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**Consider the Editor: Textual Process in the Fiction of
Raymond Carver and David Foster Wallace**

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A Thesis submitted to the School of English at the University of Dublin, Trinity College, in
fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

September 2015

DECLARATION

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SUMMARY

This thesis examines the contribution of Gordon Lish and Michael Pietsch to key works of Raymond Carver and David Foster Wallace, respectively. The Prologue situates the two authors in a historical framework, considering the reception of their work in the context of the prevalent Minimalist narrative model of 1980s U.S. fiction and the subsequent return to a more expansive, maximal aesthetic. Chapter One then explores the role of the editor from a theoretical and historical perspective, detailing the practical requirements of the editing process and examining the tensions inherent within it. This is followed by the introduction of theoretical perspectives (textual and genetic criticism) that focus on textual process rather than product and whose critical vocabulary is suited to the study of manuscript evidence.

Chapter Two presents a study of Lish's involvement in the development of Carver's stories from the late 1960s onwards, examining the way in which his methods and aesthetic approach served to influence the development and reception of the work; versions of the stories are compared in order to establish the nature of Lish's revisions and reassess critical evaluations of the stylistic traits of "Carveresque" stories. The textual development of the stories in Carver's first two major-press collections (both edited by Lish) is traced, and the editorial relationship is analysed with reference to manuscript and paratextual material. The chapter concludes with a survey of Lish's career during the years he was editing Carver and argues that his approach to Carver's work is consistent with the methods and aesthetic aims displayed across a range of his literary activities.

Chapter Three presents a close study of the editing processes behind some of Wallace's key texts. It details Pietsch's involvement in Wallace's career, beginning with his

acquisition and editing of *Infinite Jest* during the mid-1990s, and goes on to examine the editor's posthumous assembly of *The Pale King* after Wallace's death in 2008. The analysis shows how Pietsch's choices determined the form of the work and affected its subsequent reception: evidence from the author's archive, including unpublished scenes and differences between extant drafts, is presented in order to illuminate the difficulties involved in the processes of assembly and editing. The chapter concludes with an examination of the increasing importance, in Wallace's late work, of the urge towards narrative compression: this urge, it is argued, is informed by auto-editorial demands and involves a deliberate return on the part of the author to canonical models of narrative minimalism.

Chapter Four begins with a discussion of the ongoing problems presented to interpretation by the legacy of editorial mediation of the works under discussion, and argues for the importance of a genetically-informed critical perspective. The remainder of the chapter serves as an illustration of the way in which such a perspective can enable new critical readings, as our understanding of this mediation is brought to bear on the works; it considers Carver's and Wallace's late work as evidence of an anxiety of editorial influence generated by the authors' experiences of editing processes and informed by a heightened awareness of the social processes of textual development. Finally, the Conclusion offers reflections on the role of the editor within different narrative modes.

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ABBREVIATIONS

The following books are cited with enough frequency to warrant parenthetical abbreviations. Full bibliographic entries for each can be found in the Bibliography.

Of Wallace's works:

ASFTINDA	<i>A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again</i>
BFN	<i>Both Flesh and Not</i>
BIWHM	<i>Brief Interviews with Hideous Men</i>
BOS	<i>The Broom of the System</i>
CWDFW	<i>Conversations with David Foster Wallace</i>
GCH	<i>Girl with Curious Hair</i>
IJ	<i>Infinite Jest</i>
TPKa	<i>The Pale King (hardback edition, 2011)</i>
TPKb	<i>The Pale King (paperback edition, 2012)</i>
TPKCD	<i>The Pale King (audiobook edition, 2011)</i>

Of Carver's works:

CIYNM	<i>Call if You Need Me</i>
CS	<i>Collected Stories</i>
CWRC	<i>Conversations with Raymond Carver</i>
WWTA	<i>What We Talk About When We Talk About Love</i>
WICf	<i>Where I'm Calling From</i>
WYPBQP	<i>Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?</i>

Other works:

AW	<i>An Artificial Wilderness</i> . Sven Birkerts.
ELS	<i>Every Love Story is a Ghost Story</i> . D.T. Max.
FT	<i>The Fluid Text</i> . John Bryant.
MM	<i>Modern Manuscripts</i> . Dirk Van Hulle.
PE	<i>The Program Era</i> . Mark McGurl.
TC	<i>The Textual Condition</i> . Jerome McGann.
WOR	<i>The Work of Revision</i> . Hannah Sullivan.

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PROLOGUE

From Minimalism to Maximalism: Raymond Carver, David Foster Wallace, and the Role of the Editor

"Few American short story writers," writes biographer Carol Sklenicka, "have been as celebrated as Raymond Carver was in the 1980s" (ix). The claim stands up to scrutiny: Carver's success during the decade was such that he came to be considered by many to be the foremost practitioner of the short story and was credited with almost single-handedly reviving the form in the U.S. The dust jacket of his second major-press collection *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* (1981, hereafter *WWTA*) carried a quote from Frank Kermode that hailed it as "clearly the work of a full-grown master," while Irving Howe wrote in 1983 that some of the author's stories could "already be counted among the masterpieces of American fiction" (n.p.).¹ Carver's fiction, in Kirk Nessel's words, had an "uncanny power, capable of rousing not only small armies of critics but a major trend in American writing" (30) and his stylistic legacy would echo throughout American fiction during subsequent decades.

¹ Since the submission of this thesis, in fact, Lish has admitted to having invented the former quote without Kermode's knowledge:

Kermode had never made such a statement. I figured he would never see it, or that if he did, he would say, "Oh, that's Gordon, that's OK," and he would forgive it. I knew Kermode through Denis Donoghue. I would do that with some regularity. (Winters, "Interview" 93)

The revelation highlights the way in which Lish's work often traversed the accepted boundaries of the editorial role, and supports the claims I make in Chapter 2 about his influence on Carver's reception.

Carver's entry into the canon of American literature occurred rapidly and with enough critical consensus to overcome any objections. During his lifetime he saw several of his stories included in the *Best American Short Stories* series as well as serving as guest editor;² in one year alone (1983) he saw *Cathedral* nominated for the Pulitzer Prize and received a Mildred and Harold Strauss Living Award that allowed him to resign from his teaching post at Syracuse University. Upon his untimely death from cancer in August 1988, obituaries were carried in the *New York Times* as well as hundreds of other newspapers in the U.S. and beyond; in the *Sunday Times*, Peter Kemp famously declared him to be "The American Chekhov," a term that (as Sklenicka notes) would "attach itself to his reputation for years to come" (Kemp 1; Sklenicka 481). Carver's work continued to be published and praised over subsequent years, due in no small part to the tireless advocacy of his widow Tess Gallagher: his collected poems appeared in 1996, and two of the five posthumous stories published as part of the collection *Call If You Need Me* (1999) received awards.³ In 1991, Morris Dickstein wrote in the *Partisan Review* that Carver had "passed from the scene at the height of his powers, with the evidence of his handiwork all around him" (510) and in 1999, in *The New York Review of Books*, A.O. Scott appraised the author's legacy in glowing terms:

In the years since his death in 1988, at fifty, from lung cancer, Carver's reputation has blossomed. He has gone from being an influential – and controversial – member of a briefly fashionable school of experimental fiction to being an international icon of traditional American literary values. His genius – but more his honesty, his decency, his commitment to the exigencies of craft – is praised by an extraordinarily diverse cross section of his peers ("Looking for Raymond Carver" n.p.).

² "Will you Please Be Quiet, Please?" was included in 1967; "Cathedral" in 1982; "Where I'm Calling From" in 1983; "Boxes" in 1987; and "Call If You Need Me" in 2000. Carver guest edited the series in 1986.

³ See previous footnote; also, "Kindling" received an O. Henry award in 1999.

Even among those critics who have expressed reservations about Carver's legacy, his achievements have generally been granted to be considerable. In a 2001 review of *Call If You Need Me*, for example, Sven Birkerts suggested that the author's style had become less relevant to "the dense fabric of contemporary life" (noting that "young writers like David Foster Wallace, Jonathan Franzen, Aleksandar Hemon, Rick Moody" and others were better equipped to capture this) but acknowledged the powerful sense of "lyric suppression" in the best of his stories ("Carver's Last Stand" n.p.). Harold Bloom, meanwhile, in the introduction to the Carver instalment of his series *Bloom's Major Short Story Writers* (2002), professed an "imperfect sympathy" for the author's stories while nevertheless agreeing with Kermode's and Howe's assessment "that Carver was a master within the limits he imposed upon himself" (*Raymond Carver* 10). The 2009 edition of *Carver's Collected Stories* represents the 195th publication in the *Library of America* series, representing unusually rapid institutional acceptance and suggesting that the author's place in American letters is secure.⁴

Despite – and perhaps because of – the overwhelmingly rapid critical and commercial success of Carver's fiction, it has attracted much negative criticism over the years. Dissenting voices were immediately raised when *WWTA* was first published in the U.S. in April 1981. While the book's success was immediate (within a few months of its appearance its sales figures were impressive enough to warrant additional printings and Vintage had paid \$20,000 for paperback rights) and its importance was immediately recognised by its author's contemporaries (Jayne Anne Phillips termed the stories "fables for the decade" in the 20 April 1981 issue of *New York* magazine), several critics demurred

⁴ The bulk of the LOA's publications are of works from pre-WWII authors; Carver's stories are among a small number of works in the series written from the 1970s onwards.

(Sklenicka 370). Judith Chettle, for example, reviewing the collection in the *National Review*, complained that “Carver’s litany of the ills of middle America is so unremitting that the reader becomes increasingly incredulous. His spare style, where what is omitted is as significant as what remains, only heightens this impression of a human wasteland” (1503). Chettle lamented what she saw as Carver’s “nihilism” while James Atlas, writing in the *Atlantic Monthly*, complained that Carver’s “lacklustre manner and eschewal of feeling become tiresome” (Chettle 1504; Sklenicka 368). Atlas, whose review ran under the title “Less is Less,” was among the many critics who identified the stylistic economy and “minimality” of the author’s methods as, for better or worse, the crucial element in the collection (Robert Houston, for example, approvingly noted the “relentlessly minimal” description), and he suggested that the resulting stories felt “thin” and “diminished” (Atlas 96; Houston 23). Anatole Broyard’s review foreshadowed another soon-to-be-common critical move as he saw the collection as representative of much of what was wrong with “current fiction,” accusing the stories of “a sententious ambiguity that leaves the reader holding the bag” (n.p.). The term “Minimalism” was on its way into the currency of U.S. literary critical discourse, and many were already using it pejoratively to denote a style deliberately limited not only in stylistic range but also in emotional and philosophical scope.

Gallagher would later lament the impact of these early reviews and their influence upon Carver’s critical legacy: “The term [minimalist] was invented to describe [WWTA], and it was not a compliment . . . it was as though the clock stopped in April 1981.” She notes the regularity with which Carver “adamantly” rejected the label in his public

appearances⁵ and how the “minimalist” label has “shaped the expectations of students, teachers, and general readers around the world” (Kelley 5). Indeed, despite the regularity with which Carver and others such as Amy Hempel would refute the label,⁶ the association would be a lasting one: Cynthia Hallett notes that “Carver has become the quintessential referent for minimalism” (9). James Dishon McDermott notes that while the word “minimalism” had been used in a “scattered” fashion in literary criticism from the 1960 onwards (following its prominent appearance in critical discourses around music, painting and sculpture in the same period), “the term came into widespread use only with the advent of Carver’s fiction” (13).⁷ The problem for Carver was not just the critical reception of his own stories, but their importance as models for others. The stories (to return to Nessel’s phrase quoted above) had rapidly birthed a “major trend” in U.S. literature and would, in William Stull and Maureen P. Carroll’s words, “cut the pattern for minimalist fiction” (“Prolegomena” n.p.). The author’s enormous and rapid influence on contemporary writers could almost be said to be a critical truism (Houston’s review

⁵ In the Winter 1988 issue of the *Michigan Quarterly Review*, for example, he declared: “‘Minimalism’ vs. ‘Maximalism’. Who cares finally what they want to call the stories we write? (And who isn’t tired to death now of that stale debate?)” (“Symposium” 711). Similar protests can be found throughout his 1980s interviews (*CWRC* 80, 126, 153, 184–85).

⁶ Charles May notes that the word is “one of those disreputable literary terms that one dare not use without placing it within quotation marks or prefacing it with ‘so-called’. Everyone who was ever accused of being it has denied; everyone who ever applied it has apologized” (May and Hallett ix).

⁷ McDermott distinguishes between “an upper-cased ‘Minimalism’” used to describe the particular school of 1980s fiction, and a lower-cased “literary minimalism” that can be understood as, among other things, “a shared stylistic practice centering upon absence” (2). In this study, I follow McDermott in using the upper-cased word to indicate the school of writing associated with the Carveresque short story: in quotations, however, I have preserved the original letter case. In Chapter 2 I examine this designation in more detail, while in Chapter 3 I consider McDermott’s suggestion that a lower-cased “minimalist” practice can be traced through the work of other major writers of the twentieth century.

contains the claim that Carver's approach was being imitated by student writers even before *WWTA*) and critics rarely discuss Carver's career without emphasising his importance for younger writers. The word "Carveresque," used as a synonym for "Minimalist," soon became a critical commonplace: in 1986, for example, John Barth wrote an essay entitled "A Few Words About Minimalism" in which he mentioned Carver by name several times (coining, in the process, the playful label "post-Vietnam, post-literary, postmodernist blue-collar neo-early-Hemingwayism" (n.p.)). Nick Hornby claims that "in the few years before he died, Carver's influence was quite extraordinary" (30); in 1987, an interviewer told Carver that "some literary editors claim that nearly half of the short fiction they receive seems imitative of your style" (*CWRC* 208). The *Michigan Quarterly Review* conducted "A Symposium on Contemporary American Fiction" in Fall 1987 in which several contributors debated the merits of fiction with "Minimalist" attributes, and Hornby notes that Mark Helprin's introduction to *The Best American Short Stories 1988* laments Carver's pervasive presence (Hornby 30).

Carver's work, then, was at the centre of the national literary conversation during the 1980s and was the subject of frequently passionate debate by critics and fellow fiction writers. One of these writers, a young David Foster Wallace, weighed in on the debate in his first published critical essay, "Fictional Futures and the Conspicuously Young," which appeared in the *Review of Contemporary Fiction* in 1988 (Wallace's first novel *The Broom of the System* (hereafter *Broom*) had been published the year before; his debut collection *Girl With Curious Hair* would, after legal delays, appear the following September). The essay, which appeared shortly after Carver's death, mentions the elder writer's name three times and, while not explicitly criticising his work, makes clear Wallace's disdain for

the literary lineage it has engendered. Wallace identifies Carver as a central figure behind one of what he calls the “three dreary camps” of young literary production:

Catatonic Realism, a.k.a. Ultraminimalism, a.k.a. Bad Carver, in which suburbs are wastelands, adults automata, and narrators blank perceptual engines, intoning in run-on monosyllables the artificial ingredients of breakfast cereal and the new human non-soul (*BFN* 40).

“Ultraminimalism,” Wallace goes on to argue (in a thesis later to be refined in “E Unibus Pluram”), is defined by a simplistic opposition to “the aesthetic norms of mass entertainment,” and its “deliberately flat” surfaces place it at “an emotional remove of light-years” from its subject (*BFN* 47–8). Like metafiction, he writes, the form is a closed and doomed system: both are “simple engines of self-reference.” Wallace appears to suggest, as Bloom later would in his hedging appraisal of Carver’s work, that the limits within which Minimalism operates are too suffocating to allow for continuing artistic achievement: both of the aforementioned forms are “primitive, crude, and seem already to have reached the Clang-Bird-esque horizon of their own possibility” (*BFN* 65).

Wallace’s criticisms here are not unique: Minimalist writing was repeatedly attacked for the narrowness of its vision and the political and moral apathy implied in its stylistic method.⁸ Nor is his terminology original: in a 1985 essay published in *Boundary 2*

⁸ Ayala Amir usefully enumerates these criticisms in a review of Gordon Lish’s 2010 *Collected Fictions*, noting that the minimalist narrative voice has been “accused of . . . emotional bareness, narcissism, lack of commitment to the society he/she lives in, and of duplicating and maintaining the alienation and reification of the individual in the capitalist way of life” (“Harsh and Hopeful World” 5). John Biguenet’s 1985 essay “Notes of a Disaffected Reader: The Origins of Minimalism” encapsulates several such charges, arguing that the “impossibly constricted” worlds presented in minimalist fiction denote a fundamentally “asocial self” (40–45). Similar complaints have been raised against more recent iterations of the minimalist style: in a 2012 review of A.M. Homes’ *May We Be Forgiven*, Garth Risk Hallberg lamented the novel’s minimal mode of narration, echoing Wallace’s claim that “reflexive irony is now more or less the house style of late capitalism” (“Man of the House” n.p.); this year, the Nigerian, U.S.-resident novelist Chigozie Obioma

entitled "Shooting for Smallness: Limits and Values in Some Recent American Fiction" (later collected in his 1987 book *Middle Grounds: Studies in Contemporary American Fiction*) critic Alan Wilde had described Carver, Ann Beattie and others as "catatonic realists" and suggested that their mode of writing is limited by the way in which it "assume[s] the pointlessness of any action whatever" (351–353).⁹ Wallace's comments, though, coming as they did in a lengthy polemical essay in which he articulated his critical ideas publicly for the first time, indicate both the omnipresence of the Minimalist model during the years in which he was first publishing and the fact that he saw Minimalism as the dominant literary form against which he would assert his writerly identity. As an aspiring writer, he had already had to struggle against this mode: Boswell notes that while writing in Tucson "he earned the ire of his professors owing to his refusal to kowtow to the then prevailing ethos of Raymond-Carver realism" ("Introduction" 264). Anecdotes from Wallace's biography make it clear that Carver's influence was a continuing factor in his literary development: Max also describes the resistance that Wallace's experimental

(whose novel *The Fishermen* is a nominee for the 2015 MAN Booker prize) lamented what he sees as the current presence of an MFA-abetted "culture of forced literary humility," arguing that writers who conform to a minimalist style risk "becoming complicit in the ongoing disempowering of language" (n.p.).

⁹ In the aforementioned 1987 issue of *Michigan Quarterly Review*, T.C. Boyle appears to claim the term for himself:

Actually, contemporary North American fiction is too much of one thing – the safe, minimalist/realist story purveyed by a group I like to call the "Catatonic Realists." (You know the story, you've read it a thousand times: Three characters are sitting around the kitchen of a trailer, saying folksy things to one another. Finally one of them gets up to go to the bathroom and the author steps in to end it with a line like "It was all feathers") (707).

The description is a clear reference to Carver's story "Feathers," first published in *The Atlantic* in September 1982 and included in *Cathedral* in 1983. Against this "one thing," Boyle eulogises "the colorful, exuberant and imaginative novels of Denis Johnson . . . Don DeLillo . . . Louise Erdrich . . . and Robert Coover." Carver is interviewed as part of the same "Symposium on Contemporary American Fiction"; I quote from his comments elsewhere in this section.

stories met in the classroom at Arizona and emphasises the prevailing model workshop of the time as the Minimalist one representing “the world according to Raymond Carver, as interpreted by his thousands of descendants” (ELS 60–62). Wallace’s draft of *Broom*, in fact, contained a pun on Carver’s name which he cut on the advice of his editor Gerry Howard (Max, ELS 68).¹⁰ Indeed, we can suggest that Wallace felt this influence had retained its strength even after Carver’s death. In his review of David Markson’s *Wittgenstein’s Mistress* (published in summer 1990 in the *RCF*) he was moved “to deplore its [the novel’s] relative neglect & its consignment by journals like the *NYTBR* to smarmy review by an ignorant Carverian” (BFN 79);¹¹ and in “E Unibus Pluram” (published in the summer of 1993, again in the *RCF*) he again decried “the self-conscious catatonia of a platoon of Raymond Carver wannabes” (ASFTINDA 64).

Wallace, then, devoted much of his early-career energy to the attempt to define and move beyond the limits of the models, variously defined as “Minimalism,” “New Realism,” and “Neorealism,” that took Carver as a reference point. Wallace’s descriptions of his years in Arizona (“a highly, incredibly hard-assed realist school”) tend to emphasise his alienation from these models, and a moment of self-analysis in his much-cited interview with Larry McCaffery (“I seem to like to put myself in positions where I get to be the rebel . . . I chose to go there”) suggests that he deliberately attended a writing program in which his own sympathies with a more linguistically effusive tradition of postmodern fiction would place him in a continually oppositional stance (Lipsky 47;

¹⁰ Max does not reproduce the reference in question, but notes that it was a pun involving the names of Carver and Max Apple (whose 1986 novel *The Propheteers* Wallace mentions in “E Unibus Pluram” as one of several examples of fiction that treats “the pop as its own reservoir of mythopeia” (168–169)). Howard advised him that this was “too cute and you’ll be picked on for it. Drop it” (ELS 68).

¹¹ A footnote here identified said Carverian dismissively as “Amy Hempel, minimalist ordinaire” (BFN 79).

Wallace, *CWDFW* 47, italics in original). A number of critics have traced specific references to Minimalist fiction within Wallace's early work, generally with the aim of suggesting that these function as practical critiques. A short story collection was clearly the ideal venue in which to mount such a critique, and *Girl with Curious Hair* is frequently analysed in terms of its engagement with Minimalist stylistics. Boswell notes the way in which the opening of "Little Expressionless Animals" – an opening which, as he also observes, "serves double duty as the book's overture" – is "written in an incisive and damning parody of the minimalist style . . . with its short declarative sentences and its air of cold objectivity." He goes on to suggest that the story's structural movements are intended to "explode" the "internal limitations" of the Minimalist model (*Understanding* 70-73). Both Boswell and Kasia Boddy suggest that the two-page "Everything is Green" is a clear "critique of the minimalist mode" (*Understanding* 100), mimicking both the form and content of the Carveresque story in its trailer-park setting and use of sentences that "read like a parody of monosyllabic minimalism" (Boddy 33). Boddy argues that "Everything is Green" represents an attempt to both inhabit and parody the world of "Carver's men," critiquing the world of the Minimal story while simultaneously providing an exploration of the problem of solipsistic failure of connection that is "one of Wallace's most enduring and deeply felt preoccupations" (33). David Coughlan points out that a key section of "Church Not Made With Hands" recalls Carver's "Cathedral" and suggests (in its inversion of Carver's optimistic ending) the difficulty of intersubjective communication through language (164–165). Dan Tysdal's complex reading of "A Radically Condensed History of Postindustrial Life" takes the story to be a careful rewriting of Carver's early stories (with its characters afflicted by "muteness" and "inarticulation"); Wallace, in this reading, takes Minimalism as the "discursive field" of the story, working through the problems and limits

of the model in order to achieve a new application of the form and “reveal the communication still possible” within its boundaries (66-83).

The clearest references to Minimalism, of course, come in the collection’s closing piece. Boddy, Boswell and others have examined the way in which “Westward the Course of Empire Takes its Way” unites fictional practice and theoretical polemics in a complicated critical engagement. The word “minimal” echoes ambiguously through the story; D.L. uses it to criticize Mark’s unresponsiveness, and later declares that “I detest any and all kinds of minimalism” (*GWCH* 251, 305). The lengthy “Really Blatant and Intrusive Interruption” that disrupts the narrative refers to “the Resurrection of Realism, the pained product of inglorious minimalist labour in countless obscure graduate writing workshops across the U.S. of A.” (*GWCH* 265). Boddy argues that the “the collection as a whole stages a debate about fictional futures” (40) and “Westward” goes on to provide a critique that closely resembles the description of “Ultraminimalism” in Wallace’s 1987 essay:

It diverges, in its slowness, from the really real only in its extreme economy, its Prussian contempt for leisure, its obsession with the confining limitations of its own space, its grim proximity to its own horizon. It’s some of the most heartbreaking stuff available at any fine bookseller’s anywhere. I’d check it out. (*GWCH* 267)

Wallace, then, provides a highly ambiguous critical assessment of this fictional mode, mixing approval with scorn and highlighting once again the limitations and stultifying horizon of the Minimal realist project. Implicit in the story is the promise as well as the attempt to move beyond these limits.

Wallace, in the eyes of many, succeeded in this attempt: certainly, critics have tended to agree that his own fiction suggested a new literary path for writers of his generation. Indeed, when Carver and Wallace are discussed together, it is invariably with

the aim of setting up a polarity that demonstrates the generational and stylistic contrast between the two writers. Max explicitly frames Wallace's literary development as a struggle against the powerful Carverian legacy, noting that:

As Wallace entered Arizona, MFA students all over America were writing stories in the minimalist style, affecting ennui and disappointment toward a world they know mostly from other minimalists. . . . As a writer, he was a folder-in and includer, a maximalist, someone who wanted to capture the *everything* of America. (ELS 60, italics in original)

Infinite Jest identifies and critiques the limits of the Minimalist method in both its form and content. Boddy and others have pointed out the novel's clearest moments of critique, such as the "Minimal Mambo" performed by the dancers at Molly Notkin's party (*IJ* 229; Boddy 31). Timothy Jacobs identifies this moment as a representation of Minimalism's disingenuous premise that there is no self-conscious narrative presence in the text, a premise leading to art that only reinforces the subject's "detachment" and solipsism (25–26). Indeed, as early as 1996, Tom LeClair remarked on the way the novel could be read as an allegory of its generation's "aesthetic orphanhood" and as a continuation of its author's public critique of contemporary fiction ("Prodigious Fiction" 33). The recurrence of the word "catatonic" in various settings in the novel is also revealing. A description of James Incandenza, for example, suggests the evasive blankness Wallace perceived in the Minimalists' prose – "the man was so blankly and irretrievably hidden that Orin said he'd come to see him as like autistic, almost catatonic" – while the summary of Incandenza's film "Low-Temperature Civics," with its reference to an "irreversibly catatonic" father-figure, hints at a link between the death-in-life state caused by the novel's Entertainment and the self-effacing, apathetic posture of the Minimalist narrator (737, 991).

Formally, the novel represents – if by its size alone – the most enduring riposte to the ideal of the well-made Minimalist story. Andrew Hoberek argues that the novel’s copious endnotes, in their relentless drive towards inclusion and their “explicit awkwardness,” constitute the clearest possible counterweight to the “Hemingwayesque exclusion,” plain-voiced inarticulacy and self-contained craft of Minimalist prose (“The Novel After David Foster Wallace” 213). Hoberek argues convincingly that Wallace’s development was inextricably linked with Minimalism, suggesting that the overwhelming reach of the mode within the American literary world acted as a set of boundaries that the writer could usefully transgress and that Wallace “takes a kind of pure joy in the violation of the proprieties laid down by minimalist practice and pedagogy” (214). Noting Stephen Burn’s complaint that critics often situate Wallace’s work in relation to “a strawman postmodernism” (“Consider” 467) and that the writer’s much-discussed engagement with the work of the metafictionalists of the 1960s demands a more complex assessment,¹² Hoberek writes that:

The elements that Wallace adopts from encyclopedic postmodernism – the incorporation of multiple (high and low) styles; the intentional violation of canons of good taste, literary and otherwise; and, at the most basic level, a commitment to length rather than excision – all suggest that he turns to postmodernism in reaction *against* minimalism (215, emphasis in original).

In *The Program Era*, Mark McGurl argues that “postwar American fiction has been driven by a strong polarity of minimalist and maximalist compositional impulses” and represents these impulses diagrammatically as poles between which particular works (and writers) swing (377). Hoberek’s essay attempts to limn Wallace’s own stylistic legacy, claiming that the author’s use of a “renewed maximalism” has had a crucial influence on his

¹² Tore Rye Anderson and Mark Sheridan have examined the ways in which Wallace’s work contains significant and often-overlooked continuities with writers like Nabokov, Pynchon and Barth (Anderson, “Pay Attention” 7–24; Sheridan 78–93).

“contemporaries and successors” such as Egan, Spiotta and Danielewski (224); it could be seen as an extension of Boswell’s earlier claim that the author’s work “opened up new space, and created new challenges, for young writers of intrepid ambition” (*Understanding* 207). Hoberek (making explicit reference to McGurl’s ideas) uses the stylistic transition between Junot Díaz’s 1996 short story collection *Drown* and 2007 novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* as emblematic of a larger “literary-historical one” in which the pendulum of American narrative style swung decisively from Minimalism towards maximalism:

Wallace’s work, and *Infinite Jest* in particular, reside at the tipping point of a major shift not in experimental fiction but in realism: from the small-scale domestic dramas of Carveresque minimalism to a revival of the large-scale, sprawling, multicharacter novel. (212, 224)

Wallace’s work is taken here not just as catalyst but exemplar, a kind of magnetic force pulling an entire generation of writers towards a more expansive and ambitious mode of literary expression as well as an ur-maximalist text representing the most noteworthy iteration of that mode.

Wallace’s contemporaries have testified to just such an influence, with several noting that his work represented a permission slip to transgress the boundaries drawn by Minimalism. Dana Spiotta, for example, describes her first encounter with Wallace’s work as formative, noting the ambition evident in *The Broom of the System* (hereafter *Broom*) and its importance as a counterweight to prevailing literary trends; she discusses the way his work interrogates “received language and clichés” in order to investigate the tension between irony and sincerity and describes her excitement at the fact that “ideas” were “driving the fiction” (Max, “Rereading”). Rick Moody makes a similar claim, noting that *WWTA* was the “model” for fiction during the 1980s and claiming that he himself was

“somewhat reviled in writing workshops for not being able to write blunt little sentences about working-class life in the Pacific Northwest”: Wallace’s work provided an alternative model in the way it “fire[d] on all cylinders” and consciously attempted to draw on a wide range of intellectual resources (Silverblatt). In a virtual roundtable assembled to mark the publication of *The Pale King* in 2011, *The Daily Beast* assembled several contemporary novelists to discuss Wallace’s legacy. Deb Olin Unferth noted, again, the sense of license granted by Wallace’s fiction, framing this in clear references to postmodern maximalism:

He gave us permission to do a lot: to be philosophical on the page, to not be afraid of straying from straight narrative. . . to be excessive and meta-fictional and yet be very readable and be very emotional. And so he gave us a new model that felt familiar, in a way, and also felt extremely fresh. (Walls, “Generation” n.p.)

Bonnie Nadell describes the excitement of reading Wallace’s work for the first time, and suggests that its exuberant contrast to the Minimal mode encouraged her to start representing him as an agent: “at that time in America . . . everything was very Minimalist, and very, ‘He drank. She walked.’ And here was this person with this wild, crazy chapter” (Derbyshire). Howard, the Viking editor to whom Nadell sold *Broom*, also notes the prevalence of Carveresque Minimalism at the time and states: “In the middle of this comes [*Broom*] . . . it was meta, it was imperial, it was linguistically adroit, to say the least. And you could smell Pynchon and Coover and Elkin all over it” (Neyfakh n.p.). Writing about *Infinite Jest* recently, Christian Lorentzen recalls that “writers took to it like Marines sprung from a sort of literary boot camp, hunting for something beyond the minimalist vogue of the 1980s” (n.p.).

The return of Pynchonian maximalism would, of course, generate its own critical backlash. The most famous expression of this came in the form of James Wood’s criticism, made in two widely-read critical broadsides after the turn of the millennium. Wood did

not use the word “maximal” in his essays for the *New Republic* and the *Guardian* – famously coining, instead, the phrase “hysterical realism” – but his criticism of the relentless urge towards abundance and “profusion” in the contemporary novel, and his naming of culprits such as DeLillo, Smith and Franzen along with Wallace, made it clear that quantity was intrinsic to the narrative method under consideration. The hyperabundant narratives of maximalist fiction, he claimed, were characterised by their antagonistic relationship to silence:

Hysterical realism. . . is characterised by a fear of silence. This kind of realism is a perpetual motion machine that appears to have been embarrassed into velocity. Stories and sub-stories sprout on every page. There is a pursuit of vitality at all costs. (“How Does It Feel?” n.p.).

Wood argued that these narratives are harmed by “an excess of storytelling” and that as a result, character “disappears” beneath the “ideas and themes.” He decried what he saw as the lack of attention to traditional character development, suggesting that the model of the ambitious, sprawling, ideas-based contemporary novel was guilty of a self-defeating urge towards narrative inclusion: “some of the more impressive novelistic minds of our age do not think that language and the representation of consciousness are the novelist's quarries any more. Information has become the new character” (“Human, All Too Inhuman” n.p.)

In the years since Wood made these arguments, though, the maximalist novel has arguably flourished in both commercial and critical terms: examples are too numerous to list, but two recent award-winning novels, Eleanor Catton's *The Luminaries* (2013) and Donna Tartt's *The Goldfinch* (2013) serve as notable iterations of the mode. In 2010 (the year in which Joshua Cohen's *Witz* and Adam Levin's *The Instructions* were both published), Garth Risk Hallberg asked, in an essay published in *The Millions*, “Is Big Back?”

speculating that the success of novels like *Infinite Jest* and Roberto Bolaño's *The Savage Detectives* had encouraged publishers as well as authors to move towards novels of greater length (n.p.). In May 2015, a *Vulture* article dubbed 2015 "The Year of the Very Long Novel" (citing Hallberg's forthcoming 944-page *City on Fire* as one of its examples), and again returned to *Infinite Jest* as a precursor, claiming that "Wallace's magnum opus was both the bellwether of VLNs [Very Long Novels] and a case study in how to sell them."¹³ The piece contained quotes from several editors including Hachette Book Group CEO Michael Pietsch, who had been responsible for acquiring, editing and subsequently selling *Infinite Jest*: he suggested that "the promise of a book remains a unique pleasure in contrast to thumbing through 800,000 Instagrams. The idea that one mind has created this world for you is a unique and perhaps even more compelling experience to us now" (Kachka n.p.). The author noted the fact that Pietsch had also edited *The Goldfinch*: the editor's attribution of books such as these to a singular creator ("one mind") ignores his own contribution, and represents (as we shall see) a characteristically self-effacing editorial stance.

The critical and commercial developments of the previous decades, then, have often served to situate Carver and Wallace at opposite ends of the literary spectrum. There are several obvious ways, indeed, in which the two writers differ. At a biographical level the backgrounds of the two men present stark contrasts, with class and generation being perhaps the most notable factors. Carver's background, as is well-known, was decidedly blue-collar. In his essay "My Father's Life," Carver describes his parents' sometimes precarious existence, mentions the fact that his father worked as a labourer on the Grand Coulee Dam in Washington during the 1930s, and refers to the shame of

¹³ We will be examining the commercial presentation of the novel in greater detail in Chapter 3.

having a toilet that was “the last outdoor one in the neighbourhood” (CS 721). He was the first member of his family to go to college and even then, as McGurl notes, his “social ascent through education was a protracted patching together of college credits over the course of several years while he worked and raised two children” (PE 299). Wallace, by contrast, was the precociously talented son of two university professors (his mother and father taught English and philosophy, respectively) whose educational ascent was not only steady (it was broken only by his own periods of illness) but also had the auxiliary benefit of helping him to produce a published novel before his 25th birthday. His family was an intellectually active one in which grammatical mistakes would be discussed over dinner and memos would be exchanged to detail parental injustices (Max, ELS 2–6). Carver’s father sometimes mispronounced the words he knew (Sklenicka 16); Wallace claimed to remember his father reading the “unexpurgated” *Moby-Dick* to him and his sister when Wallace was five (Lipsky 49). While there is likely to be an element of retrospective self-mythologizing involved here – Carver’s brother emphasises that the family were not “deprived” as children and Max suspects the *Moby-Dick* story of being apocryphal (Sklenicka 13; ELS 3) – the contrast between the writers’ upbringing is beyond doubt. These backgrounds also help to explain the differences in their literary personae. Carver was, as Stull and Carroll note, “no literary theorist” (Kelley 8) and his interviews and essays show him discussing literature in language of deliberate (albeit nuanced) simplicity. Wallace, on the other hand, showed a remarkable degree of explicit engagement with theoretical and intellectual discourse, leading one critic to describe him as being “more fluent in Continental philosophy than any other major American novelist since Walker Percy” (Meaney n.p.). I will return later to the way in which these traits are manifested in the writers’ respective narrative methods. For now, though, it may be enough to note that

the difference in fictional method is, even by the crudest quantitative measure, obvious: the number of pages in Carver's *Collected Stories* (which includes editorial notes, four selected essays as well as the edited and unedited version of *Beginners*) is still fewer than in the 1079-page *Infinite Jest*.¹⁴

The critical placement of Carver and Wallace as opposites, therefore, is understandable. It arguably obscures important affinities between the two writers, though. Both are, if nothing else, united by the influence they had on their contemporaries. In 1998, Max wrote that "Carver is no longer a writer of the moment, the way David Foster Wallace is today" ("Carver Chronicles" n.p.); more recently, one critic has written that "as Raymond Carver had been a game-changer for the short story, so Wallace became for the novel" (Martin n.p.).¹⁵ Indeed, there is biographical evidence to suggest Wallace's admiration for Carver. When in Syracuse in 1992, according to Max's biography, Wallace – accompanied by Mark Costello and Jonathan Franzen – drove to visit the street on which Carver had lived while teaching at the university there in the 1980s (ELS 166). "Wallace," as Max notes, "admired Raymond Carver, whom he distinguished from his minimalist acolytes. He was a man who had outrun alcohol in moving from a deflected style to a more sincere one, and Wallace doubtless saw the relevance to his own story" (317 n27). Two books from Wallace's library, in fact, show the author's clear engagement with Carver's work. His copy of *WETA* is heavily annotated in at least two

¹⁴ This admittedly crude measurement leaves out Carver's considerable body of poetry, but the point remains valid.

¹⁵ In 1991, Dickstein claimed that "it would be impossible to overstate the effect of Carver's work on American writers of the 1980s" (510). Recently, Adam Kelly used the same formulation to describe Wallace's generational importance: "the influence exerted by Wallace's novelistic model upon the concerns of his fellow American fiction writers can hardly be overstated" ("Dialectic" n.p.).

different pens, and it is likely that he used this in his teaching. Wallace also annotated Carver's stories "Cathedral" and "A Small, Good Thing" in his copy of the X.J. Kennedy-edited anthology *Literature: An Introduction to Fiction, Poetry, and Drama* (5th ed.), chapter 10 of which is partly devoted to Carver's work. I will discuss some of these annotations in detail in Chapter 2, during my analysis of specific Carver stories, in order to show Wallace's engagement with the Minimalist narrative method and examine how this was affected by the editorial process behind the stories.

Max's linking of addiction and sincerity points to an important and under-remarked similarity between the writers: both men regarded their struggles with addiction as central to their literary achievements and wrote this struggle into their work as a structural and thematic principle. At a thematic level, Carver's multitude of alcoholic narrators has been widely remarked upon, and several stories explicitly depict the process of recovery from alcoholism (his story "Where I'm Calling From," for example, published in *Cathedral* in 1983, is set in an alcohol rehabilitation centre). Long sections of *Infinite Jest* follow the fortunes of a group of characters living in a recovery and treatment centre and portray the workings of AA in detail. Apart from the explicit diegetic treatment of addiction, some structural and stylistic features – such as the lengthy monologues spoken by recovering addicts in Wallace's novel – also clearly owe a debt to the demands of the processes of rehabilitation. As Max suggests, the psychological struggles involved in overcoming addiction could be seen as an important factor in the attempt by both writers to evolve a more sincere and humane style. Explorations of spirituality and post-religious faith could, in both writers' work, be linked to the recovery process: the narrator of "Where I'm Calling From" spends Christmas in a halfway house, for example, and the importance of envisioning a "higher power" in *Infinite Jest* is explicitly framed in the

context of recovery from addiction (CS 461–466; JJ 366). This explicit exploration of spirituality is more evident, in fact, when we examine the unedited manuscripts of both writers, as I will argue later in relation to Carver’s story “If It Please You” and sections of Wallace’s *The Pale King*. According to Stull and Carroll, “in contrast to the ironic, self-reflexive ‘post-realist’ experimental writers of the 1960s with whom he came of age, Carver followed Tolstoy in prizing something that sounds naïve but is fundamental: sincerity” (Kelley 1). Wallace was, of course, reacting partly to the legacy of the very same experimental writers,¹⁶ and sincerity has also been identified as a central aim of Wallace’s writing, most notably by Adam Kelly (“Dialectic” n.p.). While an extended exploration of this link between the two writers is beyond my scope here, their shared experiences and concerns illustrate that Wallace’s attitude towards Carver was never a straightforwardly oppositional one.

It is notable that Wallace, as Max mentions, frequently goes out of his way to exempt Carver from his criticisms of Minimalism: he refers, after all, to “Bad Carver” and “Carver wannabes” rather than the writer himself. In 1997, Wallace referred specifically to the ending of “So Much Water So Close to Home” as one of the exceptions to the “set of formal schticks” that Minimalism became (*Bookworm* Aug 2000).¹⁷ Indeed, in two

¹⁶ Wallace also discussed Tolstoy in interviews (with Kennedy and Polk, McCaffery, and Lipsky, for example (CWDFW 18, 26, 50; Lipsky 37–38)) and his library contains two separate annotated copies of Tolstoy’s “The Death of Ivan Ilych” (These are found in *Classics of Modern Fiction: Twelve Short Novels*, 4th ed. (ed. Irving Howe), and in *Literature: An Introduction to Fiction, Poetry, and Drama*, 5th ed., ed. X.J. Kennedy).

¹⁷ This is one of the stories Lish edited heavily and Carver later republished elsewhere: it was first published in *Furious Seasons* (1977), and Carver later included the longer version in *Where I’m Calling From* (the full details of the textual history of the story are provided by Stull and Carroll (CS 1001)). Bailey and Saltzman, among others, consider the differences between the two versions to be worthy of analysis (Bailey 206–10; Saltzman 89–91); Leyboldt argued in 2001, however, that these differences are not great enough to constitute a dramatic stylistic shift (“Reconsidering”). While Wallace made some annotations in his copy of

separate interviews, Wallace used the word “genius” to describe Carver. In a conversation with Michael Silverblatt in 2000, in the context of a discussion on the way the notion of “genius” has changed over the decades, he stated: “I would say that Carver’s a genius, but his persona was anti-genius” (*Bookworm* Aug 2000). Wallace had also used the word earlier in the course of his interview with McCaffery during his most explicit recorded discussion of Carver and his legacy, one which I will reproduce at length here because of its importance. At one point in the conversation, Wallace complains that in his writing he never seems “to get the kind of clarity and concision I want.” McCaffery replies by noting that “Ray Carver comes immediately to mind in terms of compression and clarity, and he’s obviously someone who wound up having a huge influence on your generation.” Wallace responded by framing Minimalism – again – as the obverse of metafiction, and as one of two contrasting (and failed) responses to the problem of the author’s problematic position within the text:

Minimalism’s just the other side of metafictional recursion. The basic problem’s still the one of the mediating narrative consciousness. Both minimalism and metafiction try to resolve the problem in radical ways. Opposed, but both so extreme they end up empty. Recursive metafiction worships the narrative consciousness, makes “it” the subject of the text. Minimalism’s even worse, emptier, because it’s a fraud: it eschews not only self-reference but any narrative personality at all, tries to pretend there “is” no narrative consciousness in its text.

When McCaffery objects that this fails to accurately characterise Carver’s work, in which “his narrative voice is nearly always insistently *there*, like Hemingway’s” (emphasis in original), Wallace replies at length:

I was talking about minimalists, not Carver. Carver was an artist, not a minimalist. Even though he’s supposedly the inventor of modern U.S. minimalism. ‘Schools’ of fiction are for crank-turners. The founder of a movement is never part of a

WETA, none are present at the end of the story, making it difficult to identify the version of the story to which he is referring in the *Bookworm* interview.

movement. Carver uses all the techniques and anti-styles that critics call 'minimalist', but his case is like Joyce, or Nabokov, or early Barth and Coover – he's using formal innovation in the service of an original vision. Carver invented – or resurrected, if you want to cite Hemingway – the techniques of minimalism in the services of rendering a world he saw that nobody'd seen before. It's a grim world, exhausted and empty and full of mute, beaten people, but the minimalist techniques Carver employed were perfect for it: they created it. And minimalism for Carver wasn't some rigid aesthetic program he adhered to for its own sake. Carver's commitment was to his stories, each of them. And when minimalism didn't serve them, he blew it off. If he realized a story would be best served by expansion, not ablation, he'd expand, like he did to "The Bath," which he later turned into a vastly superior story. He just chased the click. But at some point his "minimalist" style caught on. A movement was born, proclaimed, promulgated by the critics. Now here come the crank-turners. What's especially dangerous about Carver's techniques is that they seem so easy to imitate. It doesn't seem like every word and line and draft has been bled over. That's part of his genius. It looks like you can write a minimalist piece without much bleeding. And you can. But not a good one (CWDFW 45–46).

This lengthy consideration of Carver's artistic importance and of the way in which literary influence operates is revealing and, in the light of subsequent evidence, highly problematic. The "vastly superior story" Wallace alludes to here is "A Small, Good Thing," published in 1983 as part of *Cathedral* (two years after the appearance of "The Bath"). The explanation of the story's textual genesis that Wallace gives here is one that was accepted by contemporary scholars, based on explanations given by Carver himself. In 1984, for example, Carver claimed that:

I went back to that one, as well as several others, because I felt there was unfinished business that needed attending to. The story hadn't been told originally; it had been messed about with, condensed and compressed in "The Bath" to highlight the qualities of menace that I wanted to emphasize – you see this with the business about the baker, the phone call, with its menacing voice on the other line, the bath, and so on. But I still felt there was unfinished business, so in the midst of writing these other stories for *Cathedral* I went back to "The Bath" and tried to see what aspects of it needed to be enhanced, redrawn, reimagined. When I was done, I was amazed because it seemed so much better. I've had people tell me that they much prefer "The Bath," which is fine, but "A Small, Good, Thing" seems to me to be a better story (CWRC 102).

Indeed, until recently, critics have – on the basis of interviews such as this one – uniformly accepted Carver’s claims that the chronology of the story’s publication reflected that of its composition, and that the alternate versions of some of the stories in *WWTA* published after 1981 were revisions of ones whose potential he himself had failed to realise. We now know that these claims were not only incorrect but were, in fact, deliberate fictions constructed in response to the extensive editorial activity of Gordon Lish. As Carver’s friend and (frequently) editor throughout the 1970s and beyond, Lish made numerous changes to the author’s stories and was, as we will see, central to the construction of what would come to be called a “Carveresque” story. Lish’s work on *WWTA* during the editing process of the book in 1980 was the most extreme example of his methods – he cut the manuscript by over half during two rounds of editing, as well as making further last-minute changes to the galleys – and represented a concentrated effort to reshape Carver’s stories in ways that manifestly departed from the author’s intention. The interventions blurred the lines between author and editor to an extent that Carver was extremely reluctant to accept, and the process of the book’s publication would mark a lasting deterioration in their working relationship. The publication of *Beginners* in 2009, accompanied by biographical and paratextual material showing the extent of Lish’s work and the details of the disagreement between the two men, makes it clear that the collection can no longer be easily understood as an expression of Carver’s own artistic intentions.

Wallace’s discussion in 1993 of Carver’s technique, then, reads in hindsight as significantly more complicated and layered than it at first appeared at the time. He discusses Carver’s “minimalist techniques” in the understanding that the author was

always responsible for those techniques; he refers to Carver's "expansion" of a story that the author had in fact restored to its original length; and he distinguishes between Carver and the legion of subsequent "crank-turners" unaware that in Carver's case, as well as others, Lish was the one turning the crank. Wallace's identification of the "original vision" behind Carver's "formal innovation" becomes problematic when seen in this light, and suggests a need to return to critical evaluations of Carver as well as to our understanding of literary Minimalism. As I will argue in more detail later, such critical re-evaluation has been slow in coming. Wallace's words also, perhaps, point to a fundamental tension between the persistent notion of individual artistic vision and the opening-up of the text that has been a central aim of much twentieth-century literary theory: the use of the terms "original vision" and "genius" sit uneasily alongside his nods to reader-response theory and "Barthian and Derridean poststructuralism" elsewhere in the same interview (*CWDFW* 40). The deconstruction of traditional paradigms of literary authorship found in the work of Barthes, Foucault and others has, as several critics have noted, left an ambiguous legacy for literary criticism. Critical theory has, it seems, irrevocably opened textual criticism to an understanding of the reader's role in producing meaning and to the plurality of possible readings available in any given text. It has also, though, arguably retained the figure of an author at a submerged theoretical level as well returning to it in practice, as critics like Sean Burke have argued (165–69). The author's disappearance has also failed to translate into the kind of widespread paradigm shift in understanding prophesied by Foucault: as Stone and Thompson note, the idea of the solitary author "remains remarkably persistent in literary criticism, the classroom, mass culture, the marketplace, and the law" (11–12).

Wallace, it should be noted, was not unaware of the importance of the social networks behind the production of art. Indeed, the description of Minimalism he provides in "Westward" goes on to mention Carver's editor by name as he laments "the Resurrection of Realism, the pained product of inglorious minimalist labour in countless obscure graduate writing workshops across the U.S. of A., and called by Field Marshal Lish (who ought to know) the *New Realism*" (*GWCH* 265, emphasis in original).¹⁸ While Wallace wrote these words without knowledge of the extent of Lish's direct influence on Carver's work, he was clearly cognisant of the editor's central position in the U.S. literary landscape. As he makes clear both here and in the aforementioned essays, Wallace gave much thought to the institutions and forces helping to shape American fiction during the 1980s, and his extended discussion in "Fictional Futures" of the effect of MFA programs on contemporary writing echoes the concerns of several prominent critics (a special issue of the *Mississippi Review* in Winter 1985, for example, gathered several such views). Wallace's barb here reflects the fact that Lish was increasingly coming to be understood as a force in his own right: David Bellamy suggested in his 1985 essay 'A Downpour of Literary Republicanism' that Lish had become as important a literary player as *The New Yorker*, a one-man institution who had managed to exert "vast influence" on the "literary climate" (37–39). Lish's position was graphically mapped out in the "Guide to the Literary Universe" presented in *Esquire's* August 1987 issue, in which he was placed (along with Carver and Gary Fisketjon, who by that point had replaced Lish as Carver's editor) in the "Red Hot Center"; Wallace was depicted, presciently, as being "on the horizon" (Hills).

¹⁸ The name is a reference to the unofficial title of "Captain Fiction" that Lish earned while working at *Esquire*, (Polsgrove 248); Amy Hempel's article of the same title in *Vanity Fair* in 1984 on Lish's fiction workshop helped to popularise the soubriquet. I will discuss Lish's background at greater length in subsequent chapters.

Lish's placement on the map reflected his influence at Knopf, and Wallace's reference to "Field Marshal Lish" here thus reinforces the criticisms of the "School of Lish" that Sven Birkerts had recently identified in his October 1986 essay of the same name.

Wallace, thus, was aware of – and found it necessary to identify and critique – what Jerome McGann calls the "aesthetic and literary horizon[s]" determining the production of literary fiction during the years in which he began publishing ("Socialization" 72). He was also, of course, operating within these horizons himself. Notes from papers belonging to Bonnie Nadell show that he asked his agent to send a story to Lish for possible publication in the *Quarterly*, Lish's newly-founded literary journal (02 Sep 1987). Lish replied politely in the negative, citing a clash of schedules; he would not, he said, be able to publish Wallace's story "Luckily the Account Representative Knew CPR" before December 1988, by which time *Girl With Curious Hair* was already scheduled to have appeared in print (25 Sep 1987). A note in the Lish archives, moreover, shows Wallace thanking Lish for his attention in a playfully cordial and complimentary tone (this appears to refer to a separate note from Lish): "Dear Mr. Lish: Thanks for your nice note, and the even nicer note that crossed mine in the mail. I've asked my agent's assistant's secretary's receptionist's client-relations aide to petition a person of consequence to send you a much shorter story. Congratulations, by the way, on a really good magazine" (29 Aug 1987). We can see this, perhaps, as a case of literary *realpolitik* – Wallace was, during these years, a young writer urgently trying to publish in several venues – but the notes also suggest that a straightforward division between Minimalist and maximalist camps is insufficient to account for the complex network of literary connections linking these writers.

Centrally, these communications highlight the importance in contemporary literary production of the editor, whose role complicates the popular idea of the solitary creator. American literary history, as Jack Stillinger shows in his *Multiple Authorship and the Myth of Solitary Genius* (1991), is notable for its many examples of strong editorial intervention, but the critical attention given to these examples has primarily focused on earlier figures such as Max Perkins (139–62). The Carver controversy, however, as it has come to be known (Stull and Carroll, “Prolegomena” 2), has demonstrated that editing has a crucial and under-appreciated role in recent U.S. literary history. The emergence of the Minimalist story as the dominant paradigm, as I will argue, involved a high degree of editorial agency that has as yet received little critical acknowledgement. The return to a “renewed maximalism,” meanwhile, also owes a great deal to editorial intervention: the publication of *Infinite Jest* was overseen and aided by an editor, Michael Pietsch, who not only recruited and edited Wallace but worked steadily to make the 1,079-page novel a commercial success. Pietsch’s relationship with Wallace would last up to and beyond the author’s death, and his work on *The Pale King* represents perhaps the most notable and commercially successful example of posthumous editing in recent American fiction. The availability for study of the drafts of these seminal works of contemporary literature is unusual – Wallace’s voluminous papers, indeed, represent a rich variety and depth of textual material, as Schwartzburg notes (256) – and allows us to bring the methods and ideas of genetic criticism to bear on recent (and in the case of *The Pale King*, very recent) publications.

The figure of the editor, then, touches on enduring questions of authorship and literary influence, complicating notions of individual authorship and posing challenges for a

critical tradition that has oscillated between intense focus on the author and an attempt to do away with the author-figure entirely. The role of the editor also demands attention from the various critical perspectives – from McGann’s emphasis on the textual horizons involved in editing, to genetic critics’ focus on the movement of writing across tangible documents, to McGurl’s influential arguments for the importance of understanding the institutional settings of postwar American fiction – that seek to enlarge literary criticism’s horizons through close attention to social and material networks. Each of these approaches is attentive to what I refer to as textual process: namely, the whole range of observable procedures and processes, from initial authorial note-taking to collaborative revision to the creation of the printed book (and beyond), involved in bringing a text into being. My focus on process seeks not just to recreate the historical moment of textual production, but to historicize the text itself by tracing the specifics of its material history and closely examining the way in which different – and sometimes competing – forces and agents have acted upon it. In the following chapters, therefore, I will bring these critical methods to bear on the editing processes behind Carver’s and Wallace’s work in the belief that these varied perspectives – theoretical and specific, individual and social, abstract and material – can serve to illuminate each other.

My first chapter provides context for the position of the editor in contemporary literary production and outlines the methodologies and critical traditions upon which I will be drawing. Chapters 2 and 3, the lengthiest sections, present detailed studies of the work performed by Lish and Pietsch on Carver’s early stories and on *The Pale King* respectively. In Chapter 2 I analyse the editorial processes behind Carver’s first two collections and trace their effects on the published texts, ending with a consideration of Lish’s career in order to provide context for these. In Chapter 3, I discuss the editing of

Wallace's texts with a focus on the posthumous work done by Pietsch on *The Pale King*, based on a study of the manuscripts for the unfinished novel; I close this chapter by examining the way in which the work's manuscripts prompt a re-examination of Wallace's relationship to Minimalism. In the final chapter, I present readings showing that editorial processes can, in the case of both writers, be said to feed back into the work in oblique ways. The mediating role of the editor – so often invisible and so easily ignored – is, I argue, inseparable from the development, form, and reception of these works.

CHAPTER 1

“Stuff that editors do”: Theorizing Editing

1.1 “Why not just have the editor write the book?”:

Random House versus Joan Collins

In February of 1996, Joan Collins spent several days in a Manhattan courtroom defending a lawsuit brought by her publisher Random House. In 1990, the publishing house had agreed a \$4 million, two-book deal with the actress and author, but their relationship had broken down in the intervening years: the manuscripts of the two novels in question – *A Ruling Passion* and *Hell Hath No Fury* – were rejected on the basis that both were below the required standard. Random House sued for the return of the \$1.3 million advance; Collins responded by countersuing on the basis that she was owed the balance of the \$4 million.

The case centred on the question of whether the author had turned in a “complete” manuscript, as per the terms of her contract: Collins’ agent, the *New York Times* noted, had persuaded the publisher “to delete from their contract the customary requirement that the author turn in a ‘satisfactory performance’” (Goodman n.p.). In her later account of the trial, Collins would note that this clause was “the publishing world’s most powerful weapon,” allowing them “not to pay for work they don’t like” (4). The legal arguments thus came to hinge on the question of whether the word “complete” was to be understood in qualitative or quantitative terms. The prosecution argued that

despite the fact that Collins had turned in a manuscript of some bulk, this could not be considered to be “complete” due to its disorganised and incoherent nature. Collins’ editor Joni Evans took to the stand to describe her feelings of “alarm” upon receiving one of the manuscripts, claiming that it had struck her as being “primitive, very much off-base.” Asked to elaborate, she claimed “this was a manuscript not in any shape to edit. This was a manuscript that was setting out characters but all over the map, with many themes not quite gelling. . . it was jumbled and disjointed. It was alarming.”¹⁹ It did not, she claimed, have “a beginning, a middle and an end” and was not yet in an appropriate state for submission to the publication and editing process (Collins 7). The defence, on the other hand, argued that the manuscripts’ faults were provisional and unexceptional: Collins’ defence lawyer went so far as to imply that “a talented, skilful editor, working on a close basis with an author, could have helped [to] find a resolution” to the problems they contained.

Despite the central issue of the quality of Collins’ manuscripts (“my literary ability,” she recalled, “was on trial” (7)), therefore, the focus of the dispute soon shifted onto the question of what exactly the editor’s role entailed. Was Evans correct in refusing to give Collins line-by-line criticism even though previous editors had provided this to the author? Was she correct in her claim that the manuscript needed to be fixed in “basic” ways before such detailed criticism was even possible? The defence called Rosemary Cheetham, who had previously worked as Collins’ editor in the UK: she described an early editorial group meeting, hinting that Evans’ editorial advice to the author on the plot had

¹⁹ These quotes are taken from a 1996 documentary made for the US network Court TV (since relaunched as Tru TV). All subsequent quotes, unless otherwise noted, are taken from this documentary, which is (at the time of writing) available on Youtube. (Worden : url provided in list of works cited).

been misguided. Asked whether she herself would, as editor, have been capable of turning the manuscript into a successful work of commercial fiction, she replied in the affirmative, noting that this would have required detailed suggestions and page-by-page notes: the manuscript was, she argued, "complete but not ready for press." The defence then heard from expert witness Lucianne Goldberg, who had previously worked as a ghostwriter and editor, to provide an unambiguous verdict: "Is it fixable? Absolutely." When the prosecuting lawyer selected examples from the manuscript to demonstrate the fragmented, chaotic nature of its plot (for example, instances in which one character's drug problem disappears inexplicably from the narrative and another character's lifesaving heart operation is apparently alluded to as an afterthought) Goldberg waved her hand and replied, "all of this is stuff that editors do." Upon being asked whether Collins' manuscripts were in fact publishable, she replied, "Absolutely. All they needed was some cutting and moving things around. All the stuff editors get well paid for." Collins later approvingly quoted Goldberg's statement to the court that "Putting raw material right is what editors are *supposed* to do. They just use their blue pencil." (Collins 8–9, emphasis in original). When called to the stand herself, the author offered a paean to the importance of the editor's input:

You neglect editors at your peril. They are 50% of the partnership after you've done the best that you possibly can with your manuscript. You go up to a point and then you can no longer do it anymore. . . there are some authors who can self-edit, but I am not one of them. I need an editor, and I am the first to admit it.

One report on the case neatly summarised the defence's position: "writers write; editors 'fix'" (Sjoerdsma n.p.).

In summing up the prosecution's case, Random House's counsel Robert Callagy rejected the idea that editors should have to do all this "stuff," appealing to the jury's

intuition as he asked them to preserve a distinction between the functions of author and editor:

What the defence amounts to is that Joan Collins wanted Joni Evans to do Miss Collins' job for her. But if it was the editor's job to execute the plots and subplots and to develop the characters, write the descriptive passages and structure the drama, why would you ever need a writer? Why would anyone who could do that, be an editor instead of a writer? Why not just have the editor write the book? That's not the way it works. You know that, and I know that.

The jury returned a split decision, meaning that Collins could keep the majority of her advance: the author was ebullient, promising reporters afterwards that this episode would be added to the autobiography she had just finished writing for her English publisher. In this later account she focused on the positive aspects of the judgement, claiming that "justice had been served" and noting that after delivering their verdict, the jury had insisted on meeting her, their faith in her literary prowess seemingly undimmed: "each juror," she notes, "requested I sign their copies of the manuscripts" (16).

This legal battle describes an editing and publication process that is, in some ways, very distant from the ones I will be examining. Collins was working within a paradigm of commercial publishing in which the degree of authorial attribution might be expected to be lower than in the case of the serious literary fiction produced by Carver and Wallace. Indeed, it can be argued that in the case of celebrity fiction, "the author's name" as Donald Laming notes, "functions not as a guarantee of literary quality, but as a link between the book and pre-existing publicity" (100); even Collins' defence attorney was quick to concede that his client "is not, and has not claimed to be, Hemingway or James Joyce or Proust." However, it serves as a useful background to the cases I will be considering here, both of which involved editorial interventions that go beyond the boundaries of the expected. It may also be worth noting that these two worlds – that of

the celebrity airport novel on the one hand, and prestigious literary fiction on the other – are not entirely discrete in the way they are brought to the market. Indeed, they can sometimes overlap in the figure of the editor: as we will see, Lish served as ghostwriter on works of commercial fiction in the 1970s, while Pietsch has edited the multimillion-selling James Patterson over a number of years. More importantly for my purposes here, the Collins case represents a rare cultural moment in which readers, writers and editors were forced to reflect upon the role of the editor. Editing is an inevitable aspect of the social and cultural processes involved in the production of writing. However they may understand it, authors are likely to accept the existence of editors – and the need for editing – within the publishing landscape. McGann writes of Byron that he was “responsive to his immediate literary environment” and that he accepted, from the outset of his career, “the general terms of the publishing institution of his day” (*Critique* 6); this is arguably true for the majority of writers, and limit cases like Blake and Dickinson – who went to exceptional lengths in order to resist collaborating with other agents in the production of their works – illustrate how rare it is for writers to avoid engaging with the social apparatus by which texts are disseminated in the public sphere.²⁰

Both Carver and Wallace embraced publishing institutions from early in their careers; it is worth noting, too, that both writers sometimes displayed a willingness to involve themselves beyond their customary authorial roles. At the time he met Lish, Carver was working as a textbook editor at Science Research Associates in Palo Alto: he excelled at the job, which involved selecting readings to interest college students and

²⁰ McGann describes, for example, how Blake “tried to produce his own work in deliberate defiance of his period’s normal avenues of publication”: this involved an uncommonly extensive set of steps in which he assumed the roles of “author, editor, illustrator, publisher, printer, and distributor” (*Critique* 44–47).

condensing these for elementary-level readers (Sklenicka 138–139). Indeed, at one point he acted as guest editor of the little magazine *December* through his friendship with its chief editor Curt Johnson, and Sklenicka notes that before Carver had met Lish, the two had jointly edited *December's* 1967 issue (143). At one point, after Lish had moved to *Esquire* in 1969, Carver even wrote to his friend in New York to ask whether there might be “any jobs going there in yr dept for asst editors or the like, that would pay a decent salary” (18 Dec 1969). Wallace, for his part, demonstrated a playful engagement with the world of campus publishing during his time in Arizona, collaborating with his friend JT Jackson on “a parody issue of [the college’s] writing programme newsletter” (Max, *ELS* 72). He also took on editorial roles at times in his career: in 1996, he guest edited an issue of the *Review of Contemporary Fiction*, noting in his introduction that “the job involved reading the essays as they came in and copyediting them—I’m a good copy editor, and this has been the only really comfortable part of the whole process as far as I’m concerned” (“Quo Vadis” 7). As this quote suggests, Wallace appears to have taken pride in his copyediting abilities, and his correspondence with Don DeLillo suggests that when he received an advance copy of *Underworld*, he relished (along with his enjoyment of the book) the opportunity to act as one of its unofficial proofreaders. A note from DeLillo written to his friend Gordon Lish in advance of the publication of the book, in fact, jokingly taunts Lish with the information that “David Foster Wallace found 4 typos that you’d missed. Just thought you’d like to know. D.” (27 Jan 1997).

