, and the difference between breaching standard editorial practice and engaging in the constructive process of symbiotic authorship.

In theory, readers are aware that other hands than the authors' help to shape the final versions of the novels they read, but given the history of publicized editorial relationships, one can understand that readers might not react favorably to the knowledge that the assistance from editors goes beyond fixing the occasional grammatical or factual error. According to Simon Armitage in "Rough Crossings:"

Editing takes a variety of forms. It includes the discovery of talent in a relatively obscure literary magazine or in a "slush pile" of unsolicited manuscripts. It can be a matter of financial and emotional support in difficult times. And, once faced with a manuscript, an editor ordinarily tries to facilitate a writer's vision, to recommend changes—deletions, additions, transpositions—that best serve the work. (Armitage 3)

If readers accepted the multifaceted properties of the publishing industry, they could perhaps accept that editors can display a creative talent equal to that of their authorial

partners. Though the collaboration should be mutual and agreed-upon, it can exist and flourish.

Modern readers might no longer see poets and fiction writers as demigods or subjects of divine intervention, but the elite status possessed by writers remains intact. In fact, the writers of today lay claim to higher artistic echelons as a direct result of Mark McGurl's *The Program Era*. The "Program Era" refers to the time period following the establishment of creative writing programs such as the one at the University of Iowa, which have come to be almost a prerequisite for literary success. According to McGurl:

The postwar creative writing program was founded on the assumption that artists are forged in the imposition of these institutional constraints upon unfettered creativity; its fancy footwork, reciprocally, would be put to the task of explaining the continuing import of inborn talent, the human "raw materials" with which the workshop works. Engle's colorful way of putting it was to say that "we do not pretend to grow blonde curls on an autumn pumpkin," admitting that "good poets, like good hybrid corn, are both born and made" (McGurl, 131).

Essentially, the program boosts the image of the successful writers who emerge from it. The fact that writers must undergo rigorous training despite their innate gifts serves only to enhance their hegemony over the rest of the literary sphere. Furthermore, McGurl repeatedly refers to writers through the lens of "craftsmanship" which is unsurprising, given the connotations of the word "workshop": a craftsman alone in his/her space, taking a hands-on approach to creating artisanal pieces. One can infer an intimacy between craftsman and project, and readers expect this same intimacy in the works of their preferred authors.

Writing is not a self-encompassed process belonging entirely to the writer alone, despite what *The Program Era* has led us to believe. If readers took time to understand and recognize the multifaceted properties of the publishing industry, they could perhaps

accept that editors can display a creative talent equal to that of their authorial partners. Though the collaboration should be mutual and agreed-upon, it can exist and flourish.

A talented editor with a sense of structure and style can transform the work of a good writer from a successful novel to a literary masterpiece. Both parties must work towards this unified vision of authorial intention, possessing some concept of success, a sense of trying to say *something*, a driving creative force for both writer and editor. There has to be a dash of genius. By analyzing the work of Maxwell Perkins in the early twentieth century and Tay Hohoff's work with Harper Lee decades later, I plan to explore the nature of symbiotic authorship, the circumstances that allow the collaboration to take place, and why it so often results in masterpieces of American literature.

Chapter I: The Genius of Judgment

The American editorial tradition as we know it was established roughly one hundred years ago, yet it has gone startlingly under-recognized for most of that time. D.T. Max's incendiary "The Carver Chronicles" awakened the American readership to the presence of the editor in works of fiction, and the publication of Harper Lee's *Go Set a Watchman* in 2015 reaffirmed the need for an understanding of the editorial role. Even the 2016 film *Genius*, based on A. Scott Berg's biography of Maxwell Evarts Perkins, brings the monumental task of editing a literary masterpiece to the fore. As Susan Bell writes in *The Artful Edit*, it is crucial to understand "editing on its own terms, not as a shadowy aspect of writing" (2). The author is not an island. A writer accepting help from an editor does not make them any less of an author, because authorship is not an individual practice. One can take part in the practice of authorship without ever writing a word. In this thesis, I argue that the term "authorship" should refer to the process of literary creation as a whole, with both "editing" and "writing" acting as essential components of this process. The alchemical transition of a story to a masterpiece novel requires first the imagination of a writer, then the judgment and guidance of an editor: the writer acting as the first necessary component, while the editor (no less valid for being the final layer) possesses the capability to *complete* the transmutation of story to novel (almost as if turning lead to gold). Though fairly equal partners in the relationship of literary production, the modern perception of all editors is still that of one who is subservient to the overall vision of the author, despite exemplary cases of American literary masterpieces whose histories prove otherwise. American audiences are ready to see and understand that certain editors participated actively in literary creation. Perkins

created a new mode of editing fiction, but perhaps more importantly he changed how we ought to look at the role of editing, in particular in 20th century American literature. This thesis explores how Maxwell Perkins' relationships with F. Scott Fitzgerald and, in particular, Thomas Wolfe exemplified "symbiotic authorship." This mode of authorship evolved from a distinctly American editorial influence that emerged in the twentieth century and in several notable cases—such as that of Tay Hohoff and Harper Lee—resulted in American literary classics. Collaborative editing and authorship of this nature is directly responsible for creating some of the most beloved works of twentieth century American fiction.

We can say with relative certainty that almost all texts since the fifteenth century have experienced some kind of editorial influence. In *The Artful Edit*, Susan Bell describes how "medieval scribes gave way to textual critics (literary detectives hired by publishers to authenticate manuscripts" and from this new role the modern editor emerged (3). No longer could editors remain distant from the process of writing; they now had to interact with living authors of manuscripts. But just what this modern editor did remains unclear: from "a change in punctuation" to a reconfiguring in "the editor's sieve until the chunky parts of speech were removed and the fine, smooth powder of an idea" revealed itself, there was no way to pinpoint just how much influence an editor could wield (Bell 3). The role was necessarily a flexible one, and gradually adapted to the needs of the locale. But in the first decades of the twentieth century, editing (and by extension, publishing) underwent a rapid change in one particular region: The United States of America. Bell recounts essayist Eliot Weinberger's reflection that "the word editor—in the American sense—does not exist in other languages" (Bell 38). In order to

describe how American editing underwent a metamorphosis drastic enough to warrant its differentiation from not only its British predecessor, but from most other publication traditions, we need to begin with the turn of the century.

During the 1890's, only a few decades prior to what is now known as the "Golden Age of Publishing," American publishers faced a nearly insatiable demand for novels with hardly a handful of American authors to offer for consumption. According to John Tebbel in his history of American book publishing, by the turn of the century "the reading of fiction in America became something of a mania" but "the fiction that was most read in the nineties came from British authors" (Tebbel 178-9). In response to this unwelcome import, the writers and publishers of the day engaged in a futile blame game, with the critics notably holding "the American authors responsible, many asserting that these writers could not hold their own with the English writer of fiction" (Tebbel 179). This accusation, while blatantly false, lends valuable insight into the ensuing change in editing and publishing practices. The American publishing community had a prominent motive to perhaps begin to take some risks in order to earn praise (and therefore success) domestically. Within twenty years American fiction would garner immense popularity as well as significant critical acclaim, the aftermath of which continues to influence the American literary canon of today.

Before the shift could take place, American publishing houses would have to overcome the belief that British authorship was the standard of fiction. This impression would be difficult to overturn because the publishing world was struggling with "a clash between Victorian morality and the awakening of naturalism" (Tebbel 185). As a result, "when the realism of the new century began to emerge, Scribner was offended by much

of it” (Tebbel 110) as were many other literary goliaths of the day. Even such successes as Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn* suffered from intense censorship towards the end of the nineteenth century (Tebbel 188). Though problems with censorship would not cease until the *Ulysses* court decision of 1932 (Tebbel 191) it seemed that if a move were to be made in favor of new fiction, it would have to garner some support from the most scrupulous of conservatives.

An average New Yorker in 1919 could hardly have expected that the Charles Scribner’s Sons (whose traditional values were reflected as much in the Scribner building’s Beaux Arts architecture and classical columns, as they were in reading lists that boasted Edith Wharton and Henry James) would become the site of a radical turning point in American literary history. Nevertheless, a man by the name of Maxwell Perkins worked there diligently during the aftermath of the World War I. Buried in this “backwater of literary tastes and values” Perkins was a “promising young editor” keen to rise above proofreading galleys, correcting grammar, and other such “perfunctory chores” (Berg, 12), that fell to the unproven staff on the editorial floor. Though he’d been working at the publishing house of Charles Scribner’s Sons for several years, in many regards the illustrious career of Maxwell Perkins truly began in 1918. He’d had an unusual reaction to an eclectic but unassuming manuscript called *The Romantic Egotist*, the first literary effort by a man named Frances Scott Fitzgerald. Perkins’s dedication to that piece of fiction and its bright 23-year-old author would ultimately result in the reinvention of American literary canon. Much less notably, yet no less importantly, he would unintentionally open new avenues for the role of the American editor.

From the first time *The Romantic Egotist* crossed his desk, Perkins never limited himself to simply copyediting. When his job demanded that he write Fitzgerald a rejection letter, Perkins not only praised the work but even dared to advise the aspiring writer on how best to improve it for future publication. While “editors at Scribners considered criticism of works they turned down as beyond their function...Perkins’s enthusiasm for Fitzgerald’s manuscript impelled him to comment further” (Berg 13), and Fitzgerald’s alacrity in implementing these changes led to a vastly improved manuscript the second time around. Already, Perkins dared to break with the established traditions of his field just as Fitzgerald’s manuscript defied the literary conventions of the time. As a further example, fellow Scribners editor William C. Brownell stated the company’s editorial policy in responding to one of Wharton’s manuscripts: “I don’t believe much in tinkering, and I am not *suffisant* enough to think the publisher can contribute much by counseling modifications” (Berg 11). This summary of Brownell’s personal practice was fairly standard not only at Scribners but in publishing as a whole. By writing extensive notes on the manuscript (to which his house did not yet own the rights) in order to suggest improvements to Fitzgerald, Perkins then diverged drastically from the Scribners editorial *modus operandi*.

This pattern would continue, as even the revised manuscript of *The Romantic Egotist* was rejected at Scribners, prompting Perkins to seek out the possibility of publishing at a rival house (doing the work of a literary agent before such work even existed in American publishing). Even as he did so, according to another Scribners employee, “Perkins was terrified that they would accept it, for all the time he saw how vitally it might still be improved” (Berg 14). The determined editor wanted a hand in the

project, and despite throwing himself in with the rest of the Scribner's workers by referring to them collectively as "us conservatives" (Berg 13), he contradicted this identification by counseling Fitzgerald to "intensify" his manuscript rather than to "conventionalize" it (Berg 13). The combination of his personal efforts and professional advice indicates that Perkins had the intention of both shaking up Charles Scribner's lists—and by extension, their readership—with the most scandalous novel of the day, and adhering to his personal conviction that an editor's "first loyalty is to talent" (Berg 16). It would have been a safer move to counsel caution and make the manuscript more palatable to the standards of the day. But just as Fitzgerald wanted more than to just be published (indeed, many of his short stories were published in H.L. Mencken's magazine *The Smart Set* before *This Side of Paradise* hit the shelves), Perkins wanted more than to just get Fitzgerald published. He wanted to create something worthwhile, a piece of literature that would speak to all the nuances of their time and place. The publication of the most scandalous novel of the season (if not the decade) at the most conservative publishing house, by the youngest author in Scribners' history, would set the tone for the Jazz Age.

America in the twenties was teeming with changes: not only were film and glossy advertisements rising in prominence within popular culture, but also Prohibition was in full swing, and the United States had just successfully emerged from what was then thought to be the "war to end all wars." In short, the nation was proving itself, and forming its own identity. Part of this identity formation would take place within the literary community, as a result of writers like Fitzgerald. The tale of Scribners' acceptance of the young writer stands in as an image of the era: the old guard making

way for the younger generation. Perkins aligning himself with Fitzgerald set the tone for their personal partnership as well as that of the literary zeitgeist. If America could successfully prove itself a military power, becoming a cultural force would be next. As previously mentioned, American readers suffered from a lack of quality American writing, and Fitzgerald's manuscript was poised to take advantage of all of these aligned circumstances in one fell swoop. Though one can't know for certain what Perkins thought when he staked his career on Fitzgerald, there is enough evidence to suggest that he was savvy enough to recognize this opportunity. By partnering with Fitzgerald, each individual working in a separate role towards the same end, Perkins engaged in not only a more American process of editing (much like separate states within the same union), but also a process that could create literature defining elements of American culture.

In order to achieve this feat, Perkins would ironically have to tap into the core of Fitzgerald's value system: youth, speed, and success. The combination of these themes at the start of their professional relationship foreshadows the nature of their shared projects (and, to a certain extent, their lasting effect on American readership). Perkins was only able to get Fitzgerald published at Scribner's because "Fitzgerald would be able to find another publisher for this novel and young authors would follow him" (Berg, 16) and when the vote was taken "the young editors tied the old" (Berg, 16) and forced Charles Scribner "Old CS" to take some more time to consider the issue and break the tie (eventually in favor of Perkins, who had threatened to quit the publishing business entirely).