These examples show just a few of the many ways in which both writers participated in the social processes of textual circulation throughout their writing lives. They serve, too, as a reminder of the relevance of McGann’s call for “a socialized concept of authorship and textual authority” in literary criticism (*Critique* 8) and hint at the way in which the

editor can be considered an essential part of the material apparatus of textual process – the entire network encompassing publisher, agent, university, and more – that underlies the production of literary texts.

1.2 The “Trusted Advisor”: Understanding the Editor’s Role

“The editor,” note Claire MacDonald and William H. Sherman in their introduction to a 2002 issue of *Performance Research* devoted to the study of editorial activity, “is at once a key player in the creation and transmission of culture and an elusive – often invisible – figure.” (1). In order to contextualize the development of my chosen texts, it will be useful to consider the reasons for the “elusive” nature of the role and to examine the ideas and practices behind it. Perhaps the first characteristic to be noted about editing is its liminal status: as MacDonald and Sherman point out, the designation is, of necessity, a “mediating term” (1). In what he calls a “fundamental definition,” Paul Eggert highlights this act of mediation and usefully points towards a point of future publication as an inescapable aspect of the editing transaction: “an editor,” in his formulation, “mediates, according to defined or undefined standards or conventions, between the text or texts of documents made or orally transmitted by another and the audience of the anticipated publication” (*Securing* 156). Indeed, Pietsch has noted that he worked “at the professional interface between [Wallace] and his readers,” an explanation that highlights the way in which the editor’s position is one that necessarily involves functioning as an intermediary in the service of the creation of a future textual product (“On David Foster Wallace” 11).

The variety of practical tasks involved in this act of mediation, though, can be significant. As the Collins case demonstrates, the term “editing” can refer to a range of activities and can also be understood differently within different spheres of publishing. The processes under discussion in this study took place within the context of U.S. commercial publishing and thus need to be understood in relation to the conventions of this tradition; identifying principles and methods in modern commercial editing is difficult, however, as standardization has traditionally been lacking and practices vary between individuals and between publishing houses. Indeed, both Thomas McCormack and Leslie Sharpe, in their respective guides to editing practice, bemoan the lack of professionalization of the editing industry and the absence of any common statements of theory or systematic instruction (Sharpe 4; McCormack 84). Within the tradition of the commercial publication of fiction, “editing,” as Sharpe observes, generally connotes a number of activities including reviewing, revising, redacting, refining, emending and correcting (1). These activities, or “patterns of revision” will, as John Bryant observes, tend to be grouped as part of a single design or “set of strategies” (FT 108) serving to act in a manner similar to that understood by Foucault’s author function, namely as a principle of specificity upon the text: an editor will be expected to “bring out the author’s voice in the strongest way possible” (Marek viii) and to display “empathy with the author’s *vision*” (Sharpe 131, emphasis in original).²¹

²¹ Foucault writes that the author:

Does not precede the works; he is a certain functional principle by which, in our culture, one limits, excludes, and chooses; in short, by which one impedes the free circulation, the free manipulation, the free composition, decomposition, and recomposition of fiction . . . the author is therefore the ideological figure by which one marks the manner in which we fear the proliferation of meaning” (290).

In the preparation of a fictional text for publication, an editor will inevitably bring his or her own aesthetic preferences to the text (McCormack identifies "sensitivity" as the key to good editing). However, the work done will likely include an awareness of its potential audience as well as the sensibilities (and perhaps the "house style") of the publishing house in question: Bryant emphasises how the attempted textual improvement involved in editing is based upon a variety of social factors.²² The attribution for the published work of fiction will in almost every case be singular, though, with the author's name usually appearing unaccompanied on the book's cover and the editor's work rarely foregrounded (McCormack notes that it is the editor's lot to be anonymous, and to "serve the author" (74, 84)). Editing consequently implies an awareness of this requirement and generally involves a movement towards a certain unity and reduction of textual variation, whether stylistic or thematic. This movement will often be encouraged by author as much as editor: correspondence between Wallace and Pietsch, for example, shows that the former sought advice on achieving coherence in collections of his stories and essays (April 19 2004).

In American literary history, the figure of Max Perkins has played as great a role as anyone in the popular understanding of the editor's position. Perkins' success in editing Fitzgerald, Hemingway and Wolfe has gained him an uncharacteristically illustrious status: indeed, A. Scott Berg's biography, ambiguously subtitled "Editor of Genius"

²² The goal of an editor, according to Bryant, is "betterment, however that may be defined . . . the editor attempts to bring the text closer in line with his or her notion of the writer's goal with his/her own personal agenda as a reader, or the agenda of the publisher or of a readership the editor presumes to represent" (*FT* 104).

(currently being adapted for cinema)²³ has surely contributed to making him something of an editorial archetype. While Perkins' fame is uncharacteristic, his legacy as the most famous example of an editor in the American tradition makes him relevant here: indeed, a current editor at Knopf recently opined that the role of a fiction editor has changed very little in the past century.²⁴ His example is also useful, however, in demonstrating some of the difficulties involved in any attempts at a theoretical understanding of the role. One of these difficulties is the inescapable nature of the human element in editing relationships, resulting from the fact that the textual relationship is determined in part by the idiosyncratic meeting of different personality types. At one level, this simply involves an acknowledgement that the working methods of writers vary dramatically, and that the editor's role will vary accordingly. Perkins' textual work with Fitzgerald, for example, primarily appears to have involved offering advice on aspects of plot and character:²⁵ with Wolfe, however, he selected material, wrote plot outlines and assembled sections of narrative, taking on functions more generally understood to be authorial ones (Berg 121–30).

However, Perkins' example also shows the frequent inseparability of an editorial relationship from one of friendship. His role, in fact, appears often to have been a holistic

²³ The production, provisionally entitled "Genius" (starring Colin Firth in the role of Perkins, Jude Law as Thomas Wolfe, Guy Pearce as F. Scott Fitzgerald and Dominic West as Ernest Hemingway), is scheduled for release in 2016 (Brown n.p.).

²⁴ Jordan Pavlin (editor of Karen Russell, Nathan Englander, Jenny Offill and others) suggests that, despite changes to the industry, "the core of an editor's role" remains "remarkably unaltered": "Then, as now, the editor's first job was to acquire and edit the best books and to talk about them with passion and purpose" (Harris).

²⁵ Famously, he requested more details on Gatsby's character, to which an impressed Fitzgerald replied that he himself had not known "what Gatsby looked like or was engaged in" (Berg 60–63).

one involving practical assistance and elements of pastoral care: Berg notes that Fitzgerald referred to the editor as one of his “closest friends,” that Perkins often acted “*in loco parentis*” for the author, and reports that in 1927, when Fitzgerald was looking for a quiet place to write in seclusion, the editor “house-hunted for him” (79–80, 106–07).²⁶ The interconnection of professional and personal relationships – an expected factor in long-term working relationships – cannot, therefore, be easily separated from the textual exchange. Sklenicka reports, for example, that in 1971 Gordon Lish took the unusual step of asking Carver to gather information about Lish’s ex-wife in San Francisco: it may, in fact, have been in return for this favour that the editor promised Carver to try to sell his writing in New York (197, 520 n68-9). Wallace and Pietsch’s relationship, as we shall see, tended to be more distant but clearly involved a high degree of personal affection: speaking at a tribute shortly after the author’s death, for example, the editor recalled a house visit during which Wallace had played with his children (“On David Foster Wallace” 12).

Perkins’ example also illustrates the tension between the power inherent in the role – the potential to affect and even determine crucial aspects of a literary work – and the way it also places the editor in “a position of subordination and even service” (MacDonald and Sherman 1). Stillingr, in his consideration of the reasons for the general invisibility of editing, highlights the general reluctance of editors to draw attention to their own work: he takes as an example the “pathological” self-effacement of Perkins, an editor who maintained a lifelong insistence on the primacy of the author’s role and

²⁶ An unusual contemporary example of such pastoral care came in Jonathan Franzen’s recent revelation that his editor at the *New Yorker*, Henry Finder, had been responsible for dissuading him from his plan to adopt an Iraqi war orphan (“Interview” n.p.).

consistently minimised his own contribution, despite the fact that his influence was in many cases (Wolfe's novels, for example) manifestly crucial to the success of the published work (Stillinger 154–55; Berg 130–33).²⁷ Even when a powerful editor has played a significant role in shaping the work of a younger writer, this role has generally not been highlighted in the public presentation of the work, tending to be revealed only in retrospect. The difficulty of apprehending and defining the editor's contribution stems, Stillinger suggests, not just from the persistence of the concept of singular authorship within literary theory but also from the practicalities of the publishing industry: "An editor who made much of a claim as collaborator," he suggests, "would very quickly find the authors giving their manuscripts to rival publishers. The fact is that authors themselves are among the most ardent believers in the myth of single authorship (155)." This suggests a kind of wilful blindness on the part of authors (as well as, perhaps, publishers and editors themselves) to the editor's role and, in fact, goes some way towards describing what happened between Lish and Carver. The claim, I would suggest, remains relevant, since single authorship is clearly integral to the commercial presentation of books. The commercial editor's role is thus one that contains inherent paradoxes: it is necessary but invisible, powerful but subservient, inherently collaborative but existing in a context where any editorial agency, no matter how extensive, will generally be subsumed at the point of presentation into a paradigm of solitary authorship. Indeed, in one interview, former *New Yorker* editor William Maxwell suggests that a successful editorial performance makes a degree of cognitive dissonance not only

²⁷ Berg quotes Perkin's colleague John Hall Wheelock on the editor's famed humility: "although I'm aware of no book [Wolfe's *Look Homeward, Angel* (1929)] that had ever been edited so extensively up to that point, Max felt that what he had done was neither more nor less than duty required" (130).

inevitable, but desirable: “what you hope is that if the writer reads the story ten years after it is published he will not be aware that anybody has ever touched it” (n.p.).

Multiple authorship has, historically, rarely been acknowledged in the commercial presentation of fiction and, as Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford note in their exploration of authorship in *Singular Texts/Plural Authors*, could be said to have an anomalous place in contemporary literature. Like Stillinger, they highlight what they term “The Myth of the Solitary Author,” following the development of the concept of individual authorship from its roots in Descartes’ conception of individual subjectivity through to the Romantic conception of solitary genius proposed by writers like Wordsworth, whose writings on the subject define authorship in terms of “individuals writing alone” (85). In the case of Carver and Lish, both men had worked in environments (namely, magazine publishing and the MFA programme) where a story or novel would, despite the possible presence of multiple contributors to a fictional text, invariably reach the public under a single author’s name. Lish, indeed, had ghostwritten several novels by the time he edited *WWTA* and was used to working in a commercial context.²⁸ The ubiquity of this model in the world of commercial publishing means that critics have often viewed it as an inevitable paradigm in the production of fictional texts and accepted it as an extension of the author’s intention, with the concept of “passive authorization” implying that the author, in effect, “signs off” on the assistance given by the editor (Crispi and Slote 37; Bucci 31). Thus, for instance, Günter Leypoldt, in defending his previous reading of Carver’s story “So Much Water So Close to Home” against new interpretations based on the revelations about the

²⁸ Sklenicka refers to Lish’s ghostwriting of Jim Garrison’s novel *The Star-Spangled Contract* (1976), and drafts in Lish’s archive make it clear that he performed the same role for Victor Herman’s 1979 memoir *Coming Out Of the Ice* (Sklenicka 283; Herman).

story's textual development, was able to dismiss the new textual evidence as an example of "the type of influences to which authors tend to be exposed" ("Reconsidering" 318).

In the light of the extensive evidence provided by *Beginners*, though, this view seems untenable. Certainly, the work undertaken by Lish exists at the extreme end of the spectrum of textual editing and it surely needs to be differentiated from an assumed paradigm of harmonious cooperation. Carol Polsgrove emphasises the extent to which Lish's methods were unusual even in the context of the magazine-editing environment in which he worked during the 1970s. Lish, she reports, was (compared to the other line editors at *Esquire*) an "aggressive editor" who "went after manuscripts with firm confidence in his editorial hand" (241); Sklenicka describes how Lish occasionally clashed with other writers, such as Nabokov, who were more prepared to resist his revisions (283–284).²⁹ The editing relationship between Wallace and Pietsch, by contrast, seems to have been largely harmonious: Wallace praised his editor both in public and in correspondence with friends, and it is clear from numerous sources that he valued his editor's methods as well as his judgement (Pietsch Oct 26 2004; Wallace, DeLillo April 28 2000). Pietsch has described the editor's role as that of "trusted advisor" ("Feldman") and stated that the job's primary requirement is "to earn the writer's agreement that changes he or she suggests are worth making" ("Editing") and archival evidence shows that Wallace did indeed have the final say on every matter during his lifetime. In this, Pietsch's

²⁹ Manuscripts in the Lish archive, in fact, show that the editor heavily cut excerpts of Nabokov's novel *Look at the Harlequins!* in 1974 for possible serialisation in *Esquire*. He had cut the novel to make it look, in the words of Fred Hills, Editor-in-Chief of McGraw-Hill at the time, "like a straight autobiographical memoir of Véra [Nabokov's wife]" and changed its title to reflect this (the excerpt was named "Myself Incomplete: A True Autobiography"); after receiving the page proofs of the proposed excerpt in the mail, the author withdrew from the arrangement (Sklenicka 283–284; Nabokov).

vision of the role recalls the words of Perkins, who conceived of himself as “a little dwarf on the shoulder of a great general advising him what to do and what not to do, without anyone’s noticing” (Berg 155). His work on Wallace’s posthumous work, however, clearly cannot be viewed in the same light and requires a perspective that attends to the high degree of mediation necessarily involved in publishing the work of an absent author.

Indeed, textual criticism has in recent decades been marked by an increased awareness of the degree to which text is subject to context and is frequently suffused with what MacDonald and Sherman refer to as “contingencies and instabilities” (1). McGann has argued that “editing, including critical editing, is more an act of translation than of reproduction.” Building on his assumption that the bibliographical and visual elements of a book are as much an inherent part of its meaning as the linguistic ones, he suggests that the multiple decisions taken in reproducing a text in a new context (and, indeed, even the very fact of a different context) mean that even scrupulous and conscientious acts of editing will result in alterations from the original work: “when we edit we change, and even good editing. . . necessarily involves fundamental departures from “authorial intention,” however that term is interpreted.” Indeed, the more successful a text, the more its bibliographical codes will proliferate beyond authorial control, as the text becomes more “socialized” (*TC* 53–58). Bryant’s related notion of the “fluid text” – the proposition that all texts are “fluid” due to the different production pressures bearing upon each version – develops this emphasis on social influences on textual transmission and highlights the ongoing nature of cultural processes of interpretation (*FT* 4–6). These processes are perhaps most clearly illustrated in the case of posthumous publication, where the author has likely had little or no control over the form of the final book.

Posthumous publication, therefore, both highlights the problem of the author's intention – the lack of an author to provide interpretation heightens the need for accuracy on the part of the critic – and ensures that a critical editor is obliged to display conflicting evidence clearly, ideally accompanied (in the words of the MLA's "Guidelines for Editors of Scholarly Editions") by the "appropriate textual apparatus or notes documenting alterations and variant readings of the text, including alterations by the author, intervening editors, or the editor of this edition" (1.1). It is here that the differences between critical and commercial editing become more apparent, since the tradition of critical editing almost invariably presupposes editing the works of a dead author. Examples can be seen throughout the history of literature, of course, as some of the central texts of the Western canon are problematically incomplete in a way that compels continual editorial attention: Virgil's *Aeneid*, for example, demonstrates the way which an unfinished text will require the editor(s) of each edition to repeat or repeal previous decisions on key textual features, and indeed demonstrates the fact that even critical editors of the same era may disagree in these matters.³⁰ However, the differences between critical and commercial editing are considerable, and could perhaps be said to hinge on the question of audience. In the case of editions intended for scholars, the need for an authoritative textual apparatus is requirement of logic as well as tradition; in the case of mass-market publications intended for a non-specialist readership, on the other

³⁰ In his introduction to a recent edition of *The Aeneid*, for example, Bernard Knox observes that Virgil is reported to have ordered his literary executors to destroy the unfinished manuscript of the poem; "imperfections remain," according to Knox, including "incomplete hexameters" and "minor contradictions," and different editors have reached contrasting conclusions about the authenticity of one of its passages (11-12).

hand, the textual authority of the work will often be considered less as a requirement than as one factor among a number of others (namely, accessibility and marketability).

Indeed, there is no uniformity in the presentation of posthumous works of significant American authors, and since these books are frequently edited according to commercial practices, a critical apparatus is often lacking. Sarah Churchwell laments the fact that “the degree to which they [posthumously published books] are edited is often disguised, even misrepresented, by people with a vested interest in the final product,” and that this is often due to the legal circumstances of the manuscripts in question: “literary executors tend to be relatives, and thus have an emotional investment, as well as a financial one, in the public image of the artist” (“Final Cut” n.p.). Several critics, for example, faulted Dmitri Nabokov’s decision to publish his father’s final work, *The Original of Laura*, in a 2009 edition which printed facsimile reproductions of the index cards on which notes for the planned novel were written and bore the subtitle “A Novel in Fragments” (Walsh; Theroux). Indeed, the book evinces a mix of critical and commercial impulses: the state of the surviving textual fragments is scrupulously displayed in anticipation of a readership that includes Nabokovian critics, but the subtitle (“A Novel in Fragments”) seems a purely commercial addition designed to suggest to the reader that the fragmentary disposition of the work is intentional and definitive rather than contingent upon its author’s inability to see it through to publication. As we shall see, *The Pale King* displays evidence of a similarly mixed set of editorial demands. David Gates, however, suggested in *The New York Times* that *The Original of Laura* should, minor faults aside, “serve as a model of how to publish a posthumous and unfinished manuscript,” noting that the “countermodel is the published version of Hemingway’s *Garden of Eden* [edited by Tom Jenks for Scribner’s and published in 1986], not a serious edition of a

great writer's epic mess, but a market-driven remix, with no information about the extent of the high-handed cutting and splicing" (n.p.).³¹

Much of Hemingway's work has been posthumously edited, often by different editors (including – as we shall see – Michael Pietsch, who worked on *The Dangerous Summer*, published in 1985), and sometimes to controversial effect: in 2009, for example, writer A.E. Hotchner protested against the appearance of the re-edited memoir *A Moveable Feast*, invoking Hemingway's "right to have these words protected against frivolous incursion" (n.p.). Churchwell notes Hemingway's own protests against the posthumous edit of Fitzgerald's *Tender is the Night*, whose structure was changed by Malcolm Cowley in 1951 in accordance with the author's expressed wishes (which appear to have been driven by commercial considerations) ("Final Cut" n.p.). Similar issues surround the structure of Roberto Bolaño's final novel, albeit thus far without the same attendant controversy: the editors of *2666* argue that "it seems preferable to keep the novel whole" rather than to publish it in five sections as the author requested, on the basis that this request was based on short-term monetary concerns rather than artistic vision (Echevarría 895). Indeed, as these examples show, the fact that authorial wishes may be posthumously interpreted in various ways (and that every unfinished manuscript is likely to be unfinished in a different way) arguably mitigates against any uniformity of presentation.

³¹ In a 1991 essay on *The Garden of Eden*, K.J. Peters claims that several people at Scribner's tried unsuccessfully to edit the work before it made its way into the hands of Tom Jenks, and that Pietsch was one of these (he writes "Michael Peach," but the misspelling presumably arises from the fact that the information comes from a phone interview with Charles Scribner Jr). The manuscript was subsequently reduced by Jenks from 200,000 words to approximately 70,000 (17–29).

The editions of *Beginners* and *The Pale King* demonstrate some of the different possibilities of presentation as well as some of the differences between commercial and scholarly editing. *Beginners* is clearly a critical edition: the text contains a full scholarly apparatus, with a description of the methods employed in its production, a list of variations, and a history of the textual genesis. This is undoubtedly due not only to the fact that its editors (William L. Stull and Maureen P. Carroll) are prominent Carver scholars, but that its very form – a manuscript version of a seminal collection – is defined by its difference from a previously existing text. Thus, the accuracy and fidelity of the published text is paramount, and an “Editors’ Preface” explains the method of the texts’ “restoration,” describing how “Carver’s original stories have been recovered by transcribing his typewritten words that lie beneath Lish’s handwritten alterations and deletions” on the base-text (vii–viii). For Stull and Carroll, the discovery of *Beginners* and of the extent of Lish’s editing necessitates “a fundamental reformulation of the research question” on the part of scholars. They argue that the questions that must concern future Carver studies are essentially epistemological in nature: “Who was Raymond Carver and what did he write? To what degree do the stories attributed to him represent his original writing, his editor’s alterations for publication purposes, or Carver’s unconstrained intentions with respect to stories published in multiple versions?” (“Prolegomena” 2–3). In 2007, *The New Yorker* published what was essentially a genetic version of the story “Beginners,” reproducing the deletions, changes and additions to be found in Lish’s manuscript version of the story (“Beginners,’ Edited”); the form of *Beginners* is also determined by the need to address these concerns. *The Pale King*, on the other hand, is the first publication based on its source material, and its editor has worked entirely within commercial editing. The book sits somewhere between the commercial and

scholarly models elucidated above, and, as McGann notes in relation to D.G. Rosetti's *The House of Life*, "the standard version of this work is a posthumous editorial construction made up from a decision about how to treat the heterodox amalgam of textual deposits" ("Socialization" 68). The third chapter of this study presents a detailed analysis of the nature of the editorial task undertaken by Pietsch in assembling this from a mass of textual evidence, and explores some of the problems for critical interpretation created by the nature of the edition.

1.3 "A protocol for making a text": The Genetic View

In an overview of trends in Anglo-American critical editing methods during the late twentieth century, Eggert highlights the importance of "the gradual loss of belief among editors in the ideal text of a work" (*Securing* 200). A combination of factors including the poststructuralist erosion of traditional notions of authorship, reader-response theory's emphasis on the role of readers in constructing the meaning of a work, and the influence of German editorial theory – which involves a far more self-consciously historical and "archival dimension" than the Anglo-American tradition of critical editing – contributed to a growing awareness of the difficulty of establishing a "fixed" text (185–213). The result of this has been, in Eggert's words, "the welcome broadening of attention to the workings of the work" (228).

This study attempts to integrate several of the scholarly perspectives involved in this "broadening of attention" to textual process and draws in particular on some of the ideas and critical vocabulary of genetic criticism, a school of criticism originating in France during the 1960s and 70s that focuses not on "finished" texts but rather on the development of a text as it changes from one manuscript to another. Genetic

explorations, as Michael Groden notes, do not have a uniform goal: genetic studies may attempt “to show how the published text came into being or to demonstrate how the earlier documents can illuminate the published text, or . . . [study] the writing process in itself” (x). Central to the project of genetic criticism is the attempt to break away from the assumption of the primacy of the “ideal” text. At the level of critical vocabulary, the notion of “avant-texte” was introduced as opposed to “variant”; this category of textual material refers to “the result of the critical analysis, reconstitution, and organization of all the extant documents related to the writing process one intends to examine” (Crispi and Slote 37). Louis Hay emphasises the way in which genetic criticism thrives on multiplicity as opposed to singularity, aiming to apprehend “a plurality of virtual texts behind the surface of the constituted text” and attempting to make visible “what Julien Gracq called the ‘phantoms of successive books’. . . that have disappeared along the way and forever haunt the finished compositions” (22). The possibilities implied by textual variety, in other words, are given precedence over the search for unity: the published work, in this approach, is “only *one* among its multiple possibilities” (Contat et al. 2) and the static iteration of the “final” text is viewed as one dimension of a “text in movement” (Hay 23). The “avant-texte” thus becomes “a sort of text laboratory” (De Biasi and Wassenaar 29), and the rough draft becomes “a protocol for making a text” (Ferrer, n.p.): the study of these can enable the construction of a narrative of creation and a consideration of textual development in an otherwise inaccessible temporal context.

There are clear advantages, in the case of *The Pale King* and *Beginners*, to the use of the ideas and vocabulary of genetic criticism. In each case, we can shift our focus from the published text to an examination of the way in which the various surviving documents – representing as they do distinctly different stages of writing – shed light upon the

development of the work, not only through multiple interventions by the author, but in its passage through more than one pair of hands. Tracing the development of the writing through the close study of material documents also provides a theoretical opening point to study the external forces in the processes of textual development, and to consider the editorial interventions in each case as part of the “process of socialization of the writing” (Hay and Wassenaar 207). It is easy to see, for example, how these ideas might be related to *Beginners*, a work which could be described as an “avant-texte” in relation to *WWTA*. Indeed, its very publication implies assumptions shared by genetic critics, as the existence of the collection – a book based on a series of previously unpublished drafts, giving readers access to two versions of the same work – challenges the idea of a definitive text. A genetic critical edition of a work will often include a writer’s notes, drafts, and correspondence, and in this sense the Library of America edition of Carver’s work, while not a genetic edition as such, already incorporates genetic assumptions by reproducing some of these documents in order to show the development of the writing process and the cultural and material contexts surrounding it. By focusing on text in development rather than as product we can sidestep the competing claims to authenticity of the two books and treat them as parts of a larger process, engaging in a continual “oscillation of perspectives” between process and artefact (Crispi and Slote 38).

The work upon which *The Pale King* is based, meanwhile, consists entirely as an agglomeration of notes, sketches and drafts in various stages of completion, and the form of the published volume is due in large part to Michael Pietsch’s editing and sequencing work. The work Pietsch was presented with was clearly without “a final form,” being spread across “Hard drives, file folders, three-ring binders, spiral-bound notebooks, and floppy disks contain[ing] printed chapters, sheaves of handwritten pages, and more,” and

was “not by any measure a finished work” (“Editor’s Note” viii–xi). This material represents the ideal basis for a genetic study; the documents housed in the Harry Ransom Center in Texas include Pietsch’s reading notes and index of chapters, making it possible to reconstruct the decisions made in relation to the selection, sequencing and presentation of the published work and thus identify the way in which it was finally structured.³² The folders also include Wallace’s notebooks, which show sketches and marginalia offering valuable insights into the creative process, a glimpse at the early growth of ideas – alternate plot designs and character sketches as well as literary references and influences, for example – and hints of ways in which the novel might have developed if it had been completed. The genetic process can, in this case, be extended even further: French genetic criticism has begun in recent years to examine cases where it is possible to trace “the *avant-texte*’s starting points in the author’s personal library” (Crispi and Slote 39). The presence of more than three hundred annotated books in Wallace’s archive – many of which could, as several critics have noted, be considered “first drafts” of his fiction (Schwartzburg 248; Walls, “Mixed-Up” 50) – will inevitably inform future criticism of his work.³³

³² The disks and digital electronic files cannot be accessed at present; many of these (Wallace’s emails to accountants and research assistants during the composition of *The Pale King*, for example) have been printed and are thus accessible in paper form.

³³ The study of the marginalia in authors’ libraries has long informed literary interpretation and its possibilities have, in recent years, frequently been explored by genetic critics: Van Hulle, for example, recently observed that such markings might be read as an example of the workings of the “extended mind” (MM 149). H.J. Jackson’s *Marginalia: Readers Writing in Books* (2001) traces the history of the changing functions of annotation throughout history; examples of detailed explorations of authors’ marginalia can be found in Van Hulle and Mark Nixon’s *Samuel Beckett’s Library* (2013) and in issues 2/3 of *Variants* (2004), edited by Van Hulle and Wim Van Mierlo, which focused on the different ways in which “reading notes” might be interpreted.

Florence Callu has claimed that the twentieth century was the “golden age of the contemporary manuscript”; Allan Friedman, in 2010, referred to “the manuscript preservation craze” as “a twentieth-century phenomenon that shows no sign of abating thanks largely to the continuing interest of research libraries and universities” (Van Hulle, *MM* 4; Friedman 94).³⁴ This “craze” has, in conjunction with the contemporary success of both authors, led to the cataloguing and display of their work within a relatively short time frame. In Carver’s case, the controversy itself has arguably led to the availability of the manuscripts: Lish’s maintenance and presentation of his archive and, perhaps, his unwillingness (as a far less self-effacing and deliberately “invisible” character than Perkins) to subsume his work into Carver’s led to the accessibility of the relevant documentation. Both writers were working, for the most part, towards what might be considered as the end of the manuscript age, prior to the twenty-first century move into digital methods of composition and transmission.

In Wallace’s case, in fact, the large archival deposit at the Ransom Center is a result of his belated incorporation of this shift into his own working methods and his continued fondness for paper-based revision. Hannah Sullivan takes Wallace, towards the close of *The Work of Revision* (her study of Modernist methods of composition and editing), as an example of an author working in the digital age, suggesting that his work exemplifies the fact that the shift to instantaneous, computer-based revision “may have made complex, belated, laborious revision less likely” and leads to less radical kinds of textual alteration (256). However, the evidence of the Wallace archive suggests that it would be a mistake to regard him, as she does, as representative of his generation in his

³⁴ Callu made this claim in an essay written in French in 1993; the phrase used here is Van Hulle’s translation.

approach to composition.³⁵ Wallace, as Max notes, was late in adopting habits of internet and email usage (265, 286-287) and his reluctance to embrace digital methods is clear from his manuscripts: while it is certainly possible that he revised digitally, it is also clear that he regularly printed out his drafts, revising them on paper and thus treating them as a traditional typescript.

This study thus brings a genetic focus to a more recent literary field. One of the earliest studies of the papers in Wallace's archive links elements of *The Pale King* to the author's reading materials and annotations and alludes to genetic methods in its justification for doing so (Staes 70-84); however, there has been little extended consideration of the way in which the insights of genetic critics might be of use in reading these materials. Genetic criticism, after all, has largely focused on canonical authors whose "avant-texte" is extensive enough to allow the application of its methods: examples include Raymond Debray Genette's work on Flaubert, or Dirk Van Hulle's on Beckett and Proust. A number of studies have, in recent years, examined the manuscript materials of canonical modernist writers in order to trace the ways in which the writing process itself informed the work throughout its development. Much recent work in English-language criticism has focused on Joyce, whose extensive (and often chaotic)

³⁵ Sullivan considers two versions of a Wallace work (a piece of fiction he read at a Lannan foundation reading in 2000, and later published as the story "Backbone" in the *New Yorker* in 2008: this later became §46 of *The Pale King*) in order to demonstrate that the changes made during revision are, for the most part, "easie[r]" and more "expected" than the sort made by Joyce and other Modernists (260-265). However, as I show in my discussion of the same piece during Chapter 3, the manuscript evidence shows that the story was altered in more radical ways than this: in many drafts, it appears interweaved with two other narratives as part of a much longer chapter. Sullivan also erroneously claims, after quoting Pietsch's introduction to *The Pale King*, that the editor had been "reading and commenting" on Wallace's novel-in-progress "since the beginning," although Pietsch clearly explains that the contrary is true (*WOR* 262; Pietsch, "Editor's Note" viii).

manuscripts and notebooks provide a rich basis for genetic explorations: Sam Slote's examination of the creation of Chapter II.I of *Finnegans Wake*, for example, uses "avant-textual" evidence such as notebooks and letters to trace the development of the writing and to explore the author's changing conceptualization of the work (181–213). Fordham, too, is concerned with "reconstructing the events of writing" in order to examine the compositional process as a textual influence in its own right, arguing, for example, that Yeats' poetic self was informed by the publication processes of his poems (13). Examining the manuscript work of modernist writers allows Fordham to illuminate "the process encoded in the product" in order to illustrate his thesis that "formation shapes content" (28–31).

Hannah Sullivan argues that many of the distinctive effects of modernist style can be traced to experimental approaches to rewriting techniques in the work of its main practitioners, and that the "radical excision or extension" behind the published works "actually produce some of the difficulties and stylistic patterns we recognize as modernist" (15, italics in original). She discusses the writing processes behind works by Woolf, Joyce, and James in order to ask how "a text's thematic or formal concerns [are] linked to its genesis" (5). Van Hulle's recent work integrates concepts from the field of cognitive science – in particular, the notion of the "extended mind" – with the study of manuscripts in order to argue that "writers' interaction with their manuscripts as part of the 'extended mind' may inform their methods of evoking fictional minds," and that "a genetically informed reading may contribute to a reassessment of the so-called 'inward turn' of literary modernism" (*MM* 13-16, 244). This blend of genetic criticism and cognitive narratology proceeds in the belief that "the nexus between the mind and the manuscript is a constant process of interaction that helps constitute the mind in the first

place” and thus presents the draft page as a key element in the study of the dialectics of creation (207). Van Hulle’s work is of great use to this study, but his theoretical approach relies upon an assumption of a literary work primarily as the evidence of the development of one individual mind as it moves through the process of creation: little consideration is given to the way in which a text may be the result of competing and sometimes antagonistic agents. In my analysis of *The Pale King*, I explore the work’s compositional history in order to trace the way in which its content is deeply informed by both its author’s and its editor’s working methods, in order to trace what Bryant refers to as the “flow of . . . sometimes synergistic sometimes oppositional creativities” (FT 8).

Van Hulle’s emphasis on the notion of the authorial mind points to the way in which the genetic method is, perhaps, inescapably author-centred in nature. The idea of the work, after all, is still reliant on that of the author: a boundary has to be drawn around the work somewhere, and the author-figure is still needed to connect the canonical text with its ephemera, its “pre-text.” As Jarrod Dunham points out in relation to *The Pale King*, “the acceptance of *this* work for scholarly inquiry seems to rest precisely on the reputation of the author. It requires an understanding of Wallace’s interests and concerns that predates and is independent of the work in question” (n.p.). De Biasi defines genetic documentation as “the whole body of known, classified, and transcribed manuscripts and documents connected with a text whose form has reached, in the opinion of its author, a state of completion or near completion” (31). It is instantly apparent how essential the author-figure is to this definition: the author provides not only the entry point but the warrant for the entire investigation. While the terms of the inquiry attempt to open the text to multiple readings, this is effected only by using the author-figure to delimit the space in which this is possible. Indeed, this recourse to

authorial documents and the attendant reconstruction of authorial intention has led critics such as Jenny and Watts to argue that genetic criticism is in danger of surrendering the critic's "hermeneutical relationship" to literature (24–5) and to question, in Crispi and Slote's paraphrasing, whether it is in fact "a new discipline at all or merely a research tool" (36). While genetic criticism may have derived energy from (and perhaps be animated by similar impulses to) Barthes' push to banish the author from critical consideration – the drive towards fluidity and indeterminacy of meaning, the opening of the text to a "polysemic, free, and fecund Other" (Jenny and Watts 20) – its methods clearly place it elsewhere on the authorial spectrum. Fordham notes the attacks of those who suggest that genetic criticism, in its focus on canonical authors, "feeds the romantic cult of the single autonomous author" (21); Hay admits the importance of the author-figure, stating that the methods of genetic criticism invite fresh consideration of the place of "the writing subject in the study of the literary object" and arguing that in studying literary production, we must be aware of the simple but problematic fact that "the writer is present at the very heart of this process" (24).

This observation, indeed, accords with the insights of a number of scholars who have, in recent decades, critiqued the tendency to take the "death of the author" as an unquestioned *fait accompli*. Sean Burke emphasises the "biographical imperative," contending that any study of a text in relation to its contexts, whether historical or cultural, must acknowledge that "an authorial life and its work allow such a passage to be made": "the author," in his words, "is that one category which clearly overlaps – one might even say conjoins – text and context" and forms an essential part of any attempts to "break up the ideal unity of the work" (195–200). While agreeing with Burke's insistence on the indispensability of the author (and the impossibility of setting aside

authorial intention) I would insist upon the necessity of adding the category of the editor to his formulation: the relationship between text and context is one in which the editor, as the primary mediating force, is also clearly imbricated. My focus on the editor widens the object of genetic study to include not only the author's decisions, hesitations and progressions but also those of the editor, and serves to illustrate the dynamic interplay of the writing as it is contested and negotiated by multiple collaborating (and sometimes competing) agents. This study assumes the truth of McGann's contention that "literary production is not an autonomous and self-reflexive activity; it is a social and institutional event" (*Critique*, 100) and attempts to make this event visible in all of its complexity in order to illustrate the way in which, in McCormack's words, "the creation of a novel takes many works of art, not just one" (54).

1.4 Introducing the Editors

The relative invisibility of the editor in literary production results in a scarcity of synoptic material that takes their work and careers as an object of study. While details about the lives and careers of successful authors – bibliography, biographical data – are, in general, easy to come by, this does not tend to be the case with even the most successful editors, whose career outlines must be pieced together from a variety of sources (Perkins is, in this case, the exception that proves the rule). In the following sections, I provide short outlines of this nature for the two editors at the centre of this study, in order to establish factual clarity and provide context for the subsequent textual analysis.

1.4.1 Gordon Lish

In September 2008, Gary Lutz, author of several collections of short fiction, delivered a lecture entitled “The Sentence is a Lonely Place” to the students of Columbia University’s writing program in which he outlined many of his ideas on composition. Describing his own formative literary experiences, Lutz pointed to his crucial encounters with a number of books (“mostly of fiction, most notably by Barry Hannah, and all of them, I later learned, edited by Gordon Lish”) of which the distinguishing feature was the fact that “virtually every sentence had the force and feel of a climax . . . almost every sentence was a vivid extremity of language, an abruption, a definitive inquietude” (n.p.). He went on to outline a number of practical techniques for producing “richly elliptical prose” at the level of the sentence: examples include “end your sentence with the wham and bang of a stressed syllable,” and “avail yourself of alliteration.” The debt to Gordon Lish was proclaimed at the outset, and the talk – later published as an essay in *The Believer* in 2009 – can be read in part as an attempt to recuperate Lish as the godfather of what Lutz closes by calling “some of today’s most artistically provocative fiction.” Almost all of the writers whose sentences Lutz isolates and analyses as exemplary – Don DeLillo, Sam Lipsyte, Ben Marcus, Christine Schutt, Diane Williams – are to some degree either associates or protégés of Lish. Lutz presents Lish’s “poetics of the sentence” as a crucial element of innovative fiction and places the editor in an eminent position within a lineage of writing that pays rigorous attention to the sonic and typographical possibilities of language. “Gordon Lish’s poetics,” he proclaims, “forever changed the way I look at sentences” (n.p.).

“The Sentence is a Lonely Place” argues for the importance of Lish’s involvement in a substantial body of successful literary production and serves as a useful starting point

from which to consider his editorial activities. Indeed, a brief outline of Lish's career path will emphasise the sheer extent of his literary connections, particularly towards the close of the previous century. During the course of his career, most notably during the years of his employment as fiction editor at *Esquire* (1969-1976), Knopf (1977-1995) and *The Quarterly* (1987-1995), Lish edited and corresponded with many of America's foremost literary figures. Lish's archives at the University of Indiana show correspondence with (and often, edited manuscripts of work by) the likes of Saul Bellow, Denis Johnson, Joyce Carol Oates, Cynthia Ozick, Harold Bloom, Denis Donoghue, Philip Roth and John Updike, among many others. His correspondence with Don DeLillo, for example, spans 11 folders and dates from 1972 to 2012, tracing four decades of friendship that began with the publication of DeLillo's story "In the Men's Room of the Sixteenth Century" in *Esquire* in 1971 (the story would later be collected in the Lish-edited anthology *The Secret Life Of Our Times* (1973)). DeLillo declined to be edited further by Lish,³⁶ but struck up a lasting friendship with the editor, however: he later dedicated *The Names* to Lish's son Atticus, whose childhood writings inspired parts of the novel (and who has recently published an acclaimed debut novel, 2014's PEN/Faulkner Award-winning *Preparation for the Next Life*), and he subsequently dedicated *Mao II* to Lish.³⁷ Lish made DeLillo the subject of the dedication for several of his books of fiction (*Mourner at the Door*, *My Romance* and

³⁶ In 1972, Lish attempted to excerpt a section from DeLillo's "Great Jones Street" but the author withdrew from the arrangement, noting his discomfort in removing a section from a longer work: "for me this kind of re-channelling would be an ecological disaster" (14 Sep 1972).

³⁷ *Vanity Fair* ran a profile of Lish and DeLillo together in its June 1991 issue, which described their friendship and compares their fiction; the author notes that the character of New York editor Charlie Everson in DeLillo's *Mao II* bears some similarity to Lish (Wolcott 30).

Epigraph).³⁸ Lish's tenure at *Esquire* was marked by the steady publication of unusual and experimental fiction, and when he became an editor at Knopf his influence grew wider. As the editor who had been responsible for bringing writers such as Raymond Carver, Barry Hannah and Mary Robison to national attention, he was able to wield considerable influence, such that in 1986 Sven Birkerts could describe him as being "at the epicenter of literary publishing" (AW 252).

At Knopf, Lish was responsible for publishing much of the fiction that emerged from the continually-growing number of graduate writing workshop classrooms in the U.S.; some of these, indeed (as I will discuss towards the end of my chapter on Carver), were the classrooms in which he himself was teaching. The editor, during these years, could be said to have successfully straddled the two worlds of "MFA" and "NYC" that have recently been proposed as the primary power centres and material support networks of U.S. fiction by Chad Harbach (9–28). McGurl devotes a brief section of his chapter on the Minimalist phenomenon to a consideration of Lish as a figure in whom the Program Era's increasing movement towards a model of systemic creativity can be traced. He focuses on Lish's work writing educational textbooks in the mid-60s in order to model a parallel between the ideas of "programmed education" then coming to the fore and the Minimalist internalisation of a dialectic of shame and pride that subjects individual creativity to a disciplinary process resulting in the "autopoetic processing of experience as creative writing" (PE 286–293). McGurl does not, however, explore the details of Lish's editing and teaching work: this study adds empirical evidence of these

³⁸ It appears that *My Romance*, in fact, owes its publication partly to DeLillo; according to editor Gerry Howard, the author had approached him in 1991 to suggest he edit Lish's novel and publish it at Norton (n.p.).

activities in order to contextualise Lish's involvement in the production of Carver's early stories.

During the latter part of his tenure at Knopf Lish also edited *The Quarterly*, a journal which served, as Carla Blumenkranz notes, as "the publishing arm of [his] fiction program" (219-220) and the freedom he was given in assembling this allowed him to publish a large number of new and/or relatively unknown writers over the course of its 31 issues including Lydia Davis, Amy Hempel and Ben Marcus. During these years Lish was not only editing and teaching, but also writing his own fiction. He was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship for fiction in 1984, and in the same year one of his own stories (a Salinger parody entitled "For Jeromé - with Love and Kisses") was included in the O. Henry Prize collection. He has continued to write and publish, and much of his short work is assembled in the 2010 *Collected Fictions*. Lish's archives have resided at the Lilly Library since 1991, but scholarly work based on these papers has been slow to appear; indeed, analysis of Lish's work has thus far been confined to short investigations and brief digressions in studies of Carver and 1970s publishing. In Chapter 2 I draw on these studies, as well as on draft material from the Lish archive, in order to explore his editorial role in Carver's work as well as to consider the ways in which his ideas have influenced the development of other writers.

1.4.2 Michael Pietsch

Pietsch's career path has taken him from being an editor at Scribner's (1979-85), Harmony (1985-91), and Little, Brown (1991-2001) to being a publisher/editor (Little, Brown, 2001-2012), and finally to the role of chief executive of the Hachette Book Group (2012-present) (Mahler, "Hachette Chief" n.p.). Some of the more notable successes in

which he has been involved are *The Tipping Point* by Malcolm Gladwell (2000), Keith Richards' memoir *Life* (2010) and the recent Pulitzer Prize-winning *The Goldfinch* by Donna Tartt (2014) (Mahler, "Hachette Chief" n.p.). In a November 2014 piece written for *Distinction* (a local lifestyle magazine based in Tidewater, Virginia) Pietsch describes his entry into the editing profession and expands upon the demands of the editor's job:

My first job in publishing was as a dogsbody at a small firm in Boston. The job was full days of photocopying and typing, and it came with a fringe benefit: manuscripts to read at night, as many as I cared to carry home. I quickly learned that editing is two jobs in one. There's the full-time office job of supporting, communicating, researching – all the work of getting manuscripts turned into books. And there's the nights-and-weekends job of reading manuscripts to find the ones you might want to publish, and editing the ones you've been fortunate enough to persuade the company to acquire. ("Norfolk Made Me" n.p.)

He goes on to recount his youthful infatuation with fiction and poetry (Eliot, Chaucer) and his admission to Harvard in 1974, before describing his current role as CEO of Hachette: "My job is to lead the company forward, overseeing its many divisions, finding ever-new ways to help writers find their readers, and ensuring that we make a good profit in doing so." He proffers brief comments on several of his favourite editing projects including Rick Moody's *The Ice Storm* (1994), Mark Leyner's *My Cousin, My Gastroenterologist* (1990) and Alice Sebold's *The Lovely Bones* (2002); he describes his work on *Infinite Jest* as "a highlight of my life" and notes that "In the past year I've edited James Patterson's new thriller *Hope To Die* and *The David Foster Wallace Reader*."

The obvious discrepancy here – between the production-line commercial fiction exemplified by Patterson and the ambitious postmodern literary novel of which *Infinite Jest* has come to be a prime exemplar – illustrates the variety of literary work in which Pietsch has been involved over the course of his career. The editor has, unlike Lish, continued to balance highbrow literary projects with more nakedly commercial

endeavours and has (rather than imposing a Lish-style aesthetic on disparate texts) displayed an obvious flexibility in his willingness to adapt his working methods to the aims of the individual author. A 2010 *New York Times* profile of Patterson, for example, described a production meeting in which Pietsch and the author discussed possible marketing slogans. The profile's author points out that the publishing house's treatment of its highest-selling author has evolved as a matter of commercial necessity, noting that Patterson's enormous commercial success since the 1990s "encouraged Little, Brown to fully embrace mass-market fiction" and that Patterson's single-minded, market-driven approach to literary production has resulted in the development of an editing process that is unusual in the book world.³⁹ Patterson, in fact, uses co-authors for almost all of his books (he has five regular co-authors, whom he himself pays), writing detailed outlines on the basis of which chapters are then drafted and returned for him to read; a recent *Vanity Fair* profile described him as "the Henry Ford of Books" (Purdum n.p.). Pietsch defends this process, saying: "Duke Ellington said, 'I need an orchestra, otherwise I wouldn't know how my music sounds' . . . Jim created a process and a team that can help him hear how his music sounds" (Mahler, "James Patterson Inc." n.p.). This type of production-line process is of course more unusual in the production of literary fiction and, as we shall see, differs dramatically from the one behind Wallace's books. However, Pietsch's involvement in the process indicates his flexible approach to working methods and his undogmatic approach to questions of literary aesthetics as well as his clear ability to combine commercial imperatives and the demands of textual editing within the same role.

³⁹ The story claimed that "since 2006, Patterson has written one out of every 17 hardcover novels bought in the United States."

This ability, indeed, has come to the fore since his assumption of the role of Chief Executive Officer of Hachette Book Group in 2012. The corporation's website notes that "as CEO he continues to edit, including books by James Patterson, Stacy Schiff, and Donna Tartt's Pulitzer Prize winning bestseller, *The Goldfinch*." Indeed, Pietsch came to international attention in 2014 for his role as Hachette's representative in the months-long dispute arising from negotiations with Amazon over e-book prices. In a report on the dispute in June 2014, Mahler noted that "it is unusual for a lifelong editor to become C.E.O. of his own publishing company," and attributed this to Pietsch's "reputation as both a man of letters and a shrewd deal maker" ("Hachette Chief" n.p.). The dispute came to an end in November of 2014, with *The Financial Times*, in its report, quoting Pietsch as claiming that the new agreement "marks a return to the 'agency model' of pricing," under which publishers set prices for books and retailers take a 30 per cent commission (Bond n.p.).⁴⁰ The episode, according to one critic, made Pietsch "something of a hero to many in the literary community," although the recent disagreements between Amazon and Penguin Random House suggest that the dispute may be a precursor to further industry battles (Macallen n.p.; Rankin n.p.).

Pietsch's work with Wallace has undoubtedly helped to secure his reputation as one of the foremost editors of ambitious fiction. This can be seen from the eagerness with which Chad Harbach entered a working relationship with Pietsch and Little, Brown in order to develop his novel *The Art of Fielding*, published in 2011; the author was willing

⁴⁰ According to the New York Times, "the multiyear agreement, which includes both e-books and print books," gives Hachette control over most of its pricing but offers "incentives to sell at lower prices" (Streitfeld n.p.); *The Financial Times* reported that "Mr. Pietsch wrote to his authors that agency pricing 'protects the value of our authors' content, while allowing the publisher to change ebook prices dynamically to maximise sales'" (Bond n.p.).

to accept a lower advance in exchange for the opportunity to work with the editor of *Infinite Jest* (Boroff n.p.; Gessen 538)⁴¹. Again, a precedent for this editorial prestige can be seen in Perkins' career: Berg's biography of the editor claims that after Hemingway left his publisher Boni & Liveright in 1925, he approached the editor at Scribners directly and ignored other publishers out of loyalty, Fitzgerald's recommendation and "the impression he had formed of Perkins through his letters" (Berg 87).

It should also be noted that Pietsch (as previously mentioned) has one prior experience of posthumously editing the drafts of a successful author. His editing of a lengthy Hemingway manuscript into *The Dangerous Summer* for Scribner's in 1985 merits a brief examination for the way in which it highlights some of the difficulties involved in presenting Wallace's unfinished work. Pietsch was, at this point, "not yet 30 years old," and was described as "a tyro editor" by Charles Scribner Jr (Gessen 458). The textual situation surrounding the manuscript given to Pietsch was complex enough that his work upon it was, of necessity, an act of lasting creative mediation: indeed, Miriam B. Mandel's study of the work, *Hemingway's The Dangerous Summer: the Complete Annotations* (2008) highlights the enduring nature of many posthumous editorial contributions with its observation that "today, when we speak of *The Dangerous Summer*, we generally mean this 1985 book, edited by Pietsch" (67). The work, a description of Hemingway's

⁴¹ The book is one of the more celebrated case studies of recent publishing history, in fact, due to the bidding war that preceded its publication. Harbach's friend Keith Gessen wrote a *Vanity Fair* article about the making of the book that was subsequently turned into a short e-book, *Vanity Fair's How a Book is Born: The Making of The Art of Fielding* (2011), published simultaneously with the novel. Gessen details the negotiations as follows:

Another difficult decision had to be made. The money difference was far from trivial; on the other hand, Michael Pietsch (the publisher of Little, Brown) said that he himself would edit the book. This clinched it. Chad and Chris (Parris-Lamb, his agent) would leave \$85,000 on the table for the opportunity to work with the editor of David Foster Wallace. That editor had also, of course, put up \$665,000. It was the biggest fiction auction in recent memory; it was especially eloquent after the darkness of 2009, when publishers had had to lay off staff (450).

travels in Spain intended as an assignment for *Life* magazine, had grown far beyond the length requested for the story and, while excerpted and published over three issues, was never published in book form during the author's lifetime. The text that Hemingway left behind was, in the words of William Kennedy's review, "a manuscript with elephantiasis" (n.p.); Mandel writes that the text as published by Scribner's is "a very complicated hybrid," since "its words were written by Hemingway, but its content and shape were largely determined by other hands" (68). Pietsch was given the manuscript by Charles A. Scribner Jr and subsequently edited the manuscript into a novella-length publication, removing many of the more detailed descriptions of bullfighting (W. Kennedy n.p.). Mandel ventures some criticism on the result, noting that "Scribner's was not necessarily bound to the *Life* publication, and it is difficult to understand why they omitted so much material from the 1985 book version; she also argues that "the structure of the book" is "affected by editorial intervention" (75). The publisher's note to *The Dangerous Summer* admits that "around 20,000 words have been cut, and it may come as a disappointment to Hemingway admirers that these cuts have been made," but expresses the hope that "respect has been paid to his intentions": it does not, however, indicate where these cuts and changes have been made, and is thus, like *The Pale King*, a reader's edition rather than a scholarly one (Hemingway, *Dangerous Summer* ix-x). Pietsch, according to Charles A. Scribner Jr, did "a wonderful job": Kennedy, reviewing the book in 1985, concurred with this, but alluded to the attribution issues involved, musing: "whose wonderfulness is it?" (W. Kennedy n.p.). The complex assembly of *The Pale King*, as we shall see, raises similar questions.

CHAPTER 2

“It is His World and No Other”: Editing Carver

2.1 Introduction: “We’re not going to become Gordon Lish and Raymond Carver here.”

In 2012, the *New York Times* published a humour piece by Colson Whitehead entitled “How to Write.” The list of rules included one that advised aspiring writers to “be concise” and referred to “the famous author-editor interaction between Gordon Lish and Ray Carver.” Whitehead describes how, “with a few deft strokes,” Lish pared down the ending of a (fictitious) story about a shark attack “to create the now legendary ending: ‘Help – land shark!’,” commenting dryly that this “wasn’t what Carver intended, but few could argue that it was not shorter” (n.p.).⁴² Another short sketch published in *McSweeney’s* later the same year imagined Raymond Carver’s dating profile as edited by Lish, with predictably terse results (Chen).⁴³ And in a recent interview, writer Vivian

⁴² The supposed “original ending” parodies the way in which many of Carver’s endings contain a note of sentiment: “In the original last lines of the story, Nat, the salty old part-time insurance agent, reassures his young charge as they cling to the beer cooler: ‘We’ll get help when we hit land. I’m sure of it. No more big waves, no more sharks. We’ll be safe once again. We’ll be home.’”

⁴³ The profile mimicked the formatting of *The New Yorker’s* presentation of the unedited “Beginners” in 2009:

~~I hate to kick a dead horse here, but I’m really good at writing. . . My first collection of short stories *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?* Was shortlisted for the National Book Award and sort of revitalized the short fiction form. John Updike selected one of my stories for inclusion in *The Best American Short Stories of the Century*; Robert Altman made a sprawling film out of my stories; writing professors all across the country solemnly mention me as a kind of blue-collar American Camus; so, I’m not saying I’m really good at writing, just noting some examples of how others seem to feel this way.~~

Gornick reminisced to Jonathan Lethem about the process of working with *Paris Review* editor Lorin Stein, recalling Stein's extensive rearrangement of the material and her own frustration with the process: "at one point I said to him, *We're not going to become Gordon Lish and Raymond Carver here.*" (n.p., italics in original).

These examples suggest that Gordon Lish's editing of Raymond Carver has, in the past decade or so, gone from being an obscure literary fact to a readily available archetype of editorial interference. Among admirers of both men's work, this has been a cause of frustration. Douglas Glover, who has argued for the value of Lish's own fiction on several occasions, refers disparagingly to "the Lish-Carver debate circus" and its tendency to preclude any broader assessment of Lish's work (Lucarelli n.p.). For the most part, however, Lish's own advocates have accepted his by-now-inextricable link to Carver's stories. The publicity material for his 2010 *Collected Fictions* begins by noting that Lish "shaped the work of many of the country's foremost writers" (it mentions Carver by name) and the book's blurb from his friend Don DeLillo leads with an admission of the author's infamy: "Gordon Lish, famous for all the wrong reasons, has written some of the most fascinating American fiction of the last ten years." For the publication of Lish's collection *Goings* (2014) his publisher OR Books created a Lish "twitterbot," a (supposedly) algorithm-driven Twitter account dispensing merciless 140-character snippets of editorial advice: while it did not mention Carver by name, the marketing strategy clearly played (as *Electric Literature* noted) upon Lish's reputation for ruthless editing (Sharrow-Reabe n.p.).⁴⁴ In the wider literary imagination, then, it is understood

⁴⁴ The twitter account, which appears only to have been active during January and February of 2014, goes by the name "gordonlishbot." Writers were invited to tweet at the account with their own sentences (using the hashtag #attacksentence); these would invariably meet with a withering assessment.

that the work produced by Carver and Lish's interaction is too significant to be dismissed: Lish represents, at the very least, a significant footnote to any assessment of Carver's career, while Carver threatens to dominate any conversation on Lish's achievements.

The work itself, though, is arguably obscured in this "circus." While Carver's *Beginners* (the unedited version of the 1981 collection *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*) occasioned a large amount of journalistic interest upon its publication in 2009 and allowed readers to examine the difference between its stories and those in *WWTA* for themselves, there has been relatively little academic study of the difference between the texts. In 2006, the editors of *Beginners* (and long-time Carver scholars) Stull and Carroll declared that the discovery of the extent of Lish's editing meant that the questions that must concern future Carver studies are epistemological in nature:

Who was Raymond Carver and what did he write? To what degree do the stories attributed to him represent his original writing, his editor's alterations for publication purposes, or Carver's unconstrained intentions with respect to stories published in multiple versions? ("Prolegomena" 2-3)

The answers to these questions clearly involve a significant amount of genetic critical work: such answers have, though, been slow in coming. The extent to which terms like "minimalism" and "Dirty Realism" are intertwined with Carver's early work; the extent to which Lish's editing of Carver's early stories represented a departure from the author's own aesthetic; the way in which this editing reveals Lish's own aims and editing techniques and suggests a much wider pattern of literary influence traceable through him: all of these are rich subjects of study, and all remain under-explored. This may be partly due to reasons of literary fashion – Minimalism has receded as a term of widespread critical currency, and critics no longer rush to define and measure it as they did throughout the final decades of the previous century. Limitations on textual

availability may also play a part in this absence: the stories in Carver's first collection *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?* (1976, hereafter referred to as *WYPBQP*) have not yet been published in unedited form, due perhaps to the greater complexity of their textual states and the less controversial circumstances of their publication. Any attempt at tracing the development of Lish's interactions with Carver is thus incomplete without considering the manuscript versions of these stories as well as the correspondence between the pair. This chapter uses a genetic perspective to address these critical deficits in the light of the ongoing difficulties (identified by Stone and Thompson) of considering questions of co-authorship and literary collaboration within existing literary-critical frameworks (11–12).

2.1.1 The Carver Controversy: the Scholarly History

In the decade following Carver's death in 1988, his editing relationship with Lish was neither widely understood nor meaningfully debated. While Carver mentioned Lish by name in several interviews during the 1980s, the editor's contribution to his writing had not generally been deemed to be of enough importance to demand specific critical focus. The first mention of the details of their working relationship appears to have come in Carol Polsgrove's industry-memoir *It Wasn't Pretty, Folks, but Didn't We Have Fun? Esquire in the Sixties* (1995). Polsgrove examined the manuscripts of Carver's work among the papers that Lish had donated to the Lilly Library at the University of Indiana (where she was at that time teaching journalism) and noted not only the fact that Lish was "an aggressive editor" but that he had cut Carver's story "Neighbors" heavily, influencing its "dry, minimalist feel" (241). These observations constituted a brief digression within her book, though, and were not widely reported. A student at Indiana University, Laura Heather Heath, drew on the same archival evidence during the following years to write

an MA thesis entitled "Carving Raymond Carver: How an *Esquire* Editor Influenced the Minimalist Movement," in 1998. Maryann Burk Carver's memoir of her marriage, *What It Used To Be Like* (2006), also mentions Lish's contributions, albeit without adding much detail. The public controversy would only begin with the publication of D.T. Max's *New York Times* article "The Carver Chronicles" in August 1998. Following up on rumours circulating persistently in literary circles, Max examined the same manuscripts, and his verdict on the extent of Lish's editing was unambiguous as he concluded "for better or worse, Lish was in there." He suggested that while many of Lish's changes were "for the better" others seemed "bullying and competitive"; he interviewed Lish, who spoke of his sense of Carver's "betrayal"; he argued that Lish "changed some of the stories so much that they were more his than Carver's," and suggested that the author's relationship with Lish could be seen as an apprenticeship that the author ultimately transcended (n.p.). In a *New York Review of Books* essay published a year later entitled "Looking for Raymond Carver," A.O. Scott took up the discussion, suggesting that the editor's "violations" had done "lasting damage" to the author's reputation; Lish's edits, he said, tending as they did to put a greater distance between the reader and the characters, were "entirely alien to Carver's sensibility" and showed a failure to recognise "the ethical commitments that are the deepest source of his [Carver's] work" ("Looking for Raymond Carver" n.p.).

Scholars began cautiously to integrate these findings into Carver criticism. In his 2002 article "Reconsidering Raymond Carver's 'Development': The Revisions of 'So Much Water so Close to Home'," Leypoldt rejected Scott's division of Carver's literary persona into "authors strikingly different in voice, manner, and attitude" and argued against what he described as the presentation of an author who "was coerced into the minimalist fallacy by his unsympathetic editor" (Scott, "Looking for Raymond Carver" n.p.; Leypoldt,

“Reconsidering” 318). He suggested that the differences between that story’s published versions are ones of degree rather than kind, arguing against a simplistic division between the “poetics of minimalism” and a “more realist sensibility” and suggesting that “The Bath”/“A Small, Good Thing” is the only case in which such a division is possible.⁴⁵ Leyboldt’s case is surely undermined, though, by his dismissal of the extent of Lish’s influence. He stated:

I see but little use in the attempt to separate Carver from the type of influences to which authors tend to be exposed. At any rate, the quest for the ‘real’ Carver behind Lish’s dominance resonates with an undertheorized, romantic notion of authorship that does not contribute much to our understanding of Carver’s versatile fiction. (318 n2)

Leyboldt’s note of caution against romantic notions of individual authorship is valid. However, the subsequent revelations about Carver’s reluctance to publish some of the Lish-edited stories, as well as the formidable evidence of textual difference between *Beginners* and *WETA*, show that the “versatility” he mentions is highly problematic and that the editor’s role cannot be so easily minimised.⁴⁶

Two other monographs on Carver’s work, Arthur F. Bethea’s *Technique and Sensibility in the Fiction and Poetry of Raymond Carver* (2001) and G.P. Lainsbury’s *The Carver Chronotope* (2004), appeared during the following years. Both mentioned the editing controversy, but in each case Lish’s editing of Carver was a tangent to the main discussion of the author’s work. Both critics largely avoided extensive engagement with editing issues while acknowledging the importance of these issues to Carver’s writing.

⁴⁵ Leyboldt compares the version of the story that appeared in *WETA* (and was cut by Lish by 70%) to the longer version that later appeared in *Fires* (1983) and was collected in *Where I’m Calling From* (1988). The story had also appeared in two magazine printings during the 1970s and been collected in *Furious Seasons* in 1977; its full publication history is detailed by Stull and Carroll (*CS* 1001).

⁴⁶ It also ignores, as we shall see, the similarities in the works of so many of the authors who were “exposed” to Lish’s influence.

Bethea wrote that “Lish was undeniably indispensable in creating what is unique about [WETA]” but proceeded in the main to “disregard Lish’s connection to the omissions” that his editing created (*Technique and Sensibility* 87–88). Lainsbury discussed the controversy only in passing but asserted that “it is now the established opinion that Lish’s editorial tampering with Carver’s work constitutes an integral part of Carver’s writerly narrative of recovery and self-assertion rather than some sort of critical indictment” (146).

More extensive comparative work began to appear as the decade progressed. In the first issue of the *Raymond Carver Review* (Winter 2007) Enrico Monti gave a useful overview of the controversy as well as analysing (again, with reference to the Lilly manuscripts) some of the specific techniques – such as textual cutting, syntactical changes, lexical changes, and alteration of endings – displayed in Lish’s editing. Michael Hemmingson also examined the Lish/Carver manuscripts as well as expanding his analysis to focus on the comparable work the editor did on Barry Hannah’s fiction in the late 1970s.⁴⁷ He argued that while Lish “went beyond the normal scope of the editor’s job,” his interventions were crucial in securing the work of both writers in “the canon of American literature.” Lish, he suggested, was not just an editor but “a silent cowriter” and “perhaps the ‘man behind the curtain’ of later twentieth-century American minimalism” (“Saying More” 483–495).

The discussion widened – and took a crucial step forwards – in late 2007. In October, a report in the *New York Times* revealed Tess Gallagher’s attempts to publish

⁴⁷ Hemmingson’s essay was not published until 2011 but, as he explains, the piece is based on a study of the manuscripts in March 2008, before the publication of *Beginners*; hence, my chronological placement of it in this discussion.

the manuscript version of *WWTA* in the face of resistance from Knopf. In December, *The New Yorker* published a transcript of the manuscript version of the volume's title story (originally titled "Beginners") allowing readers to see the specific changes that Lish had made as well as excerpts from the correspondence between author and editor that showed the extent of Carver's dissatisfaction and reluctance to publish. Readers were finally provided, here, with empirical evidence for Lish's influence on Carver's early fiction. This process culminated in 2009, when *Beginners* was finally published as part of the Library of America edition of Carver's *Collected Stories* in the U.S. and as a standalone volume by Jonathan Cape in the UK.⁴⁸ *Beginners*, as is clear from even a cursory reading, differs frequently and at times dramatically from *WWTA*: in quantitative terms, to begin with, its length is roughly double. Both the *Collected Stories* and the Jonathan Cape version of "Beginners" contain paratextual information on the details of the changes made to the manuscripts. In a "Notes" section at the rear of the book, Stull and Carroll detail the volume of cuts in percentage terms for each story, and the figures alone give an insight into their drastic nature; eight of the seventeen stories were cut by fifty percent or more, fifteen were cut by twenty-five percent or more, and two stories – "Where is Everyone?" and "A Small, Good Thing" – were cut by seventy-eight percent (CS 998-1004).

⁴⁸ In September 2015, Vintage Books publishes the first standalone U.S. print edition of *Beginners* along with a digital edition of the collection. This had not appeared previously, partly due to its involvement in ongoing negotiations over the digital rights to Carver's work; after a recent agreement between Gallagher and the publishers, the bulk of the author's backlist was published digitally for the first time in May 2015 (Alter n.p.). The publication of the 2015 edition of *Beginners* comes too late for me to discuss the additional elements – the textual presentation and accompanying paratextual material, for example – that might be relevant to this study.

Stull and Carroll's notes also contain indispensable bibliographical information on the complicated textual history of the stories, many of which appeared multiple times – with minor textual variations and sometimes with different titles – in various magazines and literary journals both before and after the publication of *WWTA*. The additional information in the *Collected Stories* is considerably greater than in the UK version, with a detailed chronology of Carver's career as well as a "Note on the Texts" incorporating what is essentially an explanatory essay on Lish's involvement with Carver's work as well as a reproduction of a lengthy 1980 letter from Carver objecting to the editor's changes to the manuscript of *WWTA*. Stull and Carroll's work is an essential scholarly resource: it is worth noting, though, that their analysis of Lish's editing work goes into relatively little detail when it comes both to the changes made to the stories in *WYPBQP* and the intermediate stage of editing in the case of *WWTA* – that is, Lish's first edit of the manuscript, which Carver was apparently more willing to accept and to which he responded with specific objections. This chapter, as well as containing a comparative analysis of *Beginners* and *WWTA*, will refer to the Lilly manuscripts in an attempt to fill the aforementioned gaps.

2009 also saw the publication of the first comprehensive biography of Carver, Carol Sklenicka's *Raymond Carver: A Writer's Life*.⁴⁹ While Sklenicka's book contains notable omissions (Gallagher refused to be interviewed for the book, as did Carver's friend Richard Ford, who nevertheless allowed excerpts from his letters to be used), it is a work of extensive scholarship (running to almost 500 pages and drawing on a decade of

⁴⁹ Other less orthodox biographical projects published before this include Sam Halpert's *Raymond Carver: An Oral Biography* (1995), Stull & Carroll's *Remembering Ray: A Composite Biography of Raymond Carver* (1993, Eds), and Maryann Burk Carver's *What It Used to Be Like: A Portrait of My Marriage to Raymond Carver* (2006).

research) containing numerous references to the author's editing processes. The book contains quotes from interviews Sklenicka conducted with Lish (revealing the editor's continuing frustration with the lack of acknowledgement for what he deemed to have been a series of creative acts) and describes his contributions to Carver's work, often in detail. It discusses Lish's early friendship with Carver as well as the way in which their working relationship developed, and goes on to examine the circumstances surrounding the editing disagreements and subsequent falling-out that occurred during and after the publication process of *WWTA*.

The appearance of *Beginners* and Sklenicka's biography almost simultaneously (Carver's *Collected Stories* was published in August 2009 while his biography and the UK edition of *Beginners* appeared in November of the same year) occasioned a great deal of coverage and comment from magazines, newspapers and bloggers. Critics frequently took the opportunity to engage in a retrospective overview of Carver's life and career and were often divided on the ethics and value of Lish's edits; while some, like Stephen King, were scathing of his influence on Carver's work (he notes that "Lish's changes were wide and deep" and refers to the editor's "baleful" influence on *WWTA* (n.p.)), others (for example, Giles Harvey and Tim Martin in the *New York Review of Books* and the *Daily Telegraph* respectively) argued that his interventions had improved the stories. Critics were led inevitably to ask which of the textual versions (to borrow terms used by Eggert in his discussion of Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*) "had the higher authority," the "authorized" text represented by *Beginners* or the "socialised" one incarnated in *WWTA* (*Securing* 192). These responses are far too numerous to list individually here. I will instead refer to many of these throughout my comparative discussion of the stories in

order to illuminate the close textual analysis and explore the ways in which *Beginners* has demanded a widespread rethinking of our understanding of Carver's work.

2.1.2 "Spare, austere, stately": the Beginnings of Carver and Lish's Collaboration

Carver and Lish's first meeting took place in the summer of 1968, shortly after the author's thirtieth birthday. He was introduced to Lish, who was four years older, by their mutual friend Curt Johnson who, as editor of *December* magazine, had just published Carver's "Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?" (Sklenicka 147). The two men struck up an instant rapport, and according to Maryann Carver's recollection, the question of editing was immediately raised:

Lish told Ray he had read "Will You Please Be Quite, Please?" He "raved about the story. He was high on it," Maryann recounted. Then Lish told the others that if he had been editing the story, Ralph Wyman wouldn't have stayed with his wife. If he'd written it, Lish told them, the story would have had a different ending. "And I just looked him right in the eye," Maryann said, "and answered, 'Well, that's just the point, Gordon. It isn't your story. You didn't write it.'" (Burk Carver 214)

This is a memory recalled at some distance, of course, and one that could be coloured by what came afterwards (as we shall see, Lish would later rewrite the ending of this very story). It is believable, though, when one takes into account Lish's well-known confidence and brashness of manner (he was by that stage already an experienced editor, having edited the journal *Genesis West* throughout the 1960s) and it chimes with the urgent spirit of literary exchange visible in the men's correspondence during the subsequent years. The friendship between the two did not develop until the following year, after the Carver family's ill-fated trip to Israel had led to a period of restless travel. When Carver returned to his job at Science Research Associates in Palo Alto, though (where he had rented a room in order to write in isolation from his family on weeknights), the pair began to meet regularly and exchange ideas and plans; one of these was to be a co-

published magazine called *Journal of American Fiction* (Sklenicka 147–178). They were united in their admiration for Leonard Gardner’s boxing novel *Fat City*, and when Carver needed a photograph for a 1969 story anthology, Lish lent the writer a work-shirt like the one in Gardner’s author photo and used his Polaroid to shoot him (the image is reproduced by Sklenicka). When the anthology was published, Carver would refer in a letter to Lish to the photograph in which “you immortalized me in your ole denim work shirt” (Sklenicka 175; Carver, 23 Feb 1970). The photograph serves as compelling evidence that Lish was, from the early days of their friendship, working as a kind of co-creator of Carver’s literary image, in a very literal sense; the author not only poses for the editor here in a carefully staged photo, but also wears his editor’s clothes.



Figure 1: Photo of Raymond Carver taken by Gordon Lish, 1969

Indeed, a letter from the following year perhaps suggests Lish's developing conception of how the author could be presented to the world. In July 1971, Lish wrote an extravagant letter of recommendation to James Hall, the Provost at the University of California, Santa Cruz, where Carver was evidently applying for a position teaching poetry. Lish wrote that "the bulk of Ray's poems and stories are spare, austere, stately" and went on to say:

But my guess is that Ray is by disposition a poet first and finally. He values the well-made thing, the ellipsis, and a shape of decisive beginning and end. He is indeed a carver, onomatologic notion intended. I therefore suppose Ray's more ambitious achievement will be in poetry—and since his concern for his art is so intense, there's every reason to suppose he'll make a most able and inspiring teacher for those who are similarly committed. (08 July 1971)

Lish's valorisation of Carver's poetry seems almost disingenuous here, and is perhaps little more than a favour for a friend: the two rarely appear to have discussed poetry in their correspondence, and Lish seems to have had very little input into the author's poetic output. However, the letter provides an early example of the way in which Lish framed his advocacy of Carver, and the similarities between the language used here – "spare," "austere," "ellipsis" – and the terms that would later become critical commonplaces in relation to Carver's work are noteworthy. The letter gives a hint of the way in which Carver's image would develop in subsequent years, and also shows how his name itself contributed conveniently to this image as a ruthless "carver" of prose: we can surmise that when Wallace punned on Carver's name in the draft of his debut novel (as mentioned in my Prologue), he was playing on the same "onomatologic notion."

Lish soon left California in frustration at his textbook-editing job, and within months was installed as fiction editor at *Esquire* (Sklenicka 175–177). Carver responded to this by writing that he was "floored, overwhelmed by the news" and, apparently responding to Lish's request, added that he did have "a few stories on hand, and I'm

sending them along within the next day or two" (12 Nov 1969). Correspondence from the following month shows that he was already accepting Lish's advice on his fiction as well as reassuring his friend that such advice was welcome: "Is all right, don't worry. No question but that I will incorporate some of yr suggested changes. Everything considered, it's a better story now than when I first mailed it your way – which is the most important thing, I'm sure" (04 Dec 1969). It is not clear what story is referred to here, but another letter from the same month thanks Lish for his "intelligent observations" on "Friendship," which has now become "a much better story" after revision (n.d. Dec 1969). This story would later be published in *WWTA* (following further edits by Lish) as "Tell the Women We're Going." It is clear, then, that the editing relationship between the pair had deep roots: Lish was, in December 1969, already helping to shape a story that would not appear in book form for another twelve years. This suggests that any account of Lish's influence on the stories in *WWTA* needs to look beyond the edits he made in 1980 and acknowledge a longer and more complicated sequence of genetic development. It also highlights the need to go beyond the study of that particular volume and recognise Lish's editing of Carver as a long-term project.

Lish's contributions to Carver's early stories, after all, suggest the development of both of their respective aesthetics during what were important years for both men. During these years Carver began to publish his stories regularly while Lish moved with rapid success into the world of literary publishing and, as I will make clear, these two processes were at times closely related. These contributions have been noted by some critics, but remain relatively unexplored. No individual study has been devoted to them, and analysis of the changes in the early stories tends to be found only in digressions within longer studies (by Sklenicka, Max, and Polsgrove, for example). As well as

providing useful background to the later controversy, a study of the way in which Carver accepted Lish's changes to his early stories allows us to view some of the continuities in these contributions and also suggests that these were part of a larger project of literary activity and influence in which Lish was engaged throughout these years.

These contributions are ostensibly less problematic for questions of authorship than those Lish made to *WWTA*, as Carver did not object to them: on the contrary, he welcomed them, often with extreme gratitude. During the years between their early correspondence in 1969 and the publication of *WYPBQP* in March 1976 Lish not only gave advice on individual stories but began to act as a sort of unofficial agent for Carver. He submitted the writer's stories not only to his bosses but also to others within the publishing world, such as editorial staff at the magazines whose offices were located in the same building as his own.⁵⁰ Throughout this time, Carver would regularly submit stories to Lish, and these would be returned with the editor's textual deletions, additions and rearrangements. Carver would often incorporate these changes into the next draft of the story. Only in some of these cases was Lish acting in an official capacity as editor: in practice, though, he often fulfilled many of the same functions of the role, as the men's correspondence would subject the story to the processes of revision and rewriting.

⁵⁰ In one letter, Carver wrote "am sending FAT and hope someone likes it at *Cosmo* or *Mademoiselle*, if you still feel like showing it to the eds at those places"; Burk Carver recalls that Lish helped to place stories in *Harper's* and *Playgirl* (Carver n.d. 1970; Burk Carver 240–241).

2.2 “The Dark of the American Heart”: Editing

Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?

2.2.1 “My only fear is that it is too thin”: the Development of “Neighbors”

In August 1970, Carver sent Lish a copy of a piece that would later become the first story in *WYPBQP*:

Am sending back a copy of “Are You A Doctor?”—tho you may be weary of it by now, and also a copy of a story called “The Neighbors”—maybe a weak title, maybe a weak story. Let me know if you still see possibilities in the one and/or possibilities in the other. (20 Aug 1970)

Lish subsequently edited the latter story twice. Drafts in the Lilly Library show two versions of the story addressed to Carver’s different addresses in California; both contain changes that altered the story’s tone and implications, and some of these changes represent clear indications of Lish’s own ideas on fiction as well as foreshadowing ones he would later impose in a more coercive manner on the stories in *WWTA*.

The first version of the story is 12 pages long and the second (not counting Lish’s second round of edits) is 8. To begin with, then, we can see that the story’s progression was, quantitatively speaking, towards reduction. Lengthy passages of dialogue and exposition are deleted, particularly in Lish’s first revision. Many of the changes serve to highlight the sense of ambiguity and menace in the narrative, and illustrate the value Lish places on mystery; indeed, Tetman Callis quotes Lish as saying, on separate occasions, “always strive for the uncanny” and “the reader loves the enigmatic, because the enigmatic becomes numinous” (27 Nov 1990).⁵¹ Lish’s edits to the opening paragraph of

⁵¹ Callis reproduces notes from several months of “Lish’s private masters’ classes” in New York. In his introduction, he states that “quotes enclosed in double quotation marks are verbatim quotes of Lish,” while

the story demonstrate this, as his first round of changes removed the narrator's explanation of the emotional difficulties that drive the character's actions throughout the narrative:

Bill and Arlene Miller were no more nor less than any of their acquaintances friends. But now and then they felt that ~~they and~~ they alone among their circle had been passed by somehow, leaving Bill to attend to his bookkeeping duties at Syburg Motors and Arlene occupied with secretarial chores for a [illegible] realty office. They talked about it sometimes. ~~They felt there was this void in their lives, and they didn't know how to fill it.,~~ mostly in connection with the ~~When they compared their lives to those~~ lives of their neighbours, Harriet and Jim Stone. ~~, they experienced vague and almost resentful feelings of envy that they wisely never discussed. For it~~ It seemed to ~~them~~ the Millers that the Stones lived a much fuller and brighter life, one very different from their own. ("Neighbors" V1)

Carver's first draft thus states the central problem of the story explicitly within the opening paragraphs: the "void" within the couple's life together and the consequent unspoken feelings driving their dissatisfaction. Lish's changes make this implicit, and his second revision introduces a clear note of dramatic irony into its opening line: "Bill and Arlene Miller were ~~no more nor less than any of their friends~~ a happy couple" (V2).

Lish also eliminated details of the world being depicted and removed information tying the narrative to a particular time and place. In his second edit of the opening paragraphs, for example, he removed the details of the couple's respective workplaces; in his first round of edits, he suggested that rather than listening to "clamorous Jefferson Airplane records" they simply listen to "records"; and in his first edit, he removed a line explaining that the "pictures" that Arlene finds in the apartment are "of Harriet, and they're wild. Jim must've taken them with his Polaroid" (V1). In a passage following Bill as

other notes are "expanded upon with memory and interpretation in the months that followed." In my own use of this material, I will clarify in each instance whether the quote is Lish's own or is paraphrased by Callis.

he snoops around his neighbours' apartment, Lish (in the first edit) deleted several details as follows:

[He] found a half empty package of ~~filter tip~~ cigarettes ~~which he and~~ stuffed **them** into his pocket. ~~behind his own cigarettes, a paperback copy of Portnoy's Complaint with page corners prominently folded down here and there throughout the book, and a pipe. He moved around to the other side of the bed, Harriet's, and looked in her drawer. Another plastic package of pills, this one opened, along with some hair pins. The pins went into his pants pocket.~~ Then he stepped to the closet, ignoring for the moment the ~~handsome Philippine mahogany chest of drawers.~~ (V1)

The narrative method is clearly altered here, and the removal of a literary reference is, as we shall see, a move that Lish would later repeat.⁵² Indeed, Lish makes the world of the story more hermetic in general. As with other stories, he removes references to the outside world and – importantly – filters out the characters' attempts to place themselves within that world:

He tried ~~hard~~ to concentrate on **the news**, ~~of the world and his community.~~ He read the paper ~~through from first to last page, skipping only the classifieds, but none of it really interested or concerned him and~~ **turned on the television.** Finally he went across the hall ~~to knock vigorously on the door. The door was locked.~~ (V1).

The deletion of the phrase "his community" here demonstrates the way in which Lish highlights the characters' isolation and anticipates his later edits to "Community Center" in *WETA*. Verbal communication between characters is frequently minimized and/or altered in Lish's editing of Carver, and "Neighbors" also illustrates this. In Carver's original, the couple's erotic life is introduced by the characters' own words:

"Bill! God, you scared me. What're you doing home so early?"
He shrugged. "Nothing to do at work," **he said.** ~~And I kept thinking about last night. I've been horny all day."~~

⁵² He would tell Callis' class in 1990 to "write in a self-reflexive, self-referential way. This extends from constantly turning your piece back on itself to never referring to other writers or their work" (18 October 1990 – paraphrase by Callis).

~~“You’re just saying that,” she answered, but her eyes brightened.~~ She let him use her key to open the door. (V1)

Bill verbalises his desire here, and Arlene clearly reciprocates it. By contrast, the edited version makes the couple’s sex life less affectionate and plays up the sense of tension and anxiety in their relationship – in Lish’s second edit, the phrase “He grabbed for her playfully” is changed into “He grabbed for her awkwardly” and a line where Arlene addresses Bill as “honey” is removed. Elsewhere in lines deleted by Lish during his first edit, the couple verbalise their anxieties – Arlene tells Bill “I’ve been worried” – and bond over the experience in a much more affectionate and intimate way than in the later version. Bill admits to having gone into the apartment on his own and to locking the cat in the bathroom, to which his partner replies:

“Is that why she was in there? So you could look around in peace?” She began shaking her head back and forth, eyes widening as she started to laugh. “Well, I think I’m beginning to see the light. Okay, so you’ll go back over with me then? It’d be kind of fun in that case. But do you really think we should? I mean, you know.” (V1)

The tone of the dialogue is thus shifted by selective omission, and details such as Bill’s drinking problem are not specified. The final paragraphs of the story are also tightened and altered considerably in this manner, as the explanation for the couple’s being locked out of the apartment is condensed and communicated tersely, while the penultimate lines in which Bill reassures them both – “No sweat, he said . . . ‘Don’t worry,’ squeezing her and patting her hip at the same time. It was early yet, he could always raise the manager” – are deleted, adding to the tension and sense of dread that are so notable in the final edited version’s ending (V1).

The story is a crucial one in Carver’s career, since he himself appears to have regarded it as a landmark moment: in a 1977 letter written as he was getting sober, Carver reminisced to Lish about the time the editor informed him of its impending

publication in *Esquire* (it would appear in June 1971) and wrote that “my life has never been the same since” (27 Sep 1977). At the time, he pronounced himself “overwhelmed” at the news (12 Nov 1969). As the opening story in his first major-press collection, it would also set the tone for the collection and serve as the wider literary world’s first encounter with his work. Indeed, it was singled out for comment in 1978 by Ann Beattie, who wrote that the story’s ending “seems almost mythic . . . too perfect to paraphrase . . . It is as clear and stark as a light shone in your eyes, and it causes something beyond sadness” (179). Carver’s correspondence, however, reveals an early ambivalence about the story’s stylistic evolution – “sending along the redone ‘Neighbors’ tho it looks & feels a little thin now, but see what you think” (n.d. 1970) – that identifies the fault lines upon which his relationship with Lish would later fracture.

“Neighbors” was included in a 1973 anthology entitled *Cutting Edges: Young American Fiction for the ‘70s* (Ed. Jack Hicks). In their “Notes” section of the *Collected Stories*, Stull and Carroll include a short essay by Carver from the anthology in which he describes the genesis of the story in ambiguous terms. Claiming that the story “came together very quickly,” he notes that:

The real work on the story, and perhaps the art of the story, came later. Originally the manuscript was about twice as long, but I kept paring it on subsequent revisions, and then pared it down some more, until it achieved its present length and dimensions.

He then goes on to note the story’s “essential mystery and strangeness” and to worry publicly about its stylistic achievement: while the story is “more or less, an artistic success” he writes that “my only fear is that it is too thin, too elliptical and subtle, too inhuman” (CS 1013–1014). Here we see an early example of a pattern that would occur on a much more extensive scale several years later: Carver publishes a story that has

been heavily edited by Lish and takes credit for the story's stylistic economy ("the real work") while simultaneously questioning, in print, the virtue of such economy. The author engages in an oblique paratextual meditation on the minimalistic methods with which he is beginning to be identified, a continuation (and a more eloquent elaboration) of reservations already expressed to Lish in private. He does so in a form that, with the benefit of hindsight, is difficult not to read as a veiled challenge to the editor whose work he both questions and fails to publicly acknowledge.

2.2.2 "The instant you offer an explanation is the instant you have sentimentality": Lish's changes to *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?*

In November 1974, Carver learned that McGraw-Hill was willing to bring out a collection, and wrote an effusive letter to Lish:

Well, listen, can't exactly tell you how pleased and so on about the prospects of having a collection out under your aegis . . . I'll tell you this, you've not backed a bad horse . . . About the editing necessary in some of the stories. Tell me which ones and I'll go after it, or them. Tell me which ones. Or I will leave it up to you & you tell me what you think needs done or doing. (11 Nov 1974)

Lish proceeded to edit the stories for inclusion in the collection: Sklenicka reports that he "selected twenty-two stories (out of at least thirty-four Carver had published) for the book and proposed title changes for several of them" (281). Lish made two rounds of edits on the majority of these stories; it appears (although the drafts are rarely dated) that many of these took place during the summer of 1975, as Lish first edited upon copies (or photocopies) of the magazine versions of the stories and then carried out a second round of edits on the typescripts made from the first round. A study of the drafts of the other stories that would be included in *WYPBQP* shows a consistency in many of Lish's

changes; below, I examine these changes and clarify, whenever possible, where these were made.

Again, Lish tended to remove detail, create a sense of mystery and menace, and alter the relationships between characters, often using distinctive methods. Lish frequently made the characters' dialogue coarser, for example. In "Night School," during the narrator's conversation with two women he meets in a bar, Lish introduced expletives and a new note of aggression:

"I only have thirty cents," I said.

~~"We have money"~~ **"Who needs your goddamn money?,"** Edith said. **We need your goddamn car.** Jerry, let's have three more. And a six-pack to go."

"Here's to Patterson," the first woman said when the beer came. ~~Mister To Patterson and his highballs.~~

~~"He's going to be surprised,"~~ **"He'll drop his cookies,"** Edith said. ("Night School," *Draft ms. 3*)

In "A Dog Story" (which Lish retitled "Jerry and Molly and Sam"), Lish amplified the crudity in the opening section to emphasise the narrator's rage:

. . . she was always turning up with some ~~crap~~ **shit** or other . . . that the kids could ~~fight~~ **scream** over and ~~screech at~~ **fight over and beat the shit out of each other about** . . . for God's sake when he didn't even know if he was going to have a roof over his head – made him ~~open and close his hands in his pockets. When he took them out to light a cigarette, they were trembling~~ **want to kill the goddamn dog.**

¶ Sandy! Betty and Alex and Mary! Jill! And Suzy the goddamn dog!

¶ This was Al. ("Jerry and Molly and Sam," *Draft ms. 3*)

Lish inserted line breaks here as he frequently would elsewhere in Carver's stories, and the effect, at the close of this opening section of the narrative, is to sound a note of comedy at the expense of the character being introduced. The list of names here (which belong to the narrator's wife, children, sister and pet respectively) heightens the sense of the narrator's resentment at his various dependants and, of course, suggests the distinctive title of the published story.

The story also provides a clear example of the kind of attribution of dialogue – “he said, she said” – that would become a cliché of Minimalism.⁵³ Early in the story, we find the following exchange:

¶ **She said**, “I see.”

¶ **He said**, “You don’t mind, do you?! Jesus!”

¶ **She said**, “Go ahead, I don’t care.”

¶ **He said**, “I won’t be long,~~don’t~~. **Don’t** worry.”

¶ **She said**, “Go ahead, I said. I said I didn’t care, didn’t I? Go on!” **she said**.

In 1990, Lish would suggest that this form of attribution was punchier and more powerful: “Don’t use ‘asked’ — ‘said’ will do — same for ‘told me,’ etc. ‘Said’ is forceful, direct, almost a punctuation” (Callis 13 Dec 1990 – direct quotation).

“A Dog Story” is one of many in which Lish cut lengthy paragraphs from Carver’s original. Many of these deleted sections follow Al’s thoughts as he reflects upon his troubles and on his disastrous decision to surreptitiously abandon the family dog; for example, the day after the act, we are told over the course of two paragraphs that he feels as if “his number was up,” that he has avoided thinking about the dog all day, and that the incident is coming back to him “in snatches” (*Version 1*). The removal of these revealing flashbacks make the narrator less reflective and his motivations more obscure. The narrator also reminisces elsewhere in the same story about his early days with his wife as well as about his childhood days.⁵⁴ These memories humanise the narrator, inviting the reader’s sympathy – albeit at the risk of sentimentality – and provide a context for his current feelings of entrapment and frustration. As he did elsewhere,

⁵³ In a recent interview, Chuck Palahniuk notes that his new novel attempts to violate “the very conventional things that I have been taught for twenty years not to do,” with specific reference to this stylistic tag: “In minimalism it’s about keeping your attribution really simple. He said, she said, almost in a Hemingway simplicity” (sic) (“Violating the Rules” n.p.)

⁵⁴ He recalls, for example, fishing for “bass and catfish” as a boy and evokes the memory of a local character called “Old Hutchinson.”

though, Lish removed this background detail, presumably to minimise the emotional appeal to the reader; Callis quotes the editor as saying “the instant you offer an explanation is the instant you have sentimentality” (October 1991).

Indeed, explanations are notable by their absence in all of the stories Lish edited, and the reason for a character’s disquiet is rarely made explicit. That this is a recurring feature of Lish’s editing is demonstrated by a number of changes in another story, “Sixty Acres,” in which the narrator is disturbed by his confrontation with a group of boys who are illegally hunting on his land. The lines removed by Lish are crucial ones, as the character gains some insight into his alienation and feels his way, through introspection, towards an epiphany:

~~He’d had put them off the land. That was all that mattered, wasn’t it?. Yet he couldn’t not understand why he felt the way he did, that something crucial had happened, a failure. that night which he could not find words to describe. But nothing, nothing had happened, that was just it. He thought for a while. One thing, he had not been himself, that was partly what bothered him now. He couldn’t explain it, but somehow he had not been himself. He felt that very strongly. He had been like a play actor standing there in the snow, making sounds, raising his arms. But if he was somebody else, if he wasn’t Lee Waite, then who was he, what was he?~~

The narrator of Carver’s original is searching, however tentatively, for a sense of understanding: edits such as these have surely determined the assessments of critics such as McDermott, who suggests that “the Carver character is incapable of hearing an inner voice, or of communicating the few moments of insight she does experience” (94). “Sixty Acres” also demonstrates that Lish frequently removed references to nature. Lish may have seen nature as linked to sentimentality, at least in Carver’s stories; characters often recall pastoral scenes at moments of crisis, and the natural world seems to function

as brief respite from personal pain.⁵⁵ The protagonist here deals with his anxiety by attempting an imaginative communion with the natural world:

~~He closed his eyes and tried to bring the land into mind, saw vaguely a few scattered fields with clumps of trees at the edges, a slow stream that came in from someplace and which beavers had dammed. Then, for some reason, he thought of Day's cows wandering slowly across his fields, going slowly into one field and then another, snapping off the barley and tall grass, chewing it and working it in their cuds a long time before swallowing. He held it all of a moment, and then it began to fade — the land, trees, even the beavers he imagined living some place on the side stream, until there was nothing left, only a herd of cows he'd seen once, airily suspended in his mind think.~~

A pastoral scene is thus hidden behind a layer of revision and, again, a genetic view of these early stories complicates assertions — such as the following — that would characterize the author's method as a consistently elliptical one: “one of the defining features of Carver's narrative style is the omission of contextualizing information about characters' environments” (McDermott 90–91).

Another recurring technique of Lish's was to make the transitions between adjacent sections of a story more abrupt by marking a section's close with a non sequitur or a diegetically opaque sentence. Again, “A Dog Story”/“Jerry and Molly and Sam” provides instances of this. For example, after the line “‘My dog had brains,’ he [Al] would say. ‘It was an Irish setter!’,” Lish deletes the subsequent five lines (which, in the relevant draft, are illegible underneath his pen marks) in order to end the section on a punchline of sorts. On the following page, he adds a line that makes the narrator more unhinged:

Then he lit a cigaret and tried to get hold of himself. **He picked up the rake and put it away where it belonged. He was muttering to himself, saying “Order, order,”** when the dog came up to the garage, sniffed around the door, and looked in. (V2)

⁵⁵ One blogger reports Lish as saying, during a recent public appearance, that he “take[s] pride in knowing not much about nature” (Ross n.p.).

The final paragraph of Carver's original not only makes clear the central dramatic problem of the story – the fact that the narrator feels “captive” – but also makes it clear that he is aware of this problem:

~~At He sat there a while, then. Then he got up with a sigh. He walked back to the car with his hands in his pockets. He didn't feel so bad, all things considered. He didn't feel free, particularly, but neither did he feel captive any longer. He felt – well, nothing. He'd have to make up a story to tell Betty and the kids. Anything would do. And see about getting them another dog. The world was full of dogs. There were dogs and then there were dogs; some Some dogs you just couldn't do anything with. He'd have to make it up to Jill, too, his rudeness of last night. Betty as well. He did feel bad about Betty. But she would come around with a present and lots of attention. A present for Betty, and a present for Jill. He began thinking about what he would get them. Something not too expensive, but something nice, too. (V1)~~

This also showcases the way in which Lish would apply the abrupt-transition technique to the end of a story: in Max's words, the editor “loved deadpan last lines” and sometimes “cut away whole sections to leave a sentence from inside the story as the end” in order to achieve them (“Carver Chronicles”). The narrator may be unredeemed in Carver's original version – the final lines here, showing his intention to continue his adultery, could be said to constitute an anti-epiphany of sorts – but he is unmistakably aware of the consequences of his actions and their effects on others, and the comedy at the story's close sits alongside a sense of pathos absent from Lish's version.

In “The Student's Wife,” Lish also truncated the ending dramatically: editing on a copy of the story previously published in *The Carolina Quarterly* in 1964 (issue 17.1), he removed the final page and a half. The ending of the version later published in *WYPBQP* presents a startling distillation of the wife's unhappiness as she cries out: “‘God’ she said. ‘God, will you help us, God?’ she said” (CS 100). Leypoldt identifies this story as “one of [the] most illustrative examples” of a type of ending he calls Carver's “arrested epiphany,” arguing that the wife's “arrested epiphany prevents her from understanding

any of the reasons for her sense of menace” and that ultimately “not only the plot’s essential contour and meaning, but even its central conflicts remain blurred” (“Epiphanic Moments” 535–536).⁵⁶ In Carver’s original, though, the story continues as the husband is woken up by his wife’s lament: he finds her crying, and their children⁵⁷ soon appear in the doorway looking concerned. The narrator tries to console her:

~~“What’s the matter, Nancy?” he asked quietly. “Can you tell me, sweetheart? Haven’t you been to sleep? My God. Can you tell me what’s wrong, darling?” “I’ll be all right,” she said. “Listen to me, darling,” wetting his lips. “Things are going to get better for us this year. Wait and see. Everything’s going to be all right. The ships will all come in, we’ll get out of this rat race yet...some nice quiet place...Just, just for God’s sake don’t worry about anything,” patting her back gently. “Just try and get some sleep.”—(V1)~~

The story, which ends with the narrator’s wife lying in bed as he still tries anxiously to connect with her, is one that was surely improved by the severity of the edits. The continuation of the narrative beyond daybreak, the narrator’s repeated and plaintive reassurances and his literal enunciation of the couple’s problems – money difficulties, the socio-cultural “rat race” in which they are trapped – all serve to dissipate the dramatic tension and “indeterminacy” of the central situation and arguably render the ending less effective (Leypoldt, “Epiphanic Moments” 536). The focus of the story is noticeably altered, though, and the intimacy of Carver’s original ending as well as its wider scope – which takes in the couple’s children (absent from the final paragraph of the published version) as well as hinting at a wider social context – are lost.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Saltzman points to the story (along with “Neighbors,” “Fat” and others) as examples of the way the author’s endings “are often abrupt, truncated” (15).

⁵⁷ One of whom is called Gordon, incidentally – this is changed to “Gary” in the published version (CS 97).

⁵⁸ Lish evidently taught Carver’s work in his writing classes during these years: a page from his workshop materials from November 1976 consists of a list of teaching questions, one of which asks, “How might one

2.2.3 Compression and Consecution: “Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?”

Like “The Student’s Wife,” “Will You Please Be Quite, Please?” was already an old story by the time it was edited for book publication, having been published almost a decade beforehand (in *December* in 1966). It became the title story of the book at Carver’s insistence, as Lish had wanted the collection to be called *Put Yourself in My Shoes* (Sklenicka 281; Carver, 21 May 1975); as such, it took on renewed importance both as the collection’s flagship piece and its atypically lengthy closing story. Lish made multiple changes: despite the story’s length, it differs dramatically from the version selected as one of the *Best American Short Stories* in 1967. As Sklenicka notes of Lish’s changes to the collection in general, while he “did not substantially alter the arc of events or the characters . . . he substantially refabricated their feeling” (283).

The story follows Ralph Wyman’s realisation that his wife betrayed him some years earlier. It is divided (unusually, for a Carver story) into three numbered parts. The first portrays the domestic argument during which this revelation surfaces, the second details Ralph’s solitary night-time journey around his town as he attempts to come to terms with this new reality, and the third (and shortest) shows him returning home to an emotionally fraught, ambiguous reconciliation with Marian. As in the other stories, some of Lish’s most noticeable changes come in the transitions between sections. At the end of the second section, Ralph is mugged by an African-American man, a violent experience that puts an end to his wandering and prepares him to return home. In his first edit, Lish

argue that Carver is, in fact, a sentimental writer?” We might see this as further evidence of the long-running and indirect paratextual struggle between the pair.

deleted a 184-word paragraph in which bystanders come to Ralph's aid and the protagonist reflects on the central problem facing him:

~~Ralph got his legs under him again. As if from a great distance he heard someone yell, "There's a man hurt over here!" and he struggled up to his feet. . . . He leaned his shoulder against the doorway and wept. In the few seconds he stood there, shaking, his mind seemed to empty out, and a vast sense of wonderment flowed through him as he thought again of Marian, why she had betrayed him. Then, as a policeman with a big flashlight walked over to him, he brought himself up with a shudder and became silent. (Version 1)~~

The section ends here. On the following page, Lish deleted a whole passage in which Ralph goes to the hospital to get X-rays and looks at photos in "large manila folders of Negro men" in a failed attempt to identify his assailant. During his second edit Lish continued this process, removing two lines from the end of the second section and shortening the opening paragraph of the third section from 138 words to 33, ensuring a more abrupt transition and reducing the sense of reflection in the narrative consciousness.

The ending of the story owes much to Lish's work. As Sklenicka notes, in his edits, "a three-paragraph (189-word) conclusion" is condensed into "93 words" (282–283). Again, this took place in two rounds: in the first round, Lish removed some phrases and added his own, and compressed Carver's three paragraphs into one. However, his second edit of the ending was much heavier, and is reproduced below in full:

~~He tensed at her cold fingers, and then, gradually, he relaxed. He imagined himself floating on his back in the heavy, milky water of Juniper Lake, where he had spent a summer years and years ago, and someone was calling to him. But he kept on floating and did not answer, and the soft rising waves laved his body. let go a little. It was easier to let go a little. No ¶. Her hand moved over his hip. Then it traced his groin before flattening itself against and over his stomach. She and she was in bed now, pressing the length of her body against over his now and moving gently over him and back and forth with over him. He waited a minute, and held himself, he later considered, as long as he could. And then he turned to her and their eyes met. He turned and turned in what might have been a stupendous sleep, and he was still turning, Her eyes were filled and seemed to~~

~~him to reveal layer beneath layer of color and reflection. He gazed even deeper. He saw in first one pupil and then the other the cameo image of the face that must be his. He continued to stare,~~ marvelling at the **impossible** changes he felt moving over him. (*Version 2*)

Some of the changes here are thematic ones consistent with Lish's approach to Carver's work: the deletion of a moment where a character recalls a particular memory, for example.⁵⁹ He changed the structure of the prose, removing a paragraph break in order to condense the lines ("No ¶"), and also removed the meeting of eyes that occurs between the couple. Ralph no longer gazes into his wife's eyes (which are entirely absent from the final text) and his experience becomes an interior one.

We also see techniques that are emblematic of Lish's narrative technique of "consecution," however. Lish used the word repeatedly in his workshops and, as Jason Lucarelli explains, he used it as a principle of composition at a thematic and formal level; the term denotes the way in which repetition can be used to achieve both "structural" and "acoustical" consecution (n.p.). We see multiple examples of this kind of repetition in this final paragraph, from the repetition of sentence structures – "He . . . let go a little. It was easier to let go a little" – to the repeated use of particular words such as "over" (a word which does not appear at all in Carver's original). The intense concentration of alliteration and acoustical repetition in the passage – "stupendous sleep," the final sentence's thrice-repeated "turning" – also ensure that the revelation that takes place in what Bethea terms the story's "epiphanic sexual encounter" (namely, the final act of lovemaking that implies Ralph's acceptance of his wife's infidelity) is communicated through poetic rather than diegetic means. Indeed, Amir, Bethea, Nessel and Saltzman all single out the poetic and symbolic effects of repetition in the story's final passage (Amir,

⁵⁹ Again, this is connected to an experience of nature: "the heavy, milky water of Juniper Lake."

Visual Poetics 119; Bethea, *Technique and Sensibility* 55–56; Nessel 25; Saltzman 72).

Bethea, in fact, returns to the story's ending in a 2007 article on Carver's technical debts to Hemingway, again with particular reference to the poetic and intertextual effects caused by the repetitions of the prose ("Inheritance" 93–94).⁶⁰ The importance of Lish's contribution here is clear, as specific textual features added in his editing are still debated more than three decades after the story's publication.

As I have noted, of course, the lack of acknowledgement of Lish's contribution here could perhaps be justified by simple reference to the "passive authorization" given by Carver. It seems clear that the author was comfortable with the edits, judging by the tone of the correspondence at the time: examining the textual changes before publication, he wrote "I think, all in all, you did a superb job of cutting and fixing on the stories," and closes by saying "Gordon, I think this is going to be a book and a half. Reading them through the cumulative effect is very powerful indeed" (28 Sep 1975). Carver seems never to have protested the changes as he later would in the case of *WWTA*, and he never attempted to republish the unedited versions of the stories in his later collections. In considering Lish's contribution to Carver's career as a whole, though, it is clear not only that the changes made here foreshadow the later controversy – many of the changes Lish made are similar in type, if not always in degree, to the ones he would make to *WWTA* – but that the editor was essential in determining the parameters of the author's literary "brand" from an early stage. Lish's blurb for the inside flap of the collection read as follows:

Here is the short fiction of a literary artist of the first rank, a maker of stories that deliver the dark of the American heart . . . in the sunless, post-speech world that

⁶⁰ He detects a "quasi-biblical rhythm" alluding to Genesis' reference to the way God's spirit "moves upon the waters."

Raymond Carver sees, apprehending the grossness of our fixed destinies amounts to a kind of triumph, a small but gorgeous prevailing against circumstance (Sklenicka 296).

Lish's blurb, acting as an official introduction to readers, presents Carver as a sort of gloomy national prophet apprehending the inevitable, ominous eclipse ("sunless," "fixed") of contemporary American reality: the narrative achievement, murky and inarticulate ("post-speech"), provides solace only in the unrelenting unity of its portrayal of that reality. These sentences read, in hindsight, as an echo of the "small, good thing" that Carver would soon write about. While Carver's phrase would refer to the possibilities of human connection, however, Lish's formulation (a "small but gorgeous prevailing against circumstance") suggests a darker, less communal vision.

2.3 Minimalism in Action: A Genetic View of *What*

We Talk About When We Talk About Love

Carver's second major-press collection was, of course, the one that would bring him worldwide renown. The collection is certainly his most culturally significant work and is often taken to exemplify an individual and collective aesthetic: Sklenicka observes that the book, consisting of "17 stories in a mere 150 pages" is for many readers "the quintessential Carver text, the ur-text of . . . minimalism" (366–369). The work was described in 2009 by Tim Adams of the *Observer* as "probably the most influential story collection of the past 30 years," and a *New York Times* article from the same year suggested that *WWTA* was still among the most widely shoplifted books in U.S. bookstores (Adams n.p.; Rabb n.p.). Any analysis of Lish's contribution, then, clearly extends beyond Carver's own career, and this realisation surely contributed to the

controversy and comment generated before, during and after *Beginners* came into print. In the following section, I outline the textual history of the volume and analyse the textual genesis of some of its most heavily-discussed stories.

2.3.1 “My very sanity is on the line here”: the Textual History

In 1977 the small Capra Press published Carver’s *Furious Seasons*, a collection of stories that had been excluded from *WYPBQP*; five of these would later appear in *WWTA*. The book contained a list of several dedicatees, and Carver removed Lish’s name as he feared the editor would be embarrassed by the book. However, Lish answered that the stories in the book were “goddamn wonderful” and reproached Carver for omitting him from the list (Sklenicka 313–315). In a reply written only a few months into his long “second life” of sobriety, Carver wrote a letter full of praise and thanks for Lish’s years of help and looked forward to their next collaboration:

You were there to read what I wrote and print it if you could. I ain’t forgot any of that, any of it. Won’t. We been around the corner a few times together, you and I. We’ve had a friendship, by God . . . My life has never been the same since, boyo. We ran them a good race for the NBA [National Book Award] too, didn’t we? Next time – and your name will be on the Dedication page of that book – we’ll take it . . . Didn’t think you’d care for FURIOUS SEASONS, so kept you off it (27 Sep 1977).

Lish took up a position as book editor at Knopf within months, but Carver’s chaotic personal circumstances and his slow consolidation of his sobriety meant that it would be over two more years before that collection would come to fruition. In May 1980 he met Lish in New York and gave him the manuscript, following which he wrote another warm letter in which he encouraged Lish to “open the throttle” on the stories:

For Christ’s sweet sake, not to worry about taking a pencil to the stories if you can make them better; and if anyone can you can. I want them to be the best possible stories, and I want them to be around for a while (10 May 1980).

In a separate letter written the same day,⁶¹ Carver wrote: "I trust you, so not to worry. If you see ways to put more muscle in the stories, don't hesitate to do so" (10 May 1980b). Another letter written eight days later can only be read, with hindsight, in an ironic light. Carver wrote partly to offer compliments on the memoir of Victor Herman, a Jewish-American former Soviet political prisoner, which Lish had ghostwritten:

I'm reading it like a novel – I've finished Part One – and I'm liking it just fine. The narrator's voice. His VOICE. I look at what he's showing me, and I listen, and in truth I can't forget any of it. It's news, real news. You know. But it's a bafflement to me, and sometimes you'll have to tell me, why you've put Victor Herman, his name, on this book. I'm reading this book like a novel, God, it is a novel, and I'm taking real pleasure in it, and I just wish your name were on it my friend. Someday fill me in on this. (18 May 1980b)

The manuscripts of Herman's memoir show multiple changes across at least four drafts and confirm that Lish did indeed craft the narrative in a distinctive manner, deleting entire pages and introducing regular line breaks to create a fragmented, elliptical and voice-driven tone (Herman). Within months Carver would protest against these techniques, as applied to his own work, in the strongest terms.

At around the same time, Carver delivered the original manuscript to his editor (Sklenicka refers to this manuscript, which bore the working title "So Much Water So Close to Home," as "version A" of the sequence), and in response Lish informed Carver that he would seek a contract from Knopf (355). Lish returned a version to Carver the following month (version B), which contained a first round of edits and the new title (*WETA*). Carver accepted the changes and signed and returned his publishing contract straight away, despite the fact that he had yet to receive the final typescript based on Lish's editing. As Sklenicka notes, the author entered "a binding contract for his book"

⁶¹ Carver had omitted a line from the envelope address of the first letter and worried that it may have gone astray (Sklenicka 355).

while having consulted “neither an agent nor an attorney” (356). Shortly after this, Version C – in large part, the version we know as *WWTA* – arrived on Carver’s desk.⁶²

The differences between B and C were significant enough to cause Carver a level of emotional distress that is clear from the ensuing correspondence. After a day and night of close comparison, he wrote a lengthy letter to Lish (reprinted in full in the Library of America edition of stories) in which he proclaimed himself to be on the verge of breakdown in an attempt to persuade his editor to reverse the changes. Worried by the fact that several of the stories had already been viewed in their unedited form by other writers and editors (including Gallagher, Ford, Tobias Wolff and others), Carver described himself as “confused, tired, paranoid, and afraid, yes, of the consequences for me if the collection came out in its present form” and announced: “I’ll tell you the truth, my very sanity is on the line here” (CS 996).

Carver repeatedly begged Lish to arrest the publication of the book, alternately pleading (“Please help me with this, Gordon”), apologising (“Forgive me for this, please”), and demanding (“Please do the necessary things to stop production of this book”). The author, still struggling to regain equilibrium in his newly sober existence, claimed that some of the stories were so close to his “sense of regaining my health and mental well-being” that he feared he might “never write another story” if the book were published in “its present edited form” (08 July 1980; CS 993–996). Carver’s entreaties were unsuccessful, however. In 1998, Lish told Max: “my sense of it was that there was a letter and that I just went ahead”; Gallagher has claimed that a phone conversation took place

⁶² The qualifying phrase here refers to the fact that Lish made some changes to the galleys, and thus some differences (of which, as we shall see, several could be considered significant) exist even between version C and the published text of *WWTA*; to a large extent, though, these two texts correspond to one another.

after Carver's first letter in which Lish insisted to the author that he would not reverse his edits ("Carver Chronicles" n.p.; Sklenicka 359). Sklenicka explores various possible reasons for Carver's acceptance of the changes, and the details of the relevant conversations remain unclear. The crucial fact may simply be that Lish, in Gallagher's words, held the "power of publication access," and as Sklenicka notes, the final judgement on Carver's feelings about the matter may be discerned in the fact that he would subsequently republish several of the stories in their original forms (362).⁶³

In his subsequent letters, Carver "slipped back," in Stull's words, "into the deferential posture he had assumed toward Lish during his drinking years" (CS 997). A letter written two days later shows that Carver had accepted the edits: "It's simply stunning, it is, and I'm honored and grateful for your attentions to it" (10 July 1980; Sklenicka 358). While Carver now accepted the majority of the changes, he did argue for the restoration of specific details such as the title "Distance" for the story retitled "Everything Stuck to Him." He also requested that one of the stories cut by seventy-eight percent, "Mr. Coffee and Mr. Fixit" (formerly titled "Where is Everyone?") be dropped from the collection entirely. The story was already in press at *Triquarterly* (whose editor, he understood, was submitting it for a possible O. Henry award) and he made it clear that his own proximity to the story (which concerned an alcoholic facing his own past) also presented a problem: "Please jettison that one, Gordon, and see that it is not included. I can't get any distance at all from that story" (10 July 1980).⁶⁴ In the case of certain stories

⁶³ Meyer observes that Carver later opted to include only seven of the seventeen stories from *WWTA* in *Where I'm Calling From* (1988) and that four of these are reprinted in their longer, fuller versions (245–246).

⁶⁴ Carver was concerned enough about the story to repeat the request in his next letter: "I won't gather that one into the collection. The next collection, not this one" (14 July 1980).

such as "The Bath," as we shall see, he specifically urged Lish to restore some of the material cut in the second edit. These requests, however, appear to have been (almost without exception) ignored.⁶⁵

With the publication of *Beginners*, critics have come to appreciate the extent to which revelations of Carver's conflicting intentions and Lish's strong editing demand a rethink of our understanding of this classic of minimalist literature: as Churchwell puts it, "it turns out that the minimalist in the machine was not Carver, but Lish" ("Final Cut" n.p.). A comparison of the two published versions of the collection shows that Lish's effect on the collection was unquestionably significant. Over the course of the editing process, Lish changed not only the title of the collection, but of ten of its stories. He wrote in lines and passages absent from Carver's original manuscript, regularly renamed characters, and made a range of textual changes at an often detailed level.⁶⁶ Critics have, however, tended to focus on the difference between Version A (*Beginners*) and Version C (*WWTA*) without examining the intervening stage. This is understandable, since this stage is unclear in publications so far: apart from isolated details given in the "Note on the Texts," Stull and Carroll do not give a detailed account of the differences between B and C. Sklenicka states that "in my opinion, the first revised manuscript is not identifiable among the Lilly holdings," that "the precise stages of editing are obscure," and that "little archival evidence of the differences between versions B and C has become available to scholars" (356). However, the Carver papers for *WWTA* in the Lilly archive are now clearly

⁶⁵ In Sklenicka's words, "apart from some requests to change names in stories, Carver got his way on only one significant change, the restoration of this line as the ending of "Gazebo": "In this, too, she was right" (361).

⁶⁶ In one case, he even halved the number of a hotel room from 22 to 11, as if to reflect the shortening of "Gazebo" by almost half (CS 237, 776).

divided into Lish's "First Rewrite" and his "Second Rewrite," which would appear to correspond to the typescript versions B and C received by Carver.⁶⁷ A study of this material (along with the changes visible in the Lilly's "Master Proofs" and "Printer's Mss" folders for the collection) makes it possible to follow a story's genetic development with reference to each stage of editing. Sklenicka notes that the intermediate typescript "would answer questions about Carver's intentions for these stories and his receptivity to Lish's first round of suggestions" and would "assist scholars in their efforts to analyse the development of Carver's fiction" (362); in the following sections of this chapter, I examine differences between the various drafts – including the "Version B" typescript – in order to trace the evolution of the writing in key stories and arrive at fuller answers to these questions.

2.3.2 Staying Inside the House: from "Beginners" to "What We Talk About When We Talk About Love"

To begin with, we can note the change of title. Lish took the phrase from a line of dialogue in the story "Beginners," and a closer examination of both the story and the line itself reveals much about the contrasting visions in its different versions, as the title functions to emphasise the thematic and tonal shifts in the narrative. The story was cut by 50%, according to Stull and Carroll, and the most noticeable deletion was of its final five pages

⁶⁷ The Carver papers in the Lish collection have been rearranged in previous years, and it seems likely that the first rewrite – Version B – was not available during Sklenicka's research (she notes that the 80,000 items in the Lish collection "have not been fully arranged and catalogued" (536)). Enquiries to the Lilly Library staff have thus far failed to yield a definitive explanation for this.

(CS 1003). The base-text⁶⁸ is riddled with changes and a study of the different stages of Lish's editing reveals the liberal insertion of paragraph breaks, changes in syntax, and the occasional replacement of sizeable chunks of prose with entirely new (and invariably shorter) paragraphs. The story revolves around an informal symposium on love, as two couples sit drinking and discussing their past relationships. In the central section of the story, one of the men, a cardiologist (named Herb by Carver, but renamed Mel by Lish), tells a story-within-a-story lasting several pages, of an old couple he encountered in the wake of their car crash. Their mutual devotion during their convalescence has, we find, made a lasting impression on him. As he addresses the group, Herb describes the intensity of Henry's feelings for his wife, and the tenderness of their reconnection after being separated in hospital, a moment representing one of the clearest examples of human connection in all of Carver's work:

I pushed Henry up to the left side of the bed and said, "You have some company, Anna. Company, dear." But I couldn't say any more than that. She gave a little smile and her face lit up. Out came her hand from under the sheet. It was bluish and bruised-looking. Henry took the hand in his hands. He held it and kissed it. Then he said, "Hello, Anna. How's my babe? Remember me?" Tears started down her cheeks. She nodded. "I've missed you," he said. She kept nodding . . . We arranged it so they could have lunch and dinner together in her room. In between times they'd just sit and hold hands and talk. They had no end of things to talk about (CS 942).

The reference to talking here serves as allusion and example, as Herb reminds the group that the story is meant to illustrate how we lack understanding "when we talk about love": "I just had a card from Henry a few days ago. I guess that's one of the reasons they're on my mind right now. That, and what we were saying about love earlier" (943).

⁶⁸ Namely, the "Version A" manuscript in Box 44 of the Lilly holdings identified as "*What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* 1st Draft," which Stull and Carroll used as the basis of their edition of *Beginners* (the editors write that they "restored the stories to their original forms by transcribing Carver's typewritten words that lie beneath Lish's alterations in ink on the typescripts" (CS 990)).

Herb then assures everyone that the story ends happily, as the couple have recovered – “sure, they’re all right” – and have reunited with their son. Herb’s story thus ends with an explicit reference to the conversation on “the subject of love” which opens “Beginners,” and acts as a counterbalance to the violent story of Terri’s former relationship, a positive illustration of the possibilities of love. In Lish’s version, though, the couple’s story (including their names) is deleted, and Herb’s reverent admiration for the strength of the old couple’s attachment is replaced by Mel’s baffled, darkly comic incredulity:

“I’d get up to his mouth-hole, you know, and he’d say no, it wasn’t the accident exactly but it was because he couldn’t see her through his eye-holes. He said that was what was making him feel so bad. Can you imagine? I’m telling you, the man’s heart was breaking because he couldn’t turn his goddamn head and see his goddamn wife.”

Mel looked around the table and shook his head at what he was going to say. “I mean, it was killing the old fart just because he couldn’t look at the fucking woman.”

We all looked at Mel.

“Do you see what I’m saying?” he said (CS 320).

In Wallace’s copy of *WWTA*, the title story is annotated on almost every page. Wallace’s annotations are attentive to the nastiness in Mel’s character, but he also sees these lines as part of a narrative strategy of elision suited to the subject matter: “*love can’t be discussed – can only be done obliquely, thru examples*” (*WWTA*, Wallace’s Copy 151 - underlinings in original).

breaking because he couldn't turn his goddamn head and see his goddamn wife."

Mel looked around the table and shook his head at what he was going to say.

"I mean, it was killing the old fart just because he couldn't look at the fucking woman."

We all looked at Mel.

"Do you see what I'm saying?" he said.

1 5 1

Love can't be
discussed - can
only be ~~of~~ love
@ 5/19/44, thru examples

Notes
can't!

Figure 2: one of Wallace's annotations to "WWTA"

Mel's story ends (as does "The Bath") with hospitalization and failed connection, and we are shown the calamity rather than the human connection that comes in its wake. In Carver's original ending, the dialogue between the characters continues and reaches a higher emotional pitch. Herb leaves the room, and his girlfriend Terri makes the startling confession that she had been pregnant with her ex-lover's baby at the time of his attempted suicide – and that Herb consequently performed an abortion – before finally breaking down in tears. The narrator's lover Laura comforts her, while he goes outside:

I kept looking at the women at the table. Terri was still crying and Laura was stroking her hair. I turned back to the window. The blue layer of sky had given way now and was turning dark like the rest. But stars had appeared. I recognised Venus and farther off and to the side, not as bright but unmistakable there on the horizon, Mars. The wind had picked up . . . I wanted to imagine horses rushing through those fields in the near dark, or even just standing quietly with their heads in opposite directions near the fence. I stood at the window and waited. I knew I had to keep still a while longer, keep my eyes out there, outside the house as long as there was something left to see (CS 948).

The movement towards openness and escape in the final lines hints at the ending of the later “Cathedral” – “My eyes were still closed. I was in my house. I knew that. But I didn’t feel like I was inside anything” (CS 529) – and suggest a redemption of sorts in which the boundaries of the “house” of identity are at least temporarily transcended.⁶⁹ The tone of the story is dramatically altered in Lish’s edit, and the final lines read as follows:

“I’ll put out some cheese and crackers,” Terri said.
But Terri just sat there. She did not get up to get anything. Mel turned his glass over. He spilled it out on the table.
“Gin’s gone,” Mel said.
Terri said, “Now what?”
I could hear my heart beating. I could hear everyone’s heart. I could hear the human noise we sat there making, not one of us moving, not even when the room went dark. (CS 322)

The ending here is austere and abrupt: the blunt, monosyllabic question “Now what?” is lent a stark existential terror by the suddenness of the termination, and the final lines leave a stylised, theatrical impression, as if the lights have gone out on stage. Wallace marked the final three sentences here with the words “Do end,” presumably indicating he planned to teach it in class.⁷⁰ These were written almost entirely by Lish: only the first line of the paragraph quoted above is present in the original manuscript. Nessel’s

⁶⁹ The ending also seems clearly to parallel Chekhov’s story “Concerning Love.” The structure of Chekhov’s story – a dinner party discussion on the meaning of love – may have provided the model for “Beginners,” and its final movement towards nature and sympathetic exchange between characters is paralleled in Carver’s story:

While Alehin was telling his story, the rain left off and the sun came out. Burkin and Ivan Ivanovich went out on the balcony, from which there was a beautiful view over the garden and the mill-pond, which was shining now in the sunshine like a mirror. They admired it, and at the same time they were sorry that this man with the kind, clever eyes, who had told them this story with such genuine feeling, should be rushing round and round this huge estate like a squirrel on a wheel . . . and they thought what a sorrowful face Anna Alexyevna must have had when he said good-bye to her in the railway carriage and kissed her face and shoulders. (*Short Stories* 118)

⁷⁰ Wallace often wrote the word “Do” next to passages in the books he annotated; researcher Eric Whiteside argues persuasively that these are texts the author intended to teach, pointing out that Wallace wrote “Do in class” next to a passage in McCarthy’s *Blood Meridian* (Pitchel n.p.).

discussion of this story is representative of the way in which the effects introduced by Lish have largely determined its reception: he writes that the couples “end up paralysed by inertia, sitting in silence” and compares the darkness of the room at the story’s end to the state of psychological and spiritual unknowing of the characters, who are engaged with “a subject so elusive and powerful that its discourses can only talk around it, and are left literally in the dark in the end” (77, 92). McDermott takes the ending of the story as exemplary: “Carver’s characters, particularly in his early stories, are like the couples of [‘WWTA’] as the party comes to a close and they feel themselves powerless to sustain the connections they had established over the course of one evening” (99). Hallett notes the theatrical dimension of the story and makes an explicit comparison to Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*, noting that the four characters on the story’s “stage” “talk of going somewhere but never go anywhere” (58).⁷¹

The more hopeful title “Beginners” points to new beginnings and suggests the possibility of renewal (a possibility also suggested by the narrator’s encounter with nature at the end of Carver’s original). When read in concert with Lish’s changes to the story as a whole, though, the repetition in the replacement title contains an undercurrent of bleakness and absurdity, directing the reader’s attention to the idea of love as an unknowable and unapproachable mystery (a “human noise” made in the dark rather than an ideal to be struggled for). The phrase could be seen, then, not only as a microcosm of Lish’s editing techniques but as emblematic of his work on the collection as a whole. Lish adapted the phrase during his first edit, changing the title of the story and using it as the

⁷¹ Hallett suggests *Godot* as “the best model to examine for the technical elements that reappear in minimalist short fiction,” since it is “the ultimate example of Beckett’s artistic designs and philosophy” (Hallett 35).

title of the collection as whole: Carver accepted the change, and thus introduced an enduringly influential and adaptable phrase into the language (13 June 1980).⁷²

Lish's change makes the title noticeably longer, of course, which may sit oddly with the legacy of this supposed "ur-minimalist" work. However, closer consideration of the title shows that it incorporates many of the qualities and techniques that Lish sought in fiction. Lucarelli describes the importance of "acoustical consecution" to Lish's poetics, mentioning "ancient recursive techniques in which sounds repeat in the form of alliteration . . . assonance . . . and consonance" and referring to Gary Lutz's recommendation that "the words in the sentence must bear some physical and sonic resemblance to each other" (n.p.). In his lecture notes, Callis quotes Lish as saying "The force of English lies in its vowels" and goes on to paraphrase: "you want to resonate the stressed assonances in your work, in a phrase, a clause, a paragraph, a sentence" (04 Dec 1990). The vowel-heavy, alliterative phrase "What We Talk About When We Talk About Love" demonstrates these qualities of assonance and acoustic resonance as well as any in Lish's own work, with its structural (and almost exact) repetition of two four-word phrases; it also demonstrates a kind of ostentatious, almost unnecessary repetition that draws attention to its own language. While the phrase is present in Carver's original in

⁷² The phrase has been the subject of homage by at least two fiction writers. Knopf has published both *What I Talk About When I Talk About Running* by Carver's acquaintance and translator Haruki Murakami (2008) and *What We Talk About When We Talk About Anne Frank* by Nathan Englander (2012), a collection whose title story – a rewrite, as its author has noted, of Carver's – won the 2012 Frank O'Connor International Short Story Award. The phrase has also shown itself to be a useful device for nonfiction writers: recent books have replaced its concluding noun with "God" (Rob Bell, 2013), "the Tube" (John Lanchester, 2013) and "Food" (Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson, 2014). The phrase's ubiquity as a template for titling journalistic think-pieces and academic articles has been noted and criticised by several bloggers, one of whom points out the absurd range of topics – such as "Drones," "The Olympics" and "Cloud Network Performance" – brought into its orbit (Cliffe n.p.).

almost the same form, Lish isolates and repurposes it (as he would do with elements of other stories) not only to achieve poetic effects but also in order to change the dynamic of the story.

Lucarelli examines the way in which “thematic consecution” is achieved in Lish-influenced stories through the use of “rhetorical questions . . . image or word patterning and aphorisms” (n.p.): Lish’s title can also be seen as an instance of such techniques, with the phrase ending in a clear focus on the story’s subject matter and the repeated clauses suggesting the characters’ obsessive and repetitive attempts to plumb its mysterious depths.⁷³ By paraphrasing Herb’s remark as he introduces the story – “I was going to prove a point . . . it ought to make us all feel ashamed when we talk like we know what we were talking about, when we talk about love” – and making it the title of both the story and the collection, Lish amplifies, through thematic consecution, Herb’s question “What do any of us really know about love?” (CS 932–934); by cutting out the most moving parts of Herb’s story, however, he excises the answer. Callis paraphrases Lish as saying that “the best ending, for example that of *Moby-Dick*, is the annihilation of its beginning” (04 Dec 1990), and the ending of “What We Talk About” illustrates this, moving from the conversation-in-progress depicted in its first sentence (“My friend Mel McGinnis was talking”) to Mel’s – and the group’s – stunned silence at the story’s close.

⁷³ Two pages after his comment that love, in this story, could only be discussed “obliquely,” Wallace underlined the story’s title at the top of the page and used a similar phrase to reiterate the elliptical approach to subject matter: “title – can’t be addressed except obliquely” (WWTA, *Wallace’s Copy* 153).

2.3.3 Little Human Connections: from “A Small, Good Thing” to “The Bath”

“A Small, Good Thing” was retitled “The Bath” by Lish and cut by seventy-eight percent.

This would prove to be one of the most enduringly contentious edits for Carver, as is clear from his later statements on it. In a 1987 interview with Kasia Boddy, Carver said:

It won a prize when it appeared in a magazine, but I felt it was a minor league effort, and I’m not happy with it to this day. I’m going to be publishing a *Selected Stories* and I’m not going to include “The Bath.” I am going to include “A Small, Good Thing,” of course. But I don’t do that kind of rewriting any more. I have more confidence in the stories now, or maybe it’s just that I feel that I have more things to do than I have time to do them, and I tend now not to look back so much. I do all the revision when I’m writing a story, and once it’s published I’m just not interested in it any longer. I want to look ahead. I think that’s healthy. (CWRC 200)

Here, Carver again seems to repeat the erroneous claim that he expanded the longer story from the shorter one, a claim first made on the title page of the story as it appeared in *Ploughshares* in 1982: “This story is expanded and revised from *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*” (Sklenicka 392). Carver was true to his word in relation to future publication, though, and chose “A Small, Good Thing” for inclusion in *Where I’m Calling From*, his career-spanning 1988 collection: he had already published the story in its original form and under its original title in *Cathedral*.