The dichotomy of youth and age applies not only to the early stages of the developing professional relationship between Fitzgerald and Perkins, but also to the

publishing industry as a whole. Though the old houses were reluctant to embrace the changing times, the standard practices of publication had been shifting their foundations for the past few decades. In fact, even through the end of the nineteenth century some publishers would have authors pay for their own plates because, according to Charles Scribner, “we are not sufficiently sure of its commercial success to justify us in running the entire risk of the manufacture of the book” (Tebbel 172). This explanation, from the father of “Old CS” no less, embodies the cautious and conservative values that defined the trade and kept the existing hierarchies of authorial relationships in check. “Though the relationship between author and publisher has always been a tortured one, for the most part, it reached a boiling point for the first time in the decades after the Civil War” (Tebbel 171). Writers had grown increasingly dissatisfied, and publishers rebuked them for their greed:

The development of the mass market, particularly in fiction, gave authors a status, and in some cases an income, they had not enjoyed before, and they resented the attitude toward authors which had become habitual with many publishers....that [the authors] should be grateful for what was given to them and not ask for more.
(Tebbel 172)

However, the turn of the century led to a complete reversal in ideology. Taking risks on new writers became a matter of course, and though it was not yet a standard practice, even advances against future royalties were not unheard of by the time Scribner’s acquired Fitzgerald.

Max Perkins was one of the pioneers of taking this shift further in the 20th century by stating that publishers’ “first allegiance is to talent. And if we aren’t going to publish a talent like [Fitzgerald], it is a very serious thing,” (Berg 16). He surmised that if and when the ambitious Fitzgerald secured another publisher for this novel, all of the young

authors would follow him: “Then we might as well go out of business” (Berg 16). By aligning himself with talent rather than profit, Perkins demonstrates a greater attachment to authorship than to publishing. Rather than a parasitic relationship between publishing house and aspiring author, Perkins advocated for the equivalent of a more symbiotic relationship that would seep into the twentieth century. In fact, Malcolm Cowley, an influential editor at Viking Press, once said that Perkins made Scribner’s “leap straight from the age of innocence into the lost generation” (Tebbel 206). Building a roster of bright young editors was a part of that push, but the true impact of Perkins’s influence is in the kinds of books he and his authors produced.

Fitzgerald and His Editor: The “Perk-Ins” and Outs

Before his work was a standard on high school syllabi, before his name became intertwined with ideas of excess and glitter, before his novel prompted a standoff on Scribner’s editorial floor, Francis Scott Key Fitzgerald was a young man desperately trying to get his manuscript published. But already, the editing had begun. In what represented a breach of protocol (and propriety) not just at Scribner’s, but in most of the publishing world of the early twentieth century, Perkins wrote back to the young author with feedback for “The Romantic Egotist.” Perkins intended his letter to not only cushion the blow of rejection, but also to ultimately result in a future acceptance of the novel he believed to be special. What Perkins described as “very general comments” about the manuscript are actually well-detailed suggestions pertaining to the existing problems of the narrative (Brucoli 2). These kinds of remarks fall under the umbrella of what Susan Bell refers to as “macro-view” edits (Bell 47). While the layperson might not understand that “editing” encompasses more than simply adjusting spelling and grammar errors and

other tasks belonging to glorified spellcheck, even a seasoned publisher (or academic, critic, etc.) might be surprised by how broad the category can truly be. Perkins remains in the acquisitions phase of his relationship with Fitzgerald, a job normally restricted to mere acceptances and rejections, and already he suggests broad structural improvements to the young writer's work. All without the assurance of eventual publication. Later Perkins' fight to acquire the heavily revised manuscript, retitled *The Education of a Personage*, would inherit an almost mythical quality. But the decision to begin editing before the acquisition bears much more significance in terms of Perkins's and Fitzgerald's careers, and by extension the qualities of symbiotic authorship that would characterize many of the novels they published.

The manuscript that would become *This Side of Paradise* was a disorganized effort at best. At worst, James L. West III refers to it as "a cut-and-paste job" and "a mongrel of a book" in his essay "The Question of Vocation in *This Side of Paradise* and *The Beautiful and the Damned*" (West 1). Though the eclectic mix of styles lent "The Romantic Egoist" some of its charm, it also represented a sort of affected laziness on the part of Fitzgerald. The initial submission was a slapdash combination of what he thought to be all of the good writing he'd produced so far, arranged into the bare bones of narrative cohesion. Even the latter was provided for him by mere virtue of the autobiographical nature of most of the material (Berg 12). As such, the manuscript displayed few visible signs of having been touched by an editorial hand at all, leading to an effect of hasty but nonetheless talented prose. Reading *Gatsby* immediately after skimming "The Romantic Egotist" becomes an almost dizzying exercise. Fitzgerald did not begin his career with a natural inclination to heavily revise and edit. The juxtaposition

of these two works demonstrates the evolution of Fitzgerald as a writer and editor as a direct result of his dialogue with Perkins. Indeed, though academics praised Fitzgerald's masterpiece for the quality of its prose and its themes, and rightly so, it also ought to have been cited as a triumph of editing.

In order to understand the quality of editing necessary to construct a novel as structurally sophisticated as *The Great Gatsby* and the longevity of its impact, one must first interrogate how that very work took place. Though Brucoli asserted that "Fitzgerald would have been published without Perkins' backing," the truth was that Perkins provided some of the early feedback and praise that would inspire Fitzgerald to continue his efforts (Brucoli *xviii*). Even if his manuscript could have been accepted elsewhere, Fitzgerald might not have gone on submitting it to prominent publishing houses if he became sufficiently discouraged. One can speculate and hope that Fitzgerald would have persisted until his talent was recognized, but between the fact that he had previously set his heart on Scribners as his publisher of choice and the fact that his courtship of Zelda had put pressure on him to solidify his career options, it's likely that Fitzgerald's correspondence with Perkins led to his golden opportunity. After all, as his biographer A. Scott Berg writes, Perkins "contended that the ambitious young Fitzgerald would be able to find another publisher for [*This Side of Paradise*]" only after it had undergone multiple revisions guided by his own feedback. In fact, the feedback Perkins provided made the manuscript truly exceptional, let alone merely publishable. Fitzgerald reciprocated this boon later by referring Perkins to another promising young writer by the name of Hemingway (Brucoli 22). The fact that Perkins was as responsible for the true beginning of Fitzgerald's career as Fitzgerald was for his own lends enormous

significance to the relationship between the two. A romantic might call it fate, but one could also refer to it as the genesis of symbiotic authorship.

The question of career was not only important to each man on an individual level, but also a crucial element of many of the narratives they would create and publish together. Maxwell Perkins grew up torn between indulging his creative energy and dutifully restraining himself in order to achieve discipline and success (more often than not gearing towards the latter), while Fitzgerald's quandary was whether to produce "either books that would sell or books of permanent value" (Berg 19). It is therefore no coincidence that what West refers to as "The question of vocation" crops up so frequently in Fitzgerald's novels. After referring back to the Latin origins of "vocation" as a word for "calling," West asserted that "one had literally to be called or summoned to meaningful efforts in life" and that "Fitzgerald recognized, however, that the pressures in American culture were designed to channel one relentlessly away" from said calling (West 3). However, Perkins's major qualm with Fitzgerald's initial submission to Scribners was the very absence of this sense of meaningful purpose: "neither the hero's career nor his character are shown to be brought to any stage which justifies an ending" (Brucoli 2). In a stroke of both literary and psychological genius, Perkins counseled *significance*. Not only did Fitzgerald's revisions display an implementation of this suggestion, invoking a much more intentional sense of wandering youth rather than meaningless chains of events, but Fitzgerald's eventual partnership with Perkins would flourish in part due to this particular beacon towards which both men had set their courses. One could debate whether Fitzgerald came to his conclusions about American society's role in the hindrances of one's pursuit of rightful vocation before or after he

began working with Perkins, but whatever the case may be, both Perkins and Fitzgerald were keenly aware of this fact and allowed it to permeate their projects. Vocation, after all, aligns itself with the idea of American self-making and, by extension, “ambition and success” (Corrigan 85). Fitzgerald’s interest in vocation evolved from Amory’s aimless meandering in the direction of some vague excellence to Gatsby’s acquisition of mysterious millions with the single-minded determination to grasp a green light. Perkins, meanwhile, got to explore self-making by assisting a pseudo-filial figure in achieving the dream he dared not chase for himself (Berg 31, Bruccoli xvii). Both of them possessed a keen awareness of the gravity of failure (Perkins “carried a chip on his shoulder in Cambridge” because he “was at Harvard on limited funds” (Berg 29) and Fitzgerald famously spent much of his career “railing against (and envying) those trust-fund babies who take their privilege for granted” (Corrigan 37)). The desire to pursue a calling was sharpened by the fear of sinking into obscurity in the “founding dare of America” challenging young dreamers to “sink or swim” (Corrigan 35).

Though the question of what it means to have a calling or achieve success in America played a role in the legacy left by both Perkins and Fitzgerald, it was only part of what made their relationship so singular. As the two began to correspond with one another more frequently (throughout the publication process of *This Side of Paradise* and during the writing period for Fitzgerald’s next book), a professional and amicable understanding grew between them. Perkins chose not to abandon his unique approach to advising his writer, and became more astute at offering suggestions as Fitzgerald developed a more pronounced instinct for revising his own work. In a way, Perkins “edited” Fitzgerald’s own habits through his steadfast guidance. It is no coincidence that

Fitzgerald revised and submitted his initial manuscript to Scribners and, by extension, Perkins three times before it was accepted and published, but revised his manuscript of *Gatsby* three times before sending it to Perkins. As Bell writes in *The Artful Edit*, “Perkins’s help was far from incidental. “I had rewritten *Gatsby* three times,” Fitzgerald freely admitted, “before Max said something to me. Then I sat down and wrote something I was proud of,”” (Bell 43). Fitzgerald improved his ability to micro-edit (correcting the smaller non-structural problems within his writing) and Perkins grew more adept at anticipating the needs of his writer. What resulted from this increase in trust and talent was a new editing style.

Susan Bell describes three primary styles of self-editing: “Arrogant and blind,” Panicked timidity/aggression, and “Pragmatic and cool” (Bell 45). As Fitzgerald’s initial lack of editing stemmed from lethargy rather than arrogance, one couldn’t properly categorize him as the first kind of editor. He tended towards the panicked variety of revision, and only after years of practice did he begin to transition towards the “pragmatic and cool” editor, the most adept iteration. The “pragmatic and cool” editor is concerned with the functionality of the piece above all else. However, during his correspondence with Perkins, particularly in the active planning and revision stages of his books, Fitzgerald would slip into a new kind of editorial mode. Functioning as two parts of a single authorial engine, Perkins and Fitzgerald together wielded a pragmatic and *warm* editing style, eschewing aloofness in favor of deep attachment to the subject matter and prose. Neither individual occupied specifically the concept of pragmatism or warmth, but took each ideal in turn or blended the two as the need arose. This method derives from an incredible trust, amity, and understanding: Perkins’s confidence that Fitzgerald won’t

ever “defer to [Perkins’s] judgment...on any vital point” (Brucoli 11) and Fitzgerald’s sense that Perkins can see and understand his characters clearly (as in the case of his struggles with Jay Gatsby, for example, when Fitzgerald writes in a letter to Perkins: “It seems of almost mystical significance to me that you thot [Gatsby] was older—the man I had in mind, half unconsciously, was older” (Brucoli 32)). Essentially, Perkins grows to trust the growing editorial instinct he has helped to nurture within Fitzgerald, while Fitzgerald for his part begins to trust Perkins with creative aspects of the narrative. Each feels he has an investment in the work, and each is capable of detaching from the work when necessary in order to see its weaknesses, without sacrificing the charm of the writing. Nowhere is the success of this collaborative process more evident than in *The Great Gatsby*.

The vantage point of nearly a century after the creation of Scott Fitzgerald’s most famous work provides a sound opportunity to interrogate just what the effect of this particular kind of editing had on *The Great Gatsby*, and, by extension, the development of an American literary identity suited to the postwar reality. In many ways, the aftermath of the World War directly resulted in both the work and legacy of Perkins and Fitzgerald. Aside from the fact that it heralded Fitzgerald’s youth and Perkins’s early adulthood, the First World War sparked a shift in American culture. The generation that had come of age during the war lived in blatant defiance of it: youth, speed, and consumer culture became the prevailing values of the twenties. This cultural shift would ripple into the literature and publishing of the time. America could come into its own identity in the postwar world, and Fitzgerald could distill the resulting cultural shift into the themes of his fiction. *Gatsby* owes much of its essential sharpness to war’s indelible stamp. In his

essay for the *Cambridge Companion to F. Scott Fitzgerald* titled “*The Great Gatsby* and the twenties” Ronald Berman writes:

The *Great Gatsby* uses much contemporary historical material. The choice of place...was itself a statement. In 1924, H.L. Mencken, then the most influential American critic, identified the life of post-war New York City as one of the new subjects of the novel. (Prigozy 81)

In choosing to set the novel deliberately in post-war New York, give the title character a military background, and populate the narrative with corpses, Fitzgerald clearly writes with the war in mind or—more accurately—a society transformed by war. Indeed, when reminiscing on the energy of the returning soldiers flooding the streets in “My Lost City”, Fitzgerald declares “New York had all the iridescence of the beginning of the world” (Wilson 25). This sense of new beginnings and breaking from the old ways embodies not only the exact sentiment that would lead young editors like Perkins to take chances on new writers like Fitzgerald, but also the coming-of-age of the American novel. For the purposes of this paper, a literary coming-of-age refers not to an improved or advanced novel compared to works of the past, but rather a novel that is simply more distinctly American. For example, American mystery novels rejected the thoughtful armchair investigator (who would collect clues and calmly explain the solved case) model favored by British writers in exchange for the more action-packed the “hard-boiled” detective novel, a proto-noir genre. These kinds of novels, as the illustrious critic Maureen Corrigan notes in her book *So We Read On*, “were written by men who had served in the war” (Corrigan 152). She also explains that the term “hard boiled” derives its origins from the demeanors of World War I drill sergeants, and even makes an early appearance within *The Great Gatsby*. Rightly so. One could easily read the novel “as a noir that surveys the rotten underbelly of the American Dream” and makes its mark on the hard-

boiled mystery genre in an unabashedly American fashion (Corrigan 140). Everything from the setting to Gatsby's criminal background glows with intentionality, indicating that Fitzgerald clearly capitalized on the most relevant aspects of his altered society. He perceived the nation's need to differentiate itself once and for all when he wrote in "Echoes of the Jazz Age": "We were the most powerful nation. Who could tell us any longer what was fashionable and what was fun? Isolated during the European war, we had been combing...for folkways and pastimes..." (Wilson 14). World War I catalyzed a more pronounced American identity. Fitzgerald and Max Perkins intended for *Gatsby* to explore what that identity, or promise of one, could be.