As we saw earlier in the Prologue, Wallace considered this to be the correct choice, and in this he was not alone among critics. Irving Howe’s verdict on “The Bath” was withering: “The first version, I would say, is a bit like second-rank Hemingway, and the second a bit like Sherwood Anderson at his best, especially in the speech rhythms of the baker” (n.p.). Stephen King sees “The Bath” as the prime example of Lish’s “baleful” influence on the collection, arguing that Carver’s original version “has a satisfying symmetry that the stripped-down Lish version lacks, but it has something more important: it has *heart*” (n.p., emphasis in original). Murakami agrees that the longer

version is “certainly the superior work,” although he argues that the shorter version has “its own special flavour” due to the impression that the story “has had its head lopped off for no reason”; indeed, he selected the shorter version for inclusion in a 2002 anthology entitled *Birthday Stories* (131).⁷⁴

The story depicts a couple whose son gets hit by a car on his birthday, and follows them as they lose him after a lengthy and emotionally devastating hospital vigil by his bedside. Meanwhile, they begin to receive threatening, enigmatic phone calls, which turn out to be from the baker of the boy’s birthday cake, ordered by the mother before the accident and never collected. After the boy’s death, the grief-stricken parents drive at midnight to the bakery to confront the man. When they explain what has happened, he asks them to sit down and bakes cakes for them, telling them of his “loneliness, and the sense of doubt and limitation that had come to him in his middle years” and apologises for his behaviour:

“I’m sorry for your son, and I’m sorry for my part in this. Sweet, sweet Jesus . . . I don’t have any children myself, so I can only imagine what you must be feeling. All I can say to you now is that I’m sorry. Forgive me, if you can.” (CS 829–30).

Wallace’s notes here – again, seemingly written with the aim of teaching the story in class – observe that the baker is “isolated” and that the encounter is redemptive for the couple: “they get to heal through forgiveness” (X. J. Kennedy, *Wallace’s copy* 285). The story ends with the couple eating the baker’s bread and listening to him speak, an unlikely scene of reconciliation and human connection that offers a measure of comfort to the traumatised characters. In the final lines, the couple break bread with the baker, hearing his story and taking what comfort they can:

⁷⁴ It should be noted that this critical consensus is not entirely unanimous: all of the contributors to a 2009 discussion on *Slate’s* Audio Book Club, for example, agreed that “The Bath” was the a more successful story (O’Rourke).

They listened to him. They ate what they could. They swallowed the dark bread. It was like daylight under the fluorescent trays of light. They talked on into the early morning, the high pale cast of light in the window, and they did not think of leaving. (CS 830)

The contrast with "The Bath" is remarkable. In Lish's version, the story ends as the threatening calls begin, and we are not told whether the child lives or dies. The mother returns home from the hospital to take a bath, and the tale stops abruptly in an ending of overwhelming confusion and menace:

The telephone rang.
"Yes!" She said. "Hello!" she said.
"Mrs Weiss," a man's voice said.
"Yes," she said. "This is Mrs Weiss. Is it about Scotty?" she said.
"Scotty," the voice said. "It is about Scotty," the voice said. "It has to do with Scotty, yes" (CS 257).

Max suggests that "the story's redemptive tone" is altered to "one of Beckettian despair" ("Carver Chronicles" n.p.); Hallett notes the indeterminacy of the final words of the dialogue, which "are not conclusively from the baker or the hospital" (62). Lish's edit ends with the principal characters indoors, alone: Carver's original ending, though, as we see, ends with all three eating and speaking under the light of the windows. As such it could be read almost as a literal riposte to John Biguenet's criticisms of the solipsistic and "impossibly constricted" worlds represented by minimalist writing: "Minimalism reminds us that light cannot enter a room through a mirror. Only a window admits the world. For the moment, some of our finest writers have their backs to the window" (45).

Unlike most of the stories in *WWTA*, "The Bath" has – as explained above – been available in both its original and its edited form for many years. However, critics have uniformly accepted Carver's claims that the chronology of its publication reflected that of its composition, and that the alternate versions of some of the stories in *WWTA* that he

published after 1981 were revisions of ones whose potential he himself had failed to realise. Another such claim came in a 1984 interview:

I went back to that one, as well as several others, because I felt there was unfinished business that needed attending to. The story hadn't been told originally; it had been messed about with, condensed and compressed in "The Bath" to highlight the qualities of menace that I wanted to emphasize – you see this with the business about the baker, the phone call, with its menacing voice on the other line, the bath, and so on. But I still felt there was unfinished business, so in the midst of writing these other stories for *Cathedral* I went back to "The Bath" and tried to see what aspects of it needed to be enhanced, redrawn, reimagined. When I was done, I was amazed because it seemed so much better. I've had people tell me that they much prefer "The Bath," which is fine, but "A Small, Good, Thing" seems to me to be a better story (CWRC 102).

The story has tended to be taken as the chief evidence in its author's move from Minimalism to a more expansive mode of fiction, a move neatly paralleled by Carver's own recovery from alcoholism. Saltzman credited "the increased stability and ease in Carver's personal life" for the "ventilation of the claustrophobic method and attitude" prevalent in his work prior to *Cathedral* (124); Stull claimed that "During the 1980s his once spare, skeptical fiction became increasingly expansive and affirmative . . . his fiction was growing longer and looser, novelistic in the manner of Chekhov's late works" ("Biographical Essay" n.p.). Mark A.R. Facknitz also assessed Carver's career in these terms, suggesting in 1986 that while the author's early stories obsessively depict "the failure of human dialogue," his later work tends to portray "a deep and creative connection between humans" (296). Adam Meyer summed up this view with his influential verdict that Carver's career has "taken on the shape of an hourglass, beginning wide, then narrowing, and then widening out again," and that "Carver has undergone an

aesthetic evolution, at first moving toward minimalism but then turning sharply away from it" (239, 249).⁷⁵

The longer version, critics concur, shifts its focus to warmth, light, sympathy, connection and redemption, and represents a dramatic shift in tone. Hallett encapsulates this critical consensus, suggesting that the two iterations of the narrative "cannot be identified simply as separate versions . . . they are not the same story; nor is one merely an extension of the other" and takes this contrast to be "the most profound example of [the] change in Carver's style and vision" (63). May agrees, stating that the longer version "moves towards a more conventionally moral ending – acceptance." The ending of the story, he claims, presents "a clear image of Carver's moral shift from the sceptical to the affirmative, from the sense of the unspeakable mystery of human life to the sense of how simple and moral life is after all" (*Short Story* 97). McDermott concurs with this view of Carver's development, and suggests that the "tableau of light and conversation" at the end of "A Small, Good Thing" "stands in direct opposition to the scene that concludes ['WWTA'], in which the couples fall silent as the room becomes dark"; he suggest that "what is new" in the stories from *Cathedral* onwards is "that the community of outcasts the earlier stories gesture toward but fail to depict is finally shown" (111).⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Murakami states that "The overwhelming majority of Carver's early works deal with loss and despair, but later an element of redemption enters in," claiming that the contrast between the two stories provides "a vivid demonstration of the drastic change" (*Birthday Stories* 131).

⁷⁶ In his biographical essay, Stull names Chekhov's "In the Hollow" as one of the stories which particularly influenced Carver's later work, and this influence is more clearly visible in "A Small, Good Thing." Chekhov's story depicts the meeting of characters shattered by a child's death and familial destruction and closes with an image of food being exchanged as a small consolation against grief: "The old man stopped, looked at them both wordlessly, lips shaking, eyes full of tears. Lipa got a piece of buckwheat pasty from her mother's bundle and gave it to him. He took it and started eating" (*Oxford Chekhov* 187).

The Lish papers in the Lilly library contain two separate revisions of "The Bath." While critics have noted the differences between the various published versions, no detailed study has yet been made between the first and the second revision, and of the specific changes that Carver was willing to accept (CS 1000). On the 10th of July 1981 (two days after the famous four-page letter attempting to cease publication) when Carver had apparently accepted Lish's edits, he was still urging his editor to reconsider some specific changes:

Please look through the enclosed copy of WHAT WE TALK ABOUT, the entire collection. You'll see that nearly all of the changes are small enough, but I think they're significant and they all can be found in the first edited ms version you sent me . . . it's a question of reinstating some of those things that were taken out in the second version . . . I feel strongly [that] some of those things taken out should be back in the finished stories (10 July 1980).

In the margins of the typed letter, a little further down, he hand-wrote: "'The Bath' which was 15 pp in the 1st edited version, and now only 12. We might have lost too much in those 3 pages." A few days later, he made it clear that this was a deeply-felt request:

But do give those things a hard third or fourth look. My greatest fear is, or was, having them too pared, and I'm thinking of "Community Center" and "The Bath" both of which lost several pages each in the second editing. I want that sense of beauty and mystery they have now, but I don't want to lose track, lose touch with the little human connections I saw in the first version you sent me. (14 July 1980)

A closer look at the second revision of "The Bath" allows us to trace the changes Lish made to the first revised version, to which Carver seems not to have objected. These changes generally take the form of compression and deletion within paragraphs rather than cutting large blocks of text in their entirety, but the cumulative effect is such that Carver evidently felt the changes were excessive. Indeed, Lish edited out several examples of what we might call "human connections," moments in which the couple at the story's centre are granted expressions of empathy by minor characters. At one point,

for example, a staff member at the hospital, described in Carver's words as a "young woman," enters the room to take blood from the boy.

"I don't understand this," the mother said to the ~~woman~~ technician.

"Doctor's orders," the ~~young woman~~ technician said. ~~"I do what I'm told to do. They say draw, I draw. What's wrong with him, anyway?" she said. "He's a sweetie."~~

~~"He was hit by a car," the man said. "A hit and run."~~

~~The young woman shook her head and looked again at the boy. Then she took her tray and left the room. (2nd Rewrite)~~

The woman, as we see, is changed by Lish to a "technician," and her concern for the boy is removed.⁷⁷ Similarly, the editor altered the moment when the mother meets another couple in the hospital who are waiting on their son:

The man shifted in his chair. He shook his head. ~~He looked down at the table, and then he looked back at the mother.~~ He said, "Our Nelson, ~~somebody~~ cut him. They say he was just standing and watching. We're we're just hoping and praying." ~~He gazed at the mother and tugged on the bill of his cap. (2nd Rewrite)~~

The look or gaze, in Carver's story, functions as a muted expression of sentiment, and characters are shown seeking (and sometimes verbalising their desire for) understanding and solace. In her comparison of the two previously published versions of the story, Hallett presents the elliptical version of this passage as an example of the "miscued actions and brief dialogue of non-sequiturs" that contribute to "textual dysfunction" and pervasive sense of broken communication in "The Bath" (62). The mother's concern is shown elsewhere in the "version B" manuscript, as she follows the son's trolley as he is taken for more tests, and "stood beside the rolling thing and gazed at the sleeping boy." As he tended to do elsewhere, Lish removed moments where a character attempts to reassure their partner: "When the woman could not wake the child, she hurried to the telephone and called her husband at work. The man said to remain calm" (2nd Rewrite).

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During his second edit of the story, Lish also highlighted the sense of menace and vague fear in "The Bath." He removed the following sentence from the description of the fatal accident:

The automobile that had struck the birthday boy had come to rest a hundred feet farther on. A man in the driver's seat sat looking back over his shoulder. When he saw the birthday boy get back up to his feet, the driver put the car into gear and drove away.

The driver thus disappears from the story and is changed from a character with identifiable motivations to an unseen, menacing presence. The same process can be seen with the character of the baker in the final lines of the story. In his second edit, Lish removed three mentions of the "man" and made the character simply a "voice," a malevolent presence on the telephone:

"Yes," she said. "This is Mrs. Weiss. Is it about Scotty?" she said.
"Scotty," the ~~man's~~ voice said. ~~It's~~ **It is about Scotty," the voice said. It has to do with Scotty, yes. Have you forgotten all about Scotty? him?"** ~~the man said.~~
~~And then the man hung up.~~ (2nd Rewrite)

The sense of absent or failed connection is also evident in the relationship between the central characters, the comatose boy's parents. Lish removed several lines, for example, in which the husband looks at the child and then stands beside the woman as they look out the window. Another scene in which the couple watch their unconscious son in hospital shows the way in which Lish subtly downplayed the connection between them:

The husband sat in the chair beside her. He wanted to say something else ~~to~~ ~~reassure her. But he was afraid to~~ **but there was no saying what it should be.** He took her hand and put it in his lap, ~~and this. This~~ made him feel better, ~~her hand being there. He picked up her hand and just held it. It made him feel he was saying something.~~ They sat like that for a while, watching the boy, ~~and~~ not talking. From time to time he squeezed her hand. ~~Finally, the woman until she took it her hand away and rubbed her temples.~~

"I've been praying," she said. ~~She said, "Maybe if you prayed too," she said to him.~~

~~"I've already prayed,"~~ **"Me too,"** he said. I've been praying **too,"** he said.

~~"That's good," she said.~~ (2nd Rewrite)

This moment serves as a genetic illustration of Saltzman's 1988 observation that "every extension of detail" in the story enhances its affective dimension and constitutes a "development of the spiritual cost of the crisis" (144). The edits here subtly change the nature of the characters' actions – Carver's version reveals the husband's desire to reassure his wife and the fact that he "held" her hand rather than simply placing it in his lap. This moment, in the original, sets up a textual echo with the moment when the narrator of "Beginners" holds his lover's hand (CS 928); the removal of the final line here (which is followed by a paragraph break) also removes the internal echo of the word "good" with Carver's original title. Lish's additions here also create an intertextual link: the line "But there was no saying what it should be" is almost identical to the final line of the collection ("But then he could not think what it could possibly be" (CS 326)), a link that creates an altogether different resonance suggesting a larger story of inarticulacy and verbal failure in the collection.

Lish, in fact, also wrote the final line of this concluding story, "One More Thing." In Carver's original, the narrator faces his wife and daughter as he is about to leave them and attempts to utter words that will atone for his behaviour:

"I just want to say one more thing, Maxine. Listen to me. Remember this," he said. "I love you. I love you both no matter what happens. I love you too, Bea. I love you both." He stood there at the door and felt his lips begin to tingle as he looked at them for what, he believed, might be the last time. "Good-bye," he said . . .

"Is this what love is, L.D.?" she said, fixing her eyes on him. Her eyes were terrible and deep, and he held them as long as he could (CS 953).

Lish removed everything after the first line here, and replaced it with the dry narratorial comment "But then he could not think what it could possibly be." Leypoldt takes this moment as a prime example of the lack of self-knowledge and understanding to be found

in *WWTA*'s characters, and states that at the end of this story, "the reader is far ahead of Carver's character" ("Epiphanic Moments" 539).⁷⁸

2.3.5 "Too abrupt?": Rewriting "Tell the Women We're Going"

"Tell the Women We're Going" was one of the first stories that Lish had advised Carver on in the early days of their friendship. This is apparent from a letter he wrote shortly after Lish had taken up his position at *Esquire*, in which he refers to the story's earlier title:

Thanks for the most careful look you gave 'Friendship'. I went through it, pruning hard and rewriting, then someone re-typing, and I'm confident [it] is a much better story. However it turns out there, thanks much for the intelligent observations. Of course, mark the ms if you see something & think it's worth the trouble (n.d. Dec 1969)

In a letter written almost a year later in which he thanks Lish for his help, Carver writes that he has "other stories coming in *Northwest*, *Western Humanities*, and *Southwest* that I wish I'd had you look at beforehand" (12 Dec 1970): this may refer to "Friendship," published in summer 1971 in *Sou'wester Literary Quarterly*.⁷⁹ The story thus appeared in print almost ten years before it was collected in *WWTA*.

The story follows two childhood friends, Bill and Jerry, as they leave a family picnic to go drinking and pursue two young girls, with tragic consequences; while Bill is eager to

⁷⁸ The ending, in fact, bears some resemblance to the sense of speechless paralysis present in some of James Purdy's stories, such as that afflicting the husband in "Don't Call Me By My Right Name": "He did not know what to say. He felt anything he said might destroy his mind. He stood there with an insane emptiness on his eyes and lips" (55). Sklenicka states, quoting a conversation with Lish, that he "was under the influence of Paley and Purdy 'in every respect' and admired Purdy's sense of 'the dark, the unexplained, the uncanny'" (215); the ending of *WWTA* represents a moment where this influence seems identifiable.

⁷⁹ Carver could also be referring to "The Lie," which was published later the same year in the Winter 1971 issue of *Sou'wester* (CS 1007).

return to his wife and children, Jerry's behaviour becomes increasingly more sinister until, in a gruesome finale, he rapes and kills one of the girls. "What's noteworthy about the story," as Max observes of the version the author gave to Lish in 1980, "is the way Carver makes a boring afternoon build to murder" ("Carver Chronicles" n.p.); the primary effect of the narrative is the mounting tension of the pursuit and its uncertain outcome. We are shown glimpses of Jerry's rising frustration as he tries to "open it up" while driving on the highway, and hints of the reasons behind his frustration: "His hair was beginning to recede, just like his father's, and he was getting heavy around the hips" (CS 832–835). They follow two girls they encounter, and chase them in a manner that begins as flirtatious and playful. The girls run in different directions and the men become separated. The narrative focus then shifts to Jerry as he corners the girl and the implicit menace of the story's premise finally comes to the surface. Over several pages of scrupulous description and dialogue, Jerry struggles with the girl, attempting to subdue and rape her, and the violence here is described in unflinching detail: "When she tried to get to her feet again, he picked up a rock and slammed it into her face. He actually heard her teeth and bones crack, and blood came out between her lips" (842).⁸⁰ A final section, lasting roughly a page, depicts Bill's arrival on the scene. We see his reflections and anxieties about the situation – "he just wanted to round up Jerry, get back before it got any later" – and follow his shock as he reaches the scene and the reality and magnitude of the crime sink in. The final lines recall the story's original title as Bill accepts the destruction of the men's friendship and experiences a sense of catharsis:

Bill felt the awful closeness of their two bodies, less than an arm's length between. Then the head came down on Bill's shoulder. He raised his hand, and as if the

⁸⁰ The story is unusually violent for Carver's work, and Capra Press's Noel Young deemed it "too gruesome for my quavering senses" when Carver submitted it for publication in 1977 (CS 1000).

distance now separating them deserved at least this, he began to pat, to stroke the other, while his own tears broke. (843–844)

When Lish edited the story for *WWTA* he cut it by fifty-five percent. His edit leaves out many of the details that accumulate in the original and changes the final pages of the story entirely. Here, the violence is contained in a few short lines which (as well as turning a murder into a double murder) provide a shockingly blunt ending:

Bill took out a cigarette. But he could not get it lit. Then Jerry showed up. It did not matter after that.

Bill had just wanted to fuck. Or even to see them naked. On the other hand, it was okay with him if it didn't work out.

He never knew what Jerry wanted. But it started and ended with a rock. Jerry used the same rock on both girls, first on the girl called Sharon and then on the one that was supposed to be Bill's (CS 264 [2nd Rewrite]).

As Max observes, "The pursuit is eliminated: the violence now comes out of nowhere and is almost hallucinogenic." The story's ending leaves the reader with a huge interpretive gap as the shocking plot development is advanced in a single final line: Max suggests that this story constitutes a "wholesale rewrite" ("Carver Chronicles" n.p.).

The difference between the version Carver gave to Lish – version A – and the published version – version C – is clear, and the two can be read side by side in the *Collected Stories*. However, as with the other examples here, an examination of the way the story develops from version B – Lish's first rewrite – to version C is illuminating, and is absent from criticism thus far. For example, in his second rewrite, the editor removed some of Bill's doubts: these function, in the original, partly in order for the reader to recognise their own doubts about Jerry's behaviour. In response to Jerry's statement "Guy's got to get out . . . You know what I mean?," the narrative shifts to Bill's thoughts, which Lish edited as follows:

Bill ~~wasn't sure~~ **understood**. He liked to get out with the guys from the plant for the Friday night bowling league, ~~and he~~. **He** liked to stop off once or twice a week

after work to have a few beers with Jack Broderick, ~~but he liked being at home too.~~ **He knew a guy's got to get out.** (2nd Rewrite)

Bill's hesitancy is changed to unquestioning agreement, and the tone is changed to stereotypical male interaction: in the margins beside this passage in his copy of *WWTA*, Wallace wrote "vapid, regular" (*WWTA*, *Wallace's Copy* 60). The Lishian repetition of a particular phrase – "a guy's got to get out" – suggests a sense of complicity on Bill's part (Max argues that in this edit, "Bill becomes just a passive companion to Jerry"). When the men go to drink, Jerry asks the barman about the absence of girls from the bar, and Lish changed the barman's response to a more vulgar innuendo: "Riley laughed. He said, 'I guess ~~there just ain't enough to go around, boys.~~ **they're all in church praying for it.**'" Beside this, Wallace wrote "nasty, sexual" (61). Towards the end of the story, during the chase – which, in the final version, takes place obliquely in a couple of paragraphs – Lish adds an expletive that shifts the tone suddenly: "Jerry said, 'You go right and I'll go straight. We'll cut ~~them~~ **the cockteasers** off.'" Jerry said." Wallace, underlining the final two words here ("cockteasers off"), wrote "scary" in the margin (65).

Several reviewers singled out the story's ending for comment, generally negative. Houston's review asserted that, "Carver resorts to a violence he hasn't earned for an ending, and comes near to breaking his own primal rule: 'No tricks'" (24). Tim O'Brien's review presents the sudden, shocking violence at the end of the story as an example of a moment which strains credibility: "the crime seems merely spontaneous, merely brutal, merely stunning" (2). LeClair singled out the same story as a failure of style, claiming that the attempt at a "dramatic ending" falls flat: "For Carver, simplicity works best at the low end of the scale" (*Fiction Chronicle* 87). Wallace also had reservations about the ending, it seems, as his comments in the margin have a critical tone that occurs nowhere

else in his annotations: he asks “Too abrupt?” and wonders “What in 1st section explains the end?” (66). All of these criticisms are reactions to the work of the story’s editor rather than its author.

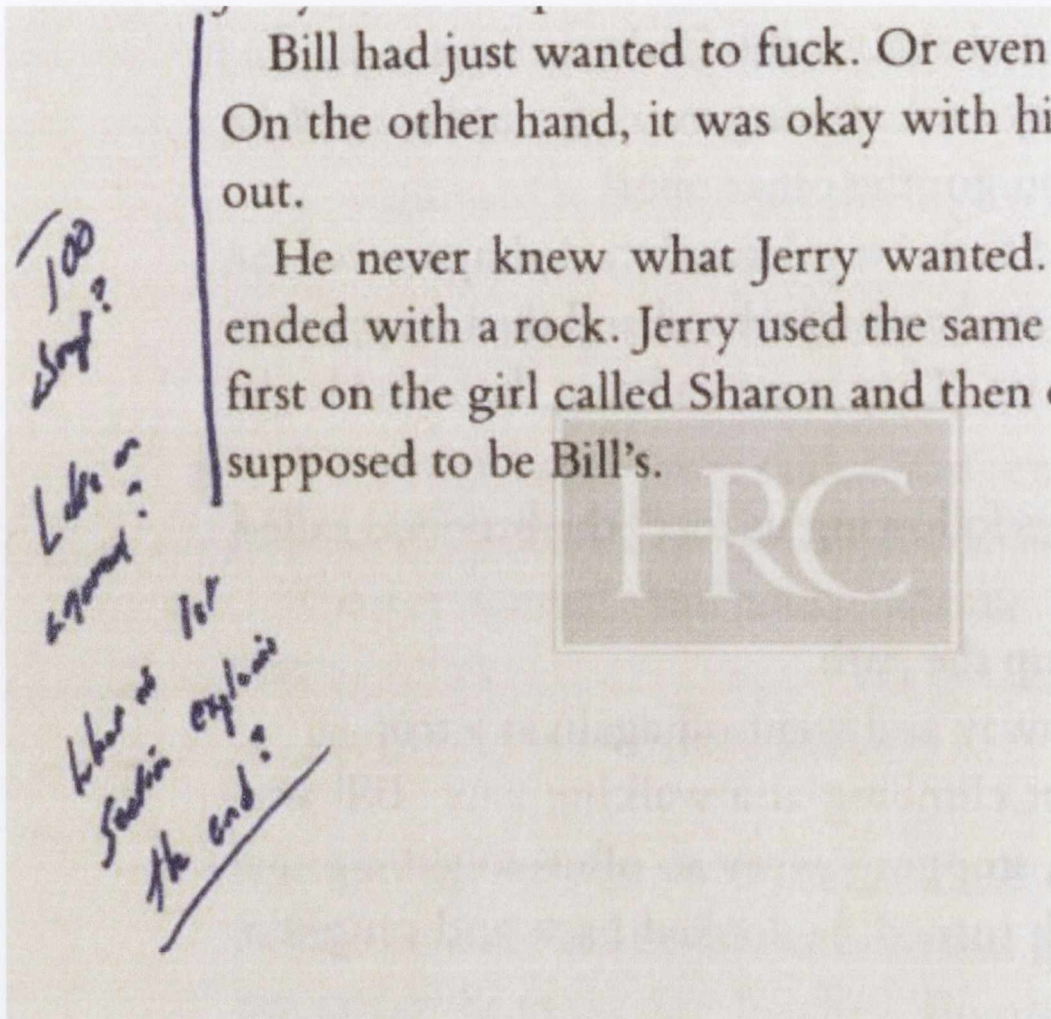


Figure 3: one of Wallace’s annotations to “Tell the Women We’re Going”

The ending also emphasises another important aspect of Lish’s editing, namely the fact that his edits of the stories were carried out in quick succession and serve to add a unified feel to the collection. Sklenicka argues that Lish’s changes served to apply Poe’s famous notion of the short story’s “unity of effect” to the collection as a whole, pointing to the

way the individual edits mesh with those of the surrounding stories and highlighting the importance of the sequencing of the pieces. Specifically, she notes that:

Comparing the way Lish honed the endings of four stories from the middle of the book – “The Bath,” “Tell the Women We’re Going,” “After the Denim,” and “So Much Water So Close to Home” – reveals that in each case Lish’s version ends with a held breath and suggestion of imminent violence (369).

While the phrasing of this is imprecise – in the story under discussion here, for example, the violence is sudden and irrevocable rather than “imminent” – the point is a valid one. Indeed, the ending of “Tell the Women We’re Going” is one of a number of moments in the collection that prompt the close reader to detect an intratextual link.⁸¹ The story is one of two that close on the image of a rock, a link which emerged late in the editing process. In his second edit of the story, Lish added the repetition of the word “rock,” making it the focus of both of the final sentences: “He never knew what Jerry wanted. But it started with ~~the~~ a rock. ~~that Jerry picked up,~~ **Jerry used the same rock on both girls**, first Sharon and then the one that was ~~supposed~~ **going** to be Bill’s” (*2nd Rewrite*). This echoes the ending of “Viewfinder,” the second story in the sequence. On the printer’s manuscript of “Viewfinder,” Lish changed the final lines to repeat the name of the object that the narrator throws from his rooftop: “Again! I screamed, and I ~~grabbed hold of another.~~ **took up another rock**” (*Printer’s Mss.*). Here, thematic and acoustical consecution is being introduced not only at the sentence and story level, but across the collection as a whole.

The resonances between the stories in *WWTA* are thus very different from those in *Beginners*, and while Carver seems to have mounted little resistance to the edits to

⁸¹ Randolph Runyon traces links such as these in order to illuminate the internal “echoes” within each of Carver’s collections: he notes Lish’s agency in the case of *WWTA* and acknowledges that in the case of *WYPBQP*, his responsibility for these is still unclear (159–71).

“Tell the Women We’re Going,” Sklenicka notes that his friend Donald Hall “especially missed” the story’s ending, along with the endings of “If It Please You” and “A Small, Good Thing,” offering to publish the earlier versions in an issue of *Ploughshares* that he would soon edit (368–369).⁸² As Hall noticed, the endings of each of these stories, in Carver’s originals, suggested moments of communion and reconciliation rather than sudden violence. When Carver collected his stories in *Where I’m Calling From* in 1988, he decided to omit “Tell the Women” from the volume entirely.

2.3.6 “A total rewrite”: Human Connection in “If It Please You”

Another story whose “human connections” Carver missed after the second round of edits was called (at this stage) “Community Center.” Lish cut the 26-page manuscript by 63%, removing the final six pages in his first round of edits (CS 1001). The story follows James and Edith Packer as they attend a bingo game in their local community centre; James is frustrated at arriving late, already unsettled (“I don’t feel lucky”) and becomes increasingly agitated as he sees a young “hippie” couple cheating during the game. During the evening, Edith reveals that her illness has returned (she tells her husband that she is “spotting,” and he understands that this “might mean what they most feared”) and when they return home, she sleeps while James finds himself alone with his fears. He begins to knit (a hobby, we learn, that he took up when he quit drinking) and to reflect on his life. His anger at the couple’s cheating dissipates as he considers their shared humanity – “He and the hippie were in the same boat, he thought, but the hippie just didn’t know it yet” – and he recalls the importance of prayer during the time when he was trying “to kick the drink” (CS 845–863). In the final paragraphs, James receives a revelation of sorts – “He

⁸² Only one of these – “A Small, Good Thing” – appeared, in 1982 (details of publication are given in the *Collected Stories* (1010)).

suddenly felt he had lived nearly his whole life without having ever once really stopped to think about anything, and this came to him now as a terrible shock and increased his feeling of unworthiness” – that prompts him to pray for “enlightenment” on his situation.

His prayers lead to an expansion of his vision:

He felt something stir inside him again. But it was not anger this time . . . He lay as if waiting. Then something left him and something else took its place. He found tears in his eyes. He began praying again, words and parts of speech piling up in a torrent in his mind. He went slower. He put the words together, one after the other, and prayed. This time he was able to include the girl and the hippie in his prayers . . . “If it please you,” he said in the new prayers for all of them, the living and the dead (CS 863).

The final lines here, of course, closely echo Joyce’s “The Dead” as the narrative focus shifts dramatically from the specific to the general and the narrative consciousness moves towards a moment of spiritual awareness. Speech and prayer lead to what seems like a moment of redemption, and James’ urge to communicate leads to understanding and release. Lish’s deletion of the final five pages removes this sense of release and leaves the character arrested and frustrated. Stephen King singled this edit out for criticism in his review of *Beginners*, arguing that “In the Lish-edited version, there are no prayers and hence no epiphany — only a worried and resentful husband who wants to tell the irritating hippies what happens ‘after the denim’, after the games. It’s a total rewrite, and it’s a cheat” (n.p.).

As we have seen, Carver had singled out the story when reiterating his concerns to Lish immediately after the second round of editing, noting that “my greatest fear is, or was, having them too pared, and I’m thinking of “Community Center” and “The Bath” both of which lost several pages each in the second editing” (14 July 1980). In November, Lish came – at Carver and Gallagher’s invitation – to speak to Carver’s class at Syracuse, and a letter written a few days after this suggests that the event had been a success:

Carver writes that the visit was “extraordinary” and tells his editor that “I feel closer to you than to my own brother.” However, it is clear that he was still bothered by some of the changes, and again mentioned this story in particular:

I wish those few changes we looked at in the motel that afternoon could be incorporated in the bound pages. I’m thinking particularly of the last sentence, phrase, whatever, for “Community Center.” That gives the story its resonance. (22 Nov 1980)

Carver may be referring to the final sentence of Lish’s first edit, as James prepares to begin knitting: “Then he set to work exactly where he’d left off.” Lish had removed this sentence from the second edit, and the fact that he reinstated it in edits made on the galleys suggests that he acceded to the author’s request here:

He left the porch light on, and went back to the guest room. He **pushed aside his knitting basket**, took up his basket of embroidery **from under the desk** and then settled himself in his chair. He raised the lid of the basket and got out the metal hoop. There was fresh white linen stretched across it. Now holding a tiny needle to the light, James Packer stabbed at the eye with a length of blue silk thread. **Then he set to work exactly where he’d left off.** (*Printer’s Mss.*)

The additional changes here, though, suggest that Lish did not feel himself to be closely bound by the author’s wishes, and further changes to the second set of proofs show him again returning to the final lines:

Holding the tiny needle to the light, James Packer stabbed at the eye with a length of blue silk thread. Then he set to work – stitch after stitch – , **making believe he was waving like the man on the keel.** (*Master Proofs*)

The “man on the keel” appears early in the story: the narrator describes the foyer of the community center, the walls of which contain “photographs of fishing boats and naval vessels, one ~~photograph~~ showing a boat that had turned over ~~on the rocks at low tide~~, a man standing on the keel and waving ~~at the camera~~” (*2nd Rewrite*). Carver’s first draft identifies this as one of the boats that has been “driven ashore onto the sandy beaches below the town” (*CS 848*), and the man in Carver’s original is, as is clear from the end of

the sentence, waving at a companion. Lish's edit to the line early in the story makes the man's action senseless, an isolated wave without any clear audience; his change to the final line of the story, with its return to the same image, adds a note of hopelessness and absurdity to James' knitting. In his final changes to "Community Center," then, Lish seems to have reinstated Carver's last line while also including a final clause that subverts the character's actions and adds a note of mockery to the narrative voice.⁸³

Lish also changed the title of the story, and again this appears to have taken place without Carver's knowledge. The original title, "If it Please You," refers to the phrase uttered by James as he prays for all of humanity, "the living and the dead" (CS 863). The subsequent title, "Community Center," retains this focus on the wider social vision available to the recovering protagonist (albeit while perhaps introducing a note of irony due to the deletion of the story's ending). The final title was only introduced after the manuscript left Carver's hands entirely. It referred to a line that Lish changed in the master proofs: "He'd tell them what was waiting for you after the ~~rings~~ **denim** and the ~~bracelets~~ **earrings**, after ~~the~~ touching each other and cheating at games" (*Master*

⁸³ Again, this introduces a new link with another story, as the final line sets up an echo two stories later at the close of "The Third Thing That Killed My Father Off." At the close of Carver's original, the arm of the drowned man (called "Dummy," as was the story itself at that point) floats above the surface for a moment, a scene that lingers in the narrator's memory:

For myself, I knew I wouldn't forget the sight of that arm emerging out of the water. Like some kind of mysterious and terrible signal, it seemed to herald the misfortune that dogged our family in the coming years (900).

In "Dummy," Lish removed the reference to the family's subsequent misfortune and tinkered with the simile several times in a way that made the narrator's voice more ironic, as we can see from his final edits: "That arm coming up and going back down in the water, it was ~~like some kind of hello and good-bye~~, **like so long to good times and hello to bad**" (*Master Proofs*). The change here introduces another waving arm, echoing the "man on the keel" and implanting an internal resonance missing from Carver's original collection.

Proofs).⁸⁴ On the master proofs of the manuscript, Lish completed this process, changing the title of the story to echo James' bitter observation on the futility of their pleasure and the certainty of death.

2.3.7 "Low-rent Tragedies": the Critical Legacy

The reception of *WWTA* offers a vivid demonstration of the way in which, in Eggert's words, early readers and reviewers may "unfold" a work over time, laying down critical parameters and "influencing subsequent readings" (*Securing* 187). The impressions of the first readers of the work were certainly crucial in determining its continuing interpretation: to Gallagher, it was "as though the clock stopped in April 1981" (Kelley 5). As we have seen, contemporary reviewers such as James Atlas focused on the "minimality" of the stories, and the parameters of the critical conversation quickly began to spring up around this term. Within four years, an entire issue of the *Mississippi Review* (Winter 1985) would be devoted to an attempt to evaluate the burgeoning genre. In her introduction to the issue (subtitled "On the New Fiction"), guest editor Kim Herzinger noted the "perceptible movement" in the preceding years towards a new fictional mode. She acknowledged the difficulties with the term "Minimalism," lamenting the absence of a more appropriate scholarly label but admitting defeat in the attempt to find one. She ventured a list of the main attributes of the prevalent fictional mode of the preceding years, which included: "equanimity of surface, 'ordinary' subjects, recalcitrant narrators and deadpan narratives, slightness of story, and characters who don't think out loud" (11). McDermott's retrospective definition in his 2006 monograph on literary minimalism is

⁸⁴ In his second edit of the story, in fact, Lish had already removed the word "community" several times, as in the following example: "They could hear the surf breaking on the rocks at the bottom of the cliff ~~down~~ behind the ~~community-center~~ building."

forensic in its detail and length, and repeats many of the same features, highlighting the relative stability of the term:

“Minimalism” refers to a short or short-short story that is nearly plotless, treating isolated moments or random, insignificant events; begins in medias res; is depicted, dramatic and filmic rather than expository or novelistic; leads nowhere or to a minor vastation or anti-climax; and favours the present tense. Characters inhabit working-class environments typified by economic disenfranchisement and menial empty work; an overwhelming consumerist culture of ubiquitous brand names and loud televisions; dysfunctional and ad hoc families; violence, alcoholism and drug abuse; rootlessness, and a bleak, quasi-Naturalistic sense of entrapment. The language of “Minimalism” features simple diction and syntax, colloquialisms, a blank tone, lyricism directed towards surfaces and mundane objects, and an elliptical quality. (13)

These descriptions contain obvious similarities in the way they both emphasise Minimalism’s deliberate refusal of several possibilities of literary presentation: its insistence on surface rather than depth, “ordinary” or “menial” subjects rather than grand ones, a deliberately limited amount of plot, and an affectless (“blank,” “deadpan”) tone. Summing up, McDermott highlights “the glaring lack of information” in Carver’s texts, suggesting that the author “has pared down a standard of fullness, substituting absence in the place of the style features we might expect to find in a work of realism” (108–109).

Theorists of the short story would also come to emphasise the deliberate absence of narrative information, using this as the primary means by which to situate Carver within the development of the genre. In the wake of *WETA*, Carver’s work was placed squarely in the tradition suggested by Hemingway’s famous analogy of fictional omission and ellipsis: “The dignity of movement of an ice-berg is due to only one-eighth of it being above water” (*Death in the Afternoon* 154). Susanne C. Ferguson noted the “deletion of traditional plot elements” (227) as well as the opaque, elliptical endings, and Charles May suggested that Carver’s work served to reduce character to voice:

In [*WWTA*], language is used so sparingly and the plots are so minimal that the stories seem pallidly drained patterns with no flesh and life in them . . . Whatever theme they may have is embodied in the bare outlines of the event and in the spare dialogue of characters who are so overcome by event and so lacking in language that the theme is unsayable. Characters often have no names or only first names and are so briefly described that they seem to have no physical presence at all; certainly they have no distinct identity but rather seem to be shadowy presences trapped in their own inarticulateness (“Chekhov” 213).

May placed the volume within a lineage of short fiction that, following Chekhov, “has pursued its movement away from the linearity of prose towards the spatiality of poetry . . . by radically limiting its selection of the presented event,” making particular reference to writers like Carver and Hemingway “whose styles are thin to the point of disappearing” (214). A genetic study of the Lish manuscripts allows us to follow the text as it approaches this vanishing point and to see, essentially, Minimalism in action.

The critical vocabulary around Carver’s work also made frequent use of the phrase “Dirty Realism,” a designation which, when examined alongside the genetic evidence, provides another example of the way in which Lish’s changes were taken up by critics as defining “Carveresque” traits. The lean, elliptical style of *WWTA* was often framed as a narrative mode specifically adapted to portray the working-class world of Carver’s characters, and its silences taken for the verbal paralysis of blue-collar America: LeClair, for example, wrote that the prose “obeys the linguistic limits of [Carver’s] subjects” (“Fiction Chronicle” 87). Sklenicka notes that many critics were “at pains to define who the characters are,” and quotes the *TIME* reviewer’s observation that Carver’s primary concern is with “the rage that ordinary folks experience” (368).⁸⁵ This “rage” is certainly

⁸⁵ Michael Wood’s contemporary review had observed that Carver’s writing presents a world of “motels, Almond Roca, baseball caps . . . and children with names like Rae and Melody” (n.p.), unaware that both of these names had been substituted into the text by Lish (Rea was named Bea in Carver’s original draft, while Melody was named Kate (CS 231, 323, 762, 949)).

more visible in Lish's version of *WWTA*'s title story, as the reflective, melancholy Herb becomes the cruder and more confrontational Mel, who utters terse declarations like "Let's finish this fucking gin" (CS 320). This process continued into the master proofs of the book, as Lish introduced additional expletives ("goddamn," "fucking") and changed "there is nothing to joke about" to the terser "What's the joke?" during his final round of changes.⁸⁶ Lish also deleted lines that contained specific literary references (as he had from "Neighbors" years before), making the characters appear less educated.⁸⁷ In a comparison of two passages from "The Bath" and "A Small, Good Thing," Hallett notes the way in which diegetic information subtly alters the story's representation of class, as details about the father's background serve to identify him as upwardly mobile: "With college, an MBA, and a junior partnership in an investment firm, this Howard resembles few, if any, characters in Carver's early 'blue-collar' fiction" (64).

Boddy points out, in relation to the "minimalist" movement in general, that "much of the discussion of the new fiction was couched in terms of the access it provided into 'low-rent' lives," and notes that "the phrase 'low-rent tragedies', ubiquitous in Carver reviews, comes from *WWTA*'s final story, 'One More Thing'" (85, 97 n12). However, an examination of the manuscripts shows that the phrase "low-rent" was a last-minute (and presumably unauthorized) addition by Lish: the editor wrote in the modifying phrase on

⁸⁶ Where Herb says "I'm a heart surgeon, sure, but really I'm just a mechanic. I just go in and fix things that go wrong with the body. I'm just a mechanic," Mel declares "I'm a heart surgeon, sure, but I'm just a mechanic. I go in and I fuck around and I fix things. Shit" (CS 937, 318).

⁸⁷ Lish deleted the following lines: "'I like *Ivanhoe*,' Herb said. '*Ivanhoe*'s great. If I had it to do over again, I'd study literature. Right now I'm having an identity crisis. Right, Terri?' Herb said. He laughed" (CS 936). Blake Morrison points out that Lish also removes a line in "Where is Everyone?" in which the narrator makes reference to a scene in a novel by Italo Svevo, and suggests that the deletion here is made "on the grounds that the lowlife characters wouldn't be sufficiently educated to read" (n.p.).

the master proofs of the story, thus adding a note of socio-economic specificity to Carver's original line – "Maxine had said it was another tragedy in a long line of **low-rent** tragedies" (CS 949) – and creating a phrase that would be taken by many critics as summative of the entire collection.

Indeed, the phrase would echo through several influential assessments of Carver's work. In the *New York Review of Books*, Robert Tower wrote that Carver's stories are "low-rent tragedies involving people who read popular mechanics and *Field and Stream*, people who play bingo, hunt deer, fish, and drink" (n.p.). In the UK, *Granta* introduced Carver to British readers in a 1983 issue entitled *Dirty Realism*, coining a term which successfully (and persistently) defined Carver's work in relation to this "punchy new movement which . . . drew attention to America's under-belly" (Hornby 33). Editor Bill Buford's introduction was similarly clear about the social status of the stories' characters, describing the issue as a collection of "unadorned, unfurnished, low-rent tragedies about people who watch day-time television, read cheap romances or listen to country and western music." Again, the style was framed as a comment upon the impoverished ("unfurnished") lives of these characters (4–5),⁸⁸ and the presentation of the work – while undeniably effective – also served, in Hornby's words, "to create an image that Carver was never really able to shake off (in the U.K.) . . . as some kind of spokesman for the mid-west poor" (34). On both sides of the Atlantic, Carver was celebrated as a chronicler of working class American life and was praised for not condescending to his psychologically damaged, financially vulnerable characters. Sklenicka comments that it was as if reviewers fully

⁸⁸ Buford listed these characters as:

Waitresses in roadside cafes, cashiers in supermarkets, construction workers, secretaries and unemployed cowboys. They play bingo, eat cheeseburgers, hunt deer and stay in cheap hotels . . . They are from Kentucky or Alabama or Oregon, but, mainly, they could just about be from anywhere: drifters in a world cluttered with junk food and the oppressive details of modern consumerism (4).

expected such characters to be condescended to (368), and indeed the author's perceived attitude could be said to have licensed a certain degree of condescension on the part of critics. In the *Partisan Review* in 1991, Morris Dickstein recycled the phrase "low-rent tragedies" and claimed that while Carver's characters are "not especially sensitive or introspective," he "never condescends to them or directly judges them." He also noted that these "blue-collar characters live far from the mainstream of upper middle-class life, with its chic urban irony and sophistication"; the telling word "mainstream," here, would seem to betray a degree of complacency in the critical perspective (507–509). Indeed, when Lish was contacted in 1984 to contribute quotes to a profile of Carver, he encouraged this critical perspective, describing Carver as an "important writer" while offering ambiguously backhanded praise:

It's not that his people are impoverished, except that they might be impoverished in spirit. It's not that they aren't educated, because in some cases they are. They just seem squalid. In every manifestation of human activity, they seem squalid. They're like hillbillies of the shopping mall. And Carver celebrates that squalor, makes poetic that squalor in a way nobody else has tried to do (CWRC 87).

The profile, which ran in the *New York Times Magazine* in June 1984 under the title "Raymond Carver: A Chronicler of Blue-Collar Despair," could be said to fit into a pattern of paratextual struggle that would characterise the post-WWTA years.

2.4 “Is there an Editor in the House?”:

The Paratextual Struggle

Carver and Lish’s struggle over the stories in *WWTA* has been well-documented, but it is clear that this struggle continued in less direct ways through the paratextual materials surrounding the book. A variety of documents from the months surrounding the editing process suggest Carver’s oscillating attitude towards the limits of the editor’s role as well as betraying an ongoing, submerged conflict between the two.

In a short review published a few months after the editing of *WWTA*, a review by Carver of Richard Brautigan’s collection of prose pieces *The Tokyo-Montana Express* (1980) appeared. Carver offered qualified praise, bemoaning the lack of quality control (there are too many “space filler-uppers”) and declared:

You want to ask, “Is there an editor in the house?” Isn’t there someone around who loves this author more than anything, someone he loves and trusts in return, who could sit down with him and tell him what’s good, even wonderful, in this farrago of bits and pieces, and what is lightweight, plain silly stuff and better left unsaid, or in the notebooks? (*CIYNM* 258–59).

“One wishes,” wrote Carver, “that this imaginary editor-friend had been stern with the author now and again” (258–59). During the same period, though, he was expressing some hesitations about the materials relating to the publication of his forthcoming book. Sklenicka, for example, describes “the extreme hype of Lish’s copy on the inside flaps of the book, much of it referencing the story Carver wished to omit, ‘Mr. Coffee and Mr. Fixit’” (366–367). This copy is probably what Carver referred to in a letter from January 1981 in which he expressed reservations about the way in which the stories were framed:

I think the cover copy is very fine. But I wonder about the words “hysterical,” “impotent,” “deranged.” It seems to me “unable” would be a better word than “impotent.” “‘Unable’ to explain the past” seems a better, or more preferable

phrasing, than “‘impotent’ to explain the past.” The husbands are not, of course, “deranged.” Not really, anyway. That’s all. Love the rest of it, naturally. It’s really very good. (19 Jan 1981)

An earlier letter (from October 1980) mentions “that pre-conference poop sheet you sent up”; the subject here is unclear, but it is possible that Lish planned to read from Carver’s work during his November visit to Syracuse. In any case, the concern expressed by Carver strongly suggests that one of his own stories was mentioned in the sheet, and that he objected to the emphasis on its stylistic compression:

The ONLY criticism of the poop sheet you sent up is that sentence “To begin with, such a story can’t get any more reduced than it already is and exists only in the peculiarly crippled speech of its composition.” I don’t like that, but the rest is fine, as I said. (06 Oct 1980)

Carver’s well-known essay “On Writing,” written during this time, reads in hindsight as a much stranger and more highly-charged document than it did when it appeared in the *Book Review* in February 1981 as “A Storyteller’s Shoptalk.” It appears from the surviving correspondence that Carver had sent this to Lish at the end of December 1980, and that Lish’s response was unfavourable. Carver urged him to reconsider his judgement:

Anyway, I have to feel this is a good thing . . . I hope you don’t have reservations about the matter. Don’t. Believe me, it is a good thing and it is going to be fine . . . When you see it, I know you’ll be able to get behind it. Don’t worry!” (30 Jan 1981)

While we can only guess at Lish’s criticisms, we can certainly observe the potential tension in the fact of a writer sending his editor – who had recently cut that writer’s work by half – a draft of an essay about the writing process that not only fails to mention that editor but also pointedly espouses the primacy of the individual artistic vision. In the essay, Carver defines the most important aspect of fiction as:

A unique and exact way of looking at things, and finding the right context for expressing that way of looking . . . It’s akin to style, what I’m talking about, but it isn’t style alone. It is the writer’s particular and unmistakable signature on everything he writes. It is his world and no other (CS 728).

It is surely not excessive to suggest that Carver – who, as Sklenicka notes, had nowhere expressed anger or questioned Lish’s methods in his lengthy letter of protest against the second round of changes to *WWTA* (358) – was engaging here in a kind of passive-aggressive resistance to his editor’s influence. Carver was already, by this time, writing stories for his next collection, and had told Gallagher of his intention to publish the unedited versions at a later date (Sklenicka 33; Kelley 4); it seems clear that he was attempting, by indirect means, to assert his identity and push back against the editorial influence he had experienced in the preceding year.

2.4.1 Declaring Literary Independence: *Cathedral*

The breakdown of Carver and Lish’s working relationship took place during the publishing process for *Cathedral*. In the correspondence for this time, the shift in the dynamic of their friendship in the wake of Carver’s newfound success (and, we can surmise, his ongoing attempt to achieve a distance from his former life) is clear. In August 1982, in advance of a planned round of editing, Carver wrote a long letter in which he preemptively asserted his authorial prerogative, noting the differences between his and Lish’s aesthetic approaches⁸⁹ and making clear his anxiety at the possibility of a repeat of the editorial process of *WWTA*:

I love your heart, you must know that. But I can’t write these stories and have to feel inhibited – if I feel inhibited I’m not going to write them at all – and feel that if you, the reader I want to please more than any, don’t like them, you’re going to re-write them from top to bottom. Why, if I think that the pen will fall right out of my fingers, and I may not be able to pick it up. (11 Aug 1982)

⁸⁹ He wrote, for example, that “most often, or often, we agree on other people’s work. But often we don’t. I know you don’t have a whole lot of regard for Beattie, Updike, Oate’s (sic) stories, Gardner, their work. But by and large I happen to like what they’re doing” (11 Aug 1982).

A letter from a month later consists largely of a litany of Carver's burgeoning professional and financial success: he mentioned, for example, that he had been elected to the Board of Directors at Yaddo, that he had just sold a story to a magazine (*Grand Street*) for a thousand dollars, and that he had recently been in New York to meet film director Michael Cimino to discuss the script (based on Dostoevsky's life story) that he and Gallagher were in the process of writing.⁹⁰ Carver wrote that he would deliver the manuscript for *Cathedral* after his next meeting with Cimino, and promised that he would find a role for Lish in the movie if he wanted (03 Sep 1982). It is clear from these letters alone that the circumstances of the production of *Cathedral* were utterly different from those of the author's previous collection. On the eve of the publication of *WWTA*, Carver had sent Lish a lengthy letter pleading for the cessation of publication of the edited version of his manuscript; now, a little over two years later, he was scheduling the delivery of his latest manuscript after a meeting with a celebrated Hollywood director, and offering to find his editor a minor part in a movie.

The editing process was one to which Lish still contributed, although it is clear that Carver took more control than he had previously. Stull and Carroll are largely correct in stating that in "Cathedral," the author "accepted only minor corrections from Lish" (CS 985): however, the editor contributed changes of varying degree to almost all of the stories in the volume. Confusingly, Stull and Carroll claim that "Lish disliked all of the new stories" in *Cathedral* ("Critical Reception" 45): however, Lish complimented at least two of them in typescripts – on his edits of "Careful" and "Feathers," he wrote that each is "a beaut" ("Careful" *Typescript*; "Feathers" *Typescript*). The manuscripts for "The Bridle," for example, contain several of Lish's cuts, but the majority of these were not taken. The

⁹⁰ The film was never made; the script was later published as *Dostoevsky: A Screenplay* (Capra, 1985).

editing of "Fever" also shows Carver's increased control. The story is lightly edited until the final pages, but Lish suggested that Carver cut the final paragraphs containing the protagonist's epiphany; Carver incorporated some of the line edits in the final pages, but kept all of the original ending ("Fever" Typescript). In "Vitamins," Carver refused several edits, but accepted some line edits affecting the interactions between the characters. Lish had deleted several lines of dialogue that took place in the bar, between the protagonist, his girlfriend and the menacing character of Nelson, recently returned from Vietnam: the result was to make Nelson more threatening and to mute the characters' reactions, reducing their displays of emotion ("Vitamins" Typescript).

The manuscripts for "Cathedral" show that Lish made a number of suggestions in his edit of the final story, most of which were accepted by Carver; these tend to be of a piece with the methods analysed earlier in this chapter.⁹¹ He proposed a change that, as with so many of Carver's earlier stories, subtly made the narrator's expression of his own predicament less eloquent: "I guess I'm agnostic or something. ~~No, the fact is,~~ I don't believe in it. ~~Anything.~~ **In anything.** Sometimes it's hard." Indeed, the lines that close "Cathedral" (following on directly from the ones referring to the men's "fingers," quoted above) show that Lish's edits, while small, played a significant part in the rhythm and texture of the story's much-praised ending:

~~In a minute then~~ he said, "I think that's ~~enough~~ **it.** I think you got ~~the idea-it,~~" he said. "Take a look. What do you think?"

But I had my eyes closed. I thought I'd keep them ~~closed~~ **closed that way** for a little longer. I thought it was something I ought ~~not to forget to do.~~

⁹¹ For example, Lish urged Carver to remove culturally specific references, suggesting that he change "cannabis" to "a smoke," "Chartres Cathedral" to "this one cathedral," "Sainte Chapelle" to "another one," and "Notre Dame" to "the famous one in Paris." All but the first of these were accepted. Elsewhere, he removed the brand name "Grisco," replacing it with the generic "gas" in the phrase "You're cooking with gas now."

"Well?" he said. Are you looking?"

My eyes were still closed. I was in my house ~~and~~ . I knew that. But I didn't feel like I was inside anything.

"It's really something," I said. ("Cathedral," *Typescript*)

In November, Carver sent Lish the dedication for the book: not, as he had promised earlier, to the editor, but to Gallagher and John Gardner (13 Nov 1982). We may speculate on the contribution of moments such as these to Lish's later sense of Carver's "ingratitude" (Max, "Carver Chronicles" n.p.); in any case, the textual record shows the perceptible decrease in personal warmth. The tone of Carver's letters to Lish became more tense over the coming months, and the relationship clearly broke down in the spring of 1983: Stull and Carroll write that Lish was "no longer in charge of *Cathedral*" by the summer and that Carver had effectively "declared his literary independence" ("Critical Reception" 45).

Carver was quick to suggest that these stories were more representative of his intentions than his previous ones, stating in a 1983 interview: "I feel closer to this book than to anything I've ever done" (qtd. in Saltzman 155). He was also, however, keen to praise his former editor: in an interview conducted in May 1983, in the midst of the dissolution of their relationship, Carver spoke to an interviewer who noted that the author "has a fierce sense of loyalty and he mentioned Lish's name at every opportunity, repeating that he was grateful to him from the bottom of his heart" (CWRC 66). The mixed messages on display here indicate the difficulty of the position Carver had reached in moving on from a working relationship that had brought him unprecedented success and suggest a conflicted attitude that, I argue, would continue in subsequent years. In the final chapter, we will examine some of Carver's later work in order to trace the after-effects of this conflict; for now, we will shift our focus to Lish

in order to further historicize this relationship and contextualise the development of Carver's stories.

2.5 "How can people not see your touch?":

Reconsidering Lish's Editorial Influence

As we have seen, therefore, Lish's involvement with Carver's work was not a short-term editing arrangement limited to a small number of works, but a prolonged period of influence intimately connected with the editor's continued rise through the world of American publishing. During these years Lish combined, for Carver, the roles of editor, agent and mentor. This process did not occur in isolation, and must be understood in relation to Lish's own increasing power and his placement within the "Red Hot Center" (in the words of *Esquire*) of the U.S. literary world. During the years of his friendship with Carver – in particular, those dating from his employment at *Esquire* in 1969 – Lish was, as we shall see, continually engaged in editing arrangements with a substantial number of authors and was regularly collaborating with several of the writers who would help to shape the direction of the American short story in subsequent decades. The following section provides context for Lish's editing of Carver by detailing some of his work with other writers and outlining central features of his own aesthetic vision. I will discuss the three primary strands of Lish's work – editing, writing, and teaching – in order to show the continuities between them, to suggest the wide-ranging nature of his influence and to test the claims of those like Douglas Glover who argue that "the last American prose writer who had this kind of impact on the minds of the best writers of her era was Gertrude Stein" (Lish and Glover).

2.5.1 “This is Your Good Stuff”: A Closer Look at Lish’s Editing

Lish’s influence appears in a direct way in several notable works of fiction produced during the years of his work with Carver, and the manuscripts for these reveal something of his contribution to the origins of literary Minimalism beyond Carver’s work. Lish was instrumental in the early careers of Barry Hannah and Mary Robison, for example, making him an essential figure in the development of what was variously known as “Minimalism,” “Dirty Realism,” and “the new realism” (or, to use McGurl’s recent formulation, “lower-middle-class modernism”) in the early 1980s (PE 32). Lish also worked extensively on Barry Hannah’s books in the late 1970s and early 1980s and indeed, as Michael Hemmingson shows, the similarities between Carver and Hannah (and between the manuscript evidence of each writer’s work) are significant. An obvious similarity lies in the problem both writers had with alcohol, which may help to explain their need for a greater degree of assistance throughout the publishing process. Lish edited both writers heavily: “Carver on the sentence and paragraph level, Hannah for entire manuscripts” (“Saying More” 493). Hemmingson describes how Lish “line-edited photocopies of the stories from the journals they had seen print in,” as he had with Carver’s work (490): indeed, in several cases the journal in question was *Esquire*, in which he himself had published many of the stories that would comprise Hannah’s collection *Airships* (1978). As with Carver, then, Lish saw Hannah’s work through several iterations, refining his vision of the stories in different stages. Several of these stories, such as “Coming Close to Donna,” show a similar spatial fragmentation to ones such as Carver’s “Mr. Coffee and Mr. Fixit,” with copious line-breaks imbuing the narrative with a jumpy, disconnected feel. Some also begin with the punchy “attack sentences” and urgent, hallucinatory present-tense of the stories in *WWTA*; for example, “Fistfight on the old

cemetery,” and “My head’s burning off and I got a heart about to burst out of my ribs” (the first lines of “Coming Close to Donna” and “Love Too Long” respectively (*Airships and Ray* 41, 6).

Lish shaped Hannah’s work from *Airships* onward to a significant degree, most notably in the case of the critically successful *Ray* (1980). Hannah’s drafts for the novel are, according to Hemmingson, “a confusing, sloppy mess”: Lish’s editing work here involved carefully rearranging sections into narrative coherence, much as Max Perkins did for Thomas Wolfe’s major novels (Hemmingson, “Saying More” 490–491; Berg 119–130, 223–228). Again, the spatial element of Lish’s arranging is clear, with frequent line breaks and several chapters consisting of only two sentences. The novel’s distinctive ending closes with three lines written by Lish (“Sister! Christians! Sabers, gentlemen, sabers!”) that appear to be spoken by a minor character (called Commander Gordon) most likely based on Lish (Hannah, *Airships and Ray* 282; “Saying More” 491–492)⁹². Hannah’s attitude to these changes was markedly different from Carver’s. In 1982, he described Lish’s edit of his novel *The Tennis Handsome* as a “revised version” of his manuscript and, ten years later, he addressed the editor in correspondence as a “master” (“Saying More” 492–493). Lish’s work on the story collection *Captain Maximus* (1985) was similarly thorough and Hemmingson speculates that the editor may have worked on Hannah’s manuscripts even after the author moved publishers in 1984, noting that several of these display a “similar minimalist sensibility and atmosphere” to the Knopf-published works (493–494). The editor’s advocacy and textual assistance was, Hemmingson argues, essential to the commercial breakthrough of both Carver and Hannah, and he claims that

⁹² Indeed, the headline for *The New Yorker’s* obituary for the writer alluded to this line: “Sabers, Gentlemen: Remembering Barry Hannah” (Ellis n.p.).

both writers “owe their careers, their place in the canon of American literature, to Lish” (495).

The importance of Lish to Hannah’s career is clear. *Airships* was nominated for the Arnold Gingrich Short Fiction Award and led to an Award for Literature from the American Institute of Arts and Letters in 1979, while *Ray* was nominated for the American Book Award; following the publication of these books Hannah moved to Hollywood to write film scripts with Robert Altman, and in 1982 he became writer in residence at the University of Mississippi (Grimes n.p.; Hannah and Tower n.p.). In his 2004 interview with the *Paris Review*, Hannah was unambiguous in his praise:

Gordon Lish was a genius editor. A deep friend and mentor. He taught me how to write short stories. He would cross out everything so there’d be like three lines left, and he would be right . . . This is your good stuff. This is the right rhythm. So I learned to write better short stories under him. (“Art of Fiction 184” n.p.)

Several of the writers who worked with Lish have gone on record to ascribe a similar importance to Lish’s part in their development: Diane Williams, for example, refers to “the cardinal importance of his influence on my writing and editing life,” and Hempel and Schutt have spoken of the way in which his aesthetic licensed their writing of stories based on language rather than plot (Williams n.p.; Hempel, “BOMB Interview” n.p.).⁹³

Lish’s work on the fiction of Harold Brodkey is also instructive, as it demonstrates the inadequacy of the word “minimalism” to describe his influence while providing

⁹³ Schutt, for example, claims that Lish “taught me how to use what I was good at to tell a story . . . he was the first to tell me all a writer had to have was one good sentence. His simply pointing that out made all the difference in the world. I didn’t have to know where I was going; I didn’t need a plan. Gordon pointed out that if you had one good sentence, and you looked at it long and hard and took from it what term was most charged for the next sentence, this was a legitimate way to proceed” (n.p.).

illuminating points of comparison with Carver. Brodkey's reputation during the 1970s and 1980s appears to have been, in New York publishing circles at least, extraordinarily high: unpublished fragments of his novel-in-progress "circulated like gold coins" and drew praise from Cynthia Ozick and Denis Donoghue, who pronounced the novel "a work of genius. As good as Proust" (Baskin n.p.; Blades n.p.). Lish was a vocal advocate of Brodkey's work, claiming that when published, the novel would "surpass almost anything you and I have ever read. He is the writer of our time, maybe of the century" (Blades n.p.). In 1976, the *New York Times* announced that Brodkey had turned in his manuscript, "one of the most anticipated works of fiction in the last five years" (Lask n.p.). The novel, referred to at the time as *Party of Animals*, never appeared under that title, and when *The Runaway Soul* (which was reputed to contain much of the same material) was published in 1991 it received "mixed reviews" and was generally deemed to have failed on this promise (Smith n.p.). Lish had withdrawn from the job of editing the novel, and their correspondence reveals a breakdown in the working relationship, with Lish objecting to – as he saw it – being asked to play the part of "idolator of Brodkey" rather than "editor of Brodkey" (09 Dec 1985). Prior to this, however, their work together had produced one notable success, as Brodkey's story "His Son, in His Arms, in Light, Aloft," published (alongside Carver's story "Collectors") in the August 1975 issue of *Esquire*, won first prize in the following year's O. Henry collection. Brodkey, as Gerry Howard later observed, was Lish's "maximalist odd man out" and his dense high-modernist style is in sharp contrast to Carver's (Howard n.p.). However, a closer examination of his work reveals aspects of Lish's own aesthetic. Baskin notes that Brodkey's writing "ceaselessly circled a set of intensely personal events" and that his prose, with its sometimes

extravagantly stylized sentences, is “elliptical” in its reversals and lack of linear progression (Baskin n.p.).

An examination of the drafts for the story shows that Lish applied many of the same techniques to Brodkey’s prose as he did to Carver’s. In the first draft, he made one of the most notable alterations to the story, honing the beginning in order to produce a typically startling opening sentence.⁹⁴ Brodkey’s original draft introduces the image of “a child running in the damp mouth of early darkness,” and is followed by lines that introduce context, detail and motive for the narrator’s actions: his father calls, saying “‘Wiley, it’s time to stop’,” and a few lines later the narrator states that “it occurs to me not to hear my name.” Lish cut all of this, making the story begin with the line “My father is chasing me.” This blunt five-word phrase, with its urgency and its suggestion of an imminent threat, functions as an attack sentence in content as well as form and clearly illustrates Lish’s desire for an attention-grabbing opening.

⁹⁴ According to Hempel, this was a recurring technique of Lish’s in his seminars: “Lish looks over our work word for word . . . ‘Here’s your attack,’ he will say, skipping past a page and a half of throat clearing to the real beginning of the story” (“Captain Fiction” 93, emphasis in original). This is, of course, an editing technique that is not unique to Lish: perhaps the most famous instance is F. Scott Fitzgerald’s advice to Ernest Hemingway to cut the opening fifteen pages of *The Sun Also Rises* (Berg 91).

~~His Son, in His Arms,~~
 His Son, in His Arms,
 in Light, Aloft
 by Harold Brodkey

①

a child running in the damp mouth of early darkness. Life, one's life,
 is in part like a sealed or closed carton -- one stuffs papers in it;
 other people stuff papers in it -- who will it turn out to be I was? What
 will it turn to be my life was like?