It's crucial to note that Perkins was wholly sympathetic to Fitzgerald's depiction of postwar life and the escalating modern mindset. Editor and writer shared a regret at never having actually fought in World War I, but this lack of combat experience didn't prevent either of them from feeling and benefiting from the movement, restlessness, and change that swept through the collective American psyche during the twenties (Berg 11). In a circular twist of fate, war was even responsible for Gatsby's return to the public eye after its period of dormancy on the shelves. During World War II countless soldiers found themselves both bored and terrified in the trenches, and a demand for novels rose to accommodate their needs. A wartime committee selected works to publish in cheap paperback editions that could be quickly read and discarded by the soldiers. *Gatsby* snuck its way onto the list. "In 1945...the Armed Services Editions printed and distributed 155,000 copies of *The Great Gatsby*," and as a result, "World War II servicemen carried with them back home...an awakened interest in F. Scott Fitzgerald" (Corrigan 234). How did this come about? One of the men in the selection committee worked for

Scribners...as did Maxwell Perkins at the time the decision was made (Corrigan 237-8). It's more than likely that Fitzgerald's old friends looked out for him even after he'd passed and assured his masterpiece its rightful place in the American literary canon. But what does war have to do with editing?

Because World War I provided the environment necessary for America's cultural shift, those changes filtered into the literary scene both in terms of style and structure: *Gatsby* could expose anew the "rotten underbelly of the American Dream" because the changing American ideals a decade prior allowed Perkins to make a stand and advocate for the controversial new writer in the first place. Perkins too took advantage of the shift in the twentieth century American cultural climate to change the game: "Before Perkins nobody had edited so boldly or so closely as he did Fitzgerald" (Berg 70). Despite how little editing Fitzgerald "required" by the time he wrote *The Great Gatsby* Perkins's intervention, such as it was, still meant a significant break from the accepted practice of the time. However, this level of intervention took *Gatsby* from good to great: "With the aid you've given me," Scott wrote Max, "I can make 'Gatsby' perfect," (Berg 67). Perkins actually spent much time in his letters to Fitzgerald doing just that: finding more ways to make *Gatsby* great. Both the character and the novel itself owe certain qualities of greatness to the editor's keen eye for Fitzgerald's ultimate goal. When suggesting changes to the revelation or suspicion about *Gatsby*'s backstory, Perkins vehemently agrees with Fitzgerald that it ought not to be said outright, going so far as to write "of course" twice in a single paragraph of the letter in question, when it comes to keeping *Gatsby*'s story mysterious (Brucoli 28). He falls back on his essential ability to share Fitzgerald's vision before proceeding to detail how it might be more perfectly realized:

by adding subtle hints and references throughout the story (“you might find ways to let some of [Gatsby’s] claims like “Oxford” come out bit by bit in the course of the actual narrative”) rather than leaving everything unsaid until Gatsby reveals it all to Nick—and the reader—the night of the crash (Bruccoli 29). This particular letter deals largely with the process of giving Gatsby a more defined physical presence, but it is the note that Perkins dashed off upon first receiving the manuscript that reintroduces the paramount question of title.

When Perkins suggested casting aside Fitzgerald’s chosen title “Trimalchio in West Egg,” Fitzgerald’s response was to immediately provide a handful of alternatives: “perhaps simply “Trimalchio” or “Gatsby”” (Bruccoli 30). From this point, Perkins quite literally made Gatsby “great” in one small but unyielding move. Fitzgerald acquiesced, but forever expressed some doubt about this title because he claimed “The Great Gatsby is weak because there is no emphasis even ironically on his greatness or lack of it” (Bruccoli 36). But Perkins for once could see the vision even more clearly than his writer could. The question wasn’t whether or not the character of Gatsby was great in any meaningful way, but whether or not one could believe Gatsby to be great. The novel is full of ideals, pure or corrupted, for which one might strive, but the very first mirage is the title page. Perkins recognized that the reader would be left reaching for the green light of Gatsby’s greatness, of his ability to rise or fall, long after they’d closed the slim volume. From describing Jay Gatsby himself (whether it be his facial expressions, the revelation of backstory, or even the leitmotif of his verbal tic “old sport”) to the adjective applied to the titular character on the novel’s cover, Perkins played a pivotal role in solidifying both the substance and the shimmer of Fitzgerald’s masterpiece. It’s worth

noting that with the help of Perkins, who famously held up *War and Peace* as a paragon of literature, Fitzgerald crafted “ultramodern prose” and “ornate, fluid descriptions of parties, for example, that rival Tolstoy’s depictions of war” (Bell 43). Likening *Gatsby* to *War and Peace* signifies Bell’s subtle acknowledgement of the evidence of aligned purposes and ideals between writer and editor that allowed them to produce such an impressive novel. A distinctly American identity emerging as a result of the postwar period allowed for a distinctly American mode of literary production: editorial collaboration.

Editorial collaboration falls under the larger umbrella of symbiotic authorship. The fact that Fitzgerald could edit so masterfully on the micro level (while depending upon Perkins and the Scribners team to correct logical and grammatical errors) and Perkins could suggest such flawless macro-edits (while always allowing Fitzgerald to actually implement them) proves their efficacy in editing novels together. Interestingly, in returning to Susan Bell’s book on editing, one will notice that her advice is all predicated upon the idea that the writer will edit his or her own work: the book’s very title *The Artful Edit: On the practice of editing yourself* states this truth. The fact remains that Fitzgerald became a fabulous and exacting editor of his own prose, years of practice and correspondence with Perkins honing his work from the dashed-off manuscript of “The Romantic Egotist” to the patient effort of *The Great Gatsby*. The additional implication of using *Gatsby* as an example of superb editing is that both Perkins and Fitzgerald were, in a fashion, editing *their own* work. Much as friends will adopt one another’s turns of phrase or behavioral patterns over time, Fitzgerald and Perkins began to anticipate one another’s needs as they worked on projects together. Fitzgerald’s close

relationship with Perkins was part of the reason he developed the ability to edit his own work, just as Perkins was able to make suggestions to Gatsby that clicked seamlessly into what Fitzgerald's vision would be.

Part of Perkins's talent was to adapt to the needs of his writer and provide the guidance necessary in order to draw out their very best writing. But for his part, Fitzgerald was a consummate people-pleaser (ever the Gatsby stand-in) and grew adept at honing in on the structure of his own work as a result of his professional and personal relationship with Perkins. No universal agreement existed between the two; they maintained equilibrium by choosing disagreements carefully and conceding politely at sporadic intervals. Perkins warned against an ineffective title and got his way. Fitzgerald made a case for leaving "Myrtle Wilson's breast ripped off" because it was "exactly the thing" and Perkins acquiesced (Brucoli 35). The symbiotic nature of this collaboration meant that Perkins never steamrolled Fitzgerald into changing his vision, and Fitzgerald placed enormous faith in Perkins's input. In one of his letters accompanying a new set of revisions to Gatsby, Fitzgerald confessed "I'd rather have you + [Edmund Wilson] like it better than anyone I know. And I'd rather you like it than [Wilson]" (Brucoli 31). In this way, writer and editor can indulge in a kind of collective American self-making by working under a shared authorial umbrella.² Fitzgerald would not be known for his restraint in any aspect of his life other than writing, whereas Perkins was a model of discipline who rarely chooses to follow his intuition until someone else's writing gives him the opportunity to do so. But Perkins knows what Susan Bell so rightfully states: it's

² The American nature of the final project set temporarily aside, the process itself, of individual equals working with the same essential values towards the same goal hints at a subtle mirroring of states within the union.

vital to understand “editing on its own terms, not as a shadowy aspect of writing. Writers need to learn to calibrate editing’s singular blend of mechanics and magic” (Bell 2). The symbiotic editor participates in authorship, but the original story ultimately belongs to the writer. To Perkins’s credit, he absorbed this concept early on, and reduced his role to that of “handmaiden to an author” (Berg 7). This mindset furnishes the collaborative author with the additional assurance that the editorial partner will not try to superimpose his own voice upon the work. The shared investment upon which symbiotic authorship thrives does profoundly impact the work when separated from one of its authors.

But perhaps most importantly, there’s something distinctly American about a unified effort. Fitzgerald knew what he was about when he revised his final line to change a singular into a plural: “A boat against the current” sounds forlorn and hopeless, but “boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past” evoke nobility in an isolated but nonetheless united struggle to “beat on” (Fitzgerald, *Gatsby MS*, Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*). By writing in the collective first person plural, Fitzgerald could evoke multitudes and unity, but the choice to give each individual a vessel—boats rather than a single shared boat—he retained the essence of American individuality. Part of the ending’s charm is that it does not sacrifice distinction for the sake of unity as it evokes the sense of struggling alone, together. Perhaps this sense of individuality amidst collective effort echoes the process of symbiotic authorship, too.

Tracing the role of editing through the interwoven careers of Fitzgerald and Perkins certainly demands a firm yet flexible grasp on what constitutes editing. Perkins influenced Fitzgerald as an editor every bit as much as—and perhaps more than—he influenced the novels themselves. But the term “influence” falls short in describing the

effect of Perkins on Fitzgerald and indeed, of Fitzgerald on Perkins. Each contributed to the other's legacy (Perkins by supporting Fitzgerald through success and failure, Fitzgerald by connecting Perkins to other promising writers whom he might acquire) and benefitted vastly from their epistolary friendship. Theirs was the first truly symbiotic authorial partnership, and without the serendipity of shared ideals, a shifting cultural climate, and a vacuum in fresh American postwar literature demanding to be filled, it might never have evolved. But both writer and editor adapted to and actively shaped the American literary scene of the early twentieth century, paving the way for Perkins to define editing on his own terms and in so doing cement the editorial role as the secret ingredient to crafting some of America's best and most lasting novels.

Perkins and Wolfe: "A Perfectly Unified but Enormous Plan"

As his first significant acquisition, Scott Fitzgerald makes for an excellent preliminary case-study of Perkins's editorial role. Because of Fitzgerald's youth, eagerness to please, attention to detail, and his particular writing style, it's easy to recognize the equal status he shared with Perkins in seeing their novels to completion. But when Perkins acquired Thomas Wolfe, his monstrous manuscript of *Look Homeward, Angel* in tow, he would be faced with a more daunting task entirely. Once again he took on what few other editor would have been willing to manage—Perkins “knew, for example, that so intense a work would be resented by a good many people” at Scribners—and in doing so entered a relationship in constant search of equilibrium (Berg 129). This quest would also grow into one of the most fulfilling challenges of his career. Their collaboration, while seen as an unequal partnership by some, stands as a testament

to what the full force of symbiotic authorship can accomplish, both in terms of literary quality and scope.

Though one would be hard-pressed to find any of Thomas Wolfe's titles on a high school syllabus, he nevertheless plays a significant role in American literary history and offers an excellent opportunity to understand symbiotic authorship. As mentioned, part of Gatsby's brand of success is how manageable the masterpiece is as a result of Fitzgerald's keen attention to structure and concision. In contrast, Wolfe's novels loom as 900-page behemoths on the shelves, demanding a different kind of attention both from reader and writer.

In many ways, Fitzgerald and Wolfe were opposites: Fitzgerald stood at a slight 5'9" while Wolfe towered at 6'6". Fitzgerald craved "Early Success" and recognition (Corrigan) whereas Wolfe was "not very much influenced by the opinions of critics" (Greene 197). Most notably, Fitzgerald's writing was concerned with "structure and point-of-view" (Brucoli xxx) while Wolfe was an "expansive genius" for whom "the dimensions of everything, physical and abstract, are too small..." (Greene 192-4). The very fact of the different styles and products of these two "sons" of Perkins serves to illustrate the unique nature of the editorial role he pioneered.

Still, the two prolific writers have something in common: most notably, the quality that attracted Perkins to them and made him so passionate about their work. He referred to this quality as "the real thing" (Berg 6), and sought it throughout his career. The "real thing" can best be described as the ability to use creativity and language to evoke an immediate truth. The ability to craft language would appeal to critics while immediacy and creativity would lead to popular appeal and therefore—ideally—profits for Scribners,

however secondary the latter concern might have been. Though Perkins scouted many authors, the ones for whom he fought (and endured some hardship or discomfort) had a particular kind of potential.

As previously established, mutual understanding between writer and editor is crucial to symbiotic authorship, and the most successful understanding is founded early in the relationship. In Fitzgerald's case, Perkins took a gamble on providing feedback to the young writer, having no way of knowing that Fitzgerald would be particularly receptive to it. Similarly, Perkins seemed to intuitively choose the correct way of acquiring Wolfe's first novel: "I do know that...[the manuscript] is a very remarkable thing, and that no editor could read it without being excited by it and filled with admiration..." (Brucoli 83). Wolfe's response expressed particular gratitude for the words of praise in Perkins's letter, and strikingly displayed even greater evidence of authorial compatibility: he admitted to the numerous obstacles to his manuscript's publication, and confessed his ignorance in matters of publishing. It was "altogether a strange letter to write to an unknown editor...but it really was a good one to write to Maxwell Perkins," (Nowell 128). When Perkins voiced his anticipation rather than trepidation at editing so vast a novel and Wolfe replied with raw enthusiasm rather than moderated professionalism, each struck a chord in the other. Already, writer and editor began to attune to one another in a prescient glimpse of the vitality their relationship will achieve at its peak. It shares many similarities with Perkins's collaboration with Fitzgerald, not the least of which is the pseudo-paternal element.

In his collection of correspondence between Perkins and his three most famous writers, Matthew Brucoli refers to Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and Wolfe collectively as the

“Sons of Maxwell Perkins” (also giving the collection its name). Perkins and his wife tried multiple times to conceive a son of their own, but each attempt resulted in a daughter. In fact, when Perkins realized he’d had his fourth daughter instead of the anticipated son, he wired the news to his mother by simply saying “another” (Berg 36). Likening these writers to surrogate sons for Perkins is therefore not such a far-fetched idea. The pseudo-paternal relationship began to emerge between Perkins and Fitzgerald as the slightly older editor provided both guidance and protection (laying his own career on the line for the sake of Fitzgerald’s initial publication) to the young writer, but took firmer shape between Perkins and Wolfe. Many instances of correspondence between Perkins and his primary protégé ring with paternal connectivity. In her biography of Thomas Wolfe, Elizabeth Nowell reflected “‘Max says’ or ‘Max thinks’ was a frequent prefix to Wolfe’s statements...just as ‘my father says’ or ‘my mother says’ is a constant phrase used by a child,” (Nowell 16). In one letter, Wolfe wrote desperately to Perkins, delving into the sordid details of his ill-fated love affair in order to seek Perkins’s advice as to how he ought to proceed (Bruccoli 129). Wolfe’s impulse to come to this older and wiser man for help with an unraveling relationship, like a son would do, reinforced Perkins’s role as a father figure. In fact, just as much as Perkins sought sons, much of Wolfe’s work concerned itself with an almost mystical search for the father. For example, Wolfe described the ending—the “only fabulous scene,” that he had written thus far—to what would become *Of Time and the River* as the protagonist:

“never sees his father but he hears the sound of his foot the thunder of horses on a beach (Poseidon and his horses) the moon drives out of clouds, he sees a print of a foot that can belong only to his father because it is like his own, the sea surges across the beach and erases the print, he cries out Father and from the sea far out, and faint upon the wind, a great voice answers ‘My Son!’” (Bruccoli 126).

Thomas Wolfe wrote the letter containing this excerpt in 1930, and sent it to Perkins as an update on his work in the wake of the publication of *Look Homeward, Angel*, his first novel, the year prior. Aside from the powerful description, the scene includes many of Wolfe's favorite elements: landscape, hope/doubt, and the search for the father (which is also a search for the self). However, upon closer inspection, one will notice that the man's search is less for "the father" than for someone whose footprint is "like his own". The scene evokes familiarity, reunion, and a symbol of a shared mark upon the world (the "footprint") but never certainty, and especially not of a biological nature. The paternal relationship established by the excerpt easily reflects the immediate connection between Wolfe and his reliable editor. The recognition of this adopted familial bond serves to prove the kind of opportunity Perkins saw with these writers. If they were like family then their interests and more importantly their legacy would be shared. This bond allowed for truly intimate collaboration, the kind that resists the power struggle of one partner attempting to take advantage of the other because they would have little to gain when their purposes already align. Of course, the idea of a familial bond between Perkins and either Fitzgerald or Wolfe breaks down at the level of genetic relation, but that detail poses no concern to writer or editor. The shared legacy is the literature.

Though Maxwell Perkins wielded far too wide an influence to ever have his literary legacy confined to a single novel, the prime contender for such an example would be *Of Time and the River*, over which he labored with Thomas Wolfe between the spring of 1933 and March of 1935.³ Both editor and author keenly felt the struggle of the effort,

³ Berg organizes much of his well-known biography around this central effort, the crux of the Perkins-Wolfe relationship and what Perkins would describe as the great challenge of his career.

and when considering his future partnership with Wolfe, Perkins speculated “I like to think we may go through another such war together” (Berg 253). Even when they were fighting against each other rather than with the manuscript directly, Wolfe and Perkins were united in their crusade from the novel’s inception. In a letter dated April 1933, Wolfe refers to a draft called “Antaeus: Earth again” and updates Perkins that it’s “only the final three or four scenes lacking to make it a complete draft” (Bruccoli 162). In that same letter, Wolfe detailed an overarching set of themes and narratives that would drive his entire project (to be divided into multiple books), and implored Perkins to determine if it made sense, already seeking the approval of his editor even in the early stages. As Wolfe became more enamored by the idea of memory and change, he would eventually rename the draft *Of Time and the River*, which he felt symbolized those concepts. It was, according to Wolfe, “about 500,000 words” (Bruccoli 172).

By the time Perkins received this initial manuscript it was almost the end of 1933, and he hastened to give Wolfe great swathes of feedback. Gone were the days when editors hesitated even to “tinker”; in Perkins’s memo to Wolfe he opened with “THINGS TO BE DONE IMMEDIATELY IN FIRST REVISION” (Bruccoli 172). While Perkins listed the most glaring changes necessary to make, he seldom makes direct use of the second person. The opening of this memo also neglected to utilize the imperative tense, implying that Perkins was not commanding Wolfe to carry out these changes, but rather taking note of their collective tasks. When he did use the second person in his seventh suggestion, Perkins practically explained to Wolfe how to go about writing exactly what he wanted: “Use the description of the trip home and the boom town scenes out of *The Man on the Wheel*. You can possibly use the trip home to follow on to the station scene.

Play up desire to go home and feelings of homesickness and unrest and then develop idea that hometown has become unfamiliar and strange to him and he sees he can no longer live there” (Bruccoli 172). Perkins essentially drove from the back seat at this stage. He never inserted his own words into the novel, but he directed Wolfe to evoke particular moods for the scenes in which they would be most effective. He also counseled Wolfe to make use of prior writing, selecting excerpts to incorporate into the novel as if the book were a collage. Furthermore, Perkins suggested transitions into other scenes that he and Wolfe had previously discussed in their late-night work sessions, and more generally advised that he ought to “complete all scenes wherever possible with dialogue” (Bruccoli 172). This kind of feedback might seem familiar now because it resembles the advice fellow fiction writers dispense to one another in workshop settings, but as creative writing and MFA programs in general were largely unheard of until the advent of what Mark McGurl refers to as the “Program Era” in his book of the same name, the fact that Perkins involved himself in this way in the very construction of the narrative reinforces the subtle way in which Perkins disrupted the traditional editor’s role.

Symbiotic authorship need not be an arcane process, however. Though initial mutual understanding bolsters the professional relationship, diligence and balance remain the most critical component of effective collaboration. In December of 1929 Wolfe wrote to Perkins, “You are now mixed with my book in such a way that I can never separate the two of you. I can no longer think clearly of the time I wrote it, but rather of the time when you first talked to me about it, and when you worked upon it,” (Bruccoli 104). Perkins’s identity combined with the book tied him to it as surely as Wolfe himself was bound to *Look Homeward, Angel*. Inferring from allocation of labor here, one finds that writing

“when you worked upon it” rather than “we worked upon it” designated Perkins as the catalyst for the book’s creation. Wolfe granted Perkins greater authority than a glorified grammarian or even a “cutter,” and already began to see him as a partner in the act of literary creation. Building upon the foundations of this success, the two would work even more effectively together on *Of Time and the River*.

Thomas Wolfe, in his optimism, presented Perkins with the nascent plan: “to correct and revise the [manuscript] 100 pages at a time, and...deliver 100 pages every week” and listed a variety of pieces to cut in the interest of condensation, from shortening specific scenes, trimming lists of colors, and even tossing out entire passages. However, as Perkins explained in a letter to Scott Fitzgerald in 1937, “[Wolfe] was a “putter-inner” rather than a “taker-outer” and “[Perkins] himself would have to take a hand in cutting and revising it” (Nowell 134-5). Wolfe’s gesture at assisting Perkins with the monumental task at hand nevertheless foreshadowed the give-and-take that characterized their relationship. Furthermore, one can’t help but observe when Perkins decided to “take a hand in cutting” that a hand is part of a pair, and Perkins conjured this idea of partnership instead of suggesting that he would take over the revision process entirely. The editor’s “attitude toward [Wolfe] was by no means patronizing: he looked upon him as an equal and a friend...because he felt that creative genius was the rarest thing on earth” (Nowell 197). Meanwhile Wolfe, via the character George Webber, indirectly lauded Perkins by writing about the latter’s fictional persona of Foxhall Edward within *You Can’t Go Home Again*. Webber, the protagonist, muses “[editing] seems so easy when Fox does it...he has had it from his birth. It is a genius,” cementing their mutual respect as commensurate to their shared interest and objective (Wolfe, *YCGHA*).

Throughout the fall and winter, Perkins and Wolfe met after normal working hours in order to discuss the passages in need of restructuring or trimming. Elizabeth Nowell described this work as the kind of chore “which probably no other editor-in-chief would have undertaken” but one that Perkins tackled with “enjoyment and enthusiasm” (Nowell 235). These after-hours sessions often took place in the Scribners offices, but on multiple occasions the two men would roam the streets of New York, expanding aloud upon the direction the novel would take. While hunkered down in one establishment or another, they enjoyed “wonderful hours of endless talk, so free and full that it combed the universe and bound the two of them together in bonds of closest friendship” (Wolfe, *YCGHA*). Granted, Wolfe described this abiding sense of amity within the context of a fictional relationship between “George Webber” and “Foxhall Edwards,” but there can be no disguising that Webber represents Wolfe and “Fox” Edwards represents none other than Perkins, as Nowell diligently confirmed.

This near-cosmic sense of closeness combined with the increasingly high literary investment allowed Perkins to take even greater editorial liberties in the interest of finishing *Of Time and the River*, such as when he took “the unheard-of step” of “taking the book away from [Wolfe]” when it became clear that the writer would not give it up of his own accord (Nowell 222). Though Perkins possessed “intuitive confidence in his ability to keep a book in hand,” he carefully avoided going against the ultimate intent of the writer, which he held to be sacred (Nowell 222). During the writing process Perkins went out of his way to anticipate Wolfe’s perspective by both considering publishing the complete work uncut and predicting that if the outcome was unfavorable the blame would fall only to him, as the man whose job it was to make the work ready for the public. In

this case, the public was not quite ready for unfiltered Wolfe. Perkins was a necessary layer to transmute the work into its full potential.

During an earlier phase in their correspondence, Thomas Wolfe wrote a few sprawling but self-consciously ambitious letters to Perkins regarding his intentions for his first novel. He said of the crates of loose pages that would become *Look Homeward, Angel* “please don’t be worried—it’s not anarchy, it’s a perfectly unified but enormous plan,” (Brucoli 126). Regardless of size, a plan was something Perkins could manage. In his truly adaptable symbiotic style, he absorbed this plan as his own and continued to do so for all future collaborations with Wolfe. Some of their longest and most involved letters detailed the structure of this plan so that Wolfe could safely go about enacting this shared vision by filling it with settings and characters. Just as Fitzgerald prized structure but created landscapes, Wolfe prized landscape and character but had some sense of structure. Each gave priority to where his skills/interest lay. There is a reason Fitzgerald could write so many effective short stories and Wolfe flourished writing long and luxurious bestselling novels.

With both Fitzgerald and Wolfe (but with the latter in particular) Perkins engaged in an ambitious attempt to document some aspect of the United States of America as a people, a place, and an idea. As discussed previously, *The Great Gatsby* not only deals with themes of class and culture critical to a changing understanding of America at the turn of the century, but it also went through a series of prospective titles: Fitzgerald claimed to be particularly “crazy about [the] title “Under the Red White and Blue”” (Brucoli 39). Though Perkins effectively prevented that change, reasoning that he’d always found “The Great Gatsby” to be “a suggestive and effective title” (Brucoli 22),

he was nonetheless aware—and supportive of—the unambiguously American character of the novel. It was one of the few qualities that Thomas Wolfe’s work shared with that of Scott Fitzgerald.