The rapt hypnosis of the novice runner is interrupted: "Wiley," my
 father calls. he calls my name: "Wiley...." He says, "Wiley, it's time to
 stop."

One is wicked and a whore, like a movie star.

It occurs to me not to hear my name: anonymous, I continue to run:
 no one is calling me: I am wicked: I laugh.

~~Free will Ecstasy.~~

My father is chasing me.

My God, I feel it up and down my spine, the thumping on the turf,
 the approach of his hands, his giant hands, the huge ramming increment
 of his breath as his breathing shifts from the near-silence of standing
 to this fierce rush of competence and of widening effort.

BEGINS

Figure 4: First page of Lish's edits to Harold Brodkey's "His Son, in His Arms, in Light, Aloft"
 (Lish mss. Box 41)

The first round of Lish's editing shows that he deleted large blocks of text, usually in order to obscure character relations and motivation: examples include a long, poetic passage in the opening pages in which the narrator recalls being bathed by his mother, along with several lines analysing his father's personality. He also introduced paragraph breaks, sometimes in the middle of sections, as he did with Carver's work. We can also observe Lish's work at a syntactic level. In several sentences, Lish changed the sentence structure by introducing anadiplosis, the repetition of a word or phrase at the start of the next sentence, which Lucarelli identifies as a characteristic method of Lish's "structural consecution": "The man I hugged or ran toward or ran away from is **not in in my memory,** ~~at times but a~~ **any photograph: a photograph** shows someone of whom I think: oh, was he like that?" (n.p.). Lish also wrote and rewrote some of the story's most memorable phrases, as we can see from this change in the first draft: "As if ~~the entire scene had worked out well—that first~~ **he had gained a kingdom and the assurance of appearing as glorious in the histories of his time.**" Towards the end of the story, he deleted several lines, wrote in another striking one, and inserted paragraph breaks to create the two-sentence paragraph: "I am dying of grief, Daddy. **I am waiting here, limp with abandonment, with exhaustion: perhaps I'd better believe in God...**" (the two deleted sentences, replaced by the bold text, are illegible here underneath Lish's deletions). In his second edit, Lish compressed the prose further by deleting whole sentences and rewriting a number of other phrases.

Years later, in a letter to DeLillo, Lish pointed to "the lovely collocation at the close of Brodkey's 'His Son, In His Arms, In Light, Aloft', not only, incidentally, my title but

also a piece I put together for him: ‘an accidental glory’ is the coupling I mean” (25 Sept 1993).⁹⁵ At the time, Brodkey expressed his thanks unreservedly:

I hope soon this will become public knowledge. How can people not see your touch? Or if not your touch, your influence? Editors are evil, I fear, but some have talent, a great deal, and things spring from that talent which usually people, at least in New York, recognize. It is a Lish-Brodkey story and one of the very few of mine that has been meddled with . . . I intend to reprint [it] in the same form in which it appeared – and with thanks and acknowledgement (17 Jan 1976).

Indeed, when Brodkey included the story in his 1988 collection *Stories in an Almost Classical Mode*, he used the version that had run in *Esquire* and retained Lish’s edits (267–285).

Lish’s involvement with fiction writers would last for several decades, and the sheer number of stories and novels that passed through his hands during the roughly quarter-century period between the beginning of his work at *Esquire* in 1969 and his leaving of Knopf and the closing of *The Quarterly* in 1995 testifies to the reach of his influence and “touch.” It is clear that several of these works not only achieved commercial success, but were influential ones for the following generation of writers. Lutz’s lecture, referred to in the first chapter of this study, is notable for its repeated references to the editor as well as its emphasis on the importance of his teaching (which I will discuss shortly) in disseminating his “enormously influential” ideas (n.p.). Lucarelli uses the word “lineage” to discuss Lish’s importance, and David Winters also presents Lish as a node in a community of writers with “implicit affinities”; in the same discussion, Greg Gerke makes the contrast clear by disparaging writers outside the lineage of those

⁹⁵ This indeed appears to be the case: the title of the story appears in Lish’s writing on the first draft, while the phrase that constitutes the entirety of the four-word final sentence – “In an accidental glory” – was excerpted from a longer sentence (parts of which are illegible under Lish’s black felt pen marking). Lish’s fondness for the formulation can also be inferred from the fact that he used a similar title – “His Son, Falling” – for a story included in his 2014 collection *Goings*).

who show “heightened attention to language as the purveyor of sensation (rather than plot)” (Lucarelli, Winters, and Gerke).⁹⁶

Choosing material to cut from manuscripts is one of the primary tasks facing any editor, but Lish’s use of excision as a powerful tool of compression is consistent and distinctive enough for its effects to constitute something like a recognisable literary style. Indeed, future scholarship based on Lish’s archival materials may provide further examples of his work on other stories published in *Esquire* as well as on later, Knopf-published books by writers like Lutz (who has described Lish as “my editorial savior” (“Interview” n.p.)). His work could also be compared, perhaps, with the pervasive behind-the-scenes influence of a figure such as Ezra Pound, a link hinted at in Hannah Sullivan’s recent work on revision. Sullivan suggests a lineage of literary minimalism traceable through distinctive compositional protocols, arguing that the “intrinsic brevity” of writing such as that found in Dickinson’s poems or Joyce’s *Dubliners* is “fundamentally different from the aesthetic effects produced by removing material.” She explores, with particular reference to Pound’s influence on Imagist poetics as well as to Hemingway’s “iceberg principle,” the idea that textual deletion leads inevitably to certain literary effects, creating “a particular kind of excised compression” that manifests itself in ambiguity and ellipsis. The use of deletion as a consistent revisionary strategy has both “diegetic and formal consequences,” as Sullivan notes in reference to Beckett’s persistent removal of

⁹⁶ Gerke makes particular reference to Franzen, who tends to represent a common target for writers wishing to defend a language-focused narrative approach: Ben Marcus’ essay in *Harper’s* in October 2005, “Why Experimental Fiction Threatens to Destroy Publishing, Jonathan Franzen, and Life as We Know It: A Correction,” framed as a response to the latter’s public pronouncements on the work of Gaddis and others, represents one of the more notable defences of the aims and methods of “experimental” fiction in recent years.

referential material from successive translations of his plays (*WOR* 102–103).⁹⁷ This is certainly applicable to the editing work performed by Lish, who introduced a memorable Beckettian bleakness to some of Carver's most celebrated stories and has spoken of Beckett's "colossal" formative influence (*Bookworm Pt 1*).

2.5.2 "Where Is The Paint?": Lish's Fiction

Lish's own fiction, which he has been publishing since the 1970s and includes several novels as well as collections of short work, is instructive in the attempt to parse his own aesthetic aims: Sven Birkerts noted in 1986 in the *New Republic* that this can be read alongside his editing and teaching work, since Lish "preaches what he practices" and is himself "the paradigmatic Lish author" (*AW* 256–257).⁹⁸ Indeed, interviews suggest that Lish revised and excised his own work to a high degree, as he has spoken of his penchant for "cutting extravagantly" and working on texts through copious drafts ("Causing Damage" n.p., *Trucks* 100-102). In his discussion of the characteristics of Minimalist fiction in 1986, Birkerts observed that the stories in Lish's debut collection *What I Know so Far* (1984) "progress by way of an anxious staccato, building their episodic structures along the fault lines of discontinuous speech patterns" (256). He noted their lack of "any kind of stable fictional order" (256), a point also made by David Seabrook who notes Lish's

⁹⁷ It should be noted that this analysis of Beckett's textual strategies is incomplete: scholars have shown that Beckett not only removed textual information during translation, but also excised material during composition in what S.E. Gontarski calls "a pattern of revision tending towards greater ambiguity," a process referred to by the author as "vaguening" (Gontarski, *Beckett's Happy Days* 36-44).

⁹⁸ It should be noted here that, judging by the available evidence, Lish exercised great control over his writing and that his work does not appear to have been edited in the manner in which he edited the work of other authors. Gerry Howard, who published Lish's *My Romance* in 1991, writes that Lish's "control-freak obsessiveness redoubled itself when it came to his own work," extending from the typography of the text to the selection of cover art: he claims that this behaviour was consistent with the experiences of other editors who worked with Lish, who represented "a living no-editing zone" (n.p.).

fiction's "forfeiture of recognizable literary aims – character, momentum, resolution." Seabrook notes that "conventional narration is jettisoned in favour of what can be termed literal figuration, in which narrative revelation is redefined as verbal process" (124); Hempel quotes Lish himself in her observation that he is "less interested in story than in 'sheer blasts of language,'" and it is clear that any sense of drama or progression in his work comes through linguistic means rather than diegetic ones ("Captain Fiction" 92).⁹⁹

In the 1998 *New York Times* essay that prompted the Carver controversy, Max memorably claimed that reading Lish's own stories was "like looking at the gears of a clock that's missing a face," an analogy suggesting a radical limitation of artistic means along a particular axis ("Carver Chronicles" n.p.). Max's description, in fact, is not dissimilar to comments that DeLillo made when responding to two stories Lish sent him in 1978:

I think your stories are very good. They are like flat painting. There is no sense of paint. Just the flat page . . . I think both are mysterious in a singular way: the canvas is there, the picture is clearly depicted, but where is the paint? (02 Jan 1979)

Lish's most enduringly influential work is perhaps *Peru*, first published in 1986 and reissued by Dalkey Archive Press in 2013. The novel takes the form of a lengthy, obsessive monologue from a narrator who unravels, in oblique and nervous accumulations of prose, childhood memories of his brutal murder of a neighbouring boy. Winters' recent retrospective review of the novel highlights the importance of Lish's central notion of "creation as recursion," and *Peru* illustrates the way in which Lish's idea of consecution tends towards a recursive narrative style that appears to spiral slowly inward, often using the same word or phrase as a turning point or a spoke in a wheel:

⁹⁹ Perhaps the most literal example of this, indeed, is his recent novella-length publication *Cess: a Spokening* (2015), the longest section of which consists of a lengthy list of arcane words.

I do not remember my mother. I do not remember my father. I do not remember anyone from back before when I killed Steven Adinoff in Andy Lieblich's sandbox. What I remember is the sandbox, and anybody who had anything to do with the sandbox, or who I, in my way, as a child, thought did. Which is why I remember the nanny, and why I remember the colored man, and why I remember Miss Donnelly, who was my teacher when it was then. (21)

Repetition is a constant feature of Lish's prose, both at the level of the sentence and the paragraph, as sentences frequently take a prior word or phrase ("sandbox," "I remember") and reuse it to create a sense of narrative progression that is coiling and oblique rather than linear. The passage quoted above illustrates the highly deliberate repetition and recursion described in Lish's instructions to his classes:

Curve back in your stories in every possible way: thematically, structurally, acoustically; be aware of the power of assonance; be aware that *every morpheme, every phoneme* counts. Do not write in a linear fashion — such writing is weak (09 Oct 1990 — paraphrase, emphasis in original).

Another former student, George Carver, recalls Lish clearly defining this as a foundational principle of composition: "The second sentence must negate what is prior . . . The second sentence recurs to the previous sentence, but revises. It moves to collect what is behind it . . . the form of the story will develop as a result of this procedure" (n.p.). In *Peru*, this method matches form to content as the narrator's internal anxieties and psychoses seem to corkscrew around one other in a looping, relentless pattern. Birkerts noted (in 1986) the concordance of form and content and suggested that Lish had, with this novel, "finally matched his talky, nipped-off style to its ideal subject — the gradual recovery of a repressed childhood memory" (AW 256–257). In a 1996 letter in which he offered advice on one of Lish's manuscripts, DeLillo referred to the distinctive place of this technique in Lish's work: "It's an amazing document . . . Possibly you want a drift-outward here rather

than the inward spiralling that marks your earlier novels and other narrators. The vertigo here is not so taut. Somehow less murderously exact" (18 Aug 1996).¹⁰⁰

Peru spirals towards a vanishing point where language reaches its limit and speech devolves into madness – like *Dear Mr. Capote*, the narrator is a murderer and the reader is increasingly enfolded in queasy complicity.¹⁰¹ According to Birkerts, Lish's work reaches an "eerie profundity" in the novel, and it is clear from the author's interviews that this unsettling power is precisely the object of the techniques employed (AW 256). Again, Purdy's fiction perhaps serves as a useful point of comparison, since Lish has lauded Purdy's early works in terms of their power to approach the limits of the expressible – "I don't think that anyone quite reaches into the zone of the unsayable and the unutterable with the success that Purdy does" – and praised the 1967 novel *Eustace Chisholm and the Works* (1967) as "one of the great self-disappearing work of malevolence that I know" (*Bookworm Pt 1*). In the same interview, he eulogises the "contaminated and dangerous" nature of Purdy's "remarkably diseased" fiction, and states that "I don't think anyone gets that extreme of the wrong, the errorful, on the page, as Purdy does." It is beyond the scope of this study to engage in an extended consideration of Purdy's fiction: these quotes are chosen simply to illustrate the dramatic extent to which Lish's aesthetic differs from that of Carver's. While Lish's own fiction gravitates towards the malevolent and the unsayable, Carver's stories tend to move outward, sometimes in an almost literal fashion – see the movement outside the house at the end of "Beginners" and "Cathedral" – and

¹⁰⁰ The manuscript was most likely of *Self-Imitation of Myself* or *Arcade*, published in 1997 and 1998 respectively by Four Walls Eight Windows.

¹⁰¹ Winters and Seabrook have, in their writing on the novel, explored the philosophical implications of this technique as well as the theoretical framework behind Lish's "compositional toolbox" (Lucarelli, Winters, and Gerke n.p.).

often take states of disaster or madness as stages in a more traditional movement towards revelation or release that counters “malevolence” with humanistic consolation. Lish has proclaimed (in the 1984 profile of Carver quoted earlier) that “what has most powerfully persuaded me of Carver’s value is his sense of a peculiar bleakness” (CWRC 87), and his own fiction illustrates the way in which his interests have informed the reception of Carver’s fiction.

2.5.3. #attacksentence: Lish in the Classroom

Winters argues that “Lish deserves a place in literary history for his teaching of creative writing” alone (“Gordon Lish” n.p.). Lish’s years of teaching allowed him to convey his ideas to a large number of students in person and for many writers, perhaps their most sustained and direct encounters with Lish came during his infamous teaching sessions. From 1972 to 1978, Lish conducted a fiction workshop at Yale. He later taught at Columbia and at New York University and continued, throughout the 1980s and 1990s, to teach private seminars at various locations in the U.S; a 1994 programme for a *Quarterly* reading states that Lish “continues to give private six-hour weekly lectures in writing in New York City as well as week-long summer lectures in San Francisco; Portland, Oregon, and Bloomington, Indiana” (“Writers from *The Quarterly*.”). He ceased teaching in the late 1990s but in 2009 and 2010 returned to teach at the Center for Fiction in Manhattan; a flyer in the Lish archive from 2009 invites students to “Get to the heart of your writing with Gordon Lish” and offers a series of twelve classes for \$2800 (“Flyer”). During the 1980s, these classes gained public renown due to Lish’s charisma and idiosyncratic approach. Hempel’s *Vanity Fair* profile of Lish in 1984 describes a typical workshop, noting Lish’s high standards for entry, the “entertainment value” provided by “the

spirited performance of his teaching,” and the obsession and animosity provoked by his confrontational methods (“men weep, women walk out, and thumbtacks are found lodged, points out, in the teacher’s chair”) (91–92). On occasion, journalists wrote about their experiences in the classes. In 1988, Sharon Solwitz wrote in the *Chicago Reader* about a day-long 12-hour workshop, in which she discussed its “EST-like format” and the high emotions involved, criticising Lish’s guru-like status and his presentation of himself as “a kind of high priest to literature” even as she admitted the value of much of his specific advice (n.p.).

Certainly, Lish’s charisma seems to have been a driving force of the workshop, and the classes would, by several accounts, often resemble lectures rather than workshops as Lish would often speak for hours on end (Callis mentions that students would sometimes bring their knitting to class (11 Dec 1990)). The most controversial aspect of Lish’s workshops was undoubtedly the instructional method used to deliver individual critiques. Lish urged students to “reduce your strategy to the most urgent sentence you can possibly find” (Oct 1991, direct quote) and the structure of the workshop was based to a large degree on a brutal pedagogical illustration of this dictum. A student would read aloud from their work until Lish found fault with it; by many accounts, this negative verdict came early on in the reading. A student’s story would therefore be judged on its ability to hold the sustained attention and approval of the workshop leader on a sentence-by-sentence basis.

This technique was predictably divisive and many students, as Hempel’s article illustrates, were antagonised by it. One of those who found little inspiration was the chef Anthony Bourdain, who enrolled in one of Lish’s writing workshops in Columbia in the years before he wrote the bestselling *Kitchen Confidential* (2000):

It was very cultlike. You didn't even go for a piss. You sat there and listened to the great man . . . You had to read aloud and only as far as he could bear it, which was usually a sentence and a half before he'd go, 'Oh, it's horrible, I can't stand it, stop, stop,' at which point everyone in the class would tell you what sucked about it. (n.p.)

The challenge was clearly one to which many writers rose, though, and Tom Piazza's description of the same process shows a student reacting very differently:

He examined the first sentence of a student's story – it was a bad, bad first sentence, pretentious and incoherent – and with utter clarity, generosity, humor, and supreme intelligence, dismantled it, talking about exactly why it was fraudulent, and at the end of this the student author thanked Lish, saying, essentially, that she had been waiting years for a teacher to tell her that she was a fraud. (n.p.)

The contrast between these anecdotes demonstrates the degree to which this pedagogical process demanded a receptive collaborator; the latter example also suggests how the approach to sentence-building could be understood by both teacher and student not just as a metonym for artistic method but as the basis for a particular ethical stance towards writing, with "fraudulence" construed not just as stylistic defect but as character judgement. Lish's classes demanded "an arresting extremity of style and subject matter" from students (Winters, "Difficult Intimacies" n.p.), and the impression made on students by his teaching has bred a micro-genre of its own as several works by former attendees have appeared to draw on details of their workshop experiences.¹⁰² Blumenkranz discusses the suggestions from many former students that Lish slept with his female students, and argues that the erotic charge of the workshop dynamic ultimately lead to

¹⁰² The first of these appears to have been T. Gertler's novel *Elbowing the Seducer* (1984), whose narrator has an affair with a teacher named "Howard Ritchie" (Wright n.p.); David Leavitt's *Martin Bauman* (2000) features a writing instructor called Flint, who seems also to be clearly based on Lish (Miller n.p.; Blumenkranz n.p.). Blumenkranz reports that Therese Rebeck's play *Seminar* (2011) features a writing instructor who is "charismatic" and "demanding": the affinity to Lish is cemented, she suggests, by the way the instructor "evaluates his students' writing after having heard a single sentence, and does so almost entirely in terms of its capacity to seduce" (n.p.).

similarities between much of the resulting work; she detects a shared approach in the highly stylised sentences and argues that Lish becomes a pervasive presence, “a kind of constant to be solved for” in the stories (n.p.).

This sentence-based focus is not, of course, entirely without precedent in literature – Hemingway’s injunction to himself to write “one true sentence . . . the truest sentence that you know” is one of the more famous statements we could look to for comparison (*Moveable Feast* 12) – but Lish’s classes also gave detailed instructions on the specific methods this entailed. The pedagogical techniques used in the workshop dovetail clearly with Lish’s editorial and fictional work, which demonstrates an intense focus on the art of the individual sentence. The “attack sentence,” for example, needed – as the name suggests – to be startling, unexpected, linguistically dramatic. Lish used the words “torsion” and “torque” to describe the kind of provocative effects created by opposing elements in a sentence, and in an example he gave to Callis’ class he identified this quality as “‘the oxymoronic tension’, for example, ‘He sold the keys to a woman with no hands’” (27 Nov 1990 – single quotes indicate Lish’s words). The following week, he returned to the theme with a similar example:

“He gave the keys to the man who wanted to open the lock” is linear; “He gave the keys to the man who had no hands” is non-linear, is swerving, is ironic. “It’s a version, a very profound version, of irony . . . irony is simply the defeat of expectation,” insofar as the object is turned back on itself. (04 Dec 1990 – double quotes indicate Lish’s words)

Both of these examples are remarkably close to the memorable opening sentence in Carver’s “Viewfinder”: “A man without hands came to the door to sell me a photograph of my house” (CS 228). The fact that this sentence was not edited by Lish at all – it is present in identical form in Carver’s manuscript – shows the difficulty of separating their respective aesthetics, and suggests that rather than imposing his vision on Carver, Lish

was (like Pound with Eliot) identifying and amplifying particular traits: Campbell and Sklenicka both use the metaphor of a music producer determining the mood and context of an artist's work through selective omission ("Real Raymond Carver" n.p.; Sklenicka 282).

The attack sentence was also expected to demonstrate a certain thematic audacity, something that Lish encouraged in the first exercise he performed with his students in class: "The assignment was to write our worst secret, the thing we would never live down, the thing that, as Gordon put it, 'dismantles your own sense of yourself'" (Hempel, "Art of Fiction" n.p.). This audacity can take many forms, but it is a common denominator in much of the fiction produced by writers with whom Lish has worked. James Wolcott was among several critics to note the "shock tactics" used in many opening sentences of stories in *The Quarterly*, giving examples of lines that use scatological and violent material to startle the reader (n.p.). Blumenkranz uses sentences from Hempel, Diane Williams and Noy Holland to illustrate what she calls the "goofy brazenness" of the approach Lish's teaching fostered (n.p.). One of the most celebrated examples of the "attack sentence," for example, is the beginning of Amy Hempel's "Harvest," the opening story in the first issue of *The Quarterly*: "The year I began to say *vahz* instead of *vase*, a man I barely knew nearly accidentally killed me" (3). "Harvest" represents an example of literary transmission in which Lish's aesthetic is an unmistakable influence: writing about Hempel's work in 2002, Chuck Palahniuk described how novelist Tom Spanbauer used photocopies of the story (taken from *The Quarterly*) to instruct students in his own writing workshop, and he noted that all three writers (including himself) had been taught by Lish ("She Breaks Your Heart" n.p.).

A sentence from “Water Liars,” the opening story in Hannah’s *Airships*, demonstrates the way an attack sentence might use unusual word choices and sudden swerves in tone to grab the reader’s attention: “When I am run down and flocked around by the world, I go down to Farte Cove off the Yazoo River and take my beer to the end of the pier where the old liars are still snapping and wheezing at one another” (1). Indeed, “Water Liars” was one of the stories that represented “not just an example but a benchmark” in Lish’s classes during the 1980s (Hempel, “Captain Fiction” 93). An attack sentence could also, like the opening of Brodkey’s “His Son, In His Arms, Aloft,” imply actual physical violence; again, the opening of Hannah’s “Coming Close to Donna” (“Fistfight on the old cemetery”) provides an example (Brodkey, *Stories* 267; Hannah, *Airships and Ray* 41). Callis reports Lish as saying that “the only sentence that matters is the one you’re writing,” and the workshop’s demands also clearly lead students to focus on creating the most remarkable opening possible for their stories (09 Oct 1990 – direct quote from Lish). One post on *Gordon Lish Edited This*, a blog about Lish’s influence by Hemmingson (and unnamed others), mentions Lish’s “desire for first sentences good enough to be etched on the writer’s gravestone” (29 Mar 2011). The concept of the “attack sentence” enshrined this as a theoretical principle upon which the rest of the story can be erected: “what you want, really, is an exorbitant opening sentence, a hook that hooks your reader to a line that could lead anywhere and everywhere” (09 Oct 1990 – paraphrase by Callis).

Lish’s instructions to his class emphasised the way that this technique could be made to work at the level of a story: “your attack sentence is a provoking sentence; you then follow it with a series of provoking sentences” (23 Oct 1990 – paraphrase by Callis). By using this method, each sentence can be seen as an attack sentence, relative to its

position in the story: “when you fashion each sentence to consume the previous sentence, each sentence, in a way, becomes the first, the attack sentence. ‘The sentence I’m putting down must contend with the prior sentence’” (23 Oct 1990 – single quotation marks indicate direct quote from Lish). The first sentence could be used as an acoustical and thematic base from which to work and, rather than functioning as an introduction to a story, could be thought of as containing the seeds of the entire narrative: “You take your initial sentence, your object, and you extrude and extrude, unpack and unpack, reflect and reflect, all in ways thematically and formally akin to the ways in the attack, the opening, the initial sentence” (29 Nov 1990 – paraphrase by Callis).¹⁰³ Lish’s teaching, then, provides more evidence that the thematic and acoustic repetition throughout stories like Carver’s “What We Talk About When We Talk About Love” is entirely characteristic of his method.

In one blog post on Lish’s editing, Hemmingson et al quote a 1989 *Publishers Weekly* review (of a Lish-edited collection by Jennifer Allen) which notes the influence of Lish’s “attack sentence” concept and criticises the “deliberately outrageous” beginnings of some of the stories (29 Mar 2011). Many contemporary critics, as I have noted, took issue with the sentence-based approach advocated by Lish. One former student described his classes as pursuing “the cult of the sentence,” and some critics have noted that the work of writers under Lish’s influence can be marked, in Kasia Boddy’s words, by “what sometimes becomes a sort of sentence-fetish”; it has also been observed that the approach lends itself more readily to short fiction than the novel (Birkerts, *AW* 260–263; Boddy 88–89; Winters, “Work the Hurt”). In 1986, Birkerts criticised “the growing cult of

¹⁰³ Lucarelli’s essay “The Consecration of Gordon Lish” provides a detailed discussion of the mechanics of this formal repetition and analyses one of Lish’s stories alongside pieces by Hannah, Lutz, and Schutt.

small-stage pyrotechnics,” arguing that writers such as Hannah and Leon Rooke were “sentence acrobats” incapable of more extended literary achievement and suggesting that in the work of Robison and Hempel, “everything genuine has been transposed into the key of the one-liner” (259–263). It is not difficult to imagine that this approach might undercut the larger formal possibilities of a piece of fiction, especially one requiring, in Birkerts’ words, “comprehensiveness and scope” (263): we might envision a film composed entirely of ostentatious dolly shots, or a soccer team in which every player is a star striker. Lish has sometimes implied an acceptance of the inevitability of these criticisms: speaking to Michael Silverblatt in 1993, he said that “it seems to me quite satisfactory, when on the page, to give away all of myself in the composition of a sentence” (*Bookworm Pt 1*). Lutz also acknowledges as a necessary risk the possibility that a “piece of writing consisting ultimately of an aggregation of loner sentences” might “threaten the enclosive forces of the larger structure in which the sentences reside” (n.p.). However, these limitations also open up the possibility of the creation of prose of a linguistic scope and poetic density quite different from that written with pre-existing structural notions — such as plot triangles and character arcs — in mind. Indeed, the range of writers, both temporal and stylistic, influenced by Lish suggests that many successful writers have turned Lish’s techniques to their own ends and that his ideas have manifestly endured beyond the mid-80s minimalist moment.

The influence of Lish’s teaching is manifested in several ways, some more direct than others. During Lish’s years at Knopf, his fiction workshop arguably doubled as a publishing meeting for many writers — Hempel’s article describes how the teacher’s positive appraisal one evening of the work of one student, Anderson Ferrell, translated immediately into commercial terms (“the next morning Ferrell had a contract with Knopf

to publish a novel”) (“Captain Fiction” 93). Birkerts wrote that Lish “not infrequently” assisted his students “into print and into publishing careers” and it is clear that *The Quarterly* represented an early publishing opportunity for many writers (AW 253). Teaching, editing and publishing thus clearly overlapped frequently in Lish’s literary activities. However, his influence could also be said to extend in a more diffuse web through the many writers who, after attending his classes (and often working with him), have themselves gone on to teach. Winters points out that many of these former students are now employed in “prominent positions” in U.S. universities, arguing that “In this sense. . . the ‘school of Lish’ has been central to the symbiosis of writing and teaching in postwar America”;¹⁰⁴ in the same review, he advances the claim that “Lish is to the second half of the 20th century what Gertrude Stein was to the first” (“Gordon Lish” n.p.).

It is possible to trace clear stylistic and aesthetic affinities between Lish’s teachings and those now being passed on by his former students. Ben Marcus, for example – author of several works of fiction and editor of two anthologies of American short stories (Anchor, 2004 and Vintage Contemporaries, 2015) – published several early pieces in *The Quarterly* which were later included in *The Age of Wire and String* (1995). An admiring letter from the author shows the esteem in which he held the editor – “I see the opportunity to do a book with you as an amazing one that might never come again” – and drafts of the work suggest that he took some of Lish’s suggestions on word choice

¹⁰⁴ Amy Hempel teaches creative writing at Harvard and at Bennington College; Sam Lipsyte and Ben Marcus both teach at Columbia (Associate Professor and Professor, respectively); Brian Evenson is a Professor of Literary Arts at Brown University; Diane Williams has taught at Syracuse University, among others; Christine Schutt has taught at universities such as Columbia and Syracuse; Barry Hannah was, until his death in 2010, director of the MFA program at the University of Mississippi, where he had taught creative writing for 28 years (Romano n.p.).

and sentence structure (Lish offered the writer a contract with Knopf but left the publishing house before the book was finished) (“Days of Yore” n.p.; Marcus, 28 Mar 1993). Much of Marcus’ writing shows clear affinities with Lish’s in both its content and form (like Lipsyte, he could be described – to borrow Birkerts’ description of Hannah – as a “sentence acrobat”), and his fiction achieves the sense of hermetic estrangement that Lish valued highly in students’ work.¹⁰⁵ Marcus’ comments in interviews also closely echo some of Lish’s pronouncements on the danger of “information” in fiction, recalling the editor’s systematic reduction of narrative information in Carver’s narratives. In a recent interview, Marcus stated that “when I give information, I feel like I’m killing a story. I worry about the inertia you can feel if you explain” (“Ben Marcus” n.p.); elsewhere, he writes that “you can flood the text with *information*, but that doesn’t enhance the literary experience of it, the drama” (“Kakfaesque” n.p.).¹⁰⁶

Lish’s influence can also be detected in the work of Sam Lipsyte. The narrative voices in Lipsyte’s stories “The Morgue Rollers” and “The Wrong Arm,” for example, are reminiscent of those in Lish’s fiction: in the former story, sections often end with the dark, nihilistic punchlines common to Lish’s work, while the latter is narrated by a malevolent child whose repetitive and elliptical speech patterns recall not only those of

¹⁰⁵ The following sentence, for example, shows the vowel-heavy cadences, swerves in diction and unusual word usage we also find in Lish’s work:

As the song escalates, skinning down around the forest like a horizon squeezing up the land from all sides, the only roundness is the mutilated Stephen’s eyes circling freely inside his boneless head like a voice behind a wall. (*Age* 167)

¹⁰⁶ Callis’ notes from Lish’s lectures show the teacher frequently railing against “information” and its power to dampen mystery in a story. Examples include: “The more information given, the less meaningful it is,” “You have to begin to view information with suspicion” and “as the information piles up, the entropy piles up” (04, 11 Dec 1990 – all direct quotes from Lish).

narrators such as that of Carver's "Viewfinder" but also that of *Peru*.¹⁰⁷ Lipsyte thanked Lish in the afterword to his first collection, 2000's *Venus Drive*, and his writing shows clear affinities with Lish's in the way it uses torque as a tool of epigrammatic wit (indeed, a recent essay on Lipsyte's craft detected "a secret minimalism at work below the surface of his flashy, fast-moving prose" (Taylor n.p.)). Again, Lipsyte's public statements on writing closely echo the approach and even terminology of Lish's classes: in a recent interview, for example, he draws a clear link between Lish's pedagogical practice and his own as he complains that many of the undergraduates he teaches "are really wedded to the information of their story":

Sometimes it's a good idea to break from that . . . The main thing, and this is something that Lish talked about, is that you have this very brief window to get somebody into your book. It's those first sentences that matter in terms of getting them to keep going. Those first sentences need to be undeniable. ("Jewcy" n.p.)¹⁰⁸

Lipsyte's story "The Dungeon Master," for example, (included in the *Best American Stories 2011*) shows the way in which the notion of "torque" can lead to a swerve in linguistic register within even a short opening sentence: "The Dungeon Master had detention" (*The Fun Parts* 29).

The work of these two writers and those previously mentioned cannot, of course, be reduced to a single point of transmission; neither Lipsyte, Lutz, nor Marcus hew closely to Lish's teachings in a uniform way, either within their own work (Marcus' recent fiction, for example, displays a notably clearer interest in "realistic" plot structures than

¹⁰⁷ Lucarelli's essay "Using Everything" provides a close analysis of the use of verbal repetition and "pattern making" in "The Wrong Arm."

¹⁰⁸ Lish repeatedly instructed students to introduce "torque" to their sentences: for example, "you must write with consecution, so that each sentence follows naturally from each preceding sentence . . . you want to swerve and torque, going forwards by looking backwards" (23 October 1990 – paraphrase by Callis).

does *The Age of Wire and String*) or by comparison with each other. However, it is noteworthy that we have here successful former students of Lish, all of whom have publicly acknowledged his influence, closely echoing his teachings in the way they describe their craft. It seems fair to suggest, as Lutz does, that a tradition is being continued here. The nature of this tradition is beginning to be examined by critics such as Winters, who, in his essay collection *Infinite Fictions* (2015), traces aspects of the “diffusion” of Lish’s ideas through the work of several of the writers mentioned here as well as others such as Dawn Raffel, Sam Michel and Jason Schwartz.

If we accept Mark McGurl’s argument that the spread of the writing workshop is a defining factor in the production of contemporary American fiction (and, indeed, his further characterisation of the Program Era as “the era of the writer-teacher”), then we need to view Lish’s teaching work as an important element in shaping the techniques and aesthetic values that are disseminated in the workshop (*PE* ix, 388). Lish represents, at the least, a link between a significant number of important – and very different – contemporary writers, and a survey of his career suggests a remarkably consistent approach over a period of many years and in a variety of literary activities. The extent of the evidence for Lish’s importance to contemporary U.S. fiction, then, is considerable, and an assessment of his contribution to Carver’s work cannot be easily considered without this wider perspective; it is arguable, indeed, that we can find out as much about Carver’s early work from studying the editor as from focusing on the author.

CHAPTER 3

“Your Devoted Editee”: Wallace’s Texts in Development

3.1 “Everything I’ve Ever Let Go of has Claw Marks on it”:

Editing Wallace¹⁰⁹

Editing David Foster Wallace, as even a cursory glance at the author’s work will suggest, was not an easy job. Wallace was, of course, a grammarian as well as a writer of dense, often allusive prose and numerous reminiscences from editors and friends show him to have been an opinionated and occasionally combative editee. Indeed, a letter (widely shared online since Wallace’s death) to *Harper’s* editor Joel Lovell in 1998 accompanying his piece “Laughing with Kafka” effectively displays the writer’s ability to argue for the integrity of his words in a manner both playful and passive-aggressive:

What I’d ask is that you (or Ms. Rosenbush, whom I respect but fear) not copyedit this like a freshman essay. Idiosyncracies [sic] of ital, punctuation, and syntax (“stuff,” “lightbulb” as one word, “i.e.”/“e.g.” without commas after, the colon 4 words after ellipses at the end, etc.) need to be stetted. (“Attempted Fax Cover Sheet”).

As Zac Farber observes, “editing Wallace could be demanding, and those who attempted it found themselves faced with the difficulty of correcting a man with a prodigious

¹⁰⁹ The quote is taken from *Infinite Jest*:

The 2-man senioest males’ bedroom has a bunch of old AA bumper-stickers on it and a calligraphic poster saying EVERYTHING I’VE EVER LET GO OF HAS CLAW MARKS ON IT, and the answer to Gately’s knock is a moan, and Glynn’s little naked-lady bedside lamp he brought in with him is on, he’s in his rack curled on his side clutching his abdomen like a kicked man. (606)

understanding of the byzantine syntactical and grammatical rules of the English language" (1). Indeed, *New Yorker* editor Deborah Triesman states that "I've worked with some people who were very precise about what they want in their work, but he was probably the most precise and the most obsessed with the tiniest details of the syntax" (Nadell, "Editors on Wallace").

This, however, does not tell the full story of Wallace's approach to the editing of his work. An examination of archival documents shows not only that Wallace's relations with editors varied depending on the circumstances of publication, but also that the writer came increasingly to accept and even invite editorial intervention, particularly into his fiction, as his career progressed. Wallace's dealings with editors have been chronicled in numerous places (Max's biography provides the most wide-ranging overview of these), and as my focus is on his interaction with Michael Pietsch I will not attempt to add to the list. Rather, I will focus here on some representative examples in order to place this interaction in context, before going on to discuss the nature of Wallace's interactions with Pietsch.

Wallace's first experience of extensive, book-length editing came during his work with Gerry Howard, the Viking Penguin editor who had acquired *The Broom of the System*. While Howard later claimed that Wallace "was very polite in ignoring me," it is clear that the novelist was relatively open to suggested changes (Neyfakh n.p.). Wallace promised Howard in early correspondence that he would be "neurotic and obsessive" but "not too intransigent or defensive about my stuff," and Max writes that "generally, he was true to his word" (ELS 68). Wallace was willing to make several cuts in response to Howard's suggestions, but when the editor proposed expanding the deliberately truncated ending and cutting sections dealing with the "membrane theory" espoused by

Dr Jay, the author disagreed. Wallace wrote a letter in which he defended the membrane section in a paragraph (described by Max as “hyperverbal”) dense with philosophical and theoretical allusion – he invoked Hegel, Wittgenstein, Heidegger, De Man and Derrida in the space of a few lines – and this seems to have persuaded Howard to relent (*ELS* 68–69). Bonnie Nadell, who appears to have been one of Wallace’s first readers throughout his career, also objected strongly to the lack of resolution: “you simply cannot end the book with an incomplete sentence” (Nadell, “28 October 1985”; Max, *ELS* 69–71). However, on this point, Wallace was indeed intransigent, and insisted on his original ending, as Howard recalls:

And he wrote a five or six page, single spaced letter in which he told me that, yes, I was absolutely right in my suggestion and he knew that he really should do this, *but* here’s why he can’t. And won’t. And the explanation was so convoluted but so heartfelt that at the end I just said, ‘Oh, alright!’ This wasn’t something I was gonna win. (Neyfakh n.p., italics in original).

Wallace would later regret what he saw as youthful stubbornness here, and came to regard the decision as an illustration of the need to be more receptive to editing suggestions; to David Lipsky in 1996, he said “I was arrogant, and missed a chance to make that book better” (36).

The editing of Wallace’s nonfiction pieces represented a slightly different proposition. Despite regularly writing pieces that dramatically exceeded the commissioned length, Wallace seems to have approached the task as a distasteful yet unavoidable one, and this is surely due to practical reasons: the presence of fixed magazine publication deadlines meant that the editing often took place in short, finite bursts as opposed to the prolonged process involved in editing fiction for book publication, and the understanding that clear commercial reasons (such as standard magazine lengths and the need for advertising revenue) necessitated these cuts seems to

have made Wallace's attitude more matter-of-fact. Wallace also clearly saw these changes as provisional to a degree, since he regularly took the opportunity to restore excised text to his essays in nonfiction collections (Moody and Pietsch 216).¹¹⁰

"Ticket to the Fair," published in *Harper's* in 1994, represents an early example of this process. According to editor Colin Harrison, the piece was commissioned to be 6,000 words, and Wallace sent in 35/40,000: the resulting collaboration was akin to a "tennis match" ("Editors on Wallace"). Wallace's approach to the editing process here was, Max reports, "strategic and aggressive, but when he lost a point, he moved on," and ultimately the pair succeeded in shortening the piece "by almost half" (ELS 186; "Editors on Wallace"). Farber refers to "Wallace's tendency to write well-reasoned screeds to his editors arguing against even the most niggling alterations to his writing" and while this particular edit appears to have been conducted verbally, Wallace's famed attention to detail was very much in evidence (2). The work was "a fairly technical magazine edit" as well as a textual one: Harrison remembers 2 a.m. voicemails and "insanely ornate conversations" by telephone regarding technical aspects of textual presentation such as lining footnotes up correctly with the text ("Editors on Wallace"). There is plenty of evidence, in fact, to show that throughout his career, Wallace took an intense interest in what McGann terms the "bibliographical codes" of literary work: Marie Mundaca describes how, when she designed the layout and interior design of *Consider the Lobster* (specifically with reference to working out how to adapt the essay "Host" from its distinctive appearance in *The Atlantic Monthly*), Wallace would leave phone messages in

¹¹⁰ Farber observes that the copyright page of *Consider the Lobster* carries a note announcing that "The following pieces were published in edited, heavily edited, or (in at least one instance) bowdlerized form" (4).

the middle of the night as well as engaging in “very intense discussions regarding the semiotics of the leaders (the lines going from the text to the boxes) and the tics and the line width of the boxes and ampersands” (n.p.).

This transfer of visual elements from magazine presentation to book-length presentation was, in fact, an unusual process, and suggests the difficulty of comparing magazine editing with the work behind book production. It also highlights the fact that Wallace’s nonfiction work was often subject to pressures absent from the production of his fiction. The journalistic pieces, for example, were subject to fact-checking, a process which not only represented an additional layer of work during the editing process (Bill Tonelli of *Rolling Stone* recalls, of Wallace’s piece on John McCain, that “our fact-checker was with him on the phone [for] almost as much time as I was”) but also arguably influenced the writing itself as Wallace tried to anticipate this stage of the process: Max discusses Harrison’s equivocal attitude to possible embellishments that “could not be disproven” and Tonelli suggests that the author was “smart enough to make up the stuff that you [were] not going to catch him on” (ELS 186; “Editors on Wallace”).¹¹¹ Wallace could, it seems, be relied upon to anticipate many editorial demands, and Farber observes that “while different editors’ experiences varied, there is a consensus that David Wallace’s best editor was David Wallace” (4). Indeed, elements of these pieces support the contention (which I will return to later in my discussion of *The Pale King*) that Wallace incorporated an awareness of the formal and compositional challenges of each writing project into the works themselves, often in a deliberately provocative and challenging

¹¹¹ The question of Wallace’s fidelity to fact in his nonfiction pieces has received considerable attention since his death, with Franzen and others debating the ethics of his writing methods (Dean n.p.; Max, ELS 184–187, 317–18 n4,5,7; Roiland 148–161).

manner: Harrison notes the way in which several of his nonfiction pieces (“Consider the Lobster” and “Democracy and Commerce at the U.S. Open,” for example) seem to be aimed at “subverting the DNA of certain magazines themselves” (“Editors on Wallace”).¹¹²

The editing of *Everything and More* (Wallace’s book on mathematics and infinity) posed another set of specific challenges and was, according to Max, a tortuous experience for Wallace, as several mathematicians as well as a general editor weighed in with criticisms of his work and suggested changes (ELS 274–276). However, as this process was clearly a unique one necessitated by the book’s subject and publisher, it is not relevant to my focus here. Howard’s editing of *Girl with Curious Hair*, meanwhile, involved a large element of what we might call extra-literary editing as Viking Penguin’s legal department subjected the entire collection to intense scrutiny following the discovery that the story “Late Night” contained dialogue from actual television footage (ELS 106–109).¹¹³ This, however, again appears to have been an anomalous difficulty in the author’s career, and since legal issues seem to have played little role in his work with Pietsch, I will not examine the issue in detail here.¹¹⁴

3.1.1 “My gut tells me you can help me”: Wallace’s Work with Pietsch

Michael Pietsch’s contact with Wallace began in 1987 with an admiring letter in which he complimented the author’s story “Lyndon” and invited him to “give me a call if you’re

¹¹² Mark O’Connell notes, of this aspect of Wallace’s work, that “to read his essays, reviews and articles is (for me at least) to feel a kind of retrospective anxiety on behalf of the unknown editors who commissioned them in the first place” (n.p.).

¹¹³ The title “Late Night” is Playboy editor Alice Turner’s, according to her recollection; Wallace returned to his original title, “My Appearance,” when including it in *Girl with Curious Hair* (Wallace, “Late Night”).

¹¹⁴ An exception is the legal challenge posed by a real-life Kate Gompert to the use of her name in *Infinite Jest* – however, this took place some time after the novel’s publication and seems to have been settled quickly, without necessitating textual alterations (ELS 161; Wallace, 28 Jan 1998).

ever in town with time on your hands." Pietsch coyly held out the prospect of future collaboration while presenting a varied list of the high-profile authors he had worked with to date:

Jerry [sic] Howard is a good friend so I'll keep this decent. He's a great editor and you'd be wise to spend your entire career working with him. But in case he ever decides that investment banking is his true love, remember that you've got a fan here at the home of Martin Amis, Stephen Wright, Chuck Berry, and Little Richard (17 September 1987).

The pair evidently met later that year and struck up a friendship, and correspondence from the subsequent years shows Wallace exchanging book recommendations with the editor as well as sending samples of his work (including "Westward . . ." and "Fictional Futures . . ."). In 1992, when Wallace was seeking an advance for *Infinite Jest*, this friendship would form the basis for the acquisition of the manuscript by Little, Brown. Max writes that Howard was authorized by Viking's editorial board to offer an advance of \$35,000, an offer insufficient to enable Wallace to write without teaching: Nadell then approached Pietsch with the manuscript, and Little, Brown subsequently paid \$85,000 (ELS 171). Max reports that Pietsch told Nadell that he wanted to publish the novel "more than I want to breathe," while Lipsky mentions that the editor's presentation at a sales conference was crucial to the publisher's acceptance and quotes Pietsch as having said "this is why we publish books" (ELS 171; Lipsky 27). An internal memo from Pietsch to the Publication Board of Little, Brown demonstrates the editor's determined attempts to persuade his colleagues of Wallace's promise and shows that the final advance figure was close to his initial suggestion:

I would like to offer \$80,000 for world English language rights to the novel. It's a big commitment but he's one of the most talented young writers around, and it would make a good statement about Little, Brown, that in addition to publishing the established generation of literary grandmasters like Pynchon, Barth, and Fowles, we're developing the next generation (05 June 1992).

Wallace subsequently wrote to Pietsch claiming that he had told Nadell throughout negotiations that he wanted to work with the editor, whose reputation and prior relationship with the author evidently counted for a great deal (22 June 1992). Pietsch's role here was clearly that of an acquisitions editor as well as a textual editor, and his talent-scouting activities soon dovetailed with personal friendship; a comparison could be made with Max Perkins' successful pursuit of Hemingway, which he carried out (with Fitzgerald's help) in a lengthy correspondence with the author (Berg 82–87).

In the same letter, Wallace thanked Pietsch for agreeing to work with him and proceeded to address the editor in direct terms that combined a discussion of his own *modus operandi* with a manifesto of sorts. I quote here at length in order to illustrate the extent of Wallace's self-awareness with regard to his own need and desire for editing, as he both warns Pietsch of his working methods and openly solicits help:

I do know that I function best when I have a core of readers whom I both trust and know – know where they're coming from, what their strengths and limitations are, when to heed them and when to go with my gut. For a long time, my triad was Bonnie, Gerry and Mark Costello, my best friend from Amherst. I would like to get to know you and be able to get help from you. I am going to need considerable help on U when the first draft's done. I may ask if I can come stay with you a couple days (assuming the paint's dry) during Editing and have you go over things with me for a few extended periods. I am a difficult editee – at once obsequious and arrogant, with both very little faith in myself and an incredible, Gila-Monsterish attachment to anything I've done; I am the world's worst cutter; rewriting for me always seem[s] to result in expansion. But I want to improve as a writer, and I want to author things that both restructure worlds and make living people feel stuff, and my gut tells me you can help me (22 June 1992).

The writer's capitalisation of the word "editing" here suggests the importance of the concept to his approach to his work, and he appears to have been deliberately attempting to challenge himself by working with Pietsch: as Farber notes, "the capitulation, even in principle, to this type of extensive editing marked a change for Wallace" (6).

3.1.2 “Playful combat”: The editing of *Infinite Jest*

The editing of Wallace’s second novel has been discussed in a number of venues, sometimes in close detail. Indeed, while some contemporary reviewers took the book’s length and stylistic approach as evidence of a lack of editorial oversight,¹¹⁵ it has since come to be understood that the process of producing the book was in fact a long and focused one. Max’s biography provides a chronological account of the editorial negotiations, while Pietsch has discussed his experience of the process and reproduced selections from Wallace’s correspondence on proposed changes (*ELS* 182–3, 193–6, 198–201, 205–7; Moody and Pietsch 208–17). An essay by Steven Moore also analyses one of Wallace’s working drafts from 1993, providing a detailed discussion of excised material and commentary on aspects of the novel’s evolution (n.p.). These texts provide the essential facts of the editing process behind *Infinite Jest*: I will not attempt an exhaustive account of the process in this study, not least since the volume of manuscript material (comprising nine containers of draft papers in the Ransom Center) would demand a separate thesis-length examination. My focus here is primarily on the importance of Pietsch’s posthumous contribution to Wallace’s work, and the majority of this chapter will deal with the editing of *The Pale King*. I will restrict myself, therefore, to examining some key features of the editing of *Infinite Jest* in order to better understand the nature of Wallace and Pietsch’s working relationship.

To begin with, we may note the size of the editing job involved and the ambiguity over the volume of cuts. Different figures have been given for the amount of material excised from the drafts, not least by Wallace himself: in 1995, he told David Markson that

¹¹⁵ Michiko Kakutani lamented that “the book seems to have been written and edited (or not edited) on the principle that bigger is better” (“Dying of Laughter” n.p.).

the book had lost 600 pages; in a 1996 radio interview, he described the novel as being “about 400 or 500 pages shorter than it was before”; to Lipsky in the same year, he claimed that “about five hundred pages” had been cut; in 1999, though, he stated that Pietsch had cut “two or three hundred pages” (*ELS* 212; Lydon; Lipsky 78; *CWDFW* 93).¹¹⁶ Pietsch, for his part, remembers cuts totalling “about 250 manuscript pages” (Moody and Pietsch 213). The truth of these claims is difficult to determine since, as the manuscript materials show, many of these alterations were not straightforward cuts but often involved compression and rearrangement of material and were made in several stages;¹¹⁷ however, the evidence in the Wallace papers suggests that the higher figures given by the author are most likely exaggerated.

What follows is a brief description of the editing process, which can roughly be said to have taken place in three stages. The first of these occurred in the summer of 1993, when Pietsch delivered a quick response to the first draft of the novel. Wallace continued writing and in June 1994 delivered the completed manuscript, which consisted of roughly 750,000 words (*ELS* 182–83, 196).¹¹⁸ Pietsch then carried out his second

¹¹⁶ Max notes that Wallace’s comments to Markson contain a note of ingratitude and represent a rare example of the author’s criticism of his editor’s work: “About the holes and lacunae and etc., I bet you’re right: the fucker’s cut by 600 pages from the first version, and though many of the cuts (editor-inspired) made the thing better, it fucked up a certain water-tightness that the mastodon-size version had, I think” (*ELS* 212).

¹¹⁷ Indeed, as has been documented, Wallace did not use the same formatting in each manuscript version, and his first draft featured a deliberately small font and narrow margins chosen in a forlorn attempt to deceive his editor as to its true length (*ELS* 182). Even a comprehensive study of the manuscripts, therefore, might encounter difficulties in ascertaining a definitive figure.

¹¹⁸ This is to simplify matters a little, since the first manuscript (which corresponds to the version described in Moore’s essay) consisted of only “about two-thirds” of the novel, and the author continued writing after he had sent the initial manuscript to Pietsch, without waiting for the editor’s response (*ELS* 183; Moody and

reading (and his first close line edit) in the winter of 1994, during which time he sent two letters accompanied by detailed lists of possible cuts. Wallace in turn responded to these in February of 1995, thus concluding the second stage. In May, Pietsch set the book in sample type and wrote that further cuts were necessary, and he soon followed this with the news that, following another close line edit, it would be necessary to make another detailed series of revisions. Thus, in May and June of 1995, Wallace engaged in the final major round of cutting and rewriting, during which he agreed to more excisions and also acceded to Pietsch's requests for additional sections in order to clarify central plot strands (writing, for example, the scene in which Orin is interrogated and tortured by the Quebecois terrorists) (*ELS* 205–07).

It is arguable that the tone and overall dynamics of the editing process were determined by Pietsch's response to the initial, unfinished manuscript. This manuscript was substantial: Steven Moore's description of his version of the same draft emphasises the presence of different stages of revision, different fonts and confusing pagination, observing that "merely flipping through the 4-inch-high manuscript would give even a seasoned editor the howling fantods" (n.p.). Pietsch's reply showed an understanding of Wallace's aesthetic, though, observing that the work was "a novel made up out of shards" and noting the importance of "Hal's sadness" to the narrative. He also expressed his enjoyment of the reading experience, making his supportive attitude clear by referring to the "huge pleasure" of reading the manuscript and enthusing that he was "fascinated by these worlds and these characters and the mysteries of how the stories are starting to

Pietsch 212). Pietsch delivered his response rapidly, though (writing to Wallace with his impressions in June of 1993), and since Wallace was aware of Pietsch's thoughts for most of the time in which he completed the full-length manuscript, I take it to be the first significant stage of their collaborative editing process on the novel.

invade each other.”¹¹⁹ However, the second paragraph of the letter clearly warned the author of impending practical difficulties. After a rough calculation of the possible word-count and length (which he projected to be 600,000 words and 1,200 pages) Pietsch stated the logistical risks involved, and his own attitude to them: “this should not be a \$30 novel so thick readers feel they have to clear their calendars for a month before they buy it” (10 June 1993).

Editors, according to Bryant, effectively serve “as emissaries of social power” (*FT* 59), and Pietsch’s words illustrate the numerous social pressures involved in publication. The phrasing of his warning invokes possible reader response (the feelings of future readers), the material limitations of book technology (the thickness of the volume and the cost arising from a high page count), and concerns about the future marketing and cultural positioning of the literary product. Wallace would later remember this as “a big mistake” on Pietsch’s part, telling Lipsky that the letter had caused him considerable anxiety about his artistic integrity. Max writes that the letter “left Wallace upset and unsatisfied”; he subsequently needed reassurance from friends and colleagues that he would not be a “whore” for co-operating in the editorial process (Lipsky 246; *ELS* 183).¹²⁰ However, Wallace clearly accepted Pietsch’s criticisms to a significant degree. Pietsch forwarded his own letter to Nadell, noting the author’s reluctant recognition of the validity of his objections: “here’s what I said to David. He seemed to agree with most of it,

¹¹⁹ Recalling this process in 2012, Pietsch highlighted the need of the editor to act as an encouraging presence:

An editor’s . . . primary job is always to express abundant, overwhelming delight and show that you appreciate what the writer has set out to do, because if they don’t feel that you appreciate and understand what they’ve set out to do then why are they going to listen to you when you make suggestions for changes? (Pietsch and Nadell).

¹²⁰ Wallace alluded to helpful conversations with Richard Powers and Steve Moore (Lipsky 246); Wallace later wrote to DeLillo for counsel on how to cope with editorial demands (*ELS* 205).

glumly" (10 June 1993). Despite being willing to stand his ground over many specific requests for cuts, Wallace never seems to have substantively disagreed with the need for co-operation with these publishing pressures – he never threatened to withdraw from the arrangement, or questioned the need to market the book – and his response to Pietsch's letter signalled his early willingness to engage in a process of negotiation with them.¹²¹ His accommodation with the demands of commercial publishing seems to have been spurred by his editor's arguments, and his acquiescence to the repeated rounds of work involved in the editorial process clearly owes a great deal to Pietsch's presentation of the arguments for these demands.

Max describes the language of Wallace's editorial correspondence with Pietsch as that of "playful combat," a phrase that aptly summarises the tone of much of the process (ELS 206). The tone is that of a focused, occasionally tense but generally good-natured negotiation, during which Wallace protected what he considered to be essential features of the project (most notably its inconclusive ending) while acceding to numerous micro-changes in order to forestall an excessive amount of what he described (paraphrasing Pietsch) as "reader alienation" (Lipsky 247). Wallace had written to Pietsch before the sending the full draft in order to express his conviction that the book would come to a conclusion that was "aclimactic" rather than being "any sort of conventionally linear ending" (16 Jan 1994); he also warned that he had introduced endnotes, a narrative strategy to which he had become "intensely attached" (29 Apr 1994). He presented several justifications for the notes (for example, the way they enabled "a discursive,

¹²¹ Indeed, in the aforementioned letter to DeLillo, he acknowledged the need for compromise: "I am uncomfortable about making cuts for commercial reasons – it seems slutty – but on the other hand L,B is taking a big gamble publishing something this long and hard and I feel some obligation not to be a p.-donna and fuck them over" (ELS 205).

authorial-intrusive style w/o Finneganizing the story” and their ability to “mimic the information-flood and data-triage I expect’d be an even bigger part of US life 15 years hence”); however, he also noted that it would “make the primary-text an easier read,” and that it would allow him to “feel emotionally like I’m satisfying your request for compression of text without sacrificing enormous amounts of stuff” (29 Apr 1994). The presence of endnotes in the novel, then – long understood to be one of its most distinctive features¹²² – came early in the editing process and can be at least partly attributed to Pietsch’s insistence on readability and accessibility as necessary values.

Upon delivering the novel, Wallace wrote that the manuscript was:

Very long, but I have done my best to cut it. If further stuff needs to be cut I’m not apt to fight but to ask for an enormous amount of help, because everything in it is connected to everything else, at least in my head. . . at this point I have no idea . . . I just want it done. (27 May 1994)

From this point on, Pietsch’s textual editing consisted of providing the requested help, and the bulk of his work with Wallace involved negotiating cuts in a process that might be characterised as the consensual management of textual excess. In his subsequent letters, the words “condense” and “cut” feature heavily, and his suggestions tend to emphasise narrative necessity and the dangers of fatigue on the part of readers who might be “exhausted at having too much data crammed into their heads with very little story to keep them moving through it” (30 Nov 1994). He focused heavily on the need to cut scenes from what he had earlier referred to as the “superstructure” of the novel, with particular reference to the dialogues between Marathe and Steeply, and did not hesitate to describe these as “vague,” “unfollrowable” and “dull” (30 Nov 1994).

¹²² David Letzler, for example, devotes an essay to examining the way in which the copious endnotes train the novel’s readers to “develop our abilities to filter information” (321).

- 70
523-1-721
1/14
- 722 Hal's dreams of splintering teeth, Madame P's absence: cut?
- 754 Story about P-terminals is good, but Fortier, read-only samizdat, double-triple-agent talk, is incomprehensible.
- 764 More Steeply/Marathe. Keep that Marathe is doubling to get artificial heart for his wife. Cut myth of hairy woman and story of Steeply's father's MASH addiction.
- 786 Murder of the Antitoi brothers: make it clearer what the AFR wants or what the Antitois unknowingly have, and how the AFR knows they have it? Mention cut/index
- 808 Ennett House talk with vegetable woman listening. Cut. - yes
- 818 James's father with mattress. Cut. yes
- 843-79 Day after Eschaton, waiting in outer office. This is excruciatingly slow. Cut CT's background 856-8, condense CT's Tina Echt interview severely. Why's Clenette in the office with Lord, Rusk, and urologist?
- 912 Lenz's rap on walk w Green. Condense more. Also 924-28.
- 928 Gately's interface w residents. Cut 931-4, 935-40.
- 940 Orin in hotel with Luria P. This thread of the story is the one I most don't get. What's she there for? Trying, like Steeply, to learn about father's cartridge from him? If so, this doesn't come through. Nor is it clear what her relationship is to wheelchair guys who follow and interview him. Are they on opposing sides although both Canadian? Can we cut this thread and just leave it that only Steeply has gotten to him? Or spell out a little more clearly, what Luria is doing there. yes
- 944 Idris Arslanian, blindfolded. Cut. NO
- 956 Cut follow up scene w Orin & Luria or combine with scene 940ff. V
- 957 More Lenz/Green. Condense Lenz's rap, cut story of Green's parents. - 161?
- 1028 The draining of the duck pond is for me the hardest scene in the novel to keep reading. Can't it be cut, and just say later that AFR found where Joelle was by kidnapping and interviewing her engineer, who knew she'd gone in for treatment? Or direly condensed. yes

536/37

362 - Copy - (copy)

Figure 5: Selection of Michael Pietsch's editorial comments from November 1994, with annotations from Wallace (Wallace papers 23.8)

Pietsch's method of negotiation was to continually urge upon Wallace the necessity of balancing his desire to challenge the reader with the demands of what Max describes as "the physics of reading" (ELS 182), a line of argumentation that Wallace clearly accepted.

To Lipsky, he later recalled

Michael being real smart about, "All right, maybe you don't cut this scene, but you take five pages off this, and it's 30 percent easier to read. And save yourself 10 percent reader alienation, which you *need* thirty pages later for this part." You know what I mean? Like *smart*. (247, italics in original)

The description suggests the size and complexity of the process, as both author and editor attempted to excise material with reference to detailed lists of possible changes and in relation to an imagined overall reading experience. Pietsch's letter of 22 December 1994, for example, which dealt with the second half of the novel, contained 45 separate requests for alterations, each one accompanied by page numbers and comments requesting not only clarification and cuts but sometimes suggesting a change in the placement of a scene.

However, Pietsch also clearly began to accept the need to compromise significantly on the practicalities of length and price. In October 1994, he wrote that:

My guiding principle is going to be that we should try to make the novel fit whatever length leaves it possible to for us to price the book under \$30. \$30 is tough enough; I don't believe anyone will buy a book over that price no matter how great they hear it is. (21 Oct 1994)

Two months later, he acquiesced to Wallace's preference for endnotes over footnotes and optimistically wrote that he was "still hoping there are ways to make the novel much shorter . . . because the longer it is the more people will find excuses not to read it" (22 Dec 1994). The evidence shows that Pietsch's work here accords with his conception of the editor's role as one which requires "earn[ing] the writer's agreement that changes he

or she suggests are worth making" ("Editing"). Several of the comments reproduced here – the demand to cut the scene featuring "Mario's first romantic experience," for example, or the suggestion that the complexity of the espionage plot could be dispensed with – were ultimately rejected by Wallace. Pietsch later recalled that "every decision was David's," and that the author frequently overruled his advice on the endnotes: "he insisted that many of them stay that I thought could well have come out" (Moody and Pietsch 213). The editor gradually accommodated himself to the demands of the work and while his focus initially fell on the management of the author's maximalist production, he began increasingly to consider the problem of how best to present that maximalism in the marketplace.

The most important feature of Pietsch's editing is surely the way in which he continually and successfully negotiated between commercial imperatives (the bottom-line necessity of producing a marketable book that might justify Little, Brown's investment) and the author's ambition and propensity for experimentation and textual abundance. Despite Wallace's engagement with the demands for cuts, the final product did, in fact, turn out to be a \$30 book¹²³ and was, in length, not far short of the figure of Pietsch's early fears (1,079 pages rather than 1,200). It is clear that both author and editor made numerous compromises, and the editor's chief concession may have been simply to accept the book's length as a necessary condition of production: Steven Moore noted that "it's to his editor's credit that, instead of insisting on further reductions, Pietsch decided to market the novel's gargantuan size as part of its appeal" (n.p.).

Indeed, the commercial presentation of the novel was successful enough for it to be recently described, as we have seen, as a "case study in how to sell" a lengthy and

¹²³ Both Steven Moore and Michiko Kakutani's reviews listed its sale price at \$29.95.

ambitious novel (Kachka n.p.). Max describes how Little, Brown adopted the strategy of sending out “a campaign of postcards. . . to four thousand reviewers, producers, and bookstore owners,” upon which were inscribed (as Tore Rye Andersen recounts) enigmatic, teasing phrases such as “It’s coming” (ELS 211; Andersen, “Judging” 276 n20). Each round of these postcards carried hyperbolic statements that served to reconceive the size and difficulty of the novel as essential selling points: one predicted it to be “the biggest literary event of next year,” while another quipped, “just imagine what they’ll say about his masterpiece” (ELS 211). A 2001 profile of Pietsch on the occasion of his promotion to the role of Publisher at Hachette noted that much of his reputation rested on the success of *Infinite Jest*, and it devoted some time to a narrative of the editor’s role in this commercial triumph. The author described how, “left with . . . a gargantuan manuscript and mindful of the fate of many other worthy but long-winded literary novels, Pietsch took the decisive step of his career.” The editor “enlist[ed] the help of young writers like his author Rick Moody” in an effort “to incite envy among Wallace’s peers”: “the trick,” Pietsch is quoted as saying, “was getting other writers to recognize that this was the guy to beat.”¹²⁴ His approach to overcoming possible “reluctance” on the part of general readers was, he remembered, based on a similarly confrontational gambit: “‘I can show you the place,’ Pietsch recalls, ‘up on the hill by my house where I first thought of making this a challenge: Are you reader enough?’” (Maneker n.p.).