Thomas Wolfe and Maxwell Perkins spent innumerable hours together struggling to create Wolfe’s vision of America. This vision was the great character in every book they worked on together. As Perkins describes in his “Answers to a Query”, responding to the questions of writer Lawrence Greene:

He has a sense of America as different from any other country, and wrestles with the effort to express that. America has never been comprehended and put into a synthesis of thought as England has, or any other nation which is old. This vast, lonely, inchoate continent which yet has got a stamp of unity upon it, and even upon its conglomerate people, is one of the things he wants to utter. Only a giant and a poet could do it, but he is both a giant and a poet. He never could be called a “Patriot.” . . . He loves Europe, and has written beautifully of it in *Of Time and the River* and elsewhere. But he feels the Americaness of this nation as it is today, when an East Side Jew, or Greek, or a northwestern Scandinavian, or a New England Portuguese, are really Americans now and not what their previous nationality would indicate. It is this vast people who inhabit America and the great physical America itself that he wants to give voice to. (Greene 197)

When Perkins described Wolfe’s vision, he did so with such depth, clarity, and confidence that the reader could easily mistake the vision he described as belonging purely to Perkins himself. In fact, in the very last line about giving voice to the people and physical geography of America, Perkins seemed to subconsciously reference his own role. As an agent of the publishing industry, Perkins necessarily provided a platform for his writers’ voices. Furthermore, Perkins cited none of Wolfe’s thoughts when describing how “America has never been comprehended and put into a synthesis of thought as England has” and stated this claim as if it were a commonly held fact. Even if Wolfe shared the sentiment, the statement unquestionably belongs to Perkins. The goal of

expressing something of America then must have also belonged to Perkins, to some extent. The fact that Wolfe captured a sense of the immediate America drew Perkins to his work because he desired to create that exact representation: an American synthesis of thought which he believed did not *yet* exist. In his biography *Editor of Genius*, Berg writes, “[Perkins] sought out authors who were not just “safe”...but who spoke in a new voice about the new values of the postwar world. In this way, as an editor he did more than reflect the standards of his age; he consciously influenced and changed them by the new talents he published” (Berg 41). Taken a step further, Perkins could influence the standards of the age by his collaboration with in addition to his acquisition of authors in order to create a uniquely American body of work. Whether this was a conscious effort could be argued, but the effort itself was undeniable, as was its eventual success.

Another example of the self-conscious effort to create an American work comes through a comparison with an entirely un-American book: *War and Peace*. In their correspondence, Perkins and Wolfe discuss their efforts to replicate the effect of Tolstoy’s novel. However, they also seem to work under the understanding that Wolfe’s book will be strikingly different. Wolfe wrote to Perkins in July 1930:

“I have been reading your favorite book, War and Peace—it is a magnificent and gigantic work—if we are going to worship anything let it be something like this: I notice in this book that the personal story is interwoven with the universal—you get the stories of private individuals, particularly members of Tolstoy’s own family, and you get the whole tremendous panorama of nations, and of Russia. This is the way a great writer uses his material, this is the way in which every good work is “autobiographical”—and I am not ashamed to follow this in my book.” (Brucoli 113)

Not only was Wolfe’s scope visibly in tune with the book recommended to him specifically by Perkins, but he used the first person plural when discussing his admiration for it: “if *we* are going to worship”, not “I” or “you”. He could have been speaking of all

of humanity, but it felt within the context far more intimate, as if he and Perkins had an understanding about what their sacred objects would be. He also spoke of the “panorama of nations” which led back into the joint desire of Perkins and his protégés to represent something significant of the country. In the case of Tolstoy, Russia was the landscape in question, but because Wolfe was keenly aware of how his own work would be perceived as autobiographical, it is clear that he intended his literary contribution to be a tribute to his own country. Perkins himself recognized the significance of his partner’s effort: “Perkins wrote: “It is said that Tolstoi never willingly parted with the manuscript of *War and Peace*. One could imagine him working on it all through his life.” So it was with Wolfe and *Of Time and the River*” (Berg 247). Wolfe himself confirmed the impulse to “work on [the novel] forever in an effort to perfect it” (Berg 243). Apparently vast countries require vast novels to accommodate them. The comparison between Wolfe’s novel and Tolstoy’s masterpiece made by both writer and editor solidifies the evidence of shared vision of a book about homeland as well as the immensity of the joint effort to create *Of Time and the River*.

Wolfe took this similarity further by admitting to the autobiographical nature of his work, but within the context of both “personal” and “universal” storytelling, just as Tolstoy did. The work is observational, rather than memoir. Wolfe felt that he was not writing only his life story, but a much larger one: otherwise he would not talk about *War and Peace* and compare it so blatantly and boldly to his intended project. He knew how much value Perkins placed in that novel, and would therefore never belittle it by equating it to a simple autobiography (hence the use of quotation marks in “autobiographical”) without allowing for significant creative energy.

According to his theory of the rise of personal voice in 20th century writing, Mark McGurl claimed that “we might understand these acts of authorial self-making...as moments in the operation, the *autopoiesis*, of a larger cultural system geared for the production of self-expressive originality” (McGurl 49). The autopoetic process in the “Program Era” can be broken down into two parts, one of which is creativity and experience. The term “autopoetics” derives its root from the Greek word for self-making, and McGurl notes that the word’s natural similarity to “poetics” lends itself to an “obvious but helpful pun” for the reflexive function of authorial auto-determination. According to this theory, early to mid-twentieth century writers like Wolfe embedded a struggle for personal identity within their creative work, which was grounded in personal experience.

Though McGurl viewed Wolfe’s adherence to the experiential element of the autopoetic process as vain and self-indulgent, he acknowledged its prominent role in the earliest established creative writing workshops in America. These workshops that sprung up in the 1940s were the next closest example of collaborative authorship to the symbiotic relationship displayed by Perkins and Wolfe (Wolfe himself even taught at a writing workshop for a time). While Wolfe and his fellow “sons” of Max Perkins indeed engaged in the practice of writing from experience (the oft-quoted adage “write what you know” comes to mind), McGurl neglected to fully analyze the connection between such a personal mode of fictionalizing and the need for collaborative authorship. By focusing on the institutionalization of creative writing arising in America during the twentieth century, McGurl perpetuated the same misguided trope that he himself identified: that of the author as a craftsman. Words such as “workshop” and even “atelier” invoke a

conception of the author as an artisan, laboring alone over each project. McGurl even recognized that this trope is outdated, “inherited from two millennia of thought about art and art making” (McGurl 18). Yet he embraced that constructed image of the author that Barthes tries so diligently to slay: “The author is...produced no doubt by our society insofar as, at the end of the middle ages, with English empiricism, French rationalism and the personal faith of the Reformation, it discovered the prestige of the individual” (Barthes 2). McGurl recognized that “the literature of this period would remain obsessed by individuals and their individuality” and yet argued that “true originality...is to be found at the level of its patron institutions”, or the very workshops that hegemonize literary productions and invite writers to develop their work within group settings (McGurl 18). Ironic, then, that he actually rejected the merit of Wolfe’s partnership with Perkins as a frailty on the part of the author.

Neither Perkins nor Wolfe believed when creating *Of Time and the River* that its “autobiographical” nature somehow delegitimized the creative process. The nature of the genius Perkins saw in him lay less in a magical power to manifest narrative out of the ether, and more in his alchemical ability to transform his experience into narrative. In his “Answers to a Query”, Perkins explained “the writings of a great novelist are in some considerable degree autobiographical. He always creates out of what is seen...but everything in [the novels] is different from what it really was, has been *transmuted* in passing through the imagination of the writer. It is this way with Thomas Wolfe” (Greene 196, emphasis mine). One can view the stages of writing and authorship as an alchemical process, where one thing is transmuted into something else. Editorial is merely another component, another layer. For example, when speaking of the yet-unpublished work

which would eventually become *The Web and the Rock* (published by another house), Perkins said “It is already complete, but needs to be revised and no doubt will also contain many additions to what now exists” (Greene 195-6). He spoke of the novel as a complete thing, whole, and yet in need of additional work, much like an experience can be complete and whole (having already taken place and perhaps recounted) but must pass through the imagination of the writer in order to become fiction. Though Perkins acknowledged Wolfe’s “genius”, he described his function as one of fabulous change rather than creation. In this way, Perkins perhaps unwittingly drew parallels between the role of the writer and editor: in this instance, both were filters through which an event or idea must pass in order to become a work of literature.

According to Mark McGurl, Thomas Wolfe “an apostle of “self-expression,” could be understood to have privileged the value of personal experience above all else, but the cluster of values surrounding “creativity” was important, too” (McGurl 82). The use of the term “apostle” here makes for a happy coincidence, as the religious connotation of that word lends itself to a different interpretation of authorship. In “The Death of the Author” Barthes describes how in early societies “narrative is never undertaken by a person, but by a mediator, shaman or speaker, whose “performance” may be admired (that is, his mastery of the narrative code), but not his “genius,” (Barthes 2). The mystical nature of the storyteller in this case has to do with his role as a vessel through which events and ideas pass in order to become narrative. However much he may embellish the story, the storyteller does not take full responsibility for the fiction, but rather the form it takes after it has undergone its alchemical transformation in the enigmatic mind of the writer. Yet McGurl did not grant that particular kind of ability the

same validity that he does to other writers.⁴

Even so, McGurl is not alone in his distaste for Wolfe: prize-winning critic Bernard DeVoto wrote a scathing review (though in truth it bordered on slander) of Wolfe's book *The Story of a Novel* and leveled many similar criticisms. However, many scholars like Edward Maisel and Christopher Bruno actually defended and praised Wolfe's work. In his book *An Anatomy of Literature*, Maisel responds to the negative criticism that so often took aim at Wolfe by pointing out that critics such as "Mr. DeVoto chose rather to fix on the concept ["novel,"] or the concept ["fiction,"] and deduces from there his remarks concerning the work. If *Look Homeward, Angel*, if *Of Time and the River*, could not be fitted with greater precision into their patent generic structure, so much the worse for them!" (34–35). Furthermore, in denouncing Wolfe's aptitude for fiction (simply because his best work was completed in tandem with Perkins), one denounces Perkins's editorial instinct. A critic's sympathetic praise for Perkins must necessarily soften the expressed derision towards Wolfe.

The most unfortunate element of McGurl's estimation lay in his assessment of Wolfe's authorial partnership. In order to make a point about the "craft" element of the autopoetic process, McGurl pointed out that "an adherence to the value of painstaking craft, however, is difficult to find anywhere in Wolfe's work, having mainly been

⁴ McGurl writes "while [Wolfe] showed little interest in the act of fictionalizing...the sense of cognitive self-sovereignty it carries in train was central to his sense of his own genius, and made even ordinary events in his life seem like emanations of an autochthonous artistic design" (McGurl 82). In *The Program Era*, McGurl paints Wolfe as a narcissistic creature who believes himself to be the ideal subject of his own fiction because his life arranges itself to support that theory, and injects this reality ready-made into his novels. On the contrary, Wolfe believed that all the life he encountered was worthy of appearing as an emanation of "artistic design", but he was only qualified to write about what he had seen (whether or not he was vain outside of this practice then ceases to be relevant).

outsourced to his long-suffering editor, Max Perkins” (McGurl 82). Not only does the description of Perkins as the “long-suffering” laborer beholden to the diva-like writer thoroughly diminish the scope and nuance of Perkins’s role; it is also thoroughly inaccurate. According to one of Wolfe’s former professors: “he was not a shirker” (Nowell 79), and during his time at New York University, Wolfe “began to learn the great necessity of work,” (Nowell 75). Despite some fluctuation in his inspiration, Wolfe carried this work ethic with him in every literary endeavor, contrary to the popular critical belief that his close relationship with Perkins derives from an indolent unwillingness to revise his own novels. Perkins and Wolfe suffered *together* when working on *Of Time and the River*. The adherence to “painstaking craft” occurred during the long hours spent in each other’s company, either in Perkins’s office or the streets of New York, or even at Perkins’s home. The fact that Perkins supplied the direction for the artisanal effort does not efface said effort. Rather, the twentieth century’s tendency to privilege individual success and reject external dependency led the misconception that working extensively with an editor (or really, any collaborator) signified a reduced capacity to create fiction. This misconception only reinforced the importance of individual roles despite shared goals under the umbrella of symbiotic authorship.

Much of the idealistic literature of the previous century stemmed from an optimistic view of American individuality. In a nation designing itself as a meritocracy, a man must “make it” on his own. However, writers of the twentieth century harbored some doubts. Fitzgerald was aware of this dark promise of America, which is why so much of his fiction features watery imagery and the implied threat of drowning (from “The Swimmers” to “Absolution” to the watery end of *The Great Gatsby*): it plays upon

the fear that in “America, this meritocracy...if you don’t make it, you’ll vanish beneath the waves” (Corrigan 35). Failure then embodied the “national literary nightmare” of the twentieth century. This fear inspired an inherent distaste for collaboration due to the possibility that a partner could not only take responsibility for lifting one up, but conversely be at fault for dragging one down. Thomas Wolfe was no exception: in his early days of exuberant writing, he revealed the sense that “he was “inevitable” and that somehow, someday soon, he would achieve success” based on the sheer force of his own talent (Nowell 82). While Wolfe took part in a shift in American fiction that engaged more heavily with authorial collaboration, he was also a part of the resistance to this movement, feeling as though it discredited him as an author/craftsman. Wolfe had a way of pouring out his words until he “had realized himself “through a process of torrential production.”” Self-realization was critical not only because Wolfe’s narratives were often personal by nature, but also because Wolfe would refuse to *be* realized by anyone else.⁵ For most of his literary career, the faith in his own creative power leading to his inevitable success and his regard for Maxwell Perkins not only coexisted, but completely intertwined. According to Susan Bell “Guidance is the gist” of the ideal editorial function, and will fluctuate based upon the writer’s needs (Bell 6). In the case of Perkins’s collaboration with Wolfe, the role expanded to include generating fundamental themes upon which Thomas could ruminate, and galvanizing him when the inspiration flagged. Later years would test his confidence as more critics accused him of depending

⁵ Here, too, the cultural element of the symbiotic authorship process emerged: literary realization served as an identity marker for both individual and nation. Wolfe’s catalogue of experience reflected the American experience, as well as the American literary community’s hunger for their own novels at the beginning of the century. A need to determine, not *be* determined.

too heavily upon Perkins's guidance. Wolfe's profound gratitude for Perkins's contribution led to the single incident responsible for the collapse of their entire relationship.