This approach was one which the author was reluctant to approve. When Wallace received the postcards he replied to express his conflicted feelings, noting his concern

¹²⁴ We might, in noting the success of this appeal to a spirit of writerly competition, recall Lorentzen’s comment that other writers “took to it [the novel] like Marines sprung from a sort of literary boot camp” (n.p.).

that the use of superlatives (such as “masterpiece”) was “icky” and asking for the size of his name to be reduced on the book’s cover (ELS 211–212; Wallace, 20 Sep 1995). Indeed, Pietsch would later note that this conflict was characteristic, since his own work had taken place “at the professional interface between [Wallace] and his readers, a borderline he approached with vast apprehension” (“On David Foster Wallace” 11). However, the success of this strategy is undeniable, and the commercial apparatus employed in the service of this marketing campaign undoubtedly served to communicate the impression (as Andersen observes) of a formidably accomplished, intellectually brilliant author.¹²⁵ Pietsch noted his satisfaction in a letter to Nadell in January 1996, saying that “all our drum beating seems to have been heard” (ELS 216), and the book would, of course, go on to be central in securing the reputation of its author as well as its editor. Maneker’s 2001 profile of Pietsch, indeed, noted that an unnamed “young novelist” had confided to her, “with two parts sarcastic envy and one part reverence,” that Pietsch was “the Maxwell Perkins of our generation.”

3.1.3 “I feel like I know him, and I trust him, and that’s priceless”: After

Infinite Jest

In November of 1995, Wallace wrote to tell Pietsch that he was, after reading through the galleys of *Infinite Jest*, “feeling the gratitude afresh” for the editor’s work: the book

¹²⁵ The blurbs on the back cover of the “advance reading copy” (ARC) of the book (of which, as Andersen notes, there were a remarkable eight) contained four iterations of the word “brilliant” and one mention of “genius”; Jeffrey Eugenides’ blurb ended with the repetition of the phrase “He’s the man!.” Andersen analyses this ARC to illustrate the way in which the paratextual elements functioned as a “gateway” for readers (noting, for example, the “rebellious charisma” suggested by the unusual choice of author photo) and positioned Wallace within a “constellation” of literary-historical reference points (“Judging” 251–278); elsewhere, he examines how the novel’s paratexts served to encourage an exaggerated focus on the author’s continuities with Pynchon (“Covered in P”).

contained no list of thanks, but the author wrote that “if there were such a list, your name would be first” (n.d. November 1995). Indeed, in the years after this unprecedentedly lengthy and extensive editing process, Wallace held a lasting respect for his editor. In 1996, speaking to Lipsky, he commended Pietsch’s work in the strongest terms: “I mean, I think he’s a little bit of a hero, and it would be nice if he got some of the good attention” (103). Pietsch remained his editor for every book-length work for the rest of his career (with the exception of *Everything and More*), and Wallace’s subsequent references to his editor’s work on the novel were almost entirely positive. In a 1999 interview, Wallace praised Pietsch’s textual editing as well as what the interviewer paraphrased as his “diplomacy as he shuttled between marketers, who worried over the novel’s size, and Wallace” (CWDFW 93). In the same interview, Wallace suggested that Pietsch’s role was deliberately distant and that their friendship was of a kind calibrated to enable improvement of his work: “This wasn’t a matter of liking my editor. We don’t mix socially: I’m nervous around Michael; he’s an authority figure for me. But I feel like I know him, and I trust him, and that’s priceless” (CWDFW 93). Wallace’s words here suggest that he required an awareness of external pressure in order to produce his best work, and Max speculates upon “the usefulness [for Wallace] of imagining Pietsch as an unforgiving authority figure so he would get [*Infinite Jest*] written” (ELS 194). I will return to this in my discussion of *The Pale King* and suggest that Wallace had, later in his career, internalised this “authority figure” and begun to incorporate it as a presence in his own work.

Wallace was aware of his own complex attitude towards his editor, and in a letter accompanying several pieces that would be included in *Oblivion*, he alludes to “the weird authority-figure-and-need-for-approval shit I constantly project onto you, Bonnie,

magazine editors, etc” (October 13 2001). Pietsch’s work on Wallace’s last two story collections appears to have primarily involved selection and sequencing rather than any extensive internal changes to stories, since the collections’ relatively standard length meant that the spatial and physical constraints that had helped to shape *Infinite Jest* were no longer a factor and also due to the fact that many of the stories had been previously edited and published in magazines.¹²⁶ Wallace clearly valued this work highly, though, and the same 2001 letter mentions that both works of fiction that Pietsch had assisted with by that point – *Infinite Jest* and *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men* – had been made “better – in some cases substantially better – than they would have been otherwise” by the editorial process. Wallace’s private correspondence backs up the praise he gave his editor in public interviews: in a letter to Don DeLillo in 2000, he confided that “I need editing help and I really like and trust Pietsch and the L,B copyeditors” (April 28 2000). Wallace’s letters to Pietsch in the later years of his work show a mixture of gratitude and deference for the editor’s attention and judgement: in 2004, he signed a letter with the words “Your Devoted Editee” (April 19 2004). During the selection process for *Consider the Lobster*, he professed respect and apologetic, belated deference to Pietsch’s judgement on the sequencing of their previous collaboration:

After overriding you about starting the fiction book with “Mister S.” and then realizing what a serious mistake I’d made, I will not override you if you feel the Lobster thing is simply too slight and, well, fluffy to be even a breather-type piece in the collection. (Oct 26 2004)

¹²⁶ These processes of selection and sequencing were often complex ones in themselves, of course, particularly in the complicated case of the presentation of the numbered title story sequence in *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men*.

Even at the late stage of March 2005 (*Lobster* was published in December of that year), Wallace agreed to cut two essays¹²⁷ if Pietsch requested it: “But your track record on inclusion/arrangement issues is so good that I’ll simply acquiesce if you’re 100% sure” (29 March 2005).

It seems clear, therefore, that Pietsch was, during the extended time of the composition of the work that would develop into *The Pale King*, a trusted and valued collaborator for Wallace. Moreover – and perhaps more interestingly – he appears to have become not only an accepted presence in Wallace’s own work, but a necessary one. The assembly of the posthumous work, of course, would change the nature of this necessity and represent a very different challenge for the editor.

3.2 A King of Shreds and Patches: Assembling Wallace’s

Final Work

After Wallace’s suicide in September 2008, Pietsch was entrusted with the task of editing and publishing the drafts left behind by the author: the resulting work was published as *The Pale King* on the 15th of April 2011 and would be one of the three finalists for the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction the following year. One of the clearest elements of textual development to be uncovered in a genetic study of *The Pale King* consists of Pietsch’s attempt to manage the chronic fragmentation and the frequent ellipses and contradictions in Wallace’s representations of plot and character. Several critics have already suggested that Pietsch’s work here involves a co-authoring function

¹²⁷ These were “Rhetoric and the Math Melodrama” and “Form and Crapola,” both subsequently published in the posthumous collection *Both Flesh and Not* (the latter was renamed as “The Best of the Prose Poem”).

(Andersen, "Pay Attention" 14; Staes 83): I will proceed here to explore what this means at a textual level.

In the "Editor's Note" prefacing the main text, Pietsch describes how the work made its way to print following Wallace's suicide in 2008. The drafts Wallace had left on his desk before his death contained no instructions for publication nor any guidelines for the editor, who had not seen any of the material save for some short magazine excerpts (vi).¹²⁸ Subsequently, Pietsch collected the entire body of work relating to the novel (including notes, sketches and research material) from Wallace's home and proceeded to painstakingly edit the material into a publishable novel. The work was, the editor reports, spread across various media: "hard drives, file folders, three-ring binders, spiral-bound notebooks, and floppy disks contained printed chapters, sheaves of handwritten pages, and more." It was also lacking in structural organization:

Nowhere in all these pages was there an outline or any other indication of what order David intended for these chapters . . . there was no list of scenes, no designated closing point, nothing that could be called a set of directions or instructions for *The Pale King* (vii–xii).

It was, the editor clearly states, "not by any measure a finished work" but still "an astonishingly full novel." This is perhaps an apparent contradiction, but the implication is that the work's thematic fullness is not matched by a similar structural accomplishment, as suggested by the claim that "I believe that David was still exploring the world he had made and had not yet given it a final form" (xi).

Pietsch, as we saw earlier, had one previous experience of posthumous editing, having worked on Hemingway's *The Dangerous Summer* (1985). Asked in a 2013 interview about these experiences and about the challenges involved in posthumous

¹²⁸ All page numbers in parenthetical citations to Pietsch's "Editor's Note" are to the 2012 paperback edition unless otherwise indicated.

editing, Pietsch stated that “in both cases there was an estate that was very involved in the editing and presentation of the book. And both books gave me an opportunity to think through the publisher's obligation to make the editorial process transparent to readers” (“Editor Ascendant” n.p.). This reply suggests that Pietsch was not solely responsible for the editing decisions involved in the book, and indeed interviews after the book's publication make it clear that Bonnie Nadell and Wallace's widow Karen Green also contributed in different ways to the work's production (Pietsch and Nadell; Derbyshire). Although this fact is not mentioned anywhere within the book, some of Nadell's comments at a symposium hosted by the Ransom Center in 2012 make it clear that she was involved in the process: she refers to extensive phone conversations with Pietsch in which they tried to make sense of the work's structure and states that “we decided that it was better to leave things as much as possible in his words and in his hands, and so where we cut was where it was confusing or where it was clearly a mistake, or where a name was not meant to be that name . . . there are drafts over so many years that we did things for clarity” (Pietsch and Nadell). Although Pietsch seems to have done the bulk of the work, then, we could see the novel as – to some extent – the result of a collective editing effort.

Pietsch's “Editor's Note” can thus be seen, at least in part, as an attempt to render the process behind the book's construction “transparent.” Indeed, the introduction, while brief, is forthright about the editor's role and about some of the specific challenges of bringing the novel to print. Pietsch admits the difficulty of the task, pointing to the problem of sequencing as his central challenge, quoting a note in which Wallace “refers to the novel as being ‘full of shifting POVs, structural fragmentation, willed incongruities.’” He points to the existence of multiple chapters that are self-

contained and lacking in chronological context, stating that “arranging these freestanding sections has been the most difficult part of editing *The Pale King*.” He notes that he used the structure of *Infinite Jest* – in which “large portions of apparently unconnected information [are] presented to the reader before a main story line begins to make sense” – as a reference for this sequencing work, citing notes from Wallace hinting at a “tornadic” structure. Pietsch states that his method here was to sequence apparently isolated chapters “so that the information they contain arrives in time to support the chronological story line,” with an awareness of “pace and mood, as in siting short comic chapters between long serious ones.” “The pages of the manuscript,” he claims, “were edited only lightly” in order to achieve consistency of factual information such as character names, place names, and job titles; “obvious grammatical errors and word repetitions” were also corrected, and Pietsch made “occasional cuts for sense or pace, or to find an end point for a chapter that trailed off unfinished” (ix–xi). In an interview elsewhere, Pietsch describes his job in more succinct terms: “to find the last version of each bit of it and then find a sequence that made sense” (“Feldman”).

Pietsch has noted that he “edited mostly for consistency” (“David Foster Wallace’s Editor”) and his introduction expresses his aim in clear terms; “my overall intent in sequencing and editing was to eliminate unintentional distractions and confusions so as to allow readers to focus on the enormous issues David intended to raise, and to make the story and characters as comprehensible as possible” (xi). Elsewhere, he goes further, claiming that “My task was to take this manuscript . . . and find the story that he had been attempting to write – that he had been writing – and then try to find the most coherent and most complete novel inside there that I could find” (“Maddow”). The latter quote points to the unavoidable distance between a fragmented

body of textual material and what might be considered a “coherent and complete” novel with a linear, unified form. The concepts of coherence, comprehensibility, and completion are crucial here and suggest that the editor’s aim was the creation of a work with a certain degree of narrative clarity rather than one that reproduces the author’s words with maximum accuracy. The goal here was clearly the production of a reader’s edition rather than a scholarly one: John F. Callahan’s stated aim of editing Ellison’s *Juneteenth* into a “single, coherent, continuous work” (366) is perhaps apposite here, and his later co-editing of the longer scholarly edition of the manuscript (published as *Three Days Before the Shooting* in 2010) illustrates some of the different possibilities for presenting an unfinished work. In editing *The Pale King*, Pietsch thus becomes (like Callahan) a literary as well as a critical editor, operating according to the demands of commercial publishing as well as to the dictates of textual fidelity; as with *The Original of Laura*, we see an editor anticipating the demands of a wide readership that nevertheless included scholars and fans who could be expected to parse the published text with intense critical interest.

Indeed, a “Notes and Asides” section follows the main text of the novel, and this reproduces material from Wallace’s drafts (while noting the contradictory plot information contained in several of them) in order to allow the reader “a fuller understanding of the ideas David was exploring . . . and illuminate how much of a work in progress the novel still was” (541). The section begins with notes attached to specific sections of the book, and continues with notes from elsewhere; some of these run to several pages, while others consist of a single line. The origins of these notes are not documented in any detail; no chronological or material information is presented, and we are told only that they come “from other parts of the manuscript” (541). Textual

variations throughout the text are not noted, and the individual chapters and notes are not accompanied by chronological or material information that would explain their place in what a genetic critic would call the work's "genetic dossier" (Van Hulle, *MM* 11).¹²⁹ The paperback edition of the book, published in April 2012 (a year after the hardback edition), contains a final section entitled "Four previously unpublished scenes from *The Pale King*." Pietsch introduces these by stating that the pieces here could not be integrated into the main narrative of the novel, that they represent some of the most complete of the many "fragments and false starts" to be found in the drafts, and that "Despite not fitting with the rest of the novel, many of these drafts are hilarious and entertaining and revealing of the ideas that Wallace was working with while writing *The Pale King*" (550).

Included in Wallace's papers at the Ransom Center is Pietsch's "Index of Documents for *The Pale King*" (36.1). This allows us a glimpse at Pietsch's own encounter with the draft material and provides a vivid illustration of the difficulty of imposing coherence or completion on the multiple drafts. The length and scope of the index indicate the difficulty of the task the editor faced: it takes the form of an extensive spreadsheet apparently listing all of the material considered for inclusion, runs to 29 pages when printed (this is the form in which it is available to scholars) and lists 474 items, with sources ranging from handwritten drafts to printed typescripts to digital copies of word processing files. Of the latter, these files are drawn from multiple sources including a laptop, a desktop computer and several disks of varying formats with titles such as "black unlabeled disk," "5" floppy disk #1" and "WPF/PK '05 ZIP disk": some material is clearly in incomplete or damaged form, as indicated by the title

¹²⁹ De Biasi's phrase, "dossier de genèse" is translated by Ingrid Wassenaar as the "collection of genetic documentation" (31).

“Corrupted disk titled Little Brown Advance 103.” These sources, along with other information relating to the individual items of draft material, are tracked throughout the spreadsheet’s columns according to a number of headings which I examine below.

Index of documents for THE PALE KING

Log #	Title	Pgs.	Format	Word Count	Date of Copy	Related Drafts	Character
1	975042012, Author's Foreword "Author here. Meaning the real author."	1-17	Typed hardcopy w/handwritten edit, no electronic			42, 57, 105,161,167,250, 336, 339, 361, 367, 422	Glenn
2	975042012 "Author here. I arrived for intake processing at Lake James."	1-50	Typed hardcopy, no electronic			12,13,44,45,47,50,104,107, 113,115,173,	David W Glenn Sloper, S
3	921042012/921042012 personnel systems snafu "Until mid-1987, the IRS's attempts at achieving an integrated data system"	1-6	Typed hardcopy, no electronic			108,51,116, 337, 368	David F Francis W
4	[untitled 2-column chapter] "Irrelevant' Chris Fogle turns a page."	1	Typed hardcopy, no electronic			17,106,176, 344	Chris F Redgate, Williams,
5	975563458 Irrelevant' Chris Fogle's monologue "I'm not sure I even know what to say. To be honest, a good bit of it I don't remember..."	1-85	Typed hardcopy w/handwritten edits, no electronic			40 & 41, 118 & 119 124,134,144,171, 342	Chris F
6	939354853 Boy with "shattering public sweats" "It was in public high school that this other boy learned the terrible power of attention and what you pay attention to."	1-8	Typed hardcopy w/handwritten edits, no electronic			23, 55, 340, 359	Cusk
7	[untitled, unnumbered 18-page section of employee interview transcripts] "It's an IRS examiner in a chair, in a room. There is little else to see."		Typed hardcopy w/handwritten edits, no electronic			21,Part of 25, drafts: 46, 256 345, 379	Tate, Stee
8	912387224 press his lips to every square inch of his own body "Every whole person has ambitions, objectives, initiatives, goals."	1-34	Typed hardcopy w/handwritten edits, no electronic			54, 124,134,158,258, 259, 260, 330, 407, 438, 456	
9	978923066 "My Audit Group's group manager and his wife have an infant I can only describe as—fierce."	13-18	Typed hardcopy w/handwritten edits, no electronic			150, 326, 327, 332, 354, 375, 416, 460, 467	Manshar
10	981622871 Girl is named Peoria "Under the sign erected every May above the outer highway reading SPRING IS HERE—THINK FARM SAFETY and through the north ingress..."	18-27	Typed hardcopy w/handwritten edits, no electronic			10, 28, 94,121,122, 333, 409, 425, 435, 436, 450, 458, 470	Peoria
11	957114169 IRS Worker Dead "Supervisors at the IRS's regional complex in Lake	28	Typed hardcopy w/handwritten edits, no electronic			11, 334, 384	Merrill B

Figure 6: Michael Pietsch’s index of documents for The Pale King (Wallace papers 36.1)

Firstly, each item is given a log number, making it identifiable as a discrete unit of textual material. This is followed by the “Title,” usually consisting either of the title given to the section by the author (e.g. “WPF Electric Girl II Story Freewriting Feb 07” (37.2)) or the first few lines of the draft. The next column relates to the number of pages in the draft, with the subsequent one indicating the “Format.” The next two

columns are "Word Count" and "Date or Code": however, these two columns are blank for a large number of items. Following the latter column down through the list of entries provides an illustration of the long gestation period of the work: much of the material is drawn from a floppy disk dated 1997, for example, and some items are dated as early as 1990 (37.5). It appears that Wallace's last sustained burst of work took place in the summer of 2007, with the latest drafts listed in the index dating from August of that year (many of the drafts, though, are not accompanied by dates).

The subsequent column of the index, "Related Drafts," appears to list the log numbers of drafts in which the same material appears in either complete or partial form. The extent of the dispersal of existing textual material is again highly evident here: the "Related Drafts" column accompanying log #2, for example (a draft of §24 of the published novel in which David Wallace travels to "intake processing") lists eleven other log numbers (36.4). If we follow these numbers through the index, we see that these drafts are scattered across a number of disks dated between January and August 2007 as well as undated hardcopy printouts. One of these (log #12) is a draft relating to Leonard Stecyk's childhood (§5 of *The Pale King*), but the "Related Drafts" column of the index notes that this contains a "Partial draft of [#] 2." The relationship between drafts is not always clear from the index – the final log number listed here as a "Related Draft" refers to a "zero draft of story of Sylvanshine on plane," with no indication as to how this relates to the David Wallace chapter (36.1). This perhaps points to the fact that much of the editor's work (as with the author's) will necessarily be intuitive, private, and resistant to subsequent reconstruction. In any case, it certainly highlights the difficulty of the editorial task and provides an obvious parallel with the problems of information overload with which the novel concerns itself; the papers could be said to

represent as much of a conceptual challenge as the “labyrinth” David Wallace observes during his entry into the REC complex in this particular section (*TPKb* 291). Some of the scenes are present in solitary drafts, while others exist (if we include backup versions stored digitally) in up to 17 different versions: the published work thus includes pieces, in various stages of completion, from different stages of Wallace’s work on the novel.

The following column lists “Characters” mentioned in the draft. Again, the information presented here is not exhaustive, since in several cases this field has been left blank. Where characters are listed, though, they again illustrate the extent of the fragmentation in the work. Wallace appears to have constantly changed the names of his characters, a habit which arguably represents one of the most intractable obstacles in any interpretation of the novel. It is enough to note here, by way of example, that a draft from April 2007 (listed as log #422 in the index and currently unavailable to scholars) refers to characters such as “Wax, Blackwelder, Hornbaker, Wallace (3)” among others. Not only are the first three names among the many that refer to characters who appear to be entirely peripheral and are mentioned elsewhere only in passing, but the fourth hints at an additional Wallace character whose presence would, of course, extend the metafictional manoeuvres in the novel and have implications for any reading that highlights its engagement with ideas of authorship. The final column of the index is named “Most recent draft?”; however, this column is empty for every item in the index, suggesting either that Pietsch did not write this information down or that he noted his conclusions elsewhere.

In examining the index and considering the various columns’ information, another difficulty of interpreting of *The Pale King* becomes apparent: that is, the problem of drawing a boundary around the work. Wallace seems to have regularly

worked on several projects simultaneously, and the archive of materials for *The Pale King* indicates the porousness of the borders between these projects, displaying many examples of (in Stephen Burns' words) "parallel projects bleeding into each other" ("Paradigm" 373); the size and composition of the genetic dossier pertaining to the work, then, is difficult to establish. Indeed, scholars have already remarked upon several shared elements between *Oblivion* and the existing version of the novel. Boswell, for example, points out several instances of "textual overlap," such as the "Mister Squishee" truck in which Sylvanshine is transported to the Regional Examination Center in §7, the use of the metaphor of a leaf upon a tree to describe citizenship in "Good Old Neon" and the novel's §19, and the fact that "both Neal and Chris Fogle experience blinding revelations from two random snatches of televised dialog" ("Constant Monologue" 157-169).¹³⁰ The index displays more of this overlap, listing several sections that Wallace developed into stories in his second and third collections: log#77, for example, is clearly a draft for the "B.I. #14" interview from *Brief Interviews With Hideous Men*, and in the "Related Drafts" column for this draft Pietsch has noted, simply, "BIWHM." The same applies to log numbers 69 and 70 ("Signifying Nothing" and "Octet" respectively in *BIWHM*) from the same 5" floppy disk containing drafts worked on in 1997.

A draft from June of 1997, meanwhile, consists of notes and dialogue clearly related to *Oblivion's* "The Soul is Not a Smithy" (a note says "Teacher writes 'Kill Them All' on blackboard"); notes suggest that the section's title, at this point, is "Not Here"

¹³⁰ To these examples we might also add the shared references to *The Exorcist* in "The Soul is Not a Smithy" (94-97) and *The Pale King's* §32 (375-377), and the nightmares of "men immersed in rote work" experienced by the narrator of the same story (108) and the vivid dream of office tedium described in the novel's §23.

and that this relates to the back-story of a character called Keck who later recedes from the work (37.4). This problem is exacerbated in the case of log#92, whose title in the index is "SJF.CGT '2-year-old in plastic diapers playing near stove'" and which, as Pietsch notes in the "Related Drafts" column, is a "Précis of story in *Oblivion*." This is clearly a draft of that collection's "Incarnations of Burned Children" and yet, as the "Characters" column indicates, the child here is named "Drinion," the name of the levitating examiner seen at length in *The Pale King's* §46 whom Wallace seems to have intended, according to multiple indications throughout the drafts, to be a central character in the novel. The same disk ("5" floppy disk #1"), indeed, contains a piece of writing (log#67) which may be autobiographical: a line listed in the index below the title ("Sex") begins with the words "Age 13-15, home, Urbana" and, according to the "Character" field of the index, "Mentions Amy, Mom, Mark Costello" (36.1).¹³¹ This clearly presents an additional problem for any critical attempt to separate life and work, as the question of whether to consider an autobiographical fragment as part of the "work" may be interpreted differently by critics. "Work" is a term whose definition can be extremely broad, depending on one's viewpoint: we recall, for instance, the definition of genetic documentation as "the whole body of known, classified, and transcribed manuscripts and documents connected with a text whose form has reached, in the opinion of its author, a state of completion or near completion" (De Biasi and Wassenaar 31). In the absence of an author to indicate either the stage of completion of the text or the extent of its connection with documents such as the

¹³¹ I was unable to access this draft, which does not appear to be available to scholars: information accompanying the description of the Wallace collection printed along with the Index notes that "Some info from disks has not been printed out by Pietsch" (36.1), and HRC staff were unable to locate it.

sketch above (and considering the additional complication of a work that features an authorial stand-in as one of its characters) the status of the various textual deposits will depend upon subjective decisions taken by archivists and critics as well as its editor. The posthumous editor's role here would seem to include the duties and responsibilities of a curator and perhaps even a biographical gatekeeper.

3.2.1 The Reception of *The Pale King*

It is clear, then, that editorial decisions will mediate the text in ways that may affect readers' encounters with the work. Many critics have observed the importance of the materials accompanying the publication of a book upon the work's subsequent reception. Perhaps the most influential notion in this field is Gérard Genette's notion of the paratext, a concept comprising a work's title, introduction, illustrations and annotations as well as extratextual (or, to use Genette's word, "epitextual") material such as interviews, private correspondence and other elements located "outside the book." Genette describes this as "a zone between text and off-text, a zone not only of transition but of transaction" whose effect on interpretation is profound: the paratext is a "threshold" which, he states (quoting Philippe Lejeune) "in reality controls one's whole reading of the text" (1–2).

The paratextual elements of Wallace's work have already received some attention: Andersen, for example, conducts an exhaustive examination of the original dust jacket of *Infinite Jest* in order to trace "the significant influence of paratextual matters . . . on the critical construction of the literary work" ("Judging" 251). Lucas Thompson has recently written about the blurbs Wallace wrote for other writers' books, examining them for what they reveal about his engagement with these works and

arguing that they constitute “a parallel history to the aesthetic agendas he set down elsewhere” (n.p.). Wallace was clearly aware of the influence of these elements himself, as is clear from his later comments to Lipsky about elements of the publicity campaign and the novel’s dust jacket:

There are a lot of things that if I’d been in charge I wouldn’t have done. I wouldn’t have done the postcard campaign . . . And I wouldn’t have had all white males on the back of the book. I wouldn’t have misspelled Vollmann’s *name* on the back of the book, that was kind of a boner (250, italics in original).

Henry Veggian, meanwhile, discusses the marketing and framing of *The Pale King* in a recent essay in order to illuminate paradoxes in “the production and valuation of literary commodity forms” (100). *The Pale King’s* status as posthumous work and the inevitable broadening of cultural interest in Wallace following his widely-reported suicide complicate the question of its reception and make a consideration of paratextual matters impossible to ignore. I attempt here to provide an overview of some of the main problems for criticism in discussion of the work, and of how the accompanying paratextual information – none of which, of course, Wallace had any part in, in contrast to his earlier works – can be said to have framed these.

The influence of *The Pale King’s* presentation and context upon its reception has already been noted by several critics. Boswell, for example, argues that Pietsch’s introduction encouraged the consensus among reviewers that the book was primarily about boredom (“Trickle-Down Citizenship” 465). Indeed, the word recurs twice in Pietsch’s “Editor’s Note,” firstly in the observation that several chapters explore “ideas of boredom, repetition, and familiarity” and then in a statement containing a clear interpretive judgment: “David set out to write a novel about some of the hardest subjects in the world – sadness and boredom – and to make that exploration nothing less than

dramatic, funny, and deeply moving” (x–xii). In several interviews given during the weeks around the book’s publication, Pietsch referred to boredom as a central theme in the novel (McGrath n.p.; “NPR Interview” n.p.); another outcome of the posthumous condition of the book, it should be noted, was the fact that in the absence of the author, the editor assumed the responsibilities of the authorial publicity duties.¹³² Andersen also notes the importance here of Max’s “The Unfinished,” the lengthy *New Yorker* essay which provided many readers with their first description of *The Pale King* and included repeated mentions of the word “boredom” (“Pay Attention” 12). This interpretation, as Herman and Staes suggest, seems to have obscured an awareness of the book’s historical and political context (Herman and Staes 4). The theme of boredom was certainly to the forefront in early reviews, and as Ralph Clare notes, “most reviewers took an almost perverse glee in declaring the book was ‘about’ boredom” (428). Michiko Kakutani described the book as “a novel about boredom” (“Maximized”) while James Campbell noted in the *Wall Street Journal* that the novel “appears to have been part of a heroic effort to think about nothing . . . it is the supreme example of purposeful boredom in literary form” (“Cure”); in *The Guardian*, James Lasdun wrote that book’s subject “is, in a word, boredom” (n.p.).

In his introduction to *The Pale King*, Pietsch confronts the fact that unfinished work necessarily prompts certain fundamental questions, such as: “How unfinished is this novel? How much more might there have been?” He acknowledges that “this is unknowable in the absence of a detailed outline projecting scenes and stories yet to be

¹³² A 2013 interviewer noted that Pietsch had, with *The Pale King*, “stepped into the spotlight as the book’s media spokesperson”: the editor replied that the experience had been “dislocating” and had provided “an invaluable lesson in the writer’s experience” (“Editor Ascendant” n.p.).

written” and mentions several notes that “could support a contention that the novel’s apparent incompleteness is in fact intentional,” but claims that “none strikes me as definitive” (x–xi). While these questions may be impossible to answer with certainty, they are not incidental ones. Any analysis of the book’s content is obliged to acknowledge the work’s unfinished nature and to at least gesture towards an acceptance that its conclusions – insofar as they touch upon authorial intention – are tentative. Marshall Boswell introduces the first extended critical survey of *The Pale King* – the second of a two-part 2012 issue of *Studies in the Novel* devoted to Wallace’s long-form fiction – by arguing for the novel’s richness in terms that echo Pietsch’s description of the work in *The Pale King*’s introduction:

Wallace knew what he wanted to say in this book, and largely said it. What he had not yet discovered was a narrative structure via which to organize all the richly developed character sketches, set pieces, and episodes he had already drafted (“Introduction” 369).

Elsewhere, Boswell begins his examination of the “David Wallace”-narrated sections of *The Pale King* by arguing that they are “polished enough to provide fairly clear and decisive hints as to their larger purpose within the novel’s thematic whole,” while admitting that “of course, just about anything one might say about [the novel] is, by necessity, provisional” (“Author Here” 25–26).

A common critical move, indeed, has been to parse an aspect of textual presentation or arrangement before pulling back to acknowledge the impossibility of attributing this to the author. John Jeremiah Sullivan describes the way that the “Author’s Foreword” chapter (§9) is placed “immediately following the last sentence of the Toni Ware chapter” as the equivalent of a “formal chest slap,” characterising it as a typical Wallacean manoeuvre; soon afterwards, however, he recognises Pietsch’s role in

sequencing the chapters and admits that “we don’t know what he [Wallace] intended” (n.p.). Tom McCarthy notes the significance of “the novel’s final image,” which “sends us back to a 19th-century factory, in which a woman counting loops of twine is shown enjoying Zen-like immersion in her task,” but acknowledges that this comes in the “Notes and Asides” section (n.p.). Andersen, meanwhile, praises the “clever juxtaposition” of Fogle’s monologue with “David Wallace’s” arrival in Peoria, but footnotes this by conceding that the juxtaposition may be Pietsch’s rather than Wallace’s and noting that “since the structure of a book affects its meaning (and may in fact be hard to extricate from this meaning), Pietsch’s editorial choices have a significant co-authoring function” (“Pay Attention” 14). Brian McHale’s analysis begins by reversing this order: he notes that Pietsch’s sequencing work makes it unclear “whether the present §1 warrants the kind of interpretive weight we typically give to novelistic beginnings,” before going on to argue that *The Pale King’s* beginning, nevertheless, “does resonate” and to use this as an entry point for his own comparison of the novel with *Gravity’s Rainbow* (192–193).

The problems caused by the inherent instability of the text become clearer when we consider the fact that many critical readings take its unfinished nature as a focus for study. Several critics have, as Pietsch anticipated, argued that the novel’s fragmentary nature is a deliberate authorial strategy. Burn, for example, argues that the novel displays a “poetics of incompleteness,” and suggests that “to some extent we can think of the book’s incompleteness as a feature rather than a bug” (“Vision” 91). Stephen Shapiro argues that the demanding, plot-light structure of “Wallace’s non-narrative text” obliges the reader to recognise the politically useful fact “that readerly pleasure is not the agent for discovering historical transformation” (1268). Lee Konstantinou’s review of the novel argues that “*The Pale King* is concerned with a decentralized network of characters, none

of which bears the classical features of a protagonist” and links this concern with “the germ of a powerful new literary style” (n.p.). Andersen takes the book’s lack of central protagonists – its “democratic attention to a number of characters” – as an aspect of its ethical and political focus on the necessity of “paying attention”: again, however, he acknowledges the difficulty of definitively ascribing this feature to the text’s author (“Pay Attention” 17).

The various drafts left by Wallace certainly provide a warrant for this kind of analysis. Pietsch includes (and quotes from) notes suggesting that the reader may never see the “high end players” in the IRS and that “something big *threatens* to happen but doesn’t actually happen” (*TPKb* 542, 546, italics in original). The idea for a play described by an anonymous IRS examiner – in which the “real action” only begins once the frustrated audience have all left the theatre – suggests a similar desire to resist narrative closure (*TPKb* 108). Indeed, notes elsewhere in the manuscripts make it clear that Wallace considered incompleteness as a possible strategy. A note from July 2005 (within an early version of §9) reads:

Towards end, as computers are implemented, someone is making record of various agents’ lives, jobs, selves – as a kind of living archive. Hence the fragmented bits of narrative from different characters, which isn’t explained for some time in the whole narrative. (38.6)

However, this note is of course itself a fragment and provides little clue to the extent to which the narrative fragmentation will be “explained.”

There is plenty of evidence, both in Wallace’s previous work and in interviews in which he discussed his ideas on writing, to support the notion that the author’s antipathy to the idea of narrative closure represents a defining feature of his fiction. It can be

argued that deliberately open endings are a recurring feature of Wallace's work,¹³³ and several critics have invoked earlier examples of these in their analysis of *The Pale King* (Boswell, "Introduction" 368–69; Staes 74–75; Wouters 461–62). However, this highlights the extent to which a reading of a posthumous work necessarily involves a degree of second-guessing arguably amounting to a continual perpetration of the intentional fallacy. Tom Scocca took issue with Kakutani's review of *The Pale King* in which she claimed that the novel "showcases [Wallace's] embrace of discontinuity" for this reason, pithily commenting "But why would it be continuous? It's not a finished novel" (n.p.). This may be a flippant, even facile, dismissal – as I have discussed, the work itself gives several signs that this may be part of a deliberate strategy – but it does point to an intractable problem in any attempt to discuss posthumous writing. The critic inevitably comes up against an interpretive wall, one that can only be surmounted by conjecture or by inferring from previous works. This wall, of course, is one that is also encountered by the editor, as E.L. Doctorow noted in his review of Hemingway's *The Garden of Eden*: "the truth about editing the work of a dead writer in such circumstances is that you can only cut to affirm his strengths, to reiterate the strategies of style for which he is known; whereas he himself may have been writing to transcend them" (n.p.). This chimes with Max's discussion of Wallace's attempts at stylistic evolution, in which he claims that the author was, in his late work, "trying to write differently" and quotes Karen Green as saying "I think he didn't want to do the old tricks people expected of him . . . but he had no idea what the new tricks would be" ("Unfinished" n.p.). The lines between editor,

¹³³ The endings of Wallace's first two novels are the most notable examples, of course; the deliberately abridged ending of "The Planet Trillaphon" (republished in the 2014 *David Foster Wallace Reader*) also shows that Wallace used the technique from the beginning of his career.

scholar and critic arguably become blurred here. We see the truth of McGann's claim that editing always involves interpretive judgement (*TC* 27), as the editor unavoidably evaluates the success of the existing material as well as estimating its relationship to prior work. The reader of the work, meanwhile, is led to make interpretive judgements that arguably go beyond those involved in encounters with the work of a living author: the impossibility of assuming "passive authorization" of textual changes on the part of the author brings the reader to an awareness of editing processes usually hidden from view. John Jeremiah Sullivan suggests that the absence of certainty with regard to the author's decisions results in a reading experience in which the author's intention is repeatedly reconstructed according to pre-existing norms: "Every word you read and don't like, you think, 'Well, he would have changed that.'" Whereas everything that does work, that's the real Wallace" (n.p.). We can view some of these problems in greater detail by examining some specifics of the editing process.

3.3 Scenes Omitted from *The Pale King*: the "Cede" Draft

The drafts for Wallace's final novel allow us to examine the quantitative difference between the voluminous mass of raw textual material and the published work. Some of the drafts and sketches that appear to have been developed as part of the work have not been included in *The Pale King* by Pietsch. The novel appears to include a large majority of the scenes developed by Wallace: there is no evidence of any lengthy scenes (comparable to Fogle's monologue or the Happy Hour chapter) having been omitted from the text. Pietsch's criteria for inclusion seem to have been generous and he has omitted

less draft material than, for example, Callahan omitted from the drafts of *Juneteenth*; the lack of a fully-developed plot, as well as the length of Wallace's previous work, are surely essential factors in this decision.

There are, however, fragments that were included neither in the first edition nor the expanded paperback edition of *The Pale King*. This fact has clear implications for interpretation, and if we hope to understand Wallace's intentions for the work, we need to examine this material. Boswell has noted that "Wallace's longer work achieves its effect through accumulation and collage" ("Introduction" 368) and the narrative method of his novels depends on the interplay of scenes whose relation to each other is not always apparent on first reading. With this in mind, I will trace the development of one of the additional scenes present in Wallace's papers in order to demonstrate how it might affect a reading of the work.

One of the fragments excluded from Pietsch's version of *The Pale King* is a narrative named "Cede" whose action takes place in Rome during the first and second century and whose title denotes the name of a boy variously referred to in the drafts as Cede, Cedo and Cedes. It appears, on a surface level at least, to have little in common with the plot and themes explored elsewhere in the work. The story appears several times in Wallace's papers, always in conjunction with the story of the strange, contortionist child we see in §36 (a narrative referred to by Pietsch in his index as the "kissing boy" section). It is unclear whether "Cede" should also be taken as the name of the kissing boy, since the stories appear alongside each other and the nature of their relationship is enigmatic. The latest drafts bearing the name "Cede" (log #s 331 and 349) are dated to July and August of 2007, and neither are accessible to scholars at present; the latter is a one-page draft whose index entry reads "SS number, Cede (DW2),"

indicating that Wallace may have intended the contortionist boy as the childhood iteration of David Francis Wallace, the “older, high-value GS-13” examiner whose identity becomes confused with that of the David Wallace-narrator upon arrival at the Peoria REC (TPKb 415).

As with many other parts of the work, this section of narrative evidently had a long gestation period: a draft saved on a floppy disk (log #79) shows that Wallace was working on it in 1997 (37.4). *New Yorker* fiction editor Deborah Triesman reports that the author sent her a version of this in April 1999 for possible inclusion in the magazine’s “20 Under 40” fiction issue, but that it was rejected in favour of what she describes as a “more polished piece” from the (then-forthcoming) *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men*.¹³⁴ Wallace presented the story in a way that self-consciously highlighted his awareness of its status as work in development: on the letter that accompanied the draft, he referred to the story as “the Fragment” and listed his return address as “Fragmentco Unltd” (“Afterword”). He subsequently read a version of the piece at a reading for the Lannan Foundation in December 2000 (J. O’Brien). Drafts from 2001 show this narrative interspersed with the long monologue by Chris Fogle (who was, at that point, named Robbie Van Note): in the lengthy draft numbered as log #124, for example, Fogle’s monologue is broken up repeatedly by shorter fragments of the stories of the contortionist boy as well as Cede. As I mentioned earlier, then, the textual history of the piece does not support Hannah Sullivan’s claim that it was revised at only a local level and that “there is no great hermeneutic difference between any of the versions” (WOR 265): these revisions are structural ones with the potential to radically alter the reading experience. Wallace appears to have returned to each of these narratives intermittently,

¹³⁴ “B.I. #40” was published in the magazine’s “20 Under 40” issue in June 1999 as “Asset.”

adding and occasionally subtracting material (apparently, judging by the “last saved” dates on digital files, revising the scene multiple times during 1997, 2000, 2005, 2006 and 2007). He read the “kissing boy” narrative at an event in 2000 without reference to the “Cede” story (J. O’Brien); however, drafts make it clear that he continued to work on the chronologically earlier narrative after this. The “kissing boy” section itself would also develop substantially and was published posthumously by *The New Yorker*, in an excerpt which had developed since the reading (Esposito; Wallace, “Backbone”).

The “Cede” narrative, like the “kissing boy” story, is told in discrete fragments broken up by line breaks, lending the narrative an elliptical and detached feel. Its distant (yet specific) historical setting makes it unique in Wallace’s work. The narrative thread begins with a short fragment describing the “Pontic flights,” a fictional historical phenomenon; it describes how mass starvation in A.D. 108-110 causes the “neozoroastrian herdsmen of extreme eastern Pontus” to become so paper-thin that their bodies become capable of “windborne flight.” The herdsmen attempt to fly to Antioch to appeal to Pliny the Younger for aid, but when they pass over the “lavish Plinian orchards of Antioch” they cannot resist eating the fruit from the trees, whereupon they are felled by gravity and set upon by the proconsul’s “Molossian hounds” (40.2).

After a break, the narrative continues with the story of these hounds, a historically real breed believed to be used by the Ancient Greeks for fighting.¹³⁵ These are ruthless creatures “bred . . . for aggression” and used to persecute Christians for the emperor’s pleasure. The hounds’ training is carried out by handpicked Corinthian trainers: subsequent sections are concerned with the greatest of these (referred to as the

¹³⁵ The dogs, related to today’s mastiffs, were “used as war dogs and gladiators” in Caesar’s time (Coile 136).

“exercitor summum,” which translates roughly as “head trainer”) and the head trainer’s son, Cede. We are given details of the trainer’s brutal methods – the hounds are kept in a perpetual state of near-starvation and fury for use in the circus – and informed of his special status, which is due to his being favoured by the emperor’s wife Poppaea (40.2). In some of these drafts, we are given clear hints of an impending conflict between father and son (38.6). Cede does not share his father’s austere detachment and has, we are told, developed an affection for the dogs: “the child saw fit secretly to feed the circus’ hounds in their pens” (38.6). The boy’s mother wants to protect him and tries, we are told elsewhere, to keep him out of military training (40.2). The narrative is not brought to any obvious point of closure or climax in any of these drafts. It is fragmentary in all of its iterations: the sections are numbered in log #260, but they alternate with the narrative of the “kissing boy” and with paragraphs relating details of real and fictional mystics, saints and contortionists that would later be included as part of the “kissing boy” narrative in *The Pale King’s* §36.

This narrative strand was presumably excluded by Pietsch because of its temporal distance from the main action of the novel and its lack of clear relevance to what the editor describes as the “central narrative,” which follows “a clear chronology” (ix). It also seems possible that Wallace was ambivalent about this section – he excluded it from his reading at the Lannan foundation in 2000, and it is possible that the story was removed entirely in later drafts that are inaccessible at present. However, the draft numbered 54 in Pietsch’s index shows that Wallace included the two and a half-page section on the “Pontic Flights” in the longer “kissing boy” chapter as late as May 2007 (37.2). It is clear that this strand of the narrative was worked on through multiple drafts and revised repeatedly, arguably making it more complete at an individual level than other drafts; for

example, §48, by contrast, exists in only two drafts.¹³⁶ While its omission from the published novel is understandable, it is less clear why it was not included in the “Previously Unpublished Scenes” included with the paperback version, and a case could certainly be made for its relevance to an expanded version of the novel.

From a genetic viewpoint, the piece certainly represents a significant strand of the “dossier” for *The Pale King*, and a closer examination of the section repays critical interest by uncovering several links with other sections of the work. To begin with, the piece adds a singular new perspective to the “collage” (to borrow Boswell’s phrase) of the work. Burn has noted the unusual treatment of time in the novel, discussing its simultaneous depiction of several time frames and suggesting that the novel works by “compressing so many disparate periods” of time in order to suggest “a deeper liquid time” (“Paradigm” 385).¹³⁷ Elsewhere in the same essay, he hints at the “mythic overtones” of the work and at the “imaginative geography of Ancient Greek myth” underlying scenes set in the 1980s (382). The Cede section supports this reading, as the ancient world is not just invoked here but depicted; the piece’s inclusion for consideration as part of *The Pale King* would dramatically expand the work’s temporal and geographical range and allow for an exploration of the further development of themes in parallel yet ostensibly distant narratives. Burn argues that the book works by arranging “rich metaphorical nodes” where meaning accumulates (“Paradigm” 372), and the Cede section would support the suggestion that one of these nodes may be the world of Ancient Rome itself. The section

¹³⁶ David Hering’s 2015 conference presentation on “Cede” tracked the piece’s recurrence throughout Wallace’s drafts and highlighted the fact that the author was clearly reluctant to discard it, returning to it again and again over a number of years even as other pieces were seemingly abandoned or diverted into discrete short stories (n.p.).

¹³⁷ Shapiro also highlights the work’s treatment of time, suggesting that the novel successfully “manages to convey . . . the simultaneous, but heterogenous temporalities within capitalism” (1250).

could be considered, then, alongside the frequency with which Roman references recur in the text.

There are many examples of these, of which I will give just a few here: the Latin motto of the IRS, for example, "*alicui faciendum est*" (TPKb 14, 246); the "Roman numerals" organising the substitute lecturer's main points in §22 (226); the references to specific Roman figures such as Aurelius (18), which are sometimes more explicit in the draft material (in an earlier draft depicting Sylvanshine's plane journey, the character muses that "According to Dr. Lehl, Aurelius recommends always returning to first principles" (39.7)); and Sylvanshine's reflection, upon reaching Peoria, that it has been some time since he last saw any "Latin person" (49).¹³⁸ The frequent use of Latin words and phrases such as "David Wallace"'s dry comment "*Hiatus valde deflandus*" (which translates roughly as "a lack greatly to be deplored") on the absence of an illustrative photo from his narrative (285) is also striking. There is a recurrence of obscure or technical Latin words, such as the "temblor" or foretaste of the conversion experience that Fogle receives in §22 and the "peplum" that his jacket resembles when buttoned (222, 236). The presence of the Cede narrative also sheds new light on the "kissing boy" section itself, which contains references to "Roman legal texts" as well as dense passages filled with medical terminology derived from Latin (399, 401).¹³⁹

¹³⁸ Jorge Araya, it should be noted, interprets this last reference as an example of the monocultural racial environment of the novel, suggesting that the word "Latin" rather than "Latino" serves to indicate the character's cultural ignorance (238).

¹³⁹ The boy forces himself to endure:

[d]aily hours spent cross-legged and bowed, slowly and incrementally stretching the long vertical fasciae of his back and neck, the spinalis thoracis and levator scapulae, iliocostolaris lumborum all the way to the sacrum, and the interior thigh's dense and intransigent gracilis, pectineus, and adductor longus . . . (399, 401)

Again, the links with the world of ancient Rome are sometimes more explicit in earlier drafts: in one draft, for example, one of the inspirational maxims quoted is Virgil's "Arma virumque cano" (40.2). The same draft contains a heading in capital letters, spaced over three lines, that reads:

AMERICANID REX

ADVENTURES IN ACHIEVEMENT

DOG, CREATUS, ACHIEVER

Below this appears the maxim "*Nam tue res agitur, paries proximus ardet*": a note at the end of the same draft that appears to be from Wallace to himself rather than to the reader states that the "Epigraph is Horace – 'no time to sleep with a fire next door.'" Taken together, these suggest the use of Roman history in order to frame an address to an urgent contemporary situation as well as to explore a preoccupation with a particularly American striving for success.

AMERICANID REX
ADVENTURES IN ACHIEVEMENT
DOG, CREATUS, ACHIEVER

CEDE

'Nam tua res agitur, paries cum proximus ardet.'

1. Every whole person has objectives, ambitions, projects, desires: some kind of goal.

This boy's queer objective was to press his lips to every single square inch of his own body.

He commenced work toward his goal immediately upon conceiving it.

The fronts of his arms to the shoulders and much of the legs below the knee were child's play. Almost anyone could have pressed his lips to these. Thereafter, the difficulty of the project increased with the abruptness of a coastal drop-off. The boy came to understand that a nearly unimaginable challenge lay ahead of him. He was seven.

2. Of antiquity's Pontic Flights, now much cited as putative evidence of 'astral projection' or 'O.B.E.,' the efficient cause lay in the drought and famine (A.D. 108-110) which devastated most of Asia Minor under the administration of Trajan's proconsul Pliny the Younger.

As with cataclysms throughout human history, the drought gave occasion for power to consolidate itself further by rewarding its friends and punishing its enemies. This appears to be simply the way human beings operate. The territory of Bithynia, favored of Rome since the testament of Nicomedes IV, received emergency stocks of millet. Trajan is said personally to have dispatched his Imperial Engineers to the Caicus valley, where the weirs and sluices whose remains stand today were the land of Pergamum's reward for the fealty of King Attilus. Grain ships from Alexandria were routed up the Cayster to unload within sight of Artemis' temple, which Ephesus had consented to rename for Rome's Diana.

Figure 7: A page from one of Wallace's drafts of "Cede" (Wallace papers 40.2)

Some of the intratextual links between the Cede section and other material provide clearer hints as to how we might interpret this section. The discussion on “civics and selfishness” in §22, for example, provides what appear to be at least two clear links to the Cede narrative (*TPKb* 132). One of the men, most likely Glendenning, opens the discussion by stating what he believes to be the central problem facing the modern-day United States:

As citizens we cede more and more of our autonomy, but if we the government take away the citizens’ freedom to cede their autonomy we’re now taking away their autonomy. It’s a paradox.

He goes on, a few lines later, to predict “some sort of disaster” to be followed by a moment of crisis in which “we’ll either wake up and retake our freedom or we’ll fall apart utterly. Like Rome – conqueror of its own people” (132–133). While these links are difficult to parse (due both to the complexity of the ideas involved and the impossibility of knowing how far Wallace had developed his exploration of them), the recurrence of the word “cede” followed by a clear reference to the fall of ancient Rome indicates that the Cede chapter is part of a larger argument that Wallace is constructing about freedom and power and, perhaps, imperial decline. Lasdun’s review of *The Pale King* detected traces in the novel of W.H. Auden’s poem “The Fall of Rome,” with its “Agents of the Fisc” pursuing “tax-defaulters” and its disgruntled “unimportant clerk” (Lasdun n.p.; Auden 188). This link seems undeniable in the light of the Cede narrative, as the poem’s method of juxtaposing the political problems and vices of ancient Rome with modern-day American professional life is replicated in Wallace’s work.

The chapter also provides a link with a book in Wallace’s library that appears to have been used as a source-text: *Quo Vadis*, the 1895 novel by Nobel Prize-winning Polish author Henryk Sienkiewicz that dramatises the persecution of the early Christians in

ancient Rome. The word “peplum” used by Fogle, in fact, appears on one of the pages annotated by Wallace (74), and several other Latin words are also circled or underlined in Wallace’s copy of the novel. Cede’s mother Poppaea is a character in *Quo Vadis*, and Wallace underlined a sentence in Sienkiewicz’s novel in which the Roman crowd disparagingly refers to her as a “street-walker” (316); we are told in the Cede section that she “consorted with the most impressive” of the Corinthian trainers under the tunnels (40.2). The novel contains descriptions of battles in the circus arena in which Christians are thrown to the lions, and an underlined passage refers to animals who are “tamed by expert trainers” (315), which may have provided inspiration for the description of the Molossian hounds. On a page describing a “drunken orgy” Wallace wrote the words “Luxe, Decadence,” which could perhaps be a source for the idea of the “mass frenzied orgylike copulation” recalled in §48 by Glendenning, who moments before this utters a number of seemingly disconnected Latin phrases: “Loco weed. Parentis. Mens sano in corpus” (Sienkiewicz 75; *TPKb* 525–526).

Other intertextual links can be detected in §35, the section (later published as “The Compliance Branch” in *Harper’s* February 2008) in which the narrator describes his fear of the “fierce infant” belonging to his Group Manager: this contains another echo of the Roman narrative as we learn that much of Gary Manshardt’s office has been “ceded to the infant” (*TPKb* 393). The infant, with its “pale face,” “extreme pallor” and hair the colour of “old blood,” is granted “full authority” at the scene’s end by the narrator, who realises that he is “this tiny white frightening thing’s to command, its instrument or tool” (389–395). Pietsch placed this section immediately before the “kissing boy” section of §36 and indeed both narratives portray powerful, enigmatic children whose self-control and authority appear to intimidate those around them. Taken together, these narratives

indicate a strand of *The Pale King* in which Wallace was investigating ideas of control and freedom in the context of fatherhood: all three children (Cede, the kissing boy, the fierce infant) are presented in symbiotic yet oppositional relationships with their fathers. The fierce infant hanging in his papoose appears to be “riding [his father] like a mahout does an elephant”;¹⁴⁰ the kissing boy’s father appears to lack the self-possession and discipline of his son, but experiences a complementary problem of “backbone” and is also driven by his desires to psychologically “contort himself”; Cede, for his part, rebels against his father by extending “kindness” and “mercy” to the dogs under his care, an act for which, it is hinted, he will not be “forgiven” (*TPKb* 389, 407; “Papers” 39.6). The inclusion in *The Pale King* of an additional parallel narrative describing the complex relations between a father and son would allow the (thus far little remarked-upon) theme of fatherhood to be more visible in the work and would provide another point of comparison with, for example, the fear of fatherhood expressed by Sylvanshine in §2 and Fogle’s lengthy exploration of his father’s life and influence upon his concept of freedom (15, 175–211).

The ideas linking these sections – discipline and its attendant sacrifices, the difficulty of freedom – are also explored in narratives that have an unmistakably metafictional dimension. In the “kissing boy” chapter, the word “art” appears (in inverted commas) in relation to the achievements of “professional contortionists,” and quotations from Blake and Goethe bolster the father’s yearning for “personal achievement” (*TPKb* 399, 406–407). In the draft of “Cede” in which these stories coexist, we are invited to draw a clear contrast between the psychologically weak father of the “kissing boy” and

¹⁴⁰ It appears that Pietsch changed this word from “maheeb” after the recording of the audio book (*TPKCD* 12.7), perhaps due to its obscurity; the OED contains only a definition for “mahout.”

Cede's father, the head trainer who is utterly indifferent to the suffering undergone by the Molossian hounds as he shapes them into "instruments of the will of Rome":

His was the brutal, beautiful, technical detachment of the true artist. And in his own heart, the *exercitor summum* understood himself as a kind of god-like shaping creator, albeit one for whom there was in vulgar Greek no name (40.2).

There is a clear suggestion here of the austere sacrifice required of the artist – the reader may well surmise that the word missing from the Greek here is "author" – as well as a more complicated parallel between the power of the artist and that of the state. There is a clear contrast here between the two men as well as between both sets of fathers and sons, and a contrapuntal relationship between the two stories is established. The grotesque, solipistic dedication and "queer heartcraft" of the kissing boy could be related to the refined cruelty of the head trainer, whose confinement of the dogs involves keeping them in cramped conditions ("tiny pens," also described as "self-sized cages") whose dimensions force their bodies into contorted positions (*TPKb* 405). The modern father, meanwhile, thinks of his son as being "*dutiful*" (italics in original) while suspecting himself of lacking "backbone," and his dreams of "contorted suffocation" seem to be caused by his deficiency in the discipline needed to reach his goals; he also seems to be governed by social instincts – as indicated by his obsession with his "social standing" – unlike his hermetic, self-contained son (*TPKb* 405–408). Cede, meanwhile, shows the dogs "mercy": the word alludes to the beliefs of the Christians who are to be the animals' victims, and the act will, we are told, ruin the delicately-calibrated training regime that prepares the dogs for the "screams" and "piles of fresh-killed meat" they will encounter in the circus (38.6).

The Cede section also strongly evokes the history of early Christianity, and the brutal persecutions of Christians in the circus forms the background for the story's

narrative. Again it could be argued that this section, if included in *The Pale King*, would strengthen our apprehension of the theme in the work as a whole. Christianity (and often Catholicism in particular) is a recurring element in the textual world of the novel, and one which has thus far received little critical attention.¹⁴¹ Examples, once again, are multiple: §6's depiction of Lane Dean's crisis of faith explicitly references the Bible and Jesus (*TPKb* 42, 45) and during his later encounter with Garrity, Dean again turns to prayer in response to his despairing thoughts (*TPKb* 387). Fogle's monologue abounds with religious references, and he repeatedly compares his conversion experience in the presence of the substitute Jesuit to the Christian conversion of his roommate's girlfriend (*TPKb* 222, 230).¹⁴² Images of Christianity also occur in less obvious ways throughout the novel, often in passing – the word “cruciform,” for example, is used to refer to both the shape of a plane as well as to the rural towns around Peoria, we are told that the child Diablo paints Catholic murals on walls, and the Personnel aide describes an IRS training document as “the new Bible” (17, 334, 335, 368). The historical breadth of the novel's interest in Christianity is hinted at when Garrity refers to the “so-called *daemon meridianus*” that terrorised the early Catholic hermits of “third-century Egypt” (385). Indeed, the connection between the experiences of the early Christians and the struggles of the modern-day characters in *The Pale King* are limned in symbolic and linguistic

¹⁴¹ As Adam Kelly points out, Max details several occasions on which Wallace considered joining the Catholic faith (“Dialectic” n.p.; *ELS* 166, 251). In a blog post following the second annual David Foster Wallace Conference at Illinois State University, Matt Bucher observed that the question of Wallace's relationship to religion and the supernatural is beginning to emerge as a more prevalent theme in Wallace scholarship (“A Few Trends” n.p.).

¹⁴² Again, earlier drafts sometimes emphasise this element of the narrative: in one of these, Fogle is “spinning the Christian's ball” on his finger while watching the TV show that prompts his epiphany (38.6), a phrase that Wallace perhaps felt represented an overly obvious piece of symbolism.

terms. The description of the Pontic “aeronauts,” with their airborne resemblance to “seraphic visitations,” evokes the flight of the plane on which Sylvanshine travels, and the reference to the “yaw” they experience in flight evokes the same word in the Sylvanshine chapter (37.2; *TPKb* 11). The reference to “Zoroastrian levitation” (37.2), meanwhile, complements Drinion’s levitation in §46. Shortly after we learn that Drinion is hovering above his chair, he interrupts Meredith Rand to note that she was “‘raised in the Catholic faith,’” to which she responds “‘That’s not relevant’” (*TPKb* 474). In the light of a comparison with the Cede narrative, we can take this to be a clear piece of misdirection on Wallace’s part, and we can perhaps make a clearer judgement about his aims in the work as a whole.

This illustrates the fact that the removal of any section of an unfinished work will have an effect on interpretation, and that the excision of material may subtly alter the work’s thematic focus. A relevant example here may be Tom Jenks’ work on Hemingway’s *The Garden of Eden*. K.J. Peters, writing in the *Hemingway Review*, argued that Jenks’ editing served to eliminate “almost all of the religious overtones and images that are the foundation of the manuscript, in effect robbing the readers of the basic theme of the work as suggested in the title”: he concluded that “Jenks has excised Eden itself from his *Garden of Eden*” (18). Pietsch’s work does not display a similar systematic removal of a given type of textual material, and he presents his criteria for his editing decisions in a more forthright way than Jenks’ version of Hemingway; however, Peters’ observation that the published *Garden* is “only a patchwork of what appears in the manuscript” (28) can also be applied to Wallace’s novel, and the omission of the Cede material undoubtedly renders certain aspects of *The Pale King* less visible to readers.

3.4 “Slight Changes and Strategic Rearrangements”:

The Pale King’s Multiple Editions

Alongside Wallace’s drafts and notes, the multiple published iterations of *The Pale King* also serve to illuminate the compositional processes involved in the work. As I have mentioned, the 2012 paperback edition includes several additional scenes in a section following the main narrative entitled “Four previously unpublished scenes from *The Pale King*.” These unpublished scenes highlight the contingent nature of the book’s structure. Many fans were surprised at the exclusion of “All That” – a story which had been published as a standalone piece in *The New Yorker* in December 2009 – from the hardback edition of the published novel¹⁴³ and the piece was also absent from the paperback edition’s section of additional scenes. The story, whose narrator’s childhood memories of “religious interests” and fascination with heroism are linked with his memories of his father, clearly occupies some of the same imaginative space as Fogle’s monologue and could comfortably sit within the book’s covers, if only as an additional scene (“All That” n.p.).

Along with this, we have the audio version of *The Pale King*, which was published simultaneously with the hardcover edition in April 2011 and is available both as a CD and in downloadable audio formats. The majority of chapters in the audio book contain textual differences from the printed versions: of the audio book’s 50 chapters, only 11 are identical to the hardback edition, and these unchanged sections are all less than two pages long. It is clear, therefore, that at least one extensive round of editing

¹⁴³ See, for example, a discussion on the Wallace-I listserv from April 2011 in which several contributors questioned its absence.

took place after the recording of the audio script, as one reader speculated in an early online review (Maniatis, "Differences"; Wemyss). This has been confirmed by the editorial department of Hachette Book Group, who have stated that the audio version was made from an earlier version of the manuscript due to the demands of the production schedule (Tondorf-Dick). This allows us to treat the audio book itself as a genetic document: Pietsch's edits are a visible thread allowing the reader to follow the stitches and reconstruct the editing process, and a comparison of these differences with Wallace's drafts allows us to trace the final stages of the book's development. I will examine a few of these textual problems here and suggest that these discrepancies highlight the multiplicity inherent in the source material.

To begin with, it is possible to find some minor changes in Pietsch's own introduction to the novel, allowing us to identify the points where the editor edited himself. One of these changes refers to the structure of the work: In the audio version of the introduction (read by Pietsch himself) and the original hardcover edition, he states that there was "no designated opening or closing point" in the material for the novel. In the paperback version, though, the word "opening" is removed, suggesting that only the closing point was left unspecified (*TPKa* vii; *TPKb* ix; *CD* 1.1). In fact, at least one undated draft does suggest that the short chapter that opens the novel was considered by Wallace as a possible beginning, and the change here reflects this; in an interview upon the book's publication, Pietsch explained that he had only recently noticed this, and noted the "error" in his introduction (38.7; "Celebration"). Different editions, published a year apart, thus contain contrasting information about the extent of the novel's structural incompleteness.

Several types of changes are observable within the main text, most of which are attributable to Pietsch's desire for consistency and his attempt to ensure that "place names, job titles, and other factual matters match up throughout the book" ("Editor's Note" xi). Nine of the chapters in the audio book, for example (specifically, chapters 4, 5, 9, 13, 22, 24, 35, 36, and 38), open with the Social Security number of the character in question: the David-Wallace narrated chapters 9, 24 and 38 are all prefaced with the same number, 921042012 (*TPKCD* 3.1, 8.13, 13.3). In the latter of these, the number is repeated twice, presumably a play on the fact that the chapter details the system's conflation of the two David Wallaces. The elimination of these numbers in the printed editions is most likely due to the fact that this structural device was inconsistently applied by the author. §14 (in which several examiners are interviewed on camera) seems to have been tentatively structured in this way, and SS numbers accompany each of the short sections; two of these are introduced in the audio book not only by SS numbers but also with the accompanying words "Videotape file," a feature which Pietsch evidently felt was redundant after its first appearance (*TPKCD* 3.15; Wallace, *TPKb* 106–7). Elsewhere, discrepancies between the audio and print versions of Chapter 7 appear to show that several phrases have been silently removed. All of these refer to the weather conditions as the character of Sylvanshine travels by bus to his new IRS post: for example, one phrase refers to a "late-winter field in which nubbins of corn stalk protruded," while an entire sentence mentioning "scattered wet snow on the slopes of small rises" has also been removed (*TPKb* 46–54; *TPKCD* 2.6–2.9). This is probably to ensure consistency with later chapters which specify the time of much of the action as "mid-May." However, this has obvious potential implications for interpretation, since no indication of the changes is given to the reader: any close reading that would place a heavy emphasis on the symbolic

importance of landscape, for example, would be altered. In his analysis of the many post-publication changes to Beckett's texts, Van Hulle describes textual "discordances" such as these as "textual scars" that serve as reminders of the "multi-versional" nature of the works; in Beckett's case, this is largely due to the processes of translation undergone by his bilingual publications, while in Wallace's case, they point to the inherent multiplicity of the source material (*MM* 220).¹⁴⁴

More examples of these changes are apparent in *The Pale King's* longest chapter, §22, in which Chris "Irrelevant" Fogle tells the story of his conversion from aimless drifter to focused, attentive tax examiner. This section, as well as being the longest, contains the most differences between the audio and print versions: approximately 60 are present, with only the Happy Hour scene of §46 and the training presentation scene of §27 displaying a similar number of changes. Several changes here demonstrate the way Pietsch worked throughout the final edit to eliminate seemingly excessive stylistic redundancies and repetition. For example, the following changes in print address the fact that Wallace used the word "extreme" three times within two sentences:

". . . his inhibitions so extreme that it came out mainly as ~~extreme~~ **exaggerated** dignity and precision in his movements. He almost never permitted himself any kind of open or ~~extreme~~ **prominent** facial expression" (*TPKCD* 5.16; *TPKb* 176).