When he wrote a full paragraph dedicating *Of Time and the River* to his editor, Wolfe insisted that without Perkins's help "none of it could have been written" (Wolfe, *Time* 5). Perkins wrote a letter back on January 21st of that same year (1935) to protest this dedication on the ostensible grounds that it would be fundamentally insincere, convinced that Wolfe believed that his editing had "prevented [the book] from coming to perfection" (Brucoli 185). Perkins softened this discouragement by praising the process of collaborating with Wolfe as "the most interesting episode of [his] editorial life...however it has turned out, for good or bad" (Brucoli 185). Between the lines of this praise lies the undercurrent of wariness. Perkins refused to state outright that the dedication might incite critical backlash because he feared that Wolfe might "get the wrong idea" (Brucoli 185). Wolfe kept the publication, insisting it accurately conveyed his sentiments. As expected, public opinion quickly consumed this admittance of collaboration and churned out a narrative of dependence. In the wake of the widespread impression that the author of *Of Time and the River* couldn't write on his own, Wolfe fell back on the argument that "although *Look Homeward, Angel* had to be cut before it could be published, he had brought it to its conclusion without help from anyone," and "pointed, with great pride, to the fact that he had done so," (Nowell 106). Rather than explain the collaborative nature of their partnership, both men chose to deny the full extent of Perkins's involvement. After all, it was Perkins's philosophy that:

An editor does not add to a book. At best he serves as a handmaiden to an author. Don't ever get to feeling important about yourself, because an editor at

most releases energy. He creates nothing...a writer's best work comes entirely from himself. (Berg 6)

Despite the fact that Perkins often suggested projects for his authors, he claims that those pieces were often beneath their best work, regardless of how commercially successful they might have been. Consequently, writer and editor would endure some unpleasant back-and-forth in regards to finances and alternative publishing options, the doubt ignited in Wolfe by this single occurrence ultimately led him to break from Scribners and Perkins, both. Though the loyal editor retained countless pages of manuscript, and even assisted in organizing them for posthumous publication after Wolfe passed away in 1938, by January of 1937 the halcyon days of symbiotic authorship between Perkins and Wolfe had come to an end.

When editing a novel, Perkins was a collaborator rather than a consumer, making the relationship between author and editor symbiotic instead of parasitic. Scott Berg, the man most familiar with Perkins's life and legacy, described the process of creating *Of Time and the River* as a "symbiotic union of two artistic forces: Wolfe's passion and Perkins's judgment" (Berg 253). Just as biologically speaking, symbiosis is "interaction between two different organisms living in close physical association, typically to the advantage of both" (OED), the relationship between author and editor is not only mutually beneficial but also allows the two to remain as discrete entities. This distinction forms the basis of the broader term "symbiotic authorship": while the adjective "symbiotic" applies to the unique union between Perkins and Wolfe, "symbiotic authorship" refers to the replicable process of this mode of collaboration. Perkins knew that the editor was no parasite made to latch on to its authorial host and use it for his own ends: he actively preserved the writer's distinct voice. According to Perkins, "If you have a Mark Twain, don't try to

make him into a Shakespeare or make a Shakespeare into a Mark Twain. Because in the end an editor can get only as much out of an author as the author has in him” (Berg 6). The advice distills into a warning not to manipulate a writer’s voice. The editor was the secondary layer, molding itself to the work already done by the writer but serving a separate function in bringing the literary product closer to its final state. Therefore each of Perkins’s writers displayed his own particular stylistic elements. Only upon closer inspection would their novels reveal Perkins’s metaphorical stamp, meaning that the end result belonged neither solely to editor nor to writer, but to the combined efforts of both.

Humble though he may have been in regards to his own career, Maxwell Perkins shaped literary history by doing more than simply by having the good fortune to pluck talented writers out of the ether. He capitalized on a cultural turning point, sought out writers whose ideals or endeavors were compatible with his own, and pioneered a fully symbiotic form of collaborative authorship. Combining his superb judgment with the creative powers of the writers with whom he worked allowed Perkins and his spiritually adopted “sons” to produce a new standard of American fiction. The symbiotic authorship responsible for this fiction, while seemingly unique to Perkins, in actuality belongs more broadly to a certain pattern of American editing during the twentieth century. As such, within the right cultural context, it is replicable. Perkins’s mode of editing—symbiotic authorship—is American in nature partially as a result of its exclusivity to books published within the United States. However, though symbiotic authorship can be found in 20th century American literature, it was not universal in all editorial relationships. Even if editors and publishers at large had known and actively decided to imitate this style (which was by no means the case), there are still enough conditions that depend

upon the individual to render this imitation difficult at best. However, if some of the base conditions are met (near-familial closeness, mutual fulfillment of need, closeness developed through correspondence, etc.) then an editor could begin to cultivate their partnership with their writer to form another instance of symbiotic authorship. As Bell states, “history will help us see editing as an independent craft, and editors...as true craftsmen” (Bell 4). Maxwell Perkins, through his collaborations with Fitzgerald and Wolfe, paved the way for certain future editors to take a more active role in authorship and help produce fiction worthy of inclusion in the American literary canon.

Chapter II: The American Edit

The emergence of a new category of editorial-authorial partnership in the literature of twentieth century America cannot and does not rest solely on the shoulders of one superb editor. In order to establish that the kind of authorship facilitated by Maxwell Perkins and his writers was not merely the result of a fluke, a fortunate publishing serendipity, one must determine if symbiotic authorship is replicable. The proof will lie in the recreation of similar conditions to the first successful instance of partnership in a later example, and the latter's result in a similarly excellent product, meaning novels of similar quality to *Of Time and the River* or *The Great Gatsby*. In this section, the reader will find a brief discussion of the possible pitfalls of intense editorial intervention as well as a superb example of successful symbiotic authorship. This recently-surfaced instance of symbiotic authorship led to the creation of one of the most widely-read and well-loved books in the American literary canon: *To Kill a Mockingbird*. The publication of Lee's *Go Set a Watchman* (an early pre-edited draft of *Mockingbird*) in 2015 provides readers with the opportunity to explore seldom-seen aspects of the editorial process. By analyzing the nature of Tay Hohoff's work and relationship with Nelle Harper Lee, one recognizes the same pattern that led to the creation of some of the most notable works of American literary canon. From there, one can take the implications further and deduce that this unique mode of editing is not only distinctly American in nature, but is also necessary to produce certain quintessentially American works of fiction in the 20th century.

In the case of Therese "Tay" Von Hohoff and Nelle Harper Lee, the relationship struck a positive note both immediate and lasting. When Nelle first encountered the

editorial team of J.B. Lippincott to discuss her manuscript, “the Lippincott editors who assembled to meet Nelle were all men except one: a late-middle-aged woman dressed in a business suit with her steel gray hair pulled tightly behind her head” (Shields 115). This singular woman was Tay Hohoff, and this first impression helped to lay the foundation for kinship and understanding between herself and Lee. “Lee, a first-time author with no family in New York, likely benefited from Hohoff’s motherly editorial style, both professionally and on a personal level,” (Norris 17). Lee’s identity as a first-time author in a strange city only begins to scratch the surface of the role Hohoff would play in her life and career. Despite her best efforts (attending a local women’s finishing school like that attended by her mother, joining a sorority, etc.) Nelle⁶ was never feminine enough to live up to her frail mother’s expectations for her growing up. Tomboyish Nelle would find kinship with Tay, who recalls in her memoir *Cats and Other People* that “conventional activities bored me and were often coolly ignored. The girls both bored and terrified me, but I made friends with two boys...” (Hohoff 16). The two women also shared similar upbringings: both were daughters of lawyers, and both found their early education troublesome because “school interfered with reading” (Hohoff 16). By a happy coincidence, however, each had a family who encouraged her educational pursuits: Hohoff recalls “[My family] turned me loose in a library...they answered any question factually; they never whetted my curiosity by accident without satisfying it...” (Hohoff 20). For her part, Nelle’s descriptions of Scout’s insatiable curiosity butting against the

⁶ This chapter will often refer to writer and editor by their first names not only because that is how the two addressed one another, but also because that is how much of their respective biographical material chooses to represent them. Given their shared preference for casual over formal affairs, this writer believes neither woman would mind.

limits of her small town's educational system are drawn heavily from her own experience (Shields 56). Even the fact that Hohoff was a successful woman in a male-dominated field likely resonated with Lee because of the similar circumstances faced by the author's sister Alice.

Alice Lee, a lawyer following in her father's footsteps, was hard-pressed to make others take her seriously in the courtroom for much of her early career (Shields 46). Once she was given an opportunity, however, Alice "gave a memorable speech for her side" and it wasn't long before she "was treated as a member of the Bar and not as an aberration" (Shields 47). But the women of the Lee family were not the only ones to overcome the circumstances that conspired against their gender. Meanwhile, "it was 1942 when Hohoff joined the editorial staff of J.B. Lippincott & Co., rising to the rank of vice president by the time of her retirement in 1973" (Norris 19), which was unusual for a woman during the time period. It speaks to Tay's decisive skill that she made it to such heights in the industry.

But the connection between editor and author, and between editor and publishing house (indeed, the Hohoff's connections to the literary world ran deep) is more interesting still. In her thesis *From Watchman to Mockingbird: Tay Hohoff's Editorial Influence on Harper Lee*, Aine M. Norris notes:

Both Hohoff and Torrey shared connections to Alabama, Hohoff's familial connection extended to Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald, wife of F. Scott Fitzgerald...Hohoff's southern familial connections offered an advantage for her client roster at Lippincott, which included multiple southern authors. To say Lee's relationship with Hohoff extended beyond the traditional bounds of a writer and editor would be an understatement; their connection evolved into a friendship as the women shared commonalities

in independence, discipline, and lifestyle. This friendship helped form a strong foundation of mutual trust for their professional work. (Norris 19)

This fact is not necessarily critical to one's understanding of an effective editorial relationship, but it is nonetheless an interesting element of interconnectivity in the writing and editing world. This web of familial relations forms an almost ecological picture of instances of collaborative authorship in the twentieth century, which, while too broad to be engaged with here in full, furthers the idea of authorial symbiosis. Additionally, the topic of literary legacy discussed in the previous chapter reappears here, in two women who, through shared values, styles, and goals, establish their own legacy. The two remained close friends all their lives, until Hohoff's death in 1974.

So how does the relationship between Hohoff and Lee compare to the example set by Perkins with his authors several decades prior? The first step to understanding the conditions necessary for symbiotic authorship is to trace the patterns that emerge in everything from the initial meeting to the working process and the quality of the final product. When Lee, with the help of her literary agent Maurice Crain, first submitted her manuscript (then titled *Go Set a Watchman*, or else tentatively referred to as "Atticus") the now-defunct J.B. Lippincott Company was a conservative and traditional publishing house. Norris provides evidence of the expectations of the house in her interview with editor Fernanda Perrone: "To corroborate the old-fashioned values expected of Lippincott editors and staff, Perrone shared the anecdote that the company "had refused to publish *Forever Amber* ... because it was considered too risqué - the book later became a bestseller" (Norris 52). These values mimic those of Scribners in the first decades of the twentieth century, when Maxwell Perkins had to practically go into battle in order to convince the stoic older editors to take a chance on the risqué manuscript currently up for

discussion: Fitzgerald's debut novel *This Side of Paradise*. The idea of breaking the mold, while not definitively a component of symbiotic authorship on its own, likely acts as a catalyst for the kind of close relationship that is necessary for authorial symbiosis to occur. By overcoming this first hurdle together, writer and editor begin to align as a team.

One must now observe just how many times it is possible to connect Lee and Hohoff to Fitzgerald and Perkins. A significant factor in Tay's eagerness to work with Lee on her manuscript was the latter's "willingness to accept criticism" and her "innate humility and a deep respect for the art of writing" (Shields 87-88). As previously established, Fitzgerald was something of a perfectionist, and his correspondence with Perkins betrays countless instances of his willingness to bow to the latter's judgment. The prevailing assumption throughout most of the twentieth century up until this point had been that writers would not welcome criticism. Even in cases such as that of Joseph Conrad and Edward Garnett (three decades prior), an early example of partnership between writer and editor, criticism was a delicate matter. "The story of their relationship is in the volume of Conrad's letters to Garnett...Garnett read, encouraged, recommended publication—but apparently suggested no changes..." (Lippincott 25). It would have been highly out of character for nineteenth-century publishing relationships, and still rather unusual through the middle of the twentieth century. But in the cases of Lee and Fitzgerald, the editors gave them feedback on initial manuscripts, sent the promising writers away, and saw them return having made significant changes to their prospective novels.