On the previous page, Fogle describes how his father "looked good in a suit," and the subsequent sentence mentions that "he owned some good ones": Pietsch changed the second "good" to "nice" in print (*TPKCD* 5.15; *TPKb* 175). Earlier, Fogle ends a sentence by relating how he and his mother had "read children's books together in childhood," and Pietsch deleted the last two words (*TPKCD* 5.9; *TPKb* 162).

¹⁴⁴ Bryant refers to these occasions as "fluid-text moments" (*FT* 66). My preference here is for Van Hulle's formulation, since it hints at the conflicts of the editing process and the desire for textual stability inherent in Pietsch's editorial labour: the implicit attempt, so to speak, to "heal" these "scars."

A number of changes appear to have been made here as corrections of the author's own inaccuracies. Fogle, for example, refers to "Edward Muskie" in the audio book while in the print version, this is changed to "Edmund"; an early draft shows the word "Edmund" in this handwritten sentence, so this may simply be an instance of Pietsch correcting his own misreading of Wallace's handwriting (TPKCD 5.12; TPKb 168; "Papers," 38.6). Fogle's memory of his father's quotation of "Ozymandias" is also subtly altered. In the print version, the second word of this is halved to correct the misquotation, as follows: "*Look ~~upon~~ my works, ye mighty, and despair!*" (TPKCD 5.14; TPKb 172, italics in original; strikethrough indicates deletion in print). While this may be characterised as a common-sense correction, it could also be argued that it is a problematic one. The mistake may be a deliberate one intended to read as the narrator's: on the following page, after all, Fogle mistakenly conflates P.B. and Mary Shelley, identifying the former as the author of *Frankenstein* (TPKb 173). As scholars have noted of Matthew J. Bruccoli's corrections of Fitzgerald's factual errors and internal inconsistencies in his 1991 edition of *The Great Gatsby*, it is difficult to exclude the possibility that errors have been deliberately included for purposes such as, for example, to indicate the unreliability of the narrator or to signal the hermetic, fictional nature of the textual world: John Worthen criticizes what he sees as Bruccoli's attempt "to colonize the novel's text" on these very grounds (n.p.). One note, elsewhere, for example, suggests that the story presented to us by the Fogle/Van Note is all "bullshit"; elsewhere, we see an authorial suggestion that a character mistakenly attributes a quote, showing that Wallace at least considered making narrative unreliability a feature of this section (36.4, 38.4, 39.6).¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁵ A bracketed note in drafts of §33 considers the option of having Garrity mistakenly attribute a quote to

Van Note's monologue all bullshit? Fact is that he got his girlfriend pregnant, refused to commit to her; she died while having an abortion. (Plus, he's Catholic?)
So, out of guilt, he takes the dreariest, most unpopular job he can find?

Figure 8: A page from one of Wallace's drafts (Wallace Papers 39.6)

Sometimes these factually-based changes result in longer alterations to the base text. While describing his experiences of drug use as a student, for example, Fogle mentions listening to Brian Eno's *Another Green World*, an album "whose cover has colourful cutout figures inside a white frame" (TPKb 182, italics in original). In the audio book, however, the album cover is described as featuring "a keyhole shape of green on a mostly white field" (TPKCD 6.4). These are presumably Wallace's words, and Pietsch seems to have changed them for the purposes of factual accuracy. The description in the print version of the book conforms to the cover of the album in question, while Wallace's description does not.¹⁴⁶ This appears, therefore, to be an exceptionally observant piece of editing by Pietsch: however, it seems to have resulted in the silent substitution of the editor's phrase for the author's own. It also shows how individual edits may affect the reader's interpretation: a reader familiar with Wallace's story "Good Old Neon," for example, may be tempted to connect the image described by Fogle with the use of the keyhole as a recurring metaphor in that story, and to recall its climactic moment in which

CS Pierce instead of Kierkegaard (36.4, 38.4).

¹⁴⁶ It may in fact refer to a detail on the back cover of the vinyl LP, on which the green Island Records logo could be seen as a keyhole shape.

the “David Wallace” character is seen attempting to imagine another person’s existence “through the tiny little keyhole of himself” (*OB* 180).¹⁴⁷

3.4.1 Mid West Mirror Works (sic): Reflections of Character in the Novel

3.3.1.1 “Actually the Same Character”: Fogle/Shinn

One of the features of *The Pale King*, whether deliberate or not, is that we rarely see any single character in more than a handful of scenes. After Fogle’s 98-page monologue (which Pietsch designated §21) Fogle essentially disappears from view: we see him directly only once more, in the penultimate chapter (§49) where he is “pre-briefed” for a meeting with Lehl by Reynolds and Sylvanshine. In the printed text, the character in §49 is also called Fogle: however, in the audio reading of the novel, he is referred to as Andy Shinn throughout (*TPKb* 529; *TPKCD* 16.10). This appears to follow drafts of the chapter in Wallace’s papers named “Shinn Prebriefing Aug 06 Rough” (37.1, 40.3). In these drafts, the characters Carol Oooley and Dr. Lehl are referred to as Mrs. Van Hool and Mr. Lehl respectively – these have been changed for print, presumably to maintain consistency with other chapters (although in the audio recording the references are to “Mr. Lehl”). In early draft versions of the longer Fogle chapter, it is clear that Wallace considered alternate names for Fogle, and that Shinn was one of these (38.6).¹⁴⁸ Wallace appears to have been a compulsive changer of character names, and this character is one of many whose name changed multiple times during the drafting process: in earlier drafts, he was referred to as Robbie Van Note (38.6, 39.6).

¹⁴⁷ Boswell argues for a thematic connection between the stories, suggesting that Fogle’s monologue, “Good Old Neon” and “The Depressed Person” can be read as “a trilogy of pieces” (“Constant Monologue” 156-157).

¹⁴⁸ One note asks: “Is this Sylvanshine, not Shinn?” (38.6).

The rationale for the editorial change here would seem to be obvious, then; again, Pietsch explained in an interview that this was a late decision based on his realisation that this was “actually the same character” (“Celebration”). However, Shinn is present earlier in the printed version of *The Pale King*, in the two-page §31; in this case the character is named Shinn in the audio book and print versions¹⁴⁹ and thus no changes appear to have been made (TPKCD 11.15). We are told little about Shinn in §31, a brief vignette detailing his journey with other examiners from the men’s apartment complexes to their posts, and it is unclear why this character’s name was not also changed to Fogle. Shinn is described here as being “long-bodied” and having “very light baby-fine blond hair” (TPKb 373), information which does not seem to be contradicted by any description of Fogle elsewhere. Indeed, potential links between the chapters are arguably obscured by the difference in character name. The section ends with Shinn listening to the songs of birds and imagining these as brutal “war cries” that make “his spirits dip for some reason” (374). If this character were called Fogle, the reader might be drawn to make a link between this thought and the moment at the close of the earlier chapter when Fogle, describing the morning when he was about to submit his application forms to the IRS recruiter, notes in a brief aside that “the bird-sounds at sunrise were incredible” (TPKb 253). The recurrence of birdsong in a menacing context just as Fogle is seemingly beginning his Service posting in Peoria could then be seen as a moment of character development, of Fogle’s zeal for the Service giving way to a darker and more competitive vision of society.

There is also a discrepancy between details we are given on the two Fogles in *The Pale King* (or, between the Shinn we see in drafts of the pre-briefing scene and the Fogle

¹⁴⁹ I was unable to locate the draft of this scene.

who delivers the long monologue). Both mention attending three different colleges in Chicago, but these do not match up exactly: according to his monologue, Fogle attended UIC, Lindenhurst College and DePaul (*TPKb* 157–165), while in §49 he lists his colleges as “UIC. DuPage. DePaul” (535). Again, it appears that DuPage was considered for inclusion by the author in earlier drafts of the long monologue (38.6, 39.6). It seems likely that this detail was missed in the editing process, in which case the discrepancy represents an example of the multiple and sometimes contradictory nature of *The Pale King’s* plot and character details surviving into the published work, and of a proliferation of characters beyond what the author may have intended. In addition to this, the name “Robby Van Noght” (an earlier name used for the same character) is briefly mentioned in §46 (*TPKb* 447): it is possible to argue, then, that three versions of the same character survive into the “final” text.

As previously noted, Wallace considered presenting the possibility that Fogle is lying about his background and even that the reader might be expected to detect this. At one point Wallace considered adding marginalia to this scene providing frequent reminders that the character was being filmed: in one of these, two agents who are observing him, according to an author’s note,

[M]ention [the] truth – that Van Note had gotten girlfriend pregnant and run, joined IRS in order to change his ss# and identity. Notice all the different records and the way his parents’ names aren’t mentioned. Real name is Peter Fish?” (38.6).

The discrepancy between the colleges listed could therefore be read in a different light. In this reading, only if the reader is better at paying attention than Fogle himself (who, we recall, mistakes the attribution of “Ozymandias”) will s/he notice that the speaker is lying about his origins (*TPKb* 173). The plot idea does not seem to have been developed

and this reading may, on examination of the latest surviving drafts, seem to have little textual basis: however, it is one that is difficult to exclude entirely, given the way that traces of the earlier possibility survive into the published text. Wallace may simply not yet have reached the stage of fixing and distinguishing the novel's cast of characters, an activity many writers delay until the latter stages of composition; Robert E. Fleming, for example, identifies one of the central editorial problems in *Garden of Eden* as the fact that some characters seem to be "essentially versions of a single creation" (267).

3.3.1.2 "Mr X": Drinion

The extent to which characters multiply throughout Wallace's drafts - and the problem this presents for any attempt to present the material in a unified form - is again evident in the case of Shane Drinion. Wallace intended Drinion to be a central character in his early conception of the novel, as a "male lead" in porn movies (Max, *ELS* 257; 40.1). This plot line, of course, was not developed, but Drinion remains in numerous drafts and notes as well as in the "Happy Hour" scene (§46) that constitutes one of the longest chapters of *The Pale King* (the latest drafts of which, according to the Index, date from March 2006.) We learn during this scene that the nickname he has been ironically given is "Mr. X" or "Mr Excitement" (*TPKb* 463). A character called X also takes part in the stalled-elevator dialogue in §19, and this fact has already drawn divergent responses from critics. Boswell not only takes Drinion to be "Mr. X" but also suggests that he is "the clearest candidate for [the] first-person narrator" who briefly enters the conversation (*TPKb* 141; Boswell, "Trickle-Down Citizenship" 479 n2). However, Kelly suggests that the presence of the character X and the intrusion of an I-narrator here "seem only to point to the unfinished nature of this particular chapter," pointing out that "the characters of these two men (i.e.

X and the Drinion of §46) “seem entirely at odds with one another, which may indicate that the X in §19 was simply a placeholder for the name of a character as yet undecided by Wallace” (“Dialogue” 277, 282 n11). Hogg agrees with Kelly’s analysis, and assumes the elevator scene’s X “to be a distinct (perhaps unfinished) character” (61). Unfinished elements in the work are, here, leading directly to differences in critical interpretation.

This problem is exacerbated when we consider §32, whose narrator persuades his “live-in sister Julie” to perform an uncannily accurate impression of the possessed girl in *The Exorcist*. In print, the “new man” eager to impress his colleagues is twice referred to as Nugent (*TPKb* 376–377). In the audio book, however, his name is given as Drinion (*TPKCD* 12.1). The same change is evident in the subsequent chapter, as the narrator tells us that “Drinion’s sister did the exorcist on the phone”; this is also changed to Nugent in print (*TPKCD* 12.4; *TPKb* 383).¹⁵⁰ Pietsch’s reason for altering this in the final printed text is surely the same reason for Kelly and Hogg’s reluctance to accept X in §19 as Drinion. The bullying, hyperactive Drinion we see in this brief chapter (“I had an urge to giggle and bite my knuckle in delight”) is utterly different from the humourless, “quiet and self-contained” examiner present in §46 (*TPKb* 376, 450). The discrepancy between the characters we are presented with is simply too wide to accept without additional evidence. Here we see the editor changing a character’s name in order to maintain narrative consistency – a decision that prioritises aesthetic considerations above the evidence of the drafts – while critics, for similar reasons, refuse to make a link clearly suggested in the available text. Any textual analysis here necessarily involves second-guessing on the part of the reader. Pietsch presumably changes the character’s name in order to maintain narrative consistency, a decision that prioritises aesthetic

¹⁵⁰ An earlier draft from April 2007 gives this character’s name as “Shackleford” (38.4).

considerations above available textual evidence; Kelly and Hogg, meanwhile, refuse to make a link clearly suggested by the available text, for similar reasons. We see, once more, the divisions between the roles of editor, scholar and critic breaking down: the impossibility of assuming “passive authorization” of textual changes on the part of the author inevitably brings the reader of the published text to an awareness of – and an unavoidable reckoning with – editing processes that are usually hidden from view.

3.3.1.3 Introducing Toni Ware

In the case of Toni Ware, meanwhile, Wallace seems to have created a relatively consistent character while withholding her name in many drafts. A recurring difference between the audio book and the print versions of *The Pale King* is the fact that Toni Ware is rarely identified by name in the former: only in §§ 27 and 45, in fact, is her name given. In the audio recording of §8, “Toni Ware and her mother” are described as “she and the woman,” although certain details in the chapter make it possible to identify the pair (*TPKb* 54-60; *TPKCD* 2.11-2.13). In the audio book, the reader is left to figure this out for him or herself, while the print versions supply the name early in the chapter: this lessens the reader’s confusion in an already fragmented work but also, of course, subtly alters the narrative technique and removes the need for the reader to pay attention and “read sign in details” in the way Toni herself does (55). Similar changes can be seen in §47. In §20, meanwhile, this attempt at clarification results in the following words being introduced in the print edition: “‘I’m glad you said this,’ **she said. Her name was Toni; she’d introduced herself when he came to her door.** ‘Now I’ll know.’” (*TPKb* 151; *TPKCD* 5.5 [boldface indicates addition]). A similar change is evident in §47, in which the protagonist is described in personal pronouns in the audio book and by name in the print

versions (*TPKb* 512–518; *TPKCD* 16.3–16.6). Information in §§ 27, 45 and 47 makes it clear that Toni is working at the Peoria REC and has two dogs. In the 2012 symposium discussion of the novel, Nadell indicates that she was involved in these changes, as she remembers a point in her discussions with Pietsch at which she felt that the text was unclear on whether “this was the same woman,” and recalls that “then I think we added . . . we sort of did something that made it a little clearer. Because there were a couple of things where it needed to become a little clearer” (Pietsch, Nadell and Ulin). It seems likely, then, that in his final edit of the book, Pietsch (assisted to an unspecified degree by Nadell) felt that the duration required for the reader to piece this information together was too great (although it should of course be noted that this duration is due to the way in which Pietsch himself sequenced the novel).

The differences identified here are not necessarily major cruxes that might lead to a radically different reading of the novel, and the rationale behind the editing decisions may have been sound: however, neither the differences nor the rationale behind them are explained anywhere, leading to several silent alterations to Wallace’s draft text.

3.3.2 Conclusion: The Pale Kings

The multiple versions of *The Pale King*, then, contain numerous differences (or “textual scars”) that will subtly affect a reader’s understanding of the novel and present unusual interpretive challenges. Wallace’s changing – and perhaps conflicting – intentions about central elements in the work result in the fact that discordant elements of plot and character have become embedded in the published text. McGann’s contention that editorial decisions (and hence textual variations) will necessarily proliferate each time a text is reproduced (“variation . . . is the invariant rule of the textual condition” (*TC* 185)) is

surely borne out here, as is Bryant's related notion of textual fluidity. The radically unfinished nature of *The Pale King's* plot is thrown into sharp relief when we consider the importance of small details to an understanding of the plot of *Infinite Jest*, a novel in which iterations of character names and place names are sometimes separated by hundreds of pages and in which details such as the postal origin of a package (i.e. the one received by the medical attaché) or the date of a seemingly tangential event (such as the "M.I.T Language Riots") have been identified by critics as being key to an understanding of chronology and plot (*IJ* 37, 996n. 60; Burn, *Reader's Guide* 35; Swartz n.p.). These details were, as we have seen, subject to an editorial process consisting of several stages of correspondence between author and editor, and were, in many cases, argued over at an individual level. While the manuscript papers for *The Pale King* contain several intricately-realised individual chapters (and even some that could be said to be "completed" in the sense of having been edited for magazine publication), it seems clear that the plot as a whole never remotely approached the byzantine complexity or carefully-calibrated interconnectivity of Wallace's previous novel.

Pietsch admits that his edit of *The Pale King* is only one version of the novel ("Piecing Together") but the examples here show that even this can be said to be, in fact, several versions. It is beyond question that Pietsch is the editor that Wallace would have chosen (indeed, he is referred to by name in an early draft of Chapter 9) and his contribution has been widely and justly acclaimed: he has produced a novel that is sensitive to Wallace's own aesthetic, and his editorial changes could be seen as quite conservative when we consider the chaotic and fragmented state of the draft papers and contrast his work with, for example, the less restrained editorial approach of Jenks to Hemingway's manuscripts. A genetic view of the work, though, shows that *The Pale King*

is in many respects radically and chronically unfinished. This problem, whether directly addressed or not, is a central one in criticism of the novel to date and will surely continue to be so in future. The crux of the matter can perhaps be summarised thus: to what extent does the fragmentary, incomplete form of *The Pale King* reflect the conscious intention of its author, and to what extent is it a function of the work's unfinished condition? While this question may not be definitively answerable, it is an unavoidable one for criticism.

McGann argues that an author is "a plural entity" best understood as a "multiverse," and that the creative work is inherently "polyvocal" with "many relative centers" ("Socialization" 69). While this may be persuasive in the case of contested or posthumous work, the question remains – at least for scholarly editors – how best to mediate this polyvocality, and how to preserve the multiplicity of the text in transmission. Perhaps a future scholarly edition will make it easier for readers to engage directly with this question. The pace of technological change necessarily changes this question, as new methods of displaying textual variation become more widely available: Pietsch apparently considered, at an early stage, the possibility of a digital edition which would allow readers to essentially remix the novel, but he abandoned this idea due to technical constraints (Medley). It is not hard to imagine a future edition along these lines as such constraints become less relevant; indeed, works by canonical writers such as Melville, Dickinson and Beckett have already been presented in digital forms that allow readers to navigate the texts in nonlinear ways and to view their authors' working drafts. The Wallace estate has already experimented with this in a limited way: the drafts of the novel's Chapter 9 can be viewed on the website of the University of Texas' Harry Ransom Center, allowing readers to view the work in progress and to see the author's own words as they are

written (“Chapter 9”). Wallace’s concern with the construction of the authorial self is on full display here, as the drafts show, in the words of Pietsch’s accompanying note,

[T]he evolution of the passage that would eventually become chapter nine in *The Pale King*: the birth of the idea to make himself a character writing a fake memoir, early handwritten drafts and attempts to expand that idea, and subsequent revisions to polish it once he felt he had written a worthy version. (“Chapter 9”)

Pietsch’s words here – “evolution,” “revision” – highlight the genetic dimension of the work, albeit in reference to a draft that is taken to be essentially complete (“a worthy version”). A similar genetically-informed presentation of other working materials would assist scholars in attempting to clarify the textual status of the various drafts used in the construction of the published text. For now, though, the subtitle of *The Pale King* – “An Unfinished Novel” – is not supported by the scholarly apparatus necessary to apprehend the details of this fact, and scholarship on the work is reliant upon a potentially confusing set of texts.

3.3.2.1 Notes absent from audio

It is worth briefly considering a further difference between the print and audio versions of *The Pale King* – that is, the absence of footnotes from the audio version. While notes are not present in the text in an extensive, unified manner comparable to *Infinite Jest*’s distinctive block of almost a hundred pages of endnotes, several sections of the manuscript do incorporate footnotes in a way that clearly constitutes an essential part of the reading experience. The section dealing with Cusk’s childhood experiences of sweating, for example (§13) contains six pseudo-clinical footnotes commenting on the boy’s condition, providing a contrast between the subjective experience of pain and a detached, scientific description of that pain, thus providing an oscillation of perspectives perhaps similar to that found in Kate Gompert’s discussion with the psychiatrist in *Infinite*

Jest, or indeed in the encounter with impersonal psychiatrists described by Meredith Rand in §46 (*TPKb* 472–3).

Most strikingly, the “David Wallace” sections contain copious footnotes that often overrun and occasionally outweigh, proportionally, the main text on the page to which they refer. These notes tend to provide detailed factual information that often appears to be unnecessary: they are sometimes repetitive, occasionally apologetic regarding sentences in the main text, and frequently digressive (*TPKb* 80–87). Rivka Galchen suggests, as have several others, that these sections constitute a play on the author’s public persona and previous writing habits (Walls, “Generation”). These footnotes are absent from the audio book of the novel. In an interview about its production, producer John McElroy is reported as claiming that “the footnotes were excised to maintain the dramatic flow of the story, but included in an accompanying .pdf” (Boretz), but this does not appear to be the case; on the CD, only the “Editor’s Note” and “Notes and Asides” sections are included as a pdf file on one of the discs, while in the download none of this information is provided. This absence has implications for a reading of the relevant sections. In §24, for example, a lengthy footnote explains the reason for the identity confusion behind the events in the main text (*TPKb* 297); this is later explained in more detail in §38, meaning that the listener, unlike the reader, has to wait fourteen chapters for a retrospective understanding of the events of the scene being described. Similarly, a footnote in the final pages of the section explains the reasons for the “intensive round of fellatio” that “David Wallace” receives, an explanation without which the final lines of the chapter make little sense (310–11).

This is, of course, a problem in audio presentation of much of Wallace’s work. The endnotes for *Infinite Jest* were originally not included in the audio book of the novel,

arguably an absence with enough implications for a reader's understanding of the plot to constitute a product defect; endnotes were subsequently provided following complaints by fans and listeners (Maniatis, "IJ Audio Book"). The missing footnotes in *The Pale King*, therefore, cannot be assumed to be a result of the book's posthumous condition, but they do reinforce McGann's arguments about the inevitable proliferation of editorial decisions (and hence textual variations) as a text is reproduced.

3.5 "Magical Compression": Wallace's return to Minimalism

Wallace's notes and drafts for his final novel also provide a window into his struggles with narrative technique. A genetic view enables us to read over the author's shoulder, so to speak, as he considers narrative options and experiments with different modes of telling; it also allows us to observe as he struggles with questions of value and locates the points of tension by which his narrative will be defined. "A writer," as Van Hulle has noted, "is also his [own] first reader," and the drafts of a work can display the internal negotiations, experiments and prototypes that were involved in its composition (MM 11). We can imagine the rough draft as, in De Biasi's words,

A sort of text laboratory in which it becomes possible to piece back together an essential phase of the writer's work by tracing each one of the writing movements, observing, as if at the time they took place, choices, hesitations among the array of invented possibilities, bursts of speed and moments of discouragement or block in the composition, sudden intuitions or happy accidents that sweep aside the difficulties and set the writing off again in a new direction.
(29)

In the following section, I examine *The Pale King* in order to trace Wallace's continuing struggles with narrative technique and I argue that throughout his late work, the author conducts an oblique argument about literary style.

Wallace's work, as I discussed in my introduction, displays a longstanding fascination with – and ambivalence towards – models of narrative compression. His antipathy to the dominant model of 1980s minimalist fiction is (as Hoberek argues) essential to an understanding of his own turn to Pynchonesque excess, and the diegetic and stylistic overload of *Infinite Jest* could be seen as his definitive statement against abridgement, concealment and condensation. Critics have noted the degree of ambiguity in this turn within Wallace's narratives, however. In a recent paper on the use of syntax and narrative in Wallace's work, for example, Simon de Bourcier demonstrated that (in the words of Iain Williams' conference review) "Wallace's complex, verbose sentences often correspond to themes of irony, postmodernism and 'academese', whereas his simpler sentences often connote sincerity and empathy" (n.p.). Ostentatiously complex syntax is, as De Bourcier showed, frequently linked with unhealthy modes of thought: in opposition to the sophistic, loquacious arguments of Geoffrey Day or the manic, uncontrolled excess of the "Methamphetamine-Dependant" headline writer, we are presented with the hard-won, terse sincerity of Gately, who instructs Joelle to "Use less words" (*IJ* 271, 391, 535). In *Infinite Jest*, Wallace hints that verbal overload is indicative of the prevailing cultural problem, and counterpoints verbal excess (often associated with the avoidance and insincerity of characters like Day and Erdedy) with the pithy, minimalistic AA maxims that function as practical mechanisms for its characters' release from addiction. If AA is the antidote, of course, it is a problematic one, as others have pointed out (Holland 218–242); nevertheless, the dialectical relationship between the

novel's own narrative strategies and the direct and sometimes simplistic modes of communication favoured by some of its most morally commendable characters suggests a continued interest on the part of the author in the possibility that less could, in fact, be more.

In Wallace's late work, I argue, this fascination does not abate; rather, it enters a new phase. In *The Pale King*, his focus repeatedly returns to Minimalism again, long after it has ceased to be necessary as an antagonistic model. I do not, of course, make the counter-intuitive suggestion that Wallace returns to an upper-cased 1980s Minimalism; nor that his interest in modes of compression represents the entirety of his focus during his work on the novel; nor that the focus of this interest represented an abandonment of his earlier methods. However, there is evidence to suggest that the writer continued to look towards models of narrative compression in order to focus his own exploration of the ethics of storytelling in his late work. Wallace retains an interest in narrative austerity as both a strategy and an ideal, and invokes what McDermott refers to as a wider movement of "lower-cased 'literary minimalism'" (2) in order to explore questions of ethical and aesthetic value. Strategies of narrative excess are often used here alongside characters and situations that pointedly refer back to narrative modes based on reduction and compression.

The Pale King, after all, is a collection of fragments that never became more than the sum of its disparate parts before its author's death. Several sections work as standalone stories: four were published during Wallace's lifetime,¹⁵¹ while several other

¹⁵¹ These are: "Peoria (4)" and "Peoria (9) 'Whispering Pines'," published in *TriQuarterly* #112, June 2002 (these would become the novel's §1 and the beginning of §8, respectively); "Good People" in *The New Yorker* Feb 05 2007; and "The Compliance Branch" in *Harper's* February 2008. Matt Bucher has pointed out

pieces were, as I have mentioned, diverted into *Oblivion*. It must be acknowledged, of course, that Wallace clearly conceived of this material as part of a larger project, even if many of the individual pieces grew into self-contained entities: the synchronic drafts were evidently written in relation to the notion, however distant, of a diachronic product, and we cannot ignore what Van Hulle refers to as “the complex interplay between completion and incompleteness” (MM 246). At the level of bibliographical categorisation, though, it is accurate to describe the work as an aggregation of brief narratives and meditations, almost none of which would seem too lengthy for a volume of short fiction.¹⁵² The longer pieces, as I hope to show, often take their own length as a thematic focus, being self-reflexive in their use of detailed, exhaustive narrative techniques as well as pointing the reader towards images of compression and clarity. In order to frame the textual analysis that follows, we will briefly reconsider some of Wallace’s public statements about minimalist techniques.

3.2.4 “Clarity, Precision, Plainness, Lucidity”

In an interview with *Bookworm*’s Michael Silverblatt upon the publication of *A Supposedly Fun Thing* in 1997, Wallace discussed the narrative strategies used in his essays. While ostensibly focusing on his nonfiction, the interview slides repeatedly into discussion of his fiction, and a close reading reveals aspects of Wallace’s thinking on literary style after *Infinite Jest*.

that the first two of these are omitted in the novel’s colophon, despite the fact that Nadell would surely have been aware of their existence (“Reading Itinerary”).

¹⁵² §22 (Fogle’s monologue) lasts for 99 pages, while §46 (the Happy Hour section) is 66 pages long; §24 (the second of the “David Wallace”-narrated chapters) is 54 pages long. In his recent presentation on Wallace’s fiction, in fact, Burn suggested that *The Pale King*, with its “deliberately episodic” structure, could be viewed as a story cycle as much as a novel (“David Foster Wallace and the Short Things”).

At one point, Silverblatt observes the obsession with “information gathering” in Wallace’s essays, comparing it with the chronological complexity of the narrative structure in *Infinite Jest*; he observes that the question of “‘how do you take in new information and arrange it?’ seems to be part of your subject.” Wallace replies by explaining the challenge of reporting factual experience, and notes that his emerging “rhetorical strategy” in the essays became “simply to be really candid about it and invite the reader to kind of empathize both with my anxiety and with the overload.” Silverblatt turns the conversation to the question of Wallace’s footnotes, and the author mentions the editing process involved in this technique, noting Pietsch’s help.¹⁵³ At this point, Silverblatt announces: “I wanted to talk to you about style.” He notes Wallace’s use of the “compound conjunction,” drawing attention to the way the author’s style replicates the “brain-voice” of the culture; he also observes the fact that “impressive as these books are, there’s also a countervailing desire not to sound impressive,” suggesting that this “self-interrupting capacity” is a cultural as well as a personal development: “your work seems to be the result of something that developed in America when everyone started going to college.”

The interviewer then notes that “One of my favorite things to talk to you about follows from this.” Silverblatt mentions their shared admiration for Markson’s *Wittgenstein’s Mistress*, noting:

What we like about it is its mixture of extraordinary intelligence and, at the same time, sadness. And the intelligence in it is really swallowed by a narrative situation that wants to compress it and make it nearly impossible to express. So that the book alternates between weeping, really, and extraordinary observation.

¹⁵³ Wallace claims to have been lucky to have the assistance of Pietsch, who “gets it, and he sees . . . some of the virtues of the footnotes, but he was very good at figuring out where I had just kind of lost it with ceasing to identify with the reader in any way.”

He presents this achievement – the tension in modes of affect provoked by the urge towards narrative compression – as a kind of counterpoint to Wallace’s work in fiction, in an exchange I will reproduce at length here:

MS: And we talked about that kind of book – I say that Rilke and Kafka do it – that manages to be extremely self-conscious and yet to attain some kind of sanctity or purity or holiness or humanness or all at the same time – that I sense is the alternative to the massive book of *Infinite Jest* and the massive self-consciousnesses and paralyses this kind of book involves. I wanted to talk about that.

DFW: I think – I mean, I agree with you, and I think *Wittgenstein's Mistress* is a magical book. Not because it alternates between incredible intellectual stunt-piloting and pathos, but because it manages to marry the two in a way that – I mean, that's what my dream is: to someday be able to do something like that. I think there's a difference, though, between the kind of self-consciousness that you're talking about with *Wittgenstein's Mistress* or *The Notebook of Malte Laurids Brigge* or “The Hunger Artist” or *The Metamorphosis*. The self-consciousness there is a far, sort of deeper, wiser – it's a more autonomous, almost solipsistic self-consciousness. The kind that I'm talking about [namely, the kind displayed in Wallace’s essays] is far more concerned with the perception by others – what others' judgments are of you.

Wallace appears to agree, here, with the interviewer’s suggestion that the “sanctity or purity or holiness or humanness” displayed in the books he mentions is an alternative to the “massive” example of his recent novel and suggests that it is his ambition one day to write a book encompassing this kind of “deeper, wiser” self-consciousness. Wallace continues to explain the way in which his stylistic approach is “mimetic of a very kind of late twentieth-century American experience,” but Silverblatt’s subsequent comments return the discussion to the possibility of narrative compression:

MS: After around what was it – fifteen years? – of waiting for William H. Gass to finish *The Tunnel*, I said to myself: Wouldn't it be wonderful if after all this time – during which time we know that he's been working like a dog – if he published a book and it was 77 pages long. For me, that would have been extremely heroic –

DFW: Yeah.

MS: – because, you know, it wouldn't have been one of those little tiny aperitif-and-toothpick kind of books – it would have been the exudation . . .

DFW: It would have been *The Philosophical Investigations* is what you're talking about, right?

MS: Exactly.

Silverblatt continues by stating that he is “very curious about that ability to heroically throw away what might be brilliant stand-up stuff . . . and have the essence,” suggesting that the answer to the consumerist double-bind explored by the author in *ASFTINDA* is perhaps “to tell not the truth, but the essence of truth – to get past the process of truth-telling and go to the truth itself.” The following exchange, which concludes the interview, is also worth quoting at almost its full length, as it reveals Wallace’s ambivalent attitude towards compression in literary form:

DFW: I agree with 90% of what you're saying in principle. The problem is in practice. What you're talking about is a very condensed, aphoristic – you're talking about *Thus Spake Zarathustra* or *The Philosophical Investigations* or *The I Ching* or really really good, really really good poetry. And the problem with doing something like that kind of thing in non-fiction is that I think then you're setting yourself up as a . . . teacher, rather than as a companion. . . I agree with a lot of what you're saying, and in fact even though *Infinite Jest* is really long, the thing I'm most proud of is that for once I did not reptilianly fight and hang on to every single page that I did. And I let – I allowed myself to have faith in a really smart editor and cut some of it – and . . . that, that for me was what was valuable about that process. But I am not yet good and smart enough to be able to do what you're talking about. I agree . . . about what would be magical about that, and I think one of the most toxic things about the movement called Minimalism in the 1980s was that it aped the form of that without any of its spirit, or any of what would truly be magical – it's moments in Carver, maybe the end of “So Much Water So Close to Home,”¹⁵⁴ but for the most part it got Americanized: it got reduced to a set of formal schticks, an appearance, a persona. For now, given my limitations – at least like in the non-fiction book – I wanted much more to set myself up as . . . a kind of companion or tour-guide who was very observant but was also every bit as bound up and Americanized and self-conscious and insecure as the reader. Now, I realize that what I'm giving you is a literary defence for a kind of literature that is inferior to the kind you're talking about. But I don't think, I don't think it's without value.

MS: No, you're very present. And I guess what I'm talking about is a literature that implicitly takes to heart the Zen maxim, “Live as if you were already dead.”

¹⁵⁴ It is, as mentioned in my introduction, difficult to ascertain which version of the story Wallace is referring to here; I have refrained from any extended analysis of the story for this reason.

DFW: Oh yeah. Well, you're talking about an effaced narrator where it's not a literary choice, but it's in fact a truth. And, except for very rare, transcendent pieces of fiction, I haven't seen that done anywhere except spiritual and religious literature. Or, you know, at the end of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*. I mean, you're talking about the sort of thing that an absolute genius – I mean, a Mozart of living – comes up with after decades of effort. And I'm comfortable, I'm comfortable saying I'm not there yet. (*Bookworm* May 1997)

Wallace thus reprises the critical stance he has taken earlier in his career, disparaging the Minimalist movement for what he sees as its empty formal gestures and its facile appropriation of pre-existing structures without reference to a larger aesthetic vision (a process he characterises here as particularly American). He also goes out of his way, as he had previously, to exempt Carver – or, at least, “moments in Carver” – from criticism (it is worth noting, too, that Wallace himself introduces 1980s Minimalism – and Carver – into the discussion). The implication, however, is that the “spirit” of the attempt to, as Silverblatt puts it, “have the essence,” can lead to work that is “magical” (a word Wallace returns to several times); we might argue that what is being dismissed here is not an artistic stance or set of methods, but simply a specific movement within a particular historical moment. The kind of “magical” moments Wallace finds only in certain works of Carver are, he suggests, present to a greater degree in philosophical and religious texts; “spiritual and religious literature” is held up here as the ideal of literary compression and self-effacement. Wallace’s final comment – “I’m not there yet” – highlights the suggestion, repeated several times in this discussion, that this kind of “magical” compression, rather than being antithetical to his own fictional project, is in fact a long-term aesthetic aim of the author. Wallace’s admiration for literature that successfully achieves stylistic reduction is clear, and he ends the interview by wryly alluding to his frustration at his current inability to achieve this: as Silverblatt signs off, he announces: “I’m now going to beat my head against the wall for 30 seconds.”

I take this exchange to be an example not just of Silverblatt's characteristic perceptiveness with regard to the structures and tensions in Wallace's work (his observation, during his 1996 interview with the author, on the way *Infinite Jest* operates upon fractal structures is perhaps the most impressive example of this), but of the author's ongoing struggle with the notion that less can be more. Indeed, some brief comments by the author at a symposium on Kafka the following year show Wallace's continuing interest in textual reduction. Discussing Kafka's technique, Wallace noted that both great jokes and great short stories "depend on what communication-theorists sometimes call 'exformation', which is a certain quantity of vital information *removed from but evoked by* a communication in such a way as to cause a kind of explosion of associative connections within the recipient" ("Laughing" 23, emphasis in original). The term, and its explanation (both clearly taken from Tor Nørretranders' book *The User Illusion*, published in English in the same year; an annotated copy resides in Wallace's library) evoke the way in which literary minimalism achieves its effects by the deliberate redaction of expected content.¹⁵⁵ Wallace goes on to note: "Nor is it an accident that the technical achievement of great short stories is often called 'compression' - for both the pressure and the release are already inside the reader" (23). The particular humour found in Kafka's work, according to Wallace, is essentially a form of "harrowing spirituality" that is "a religious humor, but religious in the manner of Kierkegaard and Rilke and the Psalms" (26).

¹⁵⁵ Staes traces some of the ways in which Wallace engaged with *The User Illusion* as a research source for *The Pale King*, suggesting that the activities of the IRS rote examiners serve to illustrate Nørretranders' arguments about the way in which information functions (72-77).

Indeed, if we move forward to a piece published ten years later – at the opposite end of the decade-long stretch during which Wallace wrote the majority of *The Pale King* – we see the writer meditating, in print, on many of the same concerns. In “Deciderization 2007,” Wallace’s introduction to *The Best American Essays 2007*, we see him not only returning to some of the same ideas, but using similar language in the process. The piece can, I suggest, be read as an extended meditation on the related issues of editing and style, as Wallace – in the context of his own function as “guest editor” – contemplates the qualities of compression in prose (BFN 299). The introduction is, in a particularly Wallacean way, alive to its own context, and gestures towards the reader in its acknowledgment of the conditions and limitations inherent in its production. Wallace opens by self-deprecatingly speculating that the reader is likely to read his introduction “last, if at all” (299), and places his own struggles to the forefront by presenting the image of the guest editor seated helplessly at his desk,

Sitting there reading a dozen Xeroxed pieces in a row . . . and then another dozen in a row . . . a rate of consumption that tends to level everything out into an undifferentiated mass of high-quality description and trenchant reflection that becomes both numbing and euphoric, a kind of Total Noise that’s also the sound of our U.S. culture right now, a culture and volume of info and spin and rhetoric and context that I know I’m not alone in finding too much to even absorb, much less to try and make sense of or organize into any kind of triage of saliency or value. (301)

He then considers the different challenges of writing fiction and nonfiction – “nonfiction’s based in reality . . . Whereas fiction comes out of nothing” (302) – before appearing to downplay that difference in favour of the insight that both are performed “on tightropes, over abysses”:

Fiction’s abyss is silence, *nada*. Whereas non-fiction’s abyss is Total Noise, the seething static of every particular thing and experience, and one’s total freedom of infinite choice about what to choose to attend to and represent and connect, and how, and why, & c. (302–303, italics in original).

The distinction Wallace draws here between formal categories is arguably less important than the commonality evoked by the fear of the “abyss,” and by his identification of the necessity of the writer’s selectivity in negotiating a terrifying expanse of potential. We might also note that the *nada* here surely alludes to Hemingway by way of an example of a writer who has displayed such selectivity.¹⁵⁶

Wallace then suggests that his own editing is – since it involves neither line editing nor copyediting – unworthy of the name, with his position more accurately described as “an evaluative filter, winnowing a very large field of possibilities down to a manageable, absorbable Best for your delectation” (303; capitalization in original). A footnote here considers the fact that the editor’s job consists primarily of excluding entries, “since the really expensive, energy-intensive part of such processing is always deleting/discarding/resetting”; the final words here also suggest word processing functions that evoke the writer’s drafting process (304). Wallace then draws the reader’s attention to the “series editor” Robert Atwan, noting “the amount of quiet behind-the-scenes power he wields over these prize collections” in order to further emphasise the contextual horizons of publishing (306).

At this point, the links between the themes of the essay and those of Wallace’s parallel fiction project begin to grow noticeably stronger. Wallace uses a term borrowed from information theory to consider his function as editor – “my Decidering function is

¹⁵⁶ The allusion, of course, being to the waiter’s “conversation with himself” at the close of “A Clean, Well-Lighted Place”: “he knew it all was nada y pues nada y nada y pues nada. Our nada who art in nada, nada be thy name thy kingdom nada thy will be nada in nada as it is in nada . . .” (*Essential Hemingway* 424). Mary Holland notes that Wallace also alludes to this moment in “A Supposedly Fun Thing I’ll Never Do Again” when he refers to the ocean as a “primordial *nada*” (Holland 221; Wallace, *ASFTINDA* 262, italics in original).

anentropic and therefore mostly exclusionary"¹⁵⁷ – and points out that he has been consistent in his exclusion of “Memoirs,” which he tends not to “trust” (308). He highlights the “agenda” behind the form, and suggests that contemporary memoirs often conceal “an unconscious and unacknowledged project, which is to make the memoirists seem as endlessly fascinating and important to the reader as they are to themselves” (309). There is a clear link between Wallace’s criticism here of the impulses driving memoir writing and the “David Wallace” narrator’s revelation of his own mercenary motives for writing *The Pale King* in the form of a memoir (*TPKb* 81–83). This link is also genetically verifiable: Pietsch’s index of draft material shows that Wallace worked on the “Author here” section between November 2006 and May 2007, and thus wrote the material more or less contemporaneously with “Deciderization” (36.1).

From here, Wallace begins to consider the values of a writing that displays the marks of successful deletion and discarding. He confesses his admiration for work that exhibits “clarity, precision, plainness, lucidity, and the sort of magical compression that enriches instead of vitiates,” using the same word as he had in the *Bookworm* interview – “magical” – to describe an act of successful literary condensation (*BFN* 310). He writes of his “envy and awe” at the “essential pithiness” of many of the pieces, praising their “limpidity, compactness, and an absence of verbal methane” and hence their sense of

¹⁵⁷ The term “entropy” was coined in 1948 by Claude Shannon, who appears to be referenced in *The Pale King*. Andrew Warren notes that Claude Sylvanshine’s name is “a somewhat too obvious play on Claude Shannon, a founder of Information Theory,” an allusion also noted by Conley Wouters (Warren 399; Wouters 458). Indeed, in one of Wallace’s notebooks, Shannon is mentioned by name, which would appear to support Warren and Wouters’ contention (41.6) (it should be noted that in the same 2012 issue of *Studies in the Novel*, Burn suggests that the character’s initials allude to C.S. Lewis’ first two initials (“Paradigm” 380)). Wallace’s interest in the notion of entropy likely came via Pynchon; Boswell traces the way in which *Broom* makes use of the ideas of thermodynamic and informational entropy in a manner reminiscent of *The Crying of Lot 49* (*Understanding* 51–59).

“overall value” (311). From this admission, he asks the reader to consider the possibility that “it is possible for something to be both a quantum of information and a vector of meaning,” with an essay capable of being both factually informative and structurally instructive: the essays, he claims, act as “models and guides for how large or complex sets of facts can be sifted, culled and arranged in meaningful ways” (312). The following pages of the essay explore the political implications of Wallace’s accusation that the “polity and culture” have failed, during the Bush years, at the task of “paying attention and handling information in a competent grown-up way” (313). Wallace identifies one essay as being representative of “a special subgenre I’ve come to think of as the service essay, with ‘service’ here referring to both professionalism and virtue”; ultimately, what Wallace appears to value most in these pieces is “a special kind of integrity in their handling of fact” (315).¹⁵⁸

This “special kind of integrity” (which manifests itself in the responsible culling and arranging of detail) leads Wallace to offer a warning, in the essay’s final pages, which provides a clear hint as to the concerns behind his final novel’s Keatsian title. Wallace praises the essays he has selected for being “utterly different from the party-line pundits and propagandists . . . for whom writing is not thinking or service but more like the silky courtier’s manipulation of an *enfeebled king*” (BFN 316, my emphasis). Wallace then begins a new paragraph, but his ellipsis pulls the reader forward and the repetition of the royal simile serves to drive home the point:

. . . In which scenario we, like *diminished kings* or rigidly insecure presidents, are reduced to being overwhelmed by info and interpretation, or else paralyzed by cynicism and anomie, or else – worst – seduced by some particular set of dogmatic talking-points. . . (BFN 316, first ellipsis in original, my emphasis)

¹⁵⁸ The essay in question is Mark Danner’s “Iraq: the War of the Imagination,” first published in *The New York Review of Books* in December 2006.

Wallace ends by suggesting that the work of the ethical writer represents a kind of mindful selectivity that is alive to the danger of “reflexive dogma” and “rigid filters,” akin to a morally-wielded form of editorial power (316). He acknowledges his own failings – “I’m aware that some of the collection’s writers could spell all this out better and in much less space,” before ending by stating that the pieces he has selected are “models – not templates, but models – of ways I wish I could think and live in what seems to me this world” (317). The state of affairs in which we find ourselves akin to pale, diminished kings, then, requires the construction of “models” not just for writing, but for thinking and living. This activity, carried on in the midst of the present-day swirl of information, suggestion and analysis – what DeLillo described in Wallace’s memorial service as “the vast, babbling, spin-out sweep of contemporary culture” (“Informal Remarks” 24) – is (as *The Pale King’s* Sylvanshine realises) as difficult as “trying to build a model in a high wind” (11), but it is a necessary act, combining creation as well as compression, development as well as reduction, authoring as well as editing.

3.2.4 “Not Another Word”: Reticence and Reserve

In the following pages, I suggest that Wallace’s stated interest in the possibility of expressing oneself “better and in much less space” is not – or, at least, not entirely – a self-deprecating strategy, and that it is explored in an increasingly self-conscious thematic way within his late fiction. Within *The Pale King*, Wallace frequently returns to images of narrative compression, and these images are often keyed to literary references. Several critics, indeed, have already identified within *The Pale King* references to authors associated with a minimal or compressed style. §8, for example, which details the childhood of Toni Ware, has caused several critics to look for comparisons. While the

style of the chapter has been compared to Cormac McCarthy (Bucher, "Pale Winter" n.p.; Kirsch n.p.), its narrative content also points towards writers with whom Wallace is rarely associated. Stephen Burn suggests that the character of Toni Ware "seems to represent Bret Easton Ellis' shock-based aesthetic, an approach that Wallace felt was antithetical to his own, which might explain why Toni has a first name that yields the anagram of NOT I" ("Paradigm" 382). This is suggestive, but leads one to wonder why Wallace was still, many years after his criticisms of Ellis in his interview with McCaffery, concerned with dissociating himself from the writer (*CWDFW* 25–26); if we accept this suggestion, it would support my contention that Wallace was still engaged in an aesthetic dialogue with Minimalism long after the evolution of his own style. The anagram proposed by Burn could also, as Clare Hayes-Brady has suggested, be read as a direct reference to the Beckett play of the same title (n.p.); further references to Beckett, as I will discuss shortly, can be seen elsewhere.

We might also observe, though, that the story takes place in what has been described as "Carver Country," a place of trailer parks, truck stops and helpless poverty, described by Carver as "the dark side of Reagan's America" (*CWRC* 201). In her introduction to *Carver Country: The World of Raymond Carver*, Gallagher notes that among the features of this semi-imaginary landscape (which she defines as "an amalgam of feelings and psychic realities which had existed in America . . . even before Ray began to write about them") are: bad luck, poverty, "the tyranny of family" and "unexpected malice" (Carver, Adelman, and Gallagher 8–19)¹⁵⁹. Toni, we are told, "read stories about

¹⁵⁹ Gordon Burn introduced his 1985 interview with Carver – entitled "Poetry, Poverty and Realism Down in Carver Country" – with a description of his view from the train from New York to Syracuse, encompassing "the non-deluxe tract homes and trailer parks that for a growing number of devotees are coming to mean Carver country." He opined that "Underclass America is a territory which . . . Carver has made so

horses, bios, science, psychiatry, and *Popular Mechanics* when obtainable. . . she read halves of many torn and castoff things" (*TPKb* 60), a line that suggests a synecdoche for the fragmentary form that Wallace considered for the novel itself and also provides a possible intertextual link to Carver's *WFTA*. Carver's story "Popular Mechanics" (which portrays a couple arguing violently over custody of a baby) is, at less than two pages, the shortest in the collection. The title was, in fact, given to the story by Gordon Lish, although this fact did not emerge until *Beginners*, with its accompanying bibliographical apparatus, was published in 2009.¹⁶⁰ Elsewhere, critics have noted in *The Pale King's* §6 – in which Lane Dean and his girlfriend talk around the question of her pregnancy – a close thematic echo of Hemingway's "Hills Like White Elephants," in which a couple indirectly discuss the possibility of an abortion (Deresiewicz n.p.; Max, *ELS* 292–293; Meatto n.p.; Wouters 453).¹⁶¹

distinctively his own that you feel you can almost hear the baby wails, vacuum-cleaner squeals and recriminatory, ketchup-hurling brawls emanating from the trackside dwellings as the train flies past" (*CWRC* 117).

¹⁶⁰ The story had previously been published in journals as "Mine" and "Little Things" (*Collected Stories* 1009). The version in *WFTA* was singled out for criticism on its publication by Michael Wood: the story, he claimed, "perfectly illustrates the unkindness and condescension of some of these stories - vices that Mr. Carver at his best is always careful to avoid. He is imitating himself here, turning his intuitions into a program" (2). Craig Raine takes an opposing view, arguing that Lish's title is a "brilliant, ironically affectless" one; this is, he states, "a perfect, tiny touch . . . [Lish] has changed only one word and added two, but the effect is massive. It adds sardonic detachment, ironic contempt, to the palette of colours" (n.p.).

¹⁶¹ McGurl's lengthy 2014 essay on Wallace's relationship to institutions is structured around a comparison of the author to Hemingway: he detects – in spite of the obvious contrast between the "terseness" of Hemingway and the "incessant talkiness" of Wallace – a shared "conservatism" in the way their works display "a conception of therapeutic community" and suggests that the "bounded infinity" Wallace creates in *Infinite Jest* represents "the maximalist version of the clean, well-lighted place" ("Institution" 35–39). Other critics have noted correspondences between the two writers: Adam Kirsch compares Wallace to Hemingway with reference to the men's shared Midwestern background, their interest in "the ethics of sport and games," and the development of a distinctive, easily parodied style, while Tim Peters detects an

These intertextual links are often submerged, however, and a closer examination of Wallace's drafts shows a recurring engagement with some of the canonical writers of what could be termed the 20th-century lineage of minimalist fiction. To begin with, we may observe that several of the characters who serve as focal points for questions of moral value in the novel are associated with a minimal, compressed style of communication. I will begin by looking at §22, the lengthiest section and certainly one of its least "minimal" in terms of narrative style. While Chris Fogle's own narrative method is one of verbal excess – it is characterised by "David Wallace" as being hamstrung by its habit of "foundering in extraneous detail," causing "Wallace" and others to rotate their hands in a "please-get-on-with-it way" (273) – it is notable that the two father figures who influence his commitment to the Service are characterised by their verbal reserve. Fogle's biological father is reticent – "he and I never talked about it directly" – as well as pithy, as he demonstrates in his one-sentence, Shelley-quoting summation when his early return home catches his son stoned with friends (*TPKb* 172-5). His clothing – "understated and conservative" – and appearance – the texture of his hair is "stiffer than my own" (175) – are characterised by compression and reserve. His bodily movements, meanwhile, display a discipline and self-denial that manifest themselves as controlled, deliberate behaviour: "He was both high-strung and tightly controlled, a type A personality but with a dominant superego, his inhibitions so extreme that it came out mainly as exaggerated dignity and precision in his movements" (176). If we were to take this description as an analogy for prose style, we might think of early Hemingway (who

echo of Hemingway's "Snows of Kilimanjaro" in the regret and failure of the narrator in "Good Old Neon" (Kirsch n.p.; T. Peters n.p.)

liked to be known, of course, as “Papa”); the clipped, terse style hinting at underlying trauma.¹⁶²

If this association seems an interpretive stretch, then it is at least partly supported by the references to Hemingway in Wallace’s archive. Indeed, drafts for the Fogle chapter contain one direct reference to the writer. At one point, Fogle notes in an aside that “the Service material made those textbooks look like Hemingway’s *In Our Time* by comparison” (39.6) A handwritten note, with an arrow pointing to this, simply says “Hemmway Michener?”¹⁶³ Wallace also owned a copy of Hemingway’s first collection (the edition is a 1986 *Scribner Classic* one; there are no indications as to when Wallace read it) and his annotations within the volume show a close study of the author’s style. Most of these consist of observations on the technique of the stories, as Wallace observes, for example, the use of understatement in “My Old Man” – “Echoes of spare style of other

¹⁶² Hallett observes that “repressed or compressed emotion is a key function of minimalism – emotion resounding below a fragile, deceptively mute surface” (16).

¹⁶³ This reference is opaque, and does not appear to have been followed up; here I venture only some brief speculations. The obvious allusion here would appear to be James Michener’s introduction to Hemingway’s *The Dangerous Summer* (1985), later reprinted in his collection *Literary Reflections* (1993). This suggests an intriguing interpersonal link, since (as previously discussed) this posthumous work was edited by Pietsch. The editor is not mentioned by name in the piece, though, as Michener simply provides a general approbation of the double editing job necessitated by the size of Hemingway’s manuscript: “I think [A.E.] Hotchner and the editors of *Life* did a good job in compressing Hemingway’s outpouring into manageable form, and I believe that the editors of Scribners have done an even better job in presenting the essence in the book. (182-184).” Michener states that he “cannot be critical of the vast amount of overwriting Hemingway did – 120,000 words when only 10,000 were needed – because I often work that way myself. I have consistently turned in to magazines and newspapers three to four times the number of words requested.” We may note that Wallace was, on several occasions, similarly guilty of “overwriting” for magazine publication (as detailed at the beginning of this chapter), and it is possible that he intended, with this note, to refer to the contrast between the concision for which Hemingway is known and the excessive textual production evinced here: Michener notes that Hemingway was “powerless to halt the flood of words” (181-182).

stories" – and ellipsis in "Big Two-Hearted River Part 1": "doesn't tell the reader who Hopkins is." On one page of the latter story, he twice wrote the word "discipline" beside descriptions of Nick making camp. In the final paragraphs of the narrative, he underlined the following lines of Hemingway's: "His mind was starting to work. He knew he could choke it because he was tired enough." With reference to this, Wallace wrote in the margin the words "Wants to shut his head off." This phrase recalls the many struggles between characters and their "heads" in *Infinite Jest*,¹⁶⁴ and is directly echoed in one of that novel's passages: "Gately gets to the shelter at 0459.9h. and just shuts his head off as if his head has a kind of control switch. He screens input with a fucking vengeance the whole time" (*IJ* 435). The annotations, then, suggest a thus-far-unexplored intertextual link between Hemingway's alter-ego and one of the principal protagonists of Wallace's most celebrated novel.

Returning to Fogle, we may note that his other father figure – the "substitute father" (178) – is also presented in terms that suggest narrative compression. His choice of clothing is reminiscent of Fogle's father's – he wears "an archaically conservative dark-gray suit" – and his physical presence is compact and concentrated: "He seemed lithe and precise; his movements had the brisk economy of a man who knows time is a valuable asset" (217). The visual impact of this presence, for Fogle, is striking, recalling archaic images of selfhood: "[He] had a steel-colored crew cut and a sort of pronounced facial bone structure. Overall, he looked to me like someone in an archaic photo or

¹⁶⁴ The word "head," or variations thereof, appears abundantly in *Infinite Jest* to designate a site of suffering:: examples include the narrator's observation that "The Disease makes its command headquarters in the head"; Otis P. Lord's misfortune in emerging from the Eschaton debacle with a "Hitachi monitor . . . over his head"; James Incandenza's chosen method of suicide, executed by "putting his head in the microwave"; Gately's understanding that "What's unendurable is what is own head could make of it all," and his sensation of being "trapped inside his huge chattering head." (*IJ* 272; 527; 693; 860; 922)

daguerreotype" (219). His appearance creates associations of masculinity and military control (the substitute has his hands behind his back, as in the "military position" (229)), and in attempting to explain the visual appeal, Fogle turns to an analogy that again hints at the scorched intensity of Hemingway's post-war stories:

One way to explain it is that there was just something about him – the substitute. His expression had the same burnt, hollow concentration of photos of military veterans who'd been in some kind of real war, meaning combat. His eyes held us whole, as a group. (220)

In one draft of this chapter, in fact, the substitute's appearance creates associations of a more specifically literary nature: the Jesuit, here, "also looked like Samuel Beckett," and Wallace's handwritten note in the margin amends this to "*a little like photos of Samuel Beckett, or a Dust Bowl farmer in Walker Evans' Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*" (39.6, underlining in original). The double association here links Beckett's minimalist austerity with the economic austerity embodied in Evans' photographs of impoverished sharecroppers.¹⁶⁵ The allusion to Beckett's appearance can surely be placed alongside what appears to be a reference to *Waiting for Godot* elsewhere in the novel. One examiner's description of his or her idea for a play without any action – "He sits there longer and longer until the audience gets more and more bored and restless, and finally they start leaving" – contains (in its provocative refusal of expected narrative development) strong echoes of Beckett's major theatrical work; it is notable that the word "minimal" – "the setting is very bare and minimalistic" – appears here in one of two

¹⁶⁵ In one of Wallace's notebooks, we find a playful engagement with Beckett's aesthetic: a cut-and-pasted clipping (from an unknown source) of Beckett's famous quote, taken from his dialogues with George Duthuit, stating that "There is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express." Above, this, Wallace has drawn a smiley face (and an arrow pointing towards the quote) along with the words "Thank you, Thank you."

instances in the published version of the novel.¹⁶⁶ The examiner's description of his compositional process here pointedly refers to his reflexive wielding of the editorial function: "At first there was a clock behind him, but I cut the clock" (108). The invocation of Beckett and Hemingway within the same draft suggests a focus on the ideas and methods common to the minimalist approach: Hallett suggests, in a chapter entitled "Tracing the Roots of Minimalism," that "if Beckett's aesthetic psyche can be seen as the philosophical matrix for minimalism, so too Hemingway's artistic formula can be identified as the stylistic genitor of contemporary minimalist prose" (37).

Indeed, Fogle soon begins to comment upon the substitute's technique as well as his appearance, noting that he uses "transparencies" (a word suggesting a clear, modest style) and discusses different methods of effecting "deductions" (a word suggesting cutting and compressing) (*TPKb* 220). In one striking moment, the man's technique and his appearance appear almost as one: "when he put the first transparency on the overhead projector and the room's lights dimmed, his face was lit from below like a cabaret performer's, which made its hollow intensity and facial structure even more pronounced" (220). The substitute's economical and transparent methods of communication lead Fogle to something of a double revelation about both his late father and methods of presentation more generally:

This was partly due to the substitute's presentation, which was rapid, organized, undramatic, and dry in the way of people who know that what they are saying is too valuable in its own right to cheapen with concern about delivery or "connecting" with students. In other words, the presentation had a kind of zealous integrity that manifested not as style but as the lack of it. I felt that I suddenly, for the first time, understood the meaning of my father's term "no-nonsense," and why it was a term of approval. (221)

¹⁶⁶ The first occurs in relation to Drinion's bodily movements (*TPKb* 450).

In a draft of this section, the description quoted here reads: “not as **affect style** but as the lack of it”; the change of word here strengthens the analogy with literary style (39.6). Fogle realises, for the first time, the power of a mode of communication that allows for minimal interference and eschews digression. Indeed, the substitute’s delivery uses silence and absence as a structuring feature: “It might be fair to say that I remembered the substitute Jesuit as using pauses and bits of silence rather the way a more conventional inspirational speaker use physical gestures and expressions” (*TPKb* 233).¹⁶⁷ The substitute goes on to extol the values of “Effacement. Sacrifice. Service,” before declaring: “To put it another way, the pie has been made – the contest is now in the slicing. Gentlemen, you aspire to hold the knife. Wield it. To admeasure. To shape each given slice, the knife’s angle and depth of cut” (233–234). The imagery here is that of cutting and selecting, and if we are to pursue the literary analogy, we might note that what the substitute is describing comes closer to revision, or to editing, than to writing.

Wallace’s interest here is not only in the auto-editorial techniques of literary compression themselves, but also the ethics of a writing that attempts to distil experience to its essence. His engagement here with what I loosely term “minimalism” is not tied to a particular writer or school, and is decidedly ambiguous. However, as I have shown, clusters of references serve to link several of the novel’s most important

¹⁶⁷ Silence features frequently in any analysis of minimalist technique: Ihab Hassan’s 1971 study of postmodern literature, for example, focused on “certain authors who give themselves to silence” (namely, Hemingway, Kafka, Genet, and Beckett) (ix). The term was frequently used in relation to Carver’s technique, as in Michael Wood’s 1981 review of *WWTA*, “Stories Full of Edges and Silences.” Hallett identifies a sense of “voicelessness” and “a recognition that words are useless” as one of the characteristic features of Minimalist fiction, while McDermott refers to the “speechlessness” engendered by a minimal style (Hallett 18, 25; McDermott 31). Indeed, we might recall Wallace’s description of Carver’s world as one “full of mute, beaten people” (*CWDFW* 45–46).

characters – that is to say, the characters depicted as conveying qualities of authority, focus and integrity – to some of the key figures in the lineage of twentieth-century minimal style. Intertextual allusions show a recurring fascination with the way in which minimalist techniques – Beckettian brevity, Hemingwayesque reticence, Carverian silence – display the power of withholding. In 2001, Wood had accused Wallace and others of displaying, in their conspicuously generative maximal fictions, a “fear of silence” (“How Does It Feel?” n.p.); the evidence suggests that in his late work, the author was consciously taking a different approach.

It is surely not coincidental that Wallace, during this time, refused to involve his editor in the processes of textual compression and distillation. Pietsch, during the years of composition, received none of this work in progress, and the author appears instead to have reserved and perhaps appropriated the editorial function for himself. In 1996, Wallace had described the editor to Lipsky as a “hero” (103), and it is notable that the word recurs multiple times in *The Pale King*, often in ways that suggest an editorial function. The narrator of §17 praises “institutional heroes, bureaucratic, small-h heroes . . . the kind that seemed even more heroic because nobody applauded or even thought about them,” and the substitute Jesuit’s announcement that “the heroic frontier” now lies in “ordering and deployment” of material specifically valorises the act of conscientious mediation as the highest good (129, 234). In my introduction, I noted Mark McGurl’s claim that “postwar American fiction has been driven by a strong polarity of minimalist and maximalist compositional impulses” (PE 377); in *The Pale King*, Wallace appears deliberately to incorporate this polarity into the developing text. The continual tension – manifested in multiple sections of the work – between narrative expansion and restraint creates a dialectical relationship between minimal and maximal modes of

literary expression, and constitutes an ongoing dialogue within the text over its own methods (a dialogue that, as I will show in the final chapter, manifests itself repeatedly in Wallace's drafting process).

While my analysis here focuses on *The Pale King*, I wish to briefly consider Wallace's final story collection, which demonstrates some of the same concerns. Boswell has argued that the intense experience of reading *Oblivion*, which he describes as Wallace's "bleakest" book, ("Constant Monologue" 151) is intimately related to the spectre of claustrophobic narrative excess it presents: the maximalism of the narrative method (incorporating the formatting of the text and the grammatical constructions) works to create an experience of suffocating solipsism, rendering "a visual analog for the state of consciousness Wallace depicts in the stories themselves" (152).¹⁶⁸ Noting the "lack of mental control" afflicting many of the collection's "key figures," Boswell argues that *Oblivion* is "unique" in Wallace's oeuvre in its "unrelenting pessimism," with the ensuing novel intended as "a corrective, or at least a dialectical partner" (160, 168). I argue that this "corrective" works to portray a positive counter-example to the unrelenting maximalist nightmare of solipsistic interiority experienced by the characters in *Oblivion* whom Boswell (paraphrasing a line from Wallace's *This is Water*) claims are "hypnotized by the constant monologue inside their own heads" (163).