Another significant element of symbiotic authorship is correspondence: copious amounts of written correspondence. It remains to be seen if this element is strictly

necessary, especially as the world of editing and publishing undergoes changes in order to keep up with modern technology (handwritten letters seemed largely outdated by the end of the century and obsolete by the beginning of the next). But this method enabled each participant to not only share long uninterrupted trains of thought at a stretch, but also gave writer and editor ample time to familiarize themselves with the other's writing. Apparently this factor was significant enough for Crain to "[choose] Lippincott for his initial pitch of Lee's manuscript, noting the company's positive reputation in correspondence to the author" (Norris 10). This choice displays the literary agent's understanding that collaboration & correspondence between author and publisher (and by extension, author and editor) bode well for a novel's future. Correspondence serves the additional purpose of giving modern readers lasting insight into the authorial relationships.

The instinct to protect the author's creativity, reputation, and sense of responsibility for the work runs deep in the editorial community, which could be why even fabulously talented editors tend to downplay their contributions to a successful novel. "A full biographical portrait of Hohoff has never been written and limited discussion existed regarding her editorial relationship with Lee before *Watchman's* discovery and release" (excluding Hohoff's own book, *Cats and Other People*, which is more about the titular felines than it is about her own life, work, and legacy) (Norris 17). Even J.B Lippincott Company's *The Author and His Audience*, which features some of Hohoff's work, hardly mentions her by name. For her part, Tay offered elements of her work on authors' manuscripts into the public eye about as often as Harper Lee agreed to make public appearances: that is to say, very seldom. Even by editors' standards she was

very private. Her legacy bears a strong similarity to the kind that Maxwell Perkins might have imagined for himself had his editorial prowess not thrust him into cultural conversation (with the more recent help of a biography and subsequent film adaptation). The persistent understanding of the editorial role is one of subservience to the primary intention of the author. As stated in Simon Armitage's "Rough Crossings" the editor must "facilitate a writer's vision," (Armitage 3). When readers believe that an editor has transgressed and somehow abandoned the writer's vision in favor of something else, fallout occurs. Whether this fallout damages the reputation of the author (as in Wolfe's case) or the editor (as in Gordon Lish's case), the controversy tends to detract from the success of the partnership and of the fiction. It is logical for editors to avoid this pitfall altogether, especially in the case of such close collaboration as that of Hohoff and Lee.

The unfortunate side effect of this modesty is that it likely leaves little room for readers to truly understand the oft-obfuscated process of authorship. In her contribution to Lippincott's 175th anniversary edition, Hohoff describes her work with Lee on *Mockingbird* by saying:

After a couple of false starts, the story-line, interplay of characters, and fall of emphasis *grew* clearer, and with each revision—there were many *minor* changes as the story grew in strength and in [Lee's] own vision of it—the true stature of the novel *became* evident. (Lippincott 28)

Not only does Hohoff attribute the vision entirely to Lee (a subject explored in greater detail below), but she also downplays her own contributions. The interesting lack of human subjects in her sentences saps all responsibility from the parties involved. If one were to trust Hohoff's own account of the work she did on Lee's manuscript, one might be led to believe that the novel "grew" into completion of its own accord, with no external assistance. The truth is that Hohoff and Lee spent the better part of two years

laboring together over turning Lee's initial manuscript into the American classic it was destined to become.

In her book *The Mockingbird Next Door*, about her friendship with the reclusive Harper Lee, Marja Mills reports that a 1991 survey conducted by the Library of Congress asked which book most influenced its participants' lives, and only the Bible outranked *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Mills 5). Despite *Mockingbird's* prominence in American literary canon, its readers have access to surprisingly little information surrounding the beloved novel's creation. Certainly any journalist or biographer would be happy to reduce the narrative to embellished description of Nelle's own childhood, and many do: Charles Shields in his biography of Harper Lee hardly bothers to distinguish between the fictional Atticus and the very real A.C. Lee, a problem which I will also attempt to rectify. As previously stated, part of the writer's function is not to describe reality but to transmute it into fiction, and the editor plays a part in this alchemical process. Foraging through a novelist's history for what one might assume to be the raw materials of storytelling not only limits the scope of an author's capabilities, but also prevents readers from searching elsewhere for additional ingredients. It is no surprise then that "Hohoff remains a quiet, relatively unknown force that helped to change the final text of *Mockingbird* and, subsequently, Lee's career as a writer" (Norris 6). Max Perkins used to be in a similar state of relative anonymity compared to the fame of his writers, and was forced out of it by two major factors: the first was his very public falling out with author, friend, and protégé Thomas Wolfe, and the second was the publication of A. Scott Berg's biography. Because Lee and Hohoff (both reserved individuals when it came to public attention) maintained a close friendship until Hohoff's death in 1974, they never had such a falling

out that would invite the public to recognize the nature of their partnership (and as of yet, no one has published a biography of Tay Hohoff). Therefore, one must be grateful for all emerging evidence of the authorial process. Aine Norris's thesis "From Watchman to Mockingbird" in particular offers an invaluable glimpse of the editorial work that took place behind the scenes in creating *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Such evidence is necessary in order to then analyze the effect of symbiotic authorship.

Preserved correspondence is often the only resource available, but as Norris also argues, thanks to the release of *Go Set A Watchman*, readers gain a fresh and even more precise look into exactly what steps were taken during the editorial conversations. The book was dubiously marketed as a follow-up to *To Kill A Mockingbird* because, as reviewer Maureen Corrigan puts it, the book "reads much more like a failed sequel" than anything else. However, between incongruences over the timeline and clues at the structural level, another sequence of events begins to emerge: "Most first drafts by seasoned and first-time authors are rarely destined to be published in their original state, neither was *Watchman*...as it now has been with the publisher's implicit suggestion that it is a sequel to *Mockingbird*" (Norris 54). Readers might initially feel cheated out of a promised sequel due to the publisher's chosen marketing strategy, and rightfully so. However, this "mess that will forever change the way we read a masterpiece" still possesses immense value (Corrigan). I would contend that access to an early draft answers far more significant questions than a sequel of *To Kill A Mockingbird* could. The latter provides follow-up that seems largely unnecessary given how well the original novel ended, and the former provides insight into the work that takes place behind the

scenes of literary creation. Aíne Norris nicely sums up the benefit of the 2015 publication:

Reading and understanding *Watchman* as the initial draft for *Mockingbird* allows readers to understand the importance of Hohoff as Lee's editor and her overall impact on guiding the text through stages of revisions necessary to create in its final, published form. It is essential to examine the two novels editorially, acknowledging *Watchman*'s beginning as a foundation for an edited, focused *Mockingbird*, and its status as an initial draft never intended for publication by Lee's literary agent, Hohoff, and Lippincott" (Norris 7).

Luckily, the publication of Lee's manuscript occurred in 2015, rather than thirty years prior. This fact allowed it to receive a more nuanced understanding of its position and significance in regards to Hohoff's editorial work and Harper Lee's skill as a writer. In previous decades (one need only look to Wolfe and even Ray Carver as examples), evidence of heavy editorial intervention might have blighted the reputation of writer, editor, or both. Instead, comparing the two books provides modern readers with the chance to give Hohoff some overdue recognition. Furthermore, because of the symbiotic nature of Hohoff's relationship with Lee, *Watchman*'s publication opens up a world of discussions about editing and its effect on American literature.

The Art of Writing: "Tay"king the "Lee"d

The initial meeting was a success, and after Nelle returned with the suggested revisions to her manuscript, all involved could move on to the next stage of the process. "The official relationship as writer and editor began in 1957, pairing Lee's skill with Hohoff's experience and instinct" (Norris 12). Already, writer and editor complement each other's respective professional needs. Their complimentary skill sets and similar upbringings, as previously discussed, already laid a strong foundation for collaborative authorship similar to the kind that existed between Perkins and Fitzgerald. However, Tay

and Nelle would spend the better part of two years laboring over *Mockingbird* in a process reminiscent of Perkins's grand endeavor with Wolfe. Hohoff went as far as to take six months off from working with any other authors or manuscripts because of her firm belief that Lee's book "could be one of the great novels of our age" (Feldman 48). But in order for the book to achieve its potential, both editor and author need to contribute tremendous amounts of time and effort (Lippincott 28). Luckily, both stubborn women were well-equipped for this kind of undertaking. Tay went out of her way to encourage Nelle whenever she could, often adopting a "motherly" style of editing as she "guided Lee's work while nurturing and supporting her intentions as a writer" (Norris 55). Some might imagine her simply taking a pen to the manuscript, slashing with grand strokes what she doesn't approve of and underlining the passages that earn her esteem. Indeed, this might have been the method of some editors, and even Perkins in his work with authors besides Wolfe would often mark up the manuscript or else merely suggest changes in his letters to the authors. Hohoff, however, "would go through the manuscript and jot down little questions in the margins. From those questions, you would start questioning your own work" (Shields 130). This method, born of discussion rather than correction, led writer and editor to more closely understand one another and unify their visions for what the novel could and should become.

From the first, "the book's thematic center around racial discrimination and bigotry in the American south was clear" so Hohoff seized upon this core and began to rearrange the elements of the book to best present the message Lee wanted to explore (Norris 24). As it was, the "series of anecdotes" lacked a true narrative through line and the subject matter felt far too immediate and politically charged. As Norris notes,

“[Hohoff] wanted to ensure the novel’s timeframe, narrator, and characters would be accessible in mid-twentieth-century America, and wouldn’t become lost in similar plotlines of other Civil Rights-era published texts” (53). The novel needed some distance, a plot structure, and a hero. Ultimately, Hohoff’s suggestions were responsible for the inclusion of these elements, taking *Watchman* from a disjointed collage of Southern life to the beloved triumph that is *Mockingbird*.

For those who wonder if Hohoff’s contribution is being overstated here, there is indeed proof that the manuscript underwent a true metamorphosis at the hands of the editor: Fernanda Perrone, daughter of Marguerite Ridge Perrone who initially read Lee’s manuscript upon its entry to Lippincott, offers insight into her mother’s impressions of both the early manuscript and Hohoff’s intervention. In an interview with Aine Norris, Perrone said:

“My mother did read the manuscript. She recalled it was awful, very long, discursive, and digressive. She recommended that it not be published... My mother could not believe how she was able to turn Harper Lee’s manuscript into something so much better, more organized, cogent, etc. than the original. She felt that Tay Hohoff should have gotten more credit for what she did.” (Interview with Aine Norris, 30 Aug. 2016)

The book’s significant changes never made it unrecognizable: even Perrone observes that the primary effect was one of clarity. Much of Hohoff’s work was indeed structural: suggesting that Lee shift the perspective from adult Scout to the childhood flashbacks that were so charming was a primary alteration. In his 2015 *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* article titled “A Lesser Atticus Finch Jumps Off Page,” writer Tony Norman notes that “With some coaxing from Ms. Hohoff, Ms. Lee...shifted the action from the 1950s to the 1930s, when the characters were two decades younger. She...made the precocious Scout

the novel's narrator..." The children, and Scout in particular, provide levity to the novel and prevent it from sinking into the mire of a race-relations narrative, all too popular at the time because of the Civil Rights movement and the recent *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. In fact, Hohoff likely urged Lee to find a way of giving the children their own intrigue to supplement the crux of the plot. To fill this vacuum in the narrative, the two included Boo Radley. As Norris argues:

Despite his status as a minor character in *Mockingbird*, Radley was a constant fixture in Scout's narration and description of the street, and ultimately served as a lesson and example to the children. Radley is not mentioned at all in *Watchman*, nor is the Radley house mentioned as a fixture in Jean Louise's neighborhood...the lack of Radley in *Watchman*'s flashback scenes establishes his character's purpose solely for *Mockingbird*, and implies he was likely created during Lee's later editorial rewrites with Hohoff. (44)

Radley is a useful narrative device because he draws in the attention of the reader just as he does for the children of the novel. Long-forgotten wrongdoings, superstitious stories, and haunted houses act as a lure for the reader. One might not even realize that they are going to read a novel about prejudice (in particular, racial prejudice) until it's too late: the trial scene has arrived, and they're hooked. Then, of course, the simple mystery the children have been chasing falls into line with the central theme of the novel, and Radley becomes an immediate lesson for the children. He leaves Scout and, by extension, the reader, with a warmer sentiment towards the events than one would have if the novel had merely focused on the adults in the story and their reactions to the trial. Indeed, this warmth and innocence is partially why the whole story could not have centered directly upon Atticus.

In regards to Atticus Finch, he could perhaps be the most misunderstood character in terms of the narrative's evolution. It was so accepted at the time of the book's

publication to immediately liken the fictional Atticus to the flesh-and-blood A.C. Lee that early fans of the novel often visited Monroeville and request that Mr. Lee sign their copies of *To Kill a Mockingbird* as “Atticus” (Shields 144). However, as “the biggest change from *Mockingbird* to *Watchman* is the extreme difference in characterization of Atticus Finch” one begins to realize that Atticus is far less a recreation of Nelle’s childhood impressions of her own father and more a figure sculpted by Tay’s intervention (Norris 46). Atticus’s final characterization resulted from Hohoff’s insight into not only what Lee wanted from the character, but also what American audiences needed from the character. It is important to note that, as Norris observes:

Though her primary role at Lippincott remained that of an editor, Hohoff was also working on her own writing project during the period in which she worked with Lee. Hohoff’s own book, a biography titled *A Ministry to Man: The Life of John Lovejoy Elliott*, was an undertaking that undoubtedly influenced her notes and stylistic changes for Lee’s manuscript. (Norris 20)

Norris elaborates on the effect of this timeline by pointing out how “themes and characterization in Hohoff’s text about Elliott are notably parallel to Lee’s revised characterization of Atticus and his reformed morality as seen in *Mockingbird*. (Norris 5-6). Norris here argues that Hohoff’s work on Elliot’s biography was responsible for the characterization of Atticus Finch as he appears in *Mockingbird*. While it is true that Atticus Finch is an exact replica of neither John Lovejoy Elliot nor A.C. Lee, the character takes elements from both figures, as well as a little bit of his own spark. Atticus exists not as an observation, but as an ideal. Both Hohoff and Lee intentionally crafted his characterization in order to serve the greater function of *Mockingbird*.

The idea that Hohoff’s own work shaped her influence on the characterization of Atticus statement forms the crux of one of the chapters of Norris’s thesis. I’d like to

further analyze what effect these changes had on the overall narrative and how they made the book more appealing to American audiences. The most notable change between the original manuscript (*Watchman*) and the final novel (*Mockingbird*) is the characterization of Atticus. Notably, this characterization was part of what made the novel so popular, and even helped to win Gregory Peck an Oscar for his portrayal of the beloved lawyer in the 1962 film.⁷ Crediting Hohoff with the characterization of Atticus breaks with the traditional assumption that Lee wrote the character entirely based upon her perception of her own father A.C. Lee. In reality, Nelle's description of Atticus in *Watchman* is much closer to an accurate portrayal of her father: a flawed and complex individual with great moral strength and stumbling blocks of his own. Though this early version of Atticus is unequivocally racist in comparison to the final iteration, the fact that he is based more closely on her father meant that Lee had not intended to vilify him in this way. Rather, the character of Atticus was supposed to be a reveal that left the reader sharing the feelings of Jean-Lousie: betrayal, followed by a muddled confusion and acceptance that is supposed to be nuanced. According to Tony Norman, Lee "wanted a flawed Everyman but had to deliver a saint for mass consumption. Her first instinct was to make Atticus racist, which would have meant he resembled most Americans at the time" (Norman). Atticus was meant to fall from the impossible heights of Scout's esteem to a middling position, a gray area that would leave room for debate on either side and therefore make him relatable. Instead, he ended up representing an awkward no-man's land. Between the fact that Scout was already somewhat indecisive on the main issues in the story (where to live, whether to marry her beau, etc.), and that she ends the novel feeling more confused

⁷ And in 2003, the American Film Institute named Atticus Finch the greatest movie hero of the 20th century <https://www.afi.com/afis-100-years-100-heroes-villians/>

than ever, her character cannot fully support the narrative. Making the other most firmly-established character into a grey area then detracts from the novel's relatability rather than adding to it. As Norris states:

Though Lee's original text was truthful in its account of the social and political climate in 1950s America, its candid and straightforward characterization left little room for an amicable ending or central hero within the novel, limiting the text's marketability. Lippincott, as a company, was looking for its next bestseller... (24)

But Hohoff realized that in a time period dominated by Civil Rights texts, the American people didn't want a fallible human: they wanted a hero. She gave them the Atticus they needed. What the novel needed (and by extension, what Hohoff and Lippincott needed) was a through line and a heavy dose of optimism. Though changing the POV from adult to youthful Scout helped to accomplish the latter, Atticus alone bore the brunt of these two tasks: together, Nelle and Tay worked to make his character strong enough to carry them. In short, "the editor's sound instincts...helped Lee create Atticus, a character, like Elliott, whose principles and unwavering morality resonate across time periods and for audiences internationally" (Norris 55). But the true genius of this change is the fact that even if Atticus seemingly rises above any and all standards of morality and justice, one cannot call the depiction unrealistic. Youthful Scout's perspective justifies the simple dignity of Atticus's character: an older Scout discovers her father's flaws in *Watchman*, but an adolescent Scout in *Mockingbird* is permitted to idolize her father, and by extension, so is the reader.

The effects of the revisions to Atticus's character extend beyond the novel's narrative structure; they also reflect an American cultural context. By including this idealized figure, Lee and Hohoff give the novel a forward-looking angle even as it takes

place in the past. In his article “The Strange Career of Atticus Finch,” Joseph Crespino discusses the heroic reputation of Atticus:

[*Mockingbird*] tells us that even in the Depression-era Jim Crow South, the era of Scottsboro and Bilbo, there existed within the South men like Atticus Finch who would be the seeds of the transformation to come. Atticus is a modern hero who, while embodying the most noble aspects of the southern tradition, also transcended the limits of that tradition and attained a liberal, morally rational racial viewpoint that was seen as quintessentially American. (Crespino 20)

Atticus then represents a seemingly paradoxical figure: a man who believes in the power of honor and tradition while also firmly upholding liberal values of humanity and justice. Atticus, as relayed to the reader through Scout’s child-like impression, is a “modern hero.” Hohoff helped cultivate this characterization of Atticus in order to achieve this “quintessentially American” quality. Not only was he a full product of the South, but Atticus also represented the voice of reason and justice—specifically, justice for all people. A deeply-embedded sense of justice is inextricable from the common American cultural identity, so much so that the words hold pride of place in the pledge of allegiance. Atticus, already working within the American legal system, is perfectly poised to represent that ideal. Furthermore, though the book was written during the height of the Civil Rights movement, it is also a product of another large conflict: World War II. America had recently emerged from a contest of military might on the world stage in which it was not only the ultimate victor, but also firmly on the correct side of the moral binary. Embodying the role of the hero in a classic “good versus evil” conflict makes for an uncomplicated but compelling narrative. Despite embodying seemingly contradictory values, Atticus’s personality is strikingly simple and straightforward. By trimming away the nuance and complications of Atticus’s viewpoints as expressed in *Watchman*, *Mockingbird* presents the reader with a character who is all the more understandable for

being less fallible. Hohoff and Lee traded the flawed and complex human being for the steadfast ideal.

Now the novel had a child-like narrator, a sound structure, and an undeniable hero. Simplicity won out over nuance. But why was this trade-off successful, and how could Hohoff and Lee anticipate its effect? Perhaps “Tay Hohoff... didn’t believe American consumers were sophisticated enough to read such an uncompromising indictment of American racism when it was submitted for publication in 1957” (Norman). This assessment feels close, but poorly described. Hohoff accounted for a desire for optimism rather than a lack of sophistication. A book cannot unilaterally condemn if it also intends to universally inspire. “A resounding theme of *Mockingbird* is fairness and morality superseding racial bigotry. Lee’s initial writing regarding race relations in *Watchman* provides little hope for change in rural Alabama” (Norris 30). One might wonder why, and even if, the readers need hope. Many excellent works of literature end tragically, or else with the variety of grim realism that *Watchman* originally possessed. Hohoff advocated for an Atticus who gives the reader some hope, who sets the tone for change to come (even as the book looks backwards in time). This hope is part of what gives the book its staying power in a time full of racial tension: the Civil Rights movement in full swing, many members of Southern government entrenched more deeply than ever in their views, and harsh arguments dividing either side meant that any novel dealing with these subjects would have to tread carefully. But by giving the reader Atticus, a man who upholds the values of courtesy and honor that many Southerners in particular would hold dear while also appealing to the liberal attitudes more prevalent in the Northern states made him more universally likeable, and indeed admirable. The

book's creators chose to cater to the very American ideals of hope and justice, in contrast to subject matter which, at the time, would have been nothing but grim for most readers. There's a reason Wolfe's protagonists are constantly questing for some greater figure (perhaps a father, but likely more), that Gatsby must stretch impossibly far to try and grasp the green light, that Atticus must take the losing case. There's beauty, and a very American kind of appeal, in reaching towards an ideal, particularly when doing so might go against all rational understanding of the circumstances.

Because of the perseverance of editor and author, their combined efforts led to the evolution of the book from success to classic. As Norris argues, Hohoff's "suggestions on changes to the novel's setting, point of view, and characterization show a deeper understanding of American political and social culture at the time of pre-publication, as well as editorial and marketing prowess in what would sell" (Norris 53). Hohoff keeps her American audience in mind, trying to fill their needs almost as much as Lee's. It's also important to note Norris's phrasing here: she differentiates between Hohoff's "understanding of American political and social culture" and her ability to know "what would sell." Hohoff then considers not only what would make the book profitable, but also which changes would best suit the book's American nature. This knowledge, combined with the already established fact that she saw enough potential in Lee's skill as a writer to imagine her as being a massive success is enough to presume that she cultivated Lee's manuscript in order to make it a masterpiece of American literature. Hohoff's confidence in her writer shines through in her letter for Lippincott's anniversary edition, where she refers to Lee as a "true writer" with "remarkable talent" and that even "if sales had stopped at 3000, this statement would still stand" (Lippincott 29). Her

efforts paid off: “With time, Lee’s novel became something more: a national touchstone in a culture becoming ever more fragmented” (Mills 5). Only through the combined efforts of editor and author could this novel achieve such a feat.

An understanding of the editorial history of *To Kill a Mockingbird* credits Hohoff not with the message—the core—of the book (which necessarily must belong to Lee, as Hohoff’s function is still primarily to fulfill Lee’s ultimate vision), but for elucidating it and making it far more prominent in the narrative. This same elixir of recognition of genius, dash of optimism, and careful cultivation was present in Perkins (and his partnerships): he anticipated the success that Fitzgerald would have, as well as the genius Wolfe possessed, while suggesting only the changes that would make the books accomplish more effectively what the authors set out to do. In fact, each case study attempts to explain how equal collaboration in the pre-publication process can produce works of fiction that a less motivated author or more passive editor would be unable to achieve. We should recognize editorial contribution to American fiction without detracting from writers’ own powers. The magic lies in the duality: the symbiosis occurs because neither individual would be as successful without the counterpart.

However, an analysis of the role of editing in twentieth century American literature would be incomplete without due consideration for the limits of this variety of partnership. As previously mentioned, the case studies utilized here have possessed somewhat level playing fields by virtue of the editors’ and authors’ shared race and gender in their respective partnerships, which would not by any means be the case for all writers and editors. Furthermore, the formation of instances of symbiotic authorship requires a variety of conditions: extensive correspondence, complementary skillsets,

similar goals/vision for the literary project, and a personal connection arising from similarity/kinship between editor and author. One could even argue that the most successful partnerships occur in a postwar period, and the claim would have some merit.

Though symbiotic authorship as described here is a phenomenon unique to publishing in the United States, one might wonder if it could exist outside of the twentieth century. Due to the accelerated rate at which technology has progressed, one might find that young authors and older editors might have a greater struggle relating to one another than Perkins and Fitzgerald or Hohoff and Lee were so easily able to do. Another potential factor limiting the relationship to the twentieth century is because most publishing houses worked with a “take it or leave it” mentality when it came to manuscript submissions, a method which was not altered until after WWI and, to some extent, Perkins’s choice to break the mold. Meanwhile, by the twenty-first century, so many manuscripts were being submitted (or even self-published for that matter) that even as writers pleaded for editorial assistance, it wasn’t worth an editor’s time to reject a manuscript and give it feedback. In fact, even Lippincott’s 175th anniversary book *The Author and His Audience* observes that “this situation leads to a demand for editorial advice” and offers the writer’s conference and the creative writing course as viable solutions (Lippincott 22). In particular, the book mentions the benefit to a writer when a course that s/he attends is given by a professional editor. Such courses had become rather commonplace by 1967, the year of the book’s publication, and that trend has only grown in the decades since then. However, the book goes on to list writers, including Hemingway, who “got along without them” (Lippincott 24). This erroneous implication suggests that these earlier writers worked alone without the benefit of a collaborative

environment, which is false. In Hemingway's case, he had a cohort of creatives assisting him (Pound, Stein, Fitzgerald, etc.) as well as the eventual help of the famed editor Maxwell Perkins himself. If the purpose of the writer's conference or workshop is to give the aspiring writer a version of editorial assistance via a collaborative environment, then Hemingway wouldn't need one because he had the preexisting equivalent. Therefore, creative writing workshops, conferences, and related programs might have originally existed to fulfill a demand for the kind of editorial collaboration that Perkins pioneered, but perhaps had the unintended effect of rendering true symbiotic authorship more difficult to replicate.

A better way to know for sure if this mode of editing still works would be to explore in detail more potential symbiotic partnerships. Though only a few case studies have been mentioned here, instances of symbiotic authorship almost certainly occurred elsewhere in America during the time period in question. The early twentieth century provides the poetic pair of Elliot and Pound for potential consideration. As for more recent examples, one might compare the relationship of David Foster Wallace and editor Michael Pietsch to that of Wolfe and Perkins and track the similarities. These examples represent only a portion of the potential instances of symbiotic authorship that have, as of yet, gone relatively unexplored. Even if this editorial role was by no means universal within American literature, future scholarship would benefit from considering these other partnerships and their individual and collective impact on the American literary canon.

Whether or not true symbiotic authorship is still possible, it remains deeply relevant to our understanding of American literature, and in particular to prominent novels in the American literary canon. The fact that Perkins with both Fitzgerald and

Wolfe, and Hohoff with Lee, engaged in an active effort to create American masterpieces points to a correlation between symbiotic authorship and the struggle for the “Great American Novel.” Because of the intensely collaborative nature of these partnerships, their basis in mutual respect and equality, and the contributions of individuals towards a unified goal, the act of symbiotic authorship is itself a process grounded in American ideals. This combination results in novels that, whether or not they possess universal appeal, ring with a distinctly American quality. These case studies paint a picture of the American literary canon that would be incomplete without a consideration of symbiotic authorship and, by definition, editorial collaboration.

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