Indeed, if we take as an example the celebrated story "Good Old Neon" (which Boswell, as I mentioned earlier in this chapter, reads as part of a "trilogy" including the Fogle chapter (156)), we can see how the tension between opposing narrative impulses is

¹⁶⁸ The "entire volume," Boswell argues, "appears on the page as a vast, unbroken wall of text," and the narratives, at an individual level, use textual plenitude as a mimetic (and perhaps antagonistic) strategy: "each story locates the reader in the protagonist's word-drunk interior and traps her there for the story's gruelling duration" (152).

incorporated into the narrative in a similarly complex form.¹⁶⁹ As in Fogle's monologue, we are presented with a narrative style that is digressive and, at times, self-confessedly "clumsy and laborious" (*OB* 153). Neal acknowledges the irony of the fact that the monologue – intended, he says, as "an abstract or sort of intro" – is, in its maximalist method, "exhausting and solipsistic" for the listener (148-153).¹⁷⁰ Like Fogle, he repeatedly gestures towards the excessive nature of his comprehensive explanatory narrative, pointing out "all the English that's been expended on just my head's partial contents" (note, again, the distancing word "head") and suggesting, in the way he ends a particularly long explanation with the word "etc.," that he himself is exhausted by his narrative methods (153, 162, 177). Neal's ostentatiously comprehensive discourse is illustrative of nothing so much, here, as his "mind's ceaseless conniving about how to impress people" (160), and the textual overload serves as a mimetic device for his depression and narcissism. We are presented with several images of this fraudulent and self-defeating verbiage: he continues his relentless verbal baiting of Dr. Gustafson, for example, partly in order "to see how much he'd put up with" (156). The episode in which Neal attempts to impress his religious acquaintances by "speaking in tongues," meanwhile, is notable for the way in which he manages to convince himself "that the tongues' babble was real language," as he abandons "plain English" in his quest to impress (157). Towards the end of the story, Neal drives past a "cement overpass so

¹⁶⁹ One draft of this story, in fact, is introduced with a quote from Beckett's *The Unnamable* ("It is well to establish the position of the body from the outset, before passing on to more important matters" (243)), suggesting Wallace's continuing interest in twentieth-century minimalism during this period of composition. Wallace's library at the Ransom Center also holds a copy of *Molloy* containing a number of annotations.

¹⁷⁰ The monologue is, we are told, designed to mimic "the internal head-speed" of the "ideas, memories, realisations, emotions and so on" taking place within the narrator's consciousness (*OB* 148-153).

covered with graffiti that most of it you can't even read" (176-177), a sight that reflects the way in which his relentless mental and verbal activity cancels itself out.

As the story progresses, we are given occasional glimpses of alternative discourses, approaches that would counteract this relentless and paralysing accumulation of language. The first of these comes when Neal notes, almost as an aside, that Gustafson occasionally provides "helpful models or angles for looking at the basic problem" (164); the doctor's focus on the simple division between fear and love is, he admits (repeating the word Wallace focuses on in "Deciderization"), "a different *model* or lens" (166, my emphasis) through which to consider his despair. Shortly after this, Neal suggests that language loses its "temporal ordering" after death, with the words reaching (in his mathematical metaphor) towards "some limit toward which the series converges" (166-167). This limit is described as "epiphany or insight" (the traditional goals of the short story, we may note) and is figured in terms of linguistic compression: "imagine everything anybody on earth ever said or even thought to themselves all getting collapsed and exploding into one large, combined, instantaneous sound" (167). Neal coins the description "word-sum" to describe this moment of insight, a compound word which emphasises the way in which this limit of language is imagined in terms of compression and distillation.

This anticipates the image of the "keyhole," which will recur several times in the story's final pages (172, 178, 180) – a word which (as mentioned earlier) appears in one of the drafts of the Fogle chapter. The word suggests the compression of perspective necessary for communication ("As though inside you is this enormous room . . . and yet the only parts that get out have to squeeze out through one of those tiny keyholes" (178)) and can be read as a kind of meta-commentary on the story's narrative method, a

movement from exhaustive maximalist discourse towards an acceptance of the need for a refining, filtering “model” that may be necessary to combat the disabling plenitude of the lines of thought that go “into the sort of inbent spiral that keeps you from ever getting anywhere” (181).¹⁷¹ Driving through the fog, Neal notes the “minor paradox” of the fact that “sometimes you can actually see farther with low beams than high” (177); if used as an analogy for literary style, this could be understood as a suggestion that a deliberately restricted focus may prove more illuminating. Indeed, the final lines of “Good Old Neon” suggest that the relentless chatter of consciousness can only be stilled by the author-figure’s “commandment” to himself to utter “‘Not another word’,” an injunction that echoes the minimalist rebuke of language made explicit in several canonical minimalist short stories (181). The reader, may, at this point, be reminded of Jig’s outburst in Hemingway’s “Hills Like White Elephants” – “would you please please please please please please please stop talking?” (*Essential Hemingway* 406) – or the title of Carver’s “Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?”¹⁷²

3.3.3 “The monk’s cell and the hermit’s cave”: Wallace’s “Via Negativa”

In one section of Barth’s 1986 essay on minimalism, he chose to frame the opposite poles of narrative technique by invoking contrasting impulses embedded deep within the Western religious tradition:

The medieval Roman Catholic Church recognized two opposite roads to grace: the *via negativa* of the monk’s cell and the hermit’s cave, and the *via affirmativa* of immersion in human affairs, of being in the world whether or not one is of it. Critics have aptly borrowed those terms to characterize the difference between

¹⁷¹ Hallett claims that Minimalist stories offer “a key-hole perspective through which the reader can infer a vista of knowledge, experience, or meaning” (19).

¹⁷² Indeed, Hallett refers to both of these examples in her analysis of the final lines of Mary Robison’s story “May Queen,” in which the protagonist demands of her father: “Will you shut up?” (109).

Mr. Beckett, for example, and his erstwhile master James Joyce, himself a maximalist except in his early works. (n.p., emphasis in original)

In one chapter of his monograph on the maximalist novel, Stefano Ercolino considers the relationship of his chosen genre to literary minimalism. He quotes the aforementioned words, taking his cue from Barth's reference to a longer historical timescale; however, he takes issue with Barth's suggestion that these compositional impulses can be considered to alternate in a cyclical manner. As well as arguing for the necessity of "a *longue durée* perspective," he suggests that minimalism and maximalism can be seen as concurrent, related phenomena:

Thus, rather than seeing minimalism as a "cyclical correction" of maximalism as Barth does, the two phenomena can be understood as being *dialectically coexistent*: two elementary possibilities of human expression which have always existed side by side (as in the 1980s and 1990s for example) or alternated (between the twentieth and twenty-first centuries) in determining the aesthetic horizon of a given literary system. A dialectical coexistence in which both tendencies have undergone *phases of dormancy* and *acute phases*, without one or the other, however, ever disappearing completely. (70, italics in original)

Ercolino's conception of the relationship between minimalism and maximalism is persuasive in the way it allows for the complexity of their interrelationship, and guards against simplistic understandings of literary periodicity. Indeed, its emphasis on a long historical perspective is a useful lens through which to view Wallace's late interest in compression, fragmentation and reduction. We can, I suggest, consider *The Pale King's* interest in narrative compression alongside McDermott's related attempt to, as he puts it, "expand the valences of 'literary minimalism'" and further explore Barth's suggestion that "minimalist practices" can be found "everywhere in the history of world literature" (2).

The Pale King, after all (as I discussed earlier in this chapter), contains explicit references to Catholicism and religious asceticism, and the drafts of the "Cede" section

set in Ancient Rome seem to demand the kind of deep-focus historical lens Ercolino advocates. Certainly, the novel displays a recurring impulse to retreat to the “hermit’s cave,” in Barth’s words, even as it valorises the civic engagement of the IRS immersives who show their attention to human affairs in the way they “attend fully to the interests of the client” (in the substitute Jesuit’s words) and “give [themselves] to the care of others’ money” (*TPKb* 233). Keeping Barth’s formulation in mind, we could say that the novel explores both of these “roads to grace.” It is also surely relevant that this urge towards asceticism requires intense personal struggle, and an internalization of the disciplinary mechanisms of the editorial function.

As discussed earlier, the drafts of the “Cede” narrative are interspersed, in one draft (the same draft in which we find the references to Hemingway and Beckett), with Fogle’s story and that of the “kissing boy.” The former section contains clear references to early religious practices, and describes a scene of spiritual and physical austerity caused by food shortages in 109 A.D:

Only the Neozoroastrian goat-herders of eastern Pontus – nomadic and apolitical, whose dietary reliance on the hardy goat and long-standing custom of drinking their own urine insulated them somewhat from the ravages of drought – only the herders of eastern Pontus survived in any numbers; and of these a certain percentage found themselves so denuded and refined by inanition that they became, like dander or sheets of fine Nile parchment, capable of airborne flight. (39.6)

The goat-herders, here, are presented as physical emblems of reduction. Their bodies are so “denuded and refined,” indeed, that they find themselves to be capable not just of “the passive, static Zoroastrian levitation touted in the *Zend Avesta* but in actual flight” (39.6, italics in original). The reference to the collection of sacred Zoroastrian texts as well as to the “sheets of fine Nile parchment” creates a clear analogy between religious asceticism and literary minimalism, as the men’s bodies themselves become so reduced

as to be comparable to the pages of a holy text. If we are to read this sentence as another oblique image of literary minimalism, then the author's meta-commentary provides another layer of interest: beside the passage quoted above, Wallace wrote on the draft page (seemingly as a direction to himself) the words "*shorten sentence.*"

In consequence, there was visited upon Pontus over the winter of A.D. 109 starvation on a scale never before seen in a Roman protectorate. Pliny's *censeri* later estimated that four of every five Pontics perished between the two *aequinoctia* of that frightful year. Large portions of Amasia and Zela were burned to the ground in order to dispose of the dead. Only the Neozoroastrian goat-herders of eastern Pontus—nomadic and apolitical, whose dietary reliance on the hardy goat and long-standing custom of drinking their own urine insulated them somewhat from the ravages of drought—only the herders of eastern Pontus survived in any numbers; and of these a certain percentage found themselves so denuded and refined by inanition that they became, like dander or sheets of fine Nile parchment, capable of airborne flight.

Shorten
sentence

Figure 9: A page from one of Wallace's drafts of "Cede" (Wallace papers 39.6)

The subsequent paragraph frames the fictional phenomenon as a spiritual as well as physical occurrence:

The resemblance of the airborne Neozoroastrians to "seraphic visitations" – a resemblance compounded by the sheaths of sparks that reportedly encased and illumined any activity in the dry night air of second-century Asia Minor – is believed by some scholars to render the Pontic Flights the probably source of the "Martyred Angels of Bythnia" motif so favored by fourth-century Byzantine mosaicists.

The flights, we are told (in the final paragraph of the section) are curtailed by a temptation that recalls the Edenic one central to Christianity; the men glimpse the orchards of Antioch, and cannot resist gorging themselves on the fruit, "losing altitude and motility with each mouthful" until they are devoured by enormous hounds. This short section has the gnomic intensity of a parable – we are told no more about the goat-

herders in the subsequent pages – and it may, in Wallace’s hypothetical “final” version of the novel, have been developed further or discarded. It evokes ascetic practices, however – to borrow some terms from the *Bookworm* interview discussed earlier, the men “condense” themselves almost to the point of self-effacement” – and it strengthens the impression that Wallace was looking beyond the twentieth century and, indeed, beyond fiction in his search for models of textual austerity. Wallace’s literary references, in his conversation with Silverblatt, moved quickly from works of fiction – Markson, Rilke, Kafka – to a set of texts whose compressed styles work in the service of philosophical and spiritual enlightenment: “what you’re talking about is a very condensed, aphoristic – you’re talking about *Thus Spake Zarathustra* or *The Philosophical Investigations* or *The I Ching* or really really good, really really good poetry.” *The Pale King* contains several allusions to works which, like the ones mentioned here, express philosophical ideas in an elliptical and fragmented manner. Earlier in this chapter, I noted allusions to Marcus Aurelius’ *Meditations*, a text that proceeds through a series non-chronological fragments (TPKb 18; 39.7). In §19, a character named Nichols refers (during the discussion on civics) to Pascal, while in §33, Garrity’s ghost alludes to the writer’s *Pensées* as well as to figures of religious asceticism; the “monks under Benedict,” and “the hermits of third-century Egypt” (145, 385).¹⁷³ The narrator of §36 refers to mystics from various religious traditions as well as to E.M. Cioran’s aphoristic 1937 study of the ascetic practices of the saints, *Lacrimi Si Sfinti* (TPKb 398–404).

¹⁷³ Edmund Waldstein examines the allusions to the *Pensées* in *The Pale King*, drawing parallels between Pascal’s ideas on the way modernity intensifies the temptations of seeking “diversion” from the self and Wallace’s diagnosis of boredom as symptomatic of the postmodern condition (n.p.).

In his analysis of the *Philosophical Investigations*, McDermott takes Wittgenstein's final work as an example of what he refers to as "the episodic remark text," arguing that "we should understand [the book] to be collection not of structures built up through painstaking addition but of lesser fragments that remain after a negative regime of subtraction and paring down." He focuses on the style of Wittgenstein's argument in the *Investigations*, arguing that the author's "minimal style – his exclusion of unifying style features so consistently that their absence becomes a dominant feature of his writing" is essential to the argument expressed (18–19). I do not attempt here to pursue a substantial analysis of the influence of the *Investigations* on *The Pale King* (not least because of the ample body of existing criticism that traces Wittgenstein's influence on Wallace's thought).¹⁷⁴ Nor do I intend to present a thorough consideration of Wallace's engagement with any of the individual religious and philosophical texts mentioned here: such an examination is beyond the scope of this project. I do, however, suggest that the minimal "episodic remark text" is frequently present in Wallace's final novel as an intertextual genre or, indeed, a "model," to use Wallace's words, and that its morally responsible use of silence and absence functions in part as an implicit critique of the surrounding cultural noise.

McDermott argues persuasively that literary minimalism is inherently oppositional in nature, focusing his study on a method of textual compression that "functions to rebuke the inauthenticity of a set of contemporary discursive practices" (3). A literary style, he observes, "can merit the term 'minimal' only in relation to a standard of

¹⁷⁴ In his recent survey of Wallace scholarship to date, Kelly notes that the references to Wittgenstein are too numerous to list ("Critical Reception" 56); Boswell's early reading of Wallace's engagement with the philosopher's thought in *Broom* has been particularly influential (*Understanding* 21–64).

fullness," and a conspicuously reduced narrative mode serves immediately to evoke a "comparison" with a discursive mode or linguistic field that is implicitly critiqued (6). This stylistic approach places the writer in the role of "a kind of discursive reformer" who adopts "a critical, adversarial role" in relation to predominant modes of discourse that use conventional forms as a vehicle for "foundationalist" ideas (4, 12, 40).¹⁷⁵ The austere style of the early Carver stories, meanwhile, challenges its historical context in the way it calls into question "Reaganite propaganda and its claims to essentialist community"; McDermott here follows the way in which critics have often seen Minimalism as, to quote McGurl, "a form of resistance to the self-assertive blare of modern American gigantism" (McDermott 12; McGurl, *PE* 295). In this manner, he suggests an understanding of a lower-cased literary minimalism as a reactive strategy used by writers who, while working in very different historical circumstances, share a suspicion of master narratives and discourses of certainty.

McDermott's analysis of the political implications of Carver's aesthetic – and, indeed, of the minimalist aesthetic more generally – contains a significant degree of overlap with Andrew Hoberek's recent re-evaluation of the aesthetic strategies of DeLillo's fiction. Hoberek argues provocatively that DeLillo's writing can be said, under close scrutiny, to be "engaged in a shared project with the minimalist school that came to prominence during the same period in which his career took off," in the way that he "transposes a typical minimalist strategy onto the nonminimalist terrain of the big novel concerned with history" ("Foreign Objects" 102-103). Against the distinctions made in received narratives of U.S. literary history (between minimalism's private, domestic focus

¹⁷⁵ Wittgenstein's style, for example, implicitly challenges "metaphysical philosophy and its claims to logocentric Truth" (12).

and the “maximalist novel about history whose standard DeLillo takes up”), Hoberek argues that “DeLillo’s formal privileging of discrete individual objects as a kind of counterweight to abstract theory, mobilized in response to what we might call the competing aesthetics of U.S. foreign policy, exposes the hidden continuity between his writing and that of the minimalists” (108).¹⁷⁶ The word “counterweight” here emphasises the reactive, socially aware practice contained in the writer’s aesthetic response to a flawed and broken public discourse, and is repeated elsewhere in his analysis when DeLillo’s (specifically, *White Noise*’s) “investment in fragments” is described as “a deliberate formal counterweight to the abstractions of U.S. foreign policy” in the same period (114). We might be reminded, here, of Wallace’s letter to New Yorker editor Deborah Triesman in which he not only referred to the accompanying story as a “fragment” but also listed his return address as “Fragmentco Unltd,” figuring his artistic practice as the unending production of partial narrative elements rather than coherent wholes (“Afterword”).

DeLillo, Hoberek claims, “bridges the explicitly political and historical interests of the high postmodernists with the ostensibly apolitical domesticity of the minimalists,” and his fiction (and that of Carver et al.) displays “a powerful resistance to” contemporary politics rather than “some putative rejection of politics per se” (121-122). Hoberek’s use

¹⁷⁶ DeLillo, Hoberek claims, “endorses an aesthetic of particulars to counteract conceptual abstractions,” namely the universalizing abstractions of the postwar school of “Modernization theory” that found their expression in the ambitious U.S. foreign policy strategies that ran aground in Vietnam and Iran in the 1970s. DeLillo’s “refusal to systematize,” suggests Hoberek, correlates with the way in which Minimalism maintains a “constant, structural relationship to historical events that it only ever partially effaces,” and his “fascination with surfaces is a concern with objects traceable to such modernist sources as Hemingway’s protominimalism, imagist poetics, and William Carlos Williams’ assertion of ‘no ideas but in things’” (“Foreign Objects” 102-117).

of the word “resistance” (in the same passage, he uses “refusal” (122)) presents the literary minimalist in a similar stance to that of McDermott’s “discursive reformer” who reduces and curtails narrative methods in order to enter into an implicitly antagonistic relationship with a particular field of discourse. Indeed, both analyses present this refusal to accept systematized thinking as a positive value in these texts. Hoberk’s analysis of *White Noise* ends by detecting in the novel a “typically DeLilloesque faith in the value of contingency” akin to the “minimalist faith in the small things that escape the logic of abstract systems,” comparing DeLillo’s aesthetic here to Carver’s suspicion of master narratives and to Minimalism’s “turn to the commonplace” (120-121).¹⁷⁷ McDermott, too, notes that his interest in “the postmodern period of literary minimalism” is spurred by his sense that his chosen texts demonstrate “an engagement with the problematic of contingency” that is constantly aware of the dangers of lapsing into a “grandiose foundationalism” (12): each of the writers he discusses (Brautigan and Mamet are examined alongside Wittgenstein and Carver) “seeks to create edifying texts that raise

¹⁷⁷ McGurl, too, suggests a meeting of competing artistic impulses in late twentieth-century US fiction, arguing that maximalist and minimalist energies come together in a “collision of opposites” he refers to as “miniaturism.” This mode, exemplified in *The Program Era* by Bharati Mukherjee, Robert Olen Butler and Donald Barthelme, endeavours to condense “a maximalist relation to language into small forms” and presents a performance of linguistic mastery within carefully established boundaries. The small-scale control and craft of Minimalism is absorbed here into a “total vision” that implies the cognitive mastery of the world associated with the “historicity” and “temporal sprawl” of the maximal novel (*PE* 375–80). Wallace’s late fiction does not sit comfortably within this mode as McGurl presents it. The coexistence of maximalist ambition and Minimalist silence is, I suggest, far less comfortable than in the examples McGurl gives, and the tension between them is highlighted rather than elided: it would be more accurate to say, in this case, that Wallace attempts to import an intractable Minimalist resistance into the encyclopaedic historical novel. Nevertheless, the work draws much of its energy from this “collision of opposites”: in *The Pale King*, I argue, Wallace presents an ostentatiously self-critical maximalism that frequently appears to be animated by an urge towards reduction.

doubts about these essentialist platitudes and alert us to the possibility of authentic self-transformation" (12).

All of these analyses are, I suggest, relevant to an understanding of Wallace' late work. In "Deciderization 2007," the "model" of the successfully compressed, ethically aware nonfiction piece functions as a response to the "Total Noise" of the cultural environment and as an implicit rebuke to the "silky courtier[s]" whose irresponsible discourse pervades the body politic (*BFN* 316). In that piece, Wallace presents the writers of the selected essays as discursive reformers of a kind, presenting edifying texts that "yield and illuminate truth instead of just adding more noise to the overall roar" and serve to counteract the disabling plenitude of contemporary communication: such texts can be seen as socially responsible, civic-minded contributions to discourse ("service essay[s]" (312-315)). In this case, responsible minimalist practice is presented as a "counterweight" (Hoberek, "Foreign Objects" 114) to the dogma, propaganda and cant of a debased contemporary discourse. We might also suggest that the repeated word "model" recalls Walter Benjamin's claim, in "The Author as Producer," that "a writer's production must have the character of a model"; Wallace's focus on the instructional possibilities of the edifying text accords with Benjamin's desire for the writer to develop "a teacher's attitude" and echoes the call for literature to be formally successful as well as politically committed (Benjamin 98). The interpretive leap from Wallace's critique of essayistic style towards his own fiction is, I argue, not a great one. After all, in the conversation with Silverblatt quoted previously, Wallace himself appears to think about nonfictional and fictional forms together, moving from *ASFTINDA* to *Infinite Jest* to Carver to the *Philosophical Investigations* within the same answer. We might also note the copious amount of factual research Wallace conducted during his work on his final novel

(the Ransom Center holds material relating to his attendance at accounting classes as well as numerous documents on the IRS and contemporary tax law), and conclude that the “abyss” Wallace was attempting to traverse in his writing of *The Pale King* was, in part, one of informational abundance: Max quotes a note from Wallace to a former colleague in which he writes, “You can drown in research. I’ve done it. I’m arguably doing it now” (“Papers” 26.2–7, 41.8; Max, *ELS* 322). The fact that the language of “Deciderization” contains such clear echoes of the concerns addressed in *The Pale King*, moreover, would appear to licence a critical pathway similar to that followed by the many critics who have taken Wallace’s “essay-interview nexus” (Kelly, “Death” n.p.) of 1993 as an interpretive key to understanding *Infinite Jest*.

I do not suggest that this analysis maps neatly onto Wallace’s own late literary style (which is frequently “maximal” in its verbal density); rather, I argue that Wallace writes the dynamic explored here into the world of *The Pale King*, presenting certain of its characters as figures of discursive reform and returning repeatedly to a suggestion of the “overall value” possible as a result of successful literary compression (*BFN* 311). In *The Pale King*, canonical high-modernist minimalism, along with “spiritual and religious literature” (to use Wallace’s formulation from the *Bookworm* interview) is repeatedly pointed to as a model for the kind of service that the writer can provide. These models are frequently invoked in oblique allusions (descriptions of clothing and bodily movements, for example) as well as more explicit intertextual ones such as those noted above. Moments such as Fogle’s “conversion” scene, meanwhile, model the way in which a recuperated, morally serious minimalist practice can be not only effective, but necessary. The figure of the edifying, authoritative minimalist is presented in *The Pale King* as a “counterweight” to a decadent cultural present in which, as the men in §19 put

it, citizens have abdicated personal responsibility in favour of consumerist excess (“we all go about our individual self-interested business and struggle to gratify our appetites”) and public discourse serves as “surface rhetoric” acting only to enable social degeneration (*TPKb* 138, 150). The substitute Jesuit’s focused, “no-nonsense” presentation functions as an implicit rebuke to this rhetoric and to the cultural discourses that have left Fogle (to borrow Wallace’s words from “Deciderization”) “paralyzed by cynicism and anomie” (316).

In this way, Wallace’s late writing carries on an oblique and unresolved argument about literary style that had preoccupied the author for a number of years. In “Deciderization,” Wallace made the ostentatiously self-aware admission that he was “aware that some of the collection’s writers could spell all this out better and in much less space” than he himself could (*BFN* 317); similarly, “David Wallace’s” own narrative techniques in *The Pale King* are comically loquacious and exhaustive, and provide an ambiguous counterpoint to figures such as the substitute Jesuit and Drinion. In my final chapter I explore this self-critique further, tracing it through Wallace’s drafts in order to explore its genetic development.

CHAPTER 4

The Problem of the Invisible Editor, and the Anxiety of Editorial Influence

4.1 The Invisible Editor: Understanding the Textual Exchange

The preceding chapters have examined the genetic development of my chosen texts in the belief that an awareness of the social and material development of these works can usefully inform critical thinking about them. The document, as Eggert notes, is “the textual site where the agents of textuality meet,” and if we look closely we may find evidence of textual meetings that challenge firmly-held critical assumptions; indeed, if we neglect the importance of “keeping the documentary in touch with the textual,” we risk failing to apprehend crucial dimensions of the textual exchange (*Securing* 157).

4.1.1 “Winner’s History”: Coming to terms with Carver’s texts

Writing in 2006 in advance of the publication of *Beginners*, Stull and Carroll reflected on the work of scholarly editing and presentation that went into the volume. They noted that:

It was challenging work, involving decipherment, transcription, and collation. It was also exciting work in that it quickly overturned erroneous assumptions that underlie nearly all past and present studies of Carver’s writings. (“Prolegomena” 4)

They argued (as I noted in Chapter 1) that the discovery of the extent of Lish’s editing necessitated “a fundamental reformulation of the research question” on the part of

scholars, suggesting that the revelations of textual instability necessitated a reorientation of the focus of Carver studies towards an empirical project that would clarify the epistemological status of the stories attributed to him.

As I have suggested, though, this kind of concerted effort has been slow to materialise. The amount of critical work on Lish's contribution to Carver's body of work has grown very little since 2009. To begin with, the work of generations of Carver scholars (as I suggested throughout my analysis of the different versions of his work) needs to be re-examined. Stull and Carroll's 2013 essay "The Critical Reception of Raymond Carver" acknowledges this problem directly, providing background information on Lish's place in Carver's work and tracing the development of the "Carver controversy." They note that "studies of Carver's work published before the year 2000 require varying degrees of reassessment," identifying several of these as being "out of date in their coverage of the now expanded body of Carver's work and the genetic relationships among the multiple published versions of many of his stories" (49).¹⁷⁸ The chapter on Carver in Hallett's study of three canonical Minimalist writers, for example, does not mention Lish once: the editor appears only briefly in her analysis of Hempel and Robison.¹⁷⁹

Even in more recent monographs dealing with Carver's stories, the claims made about Carver's style are in immediate need of reassessment. Monographs by Bethea (2001) and Lainsbury (2004) acknowledge Lish's input but (as I have discussed previously) contain no information on the genetic development of Carver's stories. The analysis in

¹⁷⁸ The specific monographs referred to are Saltzman's *Understanding Raymond Carver* (1988), Ewing Campbell's *Raymond Carver: A Study of Short Fiction* (1992) and Adam Meyer's *Raymond Carver* (1995).

¹⁷⁹ The latter chapters contain no reference to the particulars of Lish's editing work, tending to attribute the textual features of Minimalism entirely to the authors: at one point, for example, Hallett quotes (without additional comment) a 1980 review of Robison's *Days* that praises "Robison's fierce editing" (112).

McDermott's chapter on Carver in his 2006 examination of austere twentieth-century poetics, for example, leans heavily on the stories in Carver's early collections while making no reference to Lish. Indeed, claims such as the following – "By means of a minimal style, Carver evokes a fictive world that is remarkably drained of value" and "Carver deploys an unadorned style that captures in language the minimalistic reality he intends to represent" (90, 96) – would now appear to require, at the very least, an acknowledgement of the editor's hand in shaping this style. These kinds of claims, along with the critical consensus of Carver's "development" (bolstered, as we have seen, by numerous misleading statements from Carver himself) arguably constitute what we might call a pervasive and consistent appearance of the Intentional Fallacy in Carver criticism. The identification of Carver with Minimalism has led to *WETA* exerting a strong gravitational pull on critical discourse, as the numerous attempts to define the contours of the notoriously influential literary movement returned inevitably to the distinctive style features of that movement's most famous iteration.

Hannah Sullivan notes, in relation to *The Waste Land*, that Pound's interventions – regardless of aesthetic judgements – clearly made the poem more distinctively modernist in form (*WOR* 127). We might say something similar of *WETA*, since critics – regardless of their opinions of the aesthetic worth of the volume or its place in the Carver canon – tend to agree on its status as the most Minimalist of his works. Even within his own lifetime, then, the identification of Carver with a minimalist aesthetic had become a self-perpetuating critical trope, leading many critics to focus heavily on the Lish-edited collections in order to isolate the most distinctively "Carveresque" examples of his stylistic practice. Hallett's self-reflective statement on her analysis of Carver's work exemplifies this trend: "I have selected certain stories from the more representative of

his minimalist crop because they seem best to exemplify the traits of minimalism as I have chosen to identify them and others because of their similarities to stories by Hempel and Robison" (5). The critical problem here is clear, as Carver's most heavily edited stories are taken as his most "representative" and his similarities to other writers who were edited by Lish is elucidated at length. In the light of the Lish manuscripts, this critical logic is no longer sound: Carver studies now needs to reckon with a more complicated model of authorship, while an updated version of Hallett's study of Minimalist writing would require a genetically informed perspective that pays close attention to Lish's own aesthetic.

An opposing critical consensus can also be detected, as critics keen to valorise Carver's literary achievement can seek to dissociate him from what is perceived as a discredited, bygone genre. Leypoldt notes that "during the turbulent debates of the eighties the term [Minimalism] appears to have been ruined for literary criticism," while May opens his preface to Hallett's study of Minimalism by acknowledging that the word is "one of those disreputable literary terms that one dare not use without placing it within quotation marks or prefacing it with 'so-called'" (Leypoldt, "Reconsidering" 317; May and Hallett ix). Both critics note the effects on Carver studies, with Leypoldt suggesting that as a result of this development, "critics intending to prove Carver's literariness often feel compelled to preface their arguments with disclaimers, emphasizing that he is first and foremost an original storyteller and only tenuously related to the minimalist trend" (317). May also laments the effect of this critical act of distancing, claiming that he "welcome[s] any critical effort that might readdress the reactionary response to so-called 'minimalism' that has made critics prefer the conventional and 'more generous' stories in Carver's last two collections to the powerfully hallucinatory, but alas, 'minimalist', stories in his first

two collections" (May and Hallett x). As we have seen, this is a critical move made repeatedly by Wallace, who appeared at pains, in any discussion of Minimalism or Carver, to place daylight between the two.

Stull and Carroll note that "a new phase in the critical reception of the works of Raymond Carver has begun" ("Critical Reception" 48). The work of critical re-evaluation of previous assumptions can be seen in essays such as Enrico Monti's "Minimalism, Dirty Realism, and Raymond Carver," an updated version of his 2007 examination (in the *Raymond Carver Review*) of the way in which Lish's edits determined the stylistic direction of Carver's early work. Likewise, Molly Fuller's comparative essay in the most recent (Summer 2014) edition of *The Raymond Carver Review* on the alternate versions of "Why Don't You Dance?" engages in a close reading of the textual alterations, noting how Lish's interventions affected the "narrative thrust" and "intention" of the story (Fuller 2). However, this understanding is not in evidence throughout all of the contemporary criticism of the author's work. Indeed, within the same 2013 *Critical Insights* volume in which Stull and Carroll (and Monti) provide nuanced assessments of Lish's contribution to Carver's development, we find Françoise Samarcelli's "What's Postmodern About Raymond Carver?," a close examination of textual features such as "fragmentation" and "gaps and silences" in his stories. Here, Samarcelli emphasises the use of "postmodern techniques" in Carver's stories, focusing on features such as the "typography and textual layout" of the stories in *WWTA*, the terse and elliptical dialogue between the men in "Tell The Women We're Going," and the abrupt, "self-cancelling" final line of "One More Thing," all of which were significantly altered by the editing process. Lish is not mentioned once, and a footnote explaining that "where there are two versions of the same story, this essay usually quotes from the first, shorter version" demonstrates the

critic's lack of interest in the textual background and attribution of the stories (228–43). At the time of completion of the present study (six years on from the publication of *Beginners*), it appears that only a handful of critics have undertaken sustained attempts to integrate the evidence of the Lish manuscripts into Carver studies. While it is now possible to conduct detailed close analyses of the differences between Carver's manuscripts and the edited drafts, critics such as Samarcelli continue to present arguments that assume a model of authorship untroubled by the textual evidence uncovered during the preceding 17 years.

The complicated history of Carver scholarship owes its many contradictions and confusions to the state of the archival evidence. The slow and sporadic nature of the uncovering of textual evidence has led to confusion and disparity between different assessments of Lish's influence; between 1998 and 2009, most Carver critics had only Max's reporting on which to base their assessments, and a genetic study would have required detailed archival research. Stull and Carroll refer to "the near-unmaking" of Carver's critical reputation in the wake of "The Carver Chronicles," and point to complicating factors such as the "unresolved" issues raised by Max's essay and the continual appearance of posthumous work (in 2000's *Call If You Need Me*) as challenges to Carver studies during that period ("Critical Reception" 47–51). We might also speculate on the difficulty (both practical and psychological), for long-time Carver critics, of re-examining years and sometimes decades of previous work. Monti comments on the "unexpected and upsetting" nature of the emerging story of Lish's influence, and the occasionally intense reactions evinced by the revelations of textual instability in Carver's work attest to the emotional investment of generations of readers in a set of canonical stories (60).

An apprehension of the complicated authorship of the most “Carveresque” stories undoubtedly generates a degree of cognitive dissonance, since the importance of *WWTA* as an ur-Minimalist text – and the consequent valorisation of its author as the originator of a movement – preceded the revelations of its textual genesis. Hannah Sullivan discusses, in relation to *The Waste Land*, the difficulty of apprehending the sense of possibility and change latent in a genetic study when the work in question is so deeply entrenched in the canon. Critics, she suggests, often analyse the poem’s genesis in terms that suggest that its published version was “predestined”: this, she argues, constitutes an attitude of “textual meliorism,” an acceptance of a “winner’s history” that elides the complexities and confusions found in the draft materials (*WOR* 123, 142). It also inevitably elides the different agencies and intentions involved, as the work’s most prominent attributes are taken to be the inevitable fulfilment of joint intentions rather than the selection, by an editor, of one possibility from among many. Sullivan argues that critics have taken Pound’s excisions as the inevitable fulfilment of Eliot’s intentions, and the “central themes and symbols” of the work to have been present from the beginning of the editing process. This perspective, she argues, misrepresents the evidence of the manuscripts: the development of the poem proceeded, in fact, from the editor’s production of “an elliptical, superposed version” of the poem “from the many possibilities latent in the drafts.” Pound performed this act of editing “at the moment when the two poets’ sensibilities were beginning dramatically to diverge” (142). The resemblance between the process Sullivan describes here and the one I have outlined in relation to *WWTA* should be clear, and the difficulties for critical apprehension of the textual genesis are comparable ones. It is only when we appreciate the different agencies operating upon the text’s development, the conflicting sensibilities of the contributors,

and the particularities of the historical moment of this development, that we can gain an appreciation of the way in which the process led to the product.

The notion of a work as “co-authored” or “collaborative” appears, in practice, to involve a merging of creative agency that effectively subsumes the editorial role within the authorial. *The Waste Land*, Sullivan argues, is often characterised as (in her phrase) “efficiently self-purging” and is thus implicitly celebrated for the way in which Eliot’s conservative poetic approach is successfully balanced against Pound’s techniques of experimental revision. The success of the poem, she argues, lies in “the aesthetically pleasing counterpoint between excision and accretion, economy and synthesis”: the tension between these forces ultimately causes the work to achieve “a maximal revision of aesthetic counterpoint” (122–45). This tension, however (as she demonstrates), is often attributed – despite critics’ knowledge of Pound’s contribution, sometimes effected in the face of the author’s confusion and hesitancy – to Eliot’s original set of intentions. *WWTA* also exemplified this dynamic of (in Sullivan’s words) “contrapuntal tension” for many critics (123), and the rush to acclaim Carver’s willingness to apply merciless techniques of deletion to his own work credited him for the opposing forces of the dynamic. Reviewers understood both the subject and form of the stories to be the author’s own, as he abbreviated his narrative methods in order to suit the foreshortened experience of the residents of his much-discussed “Country.”¹⁸⁰ The sense of aesthetic

¹⁸⁰ Two influential contemporary reviews, for example, described the way the author had tailored form to content: LeClair wrote that the author “obeys the linguistic limits of his subjects: no metaphor, no elegant variation, no allusions, nothing to learn or recognize or see through,” while O’Brien claimed that “like the best stories of Ernest Hemingway, Carver’s fiction is reductive both in content and form, boiling down the lives of its characters until nothing remains but a pure, elemental residue – love, anger, desperation, loneliness, hopelessness” (“Fiction Chronicle” 87; T. O’Brien 1). More recently, McDermott writes that

counterpoint so central to the collection's success was for many years attributed to Carver alone, and critics often characterised the palpable tension between accretion and excision as a function of Carver's own internal artistic struggle: Howe's review of *Cathedral*, for example, suggested that the more expansive stories demonstrated that Carver had "become aware of his temptations and perils," while Bloom's praise was hedged with a reference to the "limits" that the author had imposed upon himself (Howe n.p.; Bloom, *Raymond Carver* 10).

An additional problem (noted in my earlier chapter) is that the stories in *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?* have not been published in their unedited form, and critical discussions of these tend to take as their object of study a "final" published version that does not take Lish's substantial contribution into account. Indeed, even in the post-*Beginners* era, it is possible to detect a degree of confusion about the attribution of these stories. In the autumn of 2009, for example, Craig Raine contributed a lengthy, polemical piece to *Arete* magazine in which he argued that Carver's unedited stories are "manifestly inferior" to Lish's edited versions. Taking the text of *Beginners* as his evidence, Raine argued that stories such as "So Much Water So Close to Home" and "Popular Mechanics" were, in several cases, "improved *beyond recognition*" (Raine n.p., italics in original).¹⁸¹ Some of his contentions, however, rest on less solid textual ground than others. He takes the early story "Fat" as one point of comparison and the *Cathedral* story "Feathers" as another, describing these as "pre-Lish" and "post-Lish" respectively. However, neither

"Carver deploys an unadorned style that captures in language the minimalistic reality he intends to represent" (90).

¹⁸¹ Raine's comments here recall Stillinger's accusation that James L West's 1981 eclectic-text edition of Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* (based on the author's pencil draft) presented "Dreiser in his underwear" (199).

statement is quite accurate. In 1998 Max had already described “Fat” as an example of an “unusually extensive” edit, detailing several of Lish’s technical changes and noting the “resonance” resulting from these (Raine n.p.). “Feathers,” meanwhile, was in fact edited by Lish, albeit very lightly: only a handful of small changes appear to have been taken by the author. However, Lish does seem to have approved of the story – on the typescript, he described it to Carver as a “*beaut*” – and it is simplistic to characterise it as one over which he exercised no influence whatsoever (“Feathers” *Typescript*).¹⁸² Thus, even a close reading such as this one, attending directly to the nature of Lish’s interventions, contains inaccuracies and risks perpetuating overly simplistic assumptions about the textual status of several stories.

The importance of these stories to Carver’s own development as a writer, and to any history of Minimalism, means that the manuscript versions retain their relevance for critics. The difficulty of assimilating the problems of textual instability into critical practice are still in evidence and Carver criticism is still, in several instances, guilty of betraying a lack of awareness of the material and institutional contexts embedded within his work. The analysis here is intended to redress this lack of awareness by exploring these contexts in greater depth than heretofore.

4.1.2 Dead Ends and Reroutings: Understanding Wallace’s Fluid Text

The example of Carver shows that the seductions of the supposedly stable text are considerable. Without ready access to documentary evidence, critics may be all too ready to proceed on the basis of assumptions of textual authority that ignore the complexities of literary production. This problem is particularly acute in the case of posthumous works,

¹⁸² Despite the fact that Lish did not see *Cathedral* through to publication, Carver did – as I explained earlier – accept several of the editor’s suggestions within its stories.

whose textual status is always at risk of being poorly understood: the critic, faced with what Bryant calls “the smoothness of the clear reading text,” may take this text to be the simple reproduction of (to borrow a phrase from Nabokov’s Charles Kinbote) the “marble finality of an immaculate typescript” (Bryant, *FT* 27; Nabokov 15). In Chapter One, I highlighted the way in which the editor’s involvement in such works (for example, Pietsch’s editing of *The Dangerous Summer*) can result in enduring contributions to their transmission. A genetic perspective, therefore, is an essential tool of interpretation here.

In 2012, Burn wrote that

For all the established orthodoxies of the intentional fallacy and the death of the author, to some extent it is only when we can start to disentangle what Wallace originally planned from the published text (painstakingly reconstructed, as it is, by his editor) that we can begin the critical project of understanding *The Pale King* in earnest, and plot its place on the rising curve of Wallace’s career (“Paradigm” 371).

The project of critical interpretation has continued ahead of this process of disentangling, and as with Carver criticism, questionable assumptions about the author’s intentions sometimes underpin these interpretations.

A notable feature of recent Wallace criticism has been the turn towards an examination of the political and economic contexts surrounding his work, manifested primarily in a focus on *The Pale King*. Marshall Boswell’s 2012 analysis of the novel’s detailed engagement with the civic implications of Reaganomics, in which he suggests that the novel marks a deliberate shift in Wallace’s oeuvre towards an awareness of “historical contingency,” represents an early instance of this shift in focus (“Trickle-Down Citizenship” 463). More recently, three essays by Richard Godden and Michael Szalay, Mark McGurl, and Stephen Shapiro (all published towards the end of 2014) present readings of the novel that track, respectively, its dramatization of the rise of “financial

derivatives” in contemporary capitalism, its author’s engagement with “the emergent conditions of institutionalization” during the Program Era, and its narration of the “competing temporalities” of classical capitalism and contemporary neoliberalism (Godden and Szalay 1275; McGurl, “Institution” 31; Shapiro 1249). Each of these readings contains acute insights into the work’s central tensions and argues persuasively for Wallace’s growing awareness of the political structures governing contemporary Western democracy; however, it is not clear that these analyses are grounded in an appreciation of the complex processes governing the production and genesis of the work itself.

Godden and Szalay’s analysis, for example, serves to illustrate some of the difficulties inherent in reading posthumously-edited work. One section of their lengthy essay, which traces the depiction of abstraction in the novel by arguing that its characters are continually shown to “possess two bodies, one abstract and one concrete, in ways that vividly recall Marx’s account of money” (1280), consists of a meticulously close reading of its §29. This chapter corresponds to Log# 293 in Michael Pietsch’s index of documents for the novel, and portrays a dialogue between a number of IRS agents on a surveillance shift; the bored men regale each other with stories “about shit,” with the latter part of the chapter presenting the story of an ill-fated series of school pranks involving a character called “Fat Marcus the Moneylender” sitting on other students’ faces (*TPKb* 349–357; 36.1). Godden and Szalay devote over four pages of analysis to this scene in order to demonstrate the way in which, “for Wallace, shit and blood both figure circulatory monetary flows” and to trace the way in which the dialogue’s recurring “faecal images” signify “money emptied of value” within finance capitalism (1289–1293). They trace detailed, subtle intratextual links between §29 and earlier chapters in order to bolster their claim that the section performs a “critique of ‘flow and output’” (1289). The

reading continues for several pages of close textual analysis that relies heavily on linguistic associations; the authors admit, for example, that in their associative reading, “much . . . depend[s] on Wallace’s choice of faecal colour” (a reference to the character’s “yellow” excrement is taken as a symbolic allusion to the “flexible gold” of the financial derivative) (*TPKb* 349; Godden and Szalay 1290). They go on to argue that the story of Fat Marcus, which closes the chapter, “refines the link between money and human waste” (1290).

An examination of the drafts, though, suggests that Wallace himself accomplished very little refining on this chapter. The published text of the chapter was transcribed from the only existing draft of the scene, a draft which, as the words “Glitterer freewriting” in the corner of the first page suggests, was an early one that had not yet been subject to any revision at all by the author (40.5).¹⁸³ On some pages, cryptic notes suggest authorial links that are oblique, and we can see snatches of additional dialogue that were not incorporated into the story: some lines from the manuscript have been cut, most likely because of their oblique relationship to plot. The final page contains notes that suggest that the story may have continued further in subsequent drafts; on another page, a text box marked “*Ins- note to Dave*” contains short notes and quotes from the story.¹⁸⁴ These notes, along with the fact that none of the characters in the scene – Bondurant, Hurd,

¹⁸³ “Freewriting” was Wallace’s term for the method used in his early-stage attempts to draft scenes: Max describes this as “the characteristic tiny, forward-charging handwriting with which he attempted new fiction” and notes that this is often difficult to decipher (Max, “Unfinished Story” n.p.). In a 1999 interview, Wallace described himself as a “Five Draft Man,” stating that the first two of these were always on pen and paper (“Five Draft Man” n.p.).

¹⁸⁴ These may have been intended as chapter headings – in earlier iterations of the novel, Wallace explored the idea of introducing each chapter with archaic, synoptic headings, like those in McCarthy’s *Blood Meridian* (39.3, 39.5).

Gaines and Lumm – play a significant role in the more fully-developed chapters of the novel, suggest that this draft came from a relatively early stage of the work, probably from 2004 or earlier (indeed, a handwritten note elsewhere in the drafts for the novel suggests a revision of one character's identity, stating simply that: "*Hurd = Sylvanshine*" (38.3)). The year of the draft's composition is not given, but the fact that it came (according to the Index) from a binder labelled "Glitter/SJF" is a strong indicator of its chronological status: as Max notes, "Glitterer and Sir John Feelgood were both earlier working titles for the book" (36.1; *ELS* 321).

It seems difficult to argue that this draft deserves the same hermeneutical attention as the chapters drawn from more advanced drafts (that is to say, those that were typed, revised and digitally saved multiple times). If this argument were to be made, it would surely need to be made explicitly. Instead, the analysis presented appears to be predicated on the assumption of a relatively stable text, and the attribution of key textual features is rarely examined in detail. Godden and Szalay mention, for example, that §29 comes "one page after a chapter that concludes Wallace's account of the Peoria intake and orientation day" (1289) without any acknowledgement of the editor's role in this fact. We are then told that the reference to Fat Marcus' Jewish ethnicity "fits Wallace's scheme" (1291). However, it is unclear to the reader of their analysis that much of Wallace's "scheme" is being inferred here from handwritten drafts that were never intended for direct publication and certainly earmarked for extensive revision. As in many other chapters, minor editorial changes, when detected, may subtly alter the terms of critical analysis: the reference to faeces in the final sentence of the chapter was, in fact,

added by Pietsch, which adds to the problematic nature of the interpretive jumps being made here (*TPKb* 357; *TPKCD* 11.8).¹⁸⁵

This, I suggest, is indicative of a general problem in the analysis. Godden and Szalay refer, in the conclusion to their argument, to “the typescript” (1315), a word that suggests a unified piece of work corresponding roughly to the published novel. As I discussed in my description of the novel’s genesis, though, no self-contained, singular “typescript” can be said to exist. The authors also state that Wallace “printed out the manuscript of his novel just before he hanged himself, and left it in another room, a light shining upon it” (1315). They cite Max at this point, but there is some ambiguity in the source of this information: it is not clear at all from Max’s account that Wallace printed the drafts at this point, just that he “tidied up the manuscript” (*ELS* 301).¹⁸⁶ The authors refer to “the text” and “the pro forma entity,” and later add the apparent clarification that they are referring to “the published manuscript, in conjunction with the typescript” (1315), descriptions which cumulatively suggest an inadequate apprehension of the multiplicity and complexity of material involved. The approach taken throughout the piece, then, suggests an under-conceptualised attitude towards the unfinished work as well as an insufficiently close consideration of the paratextual materials surrounding the book. The final pages of their analysis cast the editor’s role in metaphorical terms, suggesting that Pietsch acted “in the manner of a derivative trader” (1315), and notes the

¹⁸⁵ The phrase “and ~~Marcus’ scream bringing~~ everybody in pyjamas” was changed to “and **Fat Marcus took a shit in fear and pain and his screams brought** everybody in pyjamas.”

¹⁸⁶ In any case, it is very clear from Pietsch’s introduction that this “neat stack of manuscript” comprised only twelve chapters of the work, and that the published version draws from other, less orderly sources such as “drafts in David’s miniscule handwriting,” “notes” and drafts that “contained abandoned or superseded plotlines” (“Editor’s Note” viii-ix).

“daunting” nature of the task facing him, but the consideration given to the practicalities of the textual editing involved in the book is minimal. Ultimately, the analysis fails to accurately represent the complexity of the extensive process bridging the author’s draft page with the published text.

Stephen Shapiro’s analysis of *The Pale King* approaches the novel through a similar conceptual framework, invoking a Marxist theoretical tradition in its limning of the work’s attention to the power structures of the modern neoliberal state and its awareness of the effects of the late-capitalist abstraction of credit into a “derivative commodity” (1264). The explanation of the way in which the work engages with the problem of narrating “different capitalist temporalities” by enacting a “turn against individual singularity” (1250, 1267) is patient and cogent, and its argument that the “anti-aesthetic” and “non-narrative” text aligns Wallace with “a left aesthetic” (1268) is convincing. However, Shapiro also pays little attention to the material processes of the book’s production; aside from passing acknowledgements of the fact that the work is “incomplete” and “edited,” the complicated genesis of the work is ignored (1250, 1268). Pietsch’s name does not appear in the essay, and the analysis appears to proceed on the assumption that its textual object is a stable one. A sentence stating that the work “documents the life passage of its characters according to both the general derangement of capitalism and the more period-specific one involving the neoliberal liquidation of the State,” for example, surely requires some qualification: as I demonstrated in Chapter 3, the manuscripts display an occasionally startling lack of clarity in establishing who exactly these characters are and what their “life passages” consist of (1258). The argument depends upon the assumption that the “new novelistic form” presented in the published work is an intentional structural feature, and implies that the “anti-style” on display

within this “non-narrative text” represents an active political intervention on the part of its author (1249, 1268). The “passive authorization” assumed to have been granted to the text by the author is debatable, as I have shown, and the degree of intentionality at play is more uncertain than Shapiro presents it to be. The argument implies a teleological assumption about the form and content of the text, and the call at the close of the essay for “an observant textual practice” does not sit entirely comfortably with its own lack of attention to the material and social genesis of the text under discussion (Shapiro 1268).

McGurl’s analysis is, on occasion, similarly guilty of a lack of attention to the process encoded within the product. While he acknowledges the work’s unfinished nature, his description of the editorial process involved in its creation is perfunctory and not entirely accurate: he reports that Pietsch assembled the work “from a pile of fragments the author left neatly stacked on his desk before hanging himself a few feet away,” an account that simplifies the range of materials drawn upon by the editor (“Institution” 29). The essay could also be said to be guilty of presenting the kind of “winner’s history” that Sullivan critiques, where features of a complexly-authored text are assumed to be inevitable extensions of the author’s intention. The thrust of the analysis, which moves towards a critique of the “limits” of Wallace’s “seductively fine mind” and of the political “terms” within which the “project” operates, surely gives insufficient weight to the fact of the editor’s partial and selective presentation of material. McGurl confidently asserts that the novel has “no protagonist,” quoting a note included by Pietsch as evidence that the notion of an authorial “crypto-protagonist” was rejected by the author: this note, we are told, “makes it clear that this was not the plan” (47–49). It could of course be objected, here, that the reading relies upon the editor’s selection for presentation of this note rather than others, and that inferences about the

author's "plan" are based on the editor's decisions as well as the critic's own assumptions.

There is a risk, therefore, judging by current work on *The Pale King*, of inaccurate textual assumptions becoming entrenched in Wallace scholarship. In his discussion of developments in editorial perspectives in the past half century, Eggert describes the hostile attitude of several critics to the presentation of texts that bring textual variation to the surface, characterising the critical position as one of "innocence" and suggesting that "the reviewers' desire . . . is for the unambiguous transcendence of product – the 'single work' out of process" (*Securing* 179).¹⁸⁷ The same criticism could be made in the cases I quote here; certainly, these essays evince little interest in exploring the "dysteleological sidepaths, dead ends and reroutings" that tend to feature in the genesis of any text (Van Hulle, *MM* 15). In the case of *The Pale King*, I argue, these sidesteps and second thoughts are an inescapable part of the work, and demand both elucidation and interpretation.

4.2 The Anxiety of Editorial Influence

I have shown that an awareness of editorial agency can significantly illuminate our understanding of some of Carver's and Wallace's works by providing a badly-needed empirical foundation for criticism and by making visible the different, often complex forms of agency involved in their development. However, we can also draw on this awareness to gain new insights by reading the story of the work's development back into

¹⁸⁷ Eggert focuses on the critical reaction to Hans Walter Gabler's 1984 edition of *Ulysses*, as well as the response during the same years to new editions of Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu* (*Securing* 162–180).

the writing itself. Fordham quotes Tzvetan Todorov's contention that "every work, every novel tells across the fabric of its events, the story of its own creation, its own story" (Fordham 29), and a genetic awareness can allow us a clearer view of such stories. Keeping manuscript development in mind, we can see the complex, dynamic relationship between process and form and understand how, in Van Hulle's words, "the composition process is an integral part of what. . . authors' works convey" (*Manuscript Genetics* 2). The close editorial relationships described in the previous chapters are often implicitly characterised as discrete episodes divorceable from authorial intention; impersonal, ephemeral outsourcing arrangements that can be neatly bracketed off from the rest of the writers' oeuvre. However, the sustained editorial processes that were so essential to Carver and Wallace in their development can, I suggest, be apprehended not just in the work that resulted directly from these encounters but also in the work produced over subsequent years as the authors, in different ways, integrated the demands and dynamics of editing into their composition processes.

Writing is inherently social, after all, and the act of producing a written document involves entering into a social transaction. Bryant writes, in his discussion of the 1968 Northwestern-Newberry edition of *Typee*, of how the editors worked to uncover a unitary "private Melville" unencumbered by political and commercial considerations.¹⁸⁸ In

¹⁸⁸ The editors of this edition were Harrison Hayford, Hershel Parker and Gregory Tanselle; the phrase "private Melville" is Tanselle's own, taken from his 1997 reflections on the edition (Bryant, *FT* 24, 181 n5). The editorial trio aimed to address the difficulties introduced by the "revised version" of *Typee* published in August 1846 (the American edition from which controversial passages were famously removed) by adjudicating between the English copy-text and the two American editions, evaluating each textual change according to their assessment of whether it "reflect[ed] Melville's own wishes regarding the artistic integrity of the book, apart from any practical considerations involving public response, sales, or the editorial policy of the publisher." Bryant points out that this strategy ignores the possibility of shifting

response to this, he argues for a perspective that accounts for the multiple and sometimes contradictory intentions involved: "aesthetic and social concerns," Bryant writes, "impinged upon [Melville's] intentions throughout all periods of composition" (*FT* 23–40). The final section of this study will focus on the writer's continual negotiation with these concerns and the editor's central role in representing them. Editing is necessarily dialectical rather than harmonious: the examples we have seen show that the process necessarily involves continual arbitration between sensibilities and agendas that may be quite distinct from one another. The editor's role is, to a significant extent, that of a necessary antagonist, an ambassador of cultural and practical forces whose responsibility it is to effect some degree of alteration to the existing textual situation. This necessary antagonism is perhaps the primary reason for the critical importance of understanding the editor's role. I follow Bryant here in seeking to preserve some distinction between the role of author and editor: the designation of "co-author" or (in Bryant's phrase) "authorial collaborator" seems insufficient for a clear understanding of the functions performed by Lish, Pietsch, and editors in general (*FT* 7). An editor always works with an existing set of documents, and the movement towards a published text is unlikely to take place without a degree of friction and dissension: "most collaboration," as Bryant observes, "derives from conflict." To collapse the distinction between author and editor into a vague notion of "collaboration," therefore, or to fold the entirety of the editor's activity into an expansively-defined set of authorial intentions, serves inevitably to obscure the "conflicting sensibilities" upon which the editing process depends (*FT* 7–8).

authorial intentions and argues that "practical considerations" such as these cannot be so easily divorced from an author's processes of composition and revision (Bryant, "L-Word" 121–22).

In an address to a creative writing class in 2009, author Toby Litt discussed the Carver controversy, warning of the dangers of imitating the distinctive Minimalist style in the light of the emerging understanding of the stories' complex textual genesis. These stories, he noted, describing Carver and Lish's stylistic and thematic struggle, were "the painful achievement of not one but two men." He warned students that if they tried to imitate these stories, they would "be internalising what was (to begin with) a two-way process" (n.p.). I wish here to highlight this notion of struggle and to examine the way an awareness of the tensions involved in textual negotiation might result in a kind of "internalising" on the part of the author. An author will, after all – over a period of years and a variety of publications – come inevitably to anticipate a critical presence and to more readily apprehend the inevitable mediating influence of the publishing apparatus, as represented most directly and forcefully by the editor. This anticipation of editorial opposition, I suggest, feeds back into the work as the writer internalises the dynamics of the editorial process, and manifests itself as an oblique sense of anxiety. I frame this anxiety, drawing on Harold Bloom's celebrated theory of poetic transmission, as one of editorial influence.

Adapting Bloom's formulation allows us to focus on the tension and anxiety inherent to the textual encounter. To accept the notion that conflict is essential to successful collaboration is to understand the editing process as inevitably, to some degree, antagonistic – or, to use a term favoured by Bloom, agonistic. Bloom's notion of the "agon," of course, refers to the struggle carried on by "strong poets" against their precursors by way of deliberate misreading; conflict, in his theory, is essential to the creative process, and literary development proceeds through a dialectical process of "both contraction and expansion" as the "ratios of revision" alternate with the processes

of creation (*Anxiety* 95). This conflict is understood within a paradigm of solitary creation, however, as the singular artist wrestles with a chosen “prior poet”: the social dynamics of textual production are narrowed to relationships between individual artists, and the possibility of editorial agency is not considered.¹⁸⁹ Bloom’s notion of poetic struggle, then, has little to say about the social processes of composition – and, specifically, the dynamics of editorial intervention – which this study has taken as an object of examination, or about the way in which this “dialectical process” might involve editorial agency: the “revisionary ratios” upon which he outlines do not incorporate the evidence of literal textual revision.¹⁹⁰ My borrowing of Bloom’s terminology, therefore, does not imply an acceptance of all of the assumptions upholding his theoretical apparatus. It is, rather, grounded in the belief that Bloom’s diagnosis of anxious self-definition as an essential dynamic in creation and his view of literary development as a contest for aesthetic supremacy (a “battle between strong equals” (11)) can be productively brought into contact with theories that emphasise the social nature of writing.

One of these points of contact can be found in Bloom’s emphasis on the future-oriented nature of the condition he diagnoses: “the anxiety of influence,” he writes, “is an anxiety in expectation of *being flooded*” (57, italics in original). While the writer is concerned with overcoming the force of the precursor or “prior poet,” therefore, the fear is of future influence. Bloom is drawing on Freud here in order to advance a notion of

¹⁸⁹ In a line that summarises the thesis of *The Anxiety of Influence*, the qualifying clause explicitly limits the theory to the psychological struggles between individual artists: “*Poetic Influence - when it involves two strong, authentic poets, - always proceeds by a misreading of the prior poet, an act of creative correction that is actually and necessarily a misinterpretation*” (30, italics and capitals in original).

¹⁹⁰ To take one example, Bloom invokes *The Waste Land* as an example of how Eliot “became a master at reversing the *apophrades*” and thus succeeded in overcoming the influence of Tennyson: Pound’s involvement in the poem’s production is not mentioned (142, italics in original).

“separation anxiety” in a parallel between poetic and biological birth: however, his emphasis on the forward-looking nature of this tension – the way it implicitly operates in relation to an impending textual event – is useful in considering the editorial transaction. McGann, after all, also emphasises the future-oriented nature of literary work when he argues that being in “the textual condition” is to be “constrained and determined by a future which at all points impinges upon [the] present text” (TC 95). This sense of the approaching future – whether manifested as excitement or apprehension – is an inevitable aspect of the editing process, as Eggert’s definition stresses: “an editor,” in his words, “mediates . . . between the text or texts . . . and the audience of *the anticipated publication*” (*Securing* 156, italics added). We might consider the anxiety of editorial influence, then, as a sense of unease informed by past textual mediation and an awareness of the inevitability of the way in which synchronic writing processes will lead, via this mediation, to a diachronic publication.

In the following section, I trace this sense of anxiety through Carver and Wallace’s late work as they reckon with the role of the editor in their fiction. In Carver’s late stories we see him obliquely representing the difficulties involved in social authorship in narratives that dramatize the struggle of co-authorship and the resulting separation of author from work. In Wallace, we see an increasingly auto-editorial presence in his drafting process, a critical dialogue with the writing self that contributes towards the structural deadlock of his final novel.

4.2.1 “The handwriting business”: Carver’s Editorial Anxiety

In Chapter Two we saw how, in the final stages of Carver and Lish’s collaboration, their struggle over textual control was often carried on obliquely and in public: paratextual materials show barely-concealed efforts to assert control over the production and interpretation of the texts they produced. Critical accounts of the end of their relationship have tended to describe it as ending in a clean break. Monti, for example, writes that “after *Cathedral*, the writer and editor finally parted ways: Carver to become the praised master of the short story and Lish to continue his work as fiction editor, talent scout, and writer with discontinuous success and a slow descent in popularity on the literary scene” (62–63). Stull has declared that with *Cathedral*, Carver “declared his independence as a master. In the five years that remained to him, the only ‘outside’ influences on his work were Gallagher and Chekhov” (“Biographical Essay” n.p.), while in his assessment of the Lish papers, Max suggested that the editor’s influence could be viewed as an “apprenticeship” that the author ultimately “transcended” (“Carver Chronicles” n.p.).¹⁹¹ This, I suggest, is to simplify the issue somewhat. While these

¹⁹¹ Gallagher’s editorial influence on Carver’s work throughout the 1980s is significant: it is beyond doubt that Carver sought her collaboration with his later stories, and there is at least one documented instance of this in the manuscripts for “Errand,” which show that she suggested some lines for the story’s ending. I have chosen to leave their collaboration outside the scope of this study primarily because, as Stull and Carroll have noted, it is a large enough subject to merit a study of its own. The two lived together for a decade, and the terms of their writing partnership – namely, collaboration between two married writers – are distinctly different from the editing relationships at the heart of this study, in which the institutional affiliation of the editors was so clearly central to the work undertaken. Indeed, much of Carver and Gallagher’s collaboration clearly took place at a pre-textual stage (as Max notes, their work together was frequently “so intimate that no traces were likely to remain” (“Carver Chronicles” n.p.)) and thus resists scholarly reconstruction. Stull and Carroll’s essay “Two Darings,” which served as the introduction to Gallagher’s book *Soul Barnacles: Ten More Years with Ray* (a collection of essays, diary entries and poetry

statements perhaps hold true as factual descriptions of the men's working relationship, they simplify and underplay the extent to which Lish's extensive and continuous involvement in Carver's career continued to inform the author's writing life.

The most obvious evidence for this lies in Carver's interviews, and the way in which they show – as I discussed in Chapter Two – that the author was continually obliged to respond to questions about his early style. Interviewers repeatedly probed Carver on the question of Minimalism and his supposed stylistic “evolution.” In 1986, Carver denied the stylistic tag in conversation with John Alton, later crediting the shift to a more “hopeful” and “positive” style to “the circumstances of my life” such as sobriety and remarriage; in the same year, he claimed (to Stull) that the different versions of “So Much Water So Close to Home” derive from “a period when I rewrote everything”; and in 1987, he told David Applefield that the stories in *Cathedral* “weren't pared down as much as the earlier stories” and were “fuller, more generous” as a result (CWRC 153–167; 187; 209–210). At times, interviewers asked him directly about his former editor, as Michael Schumacher did in 1987. Carver responded with praise both effusive and evasive, praising Lish for being “a great advocate for my stories” and “very important to me at a time when I needed to hear what he had to offer” while ignoring the question of textual editing: elsewhere in the same interview, he repeated the claim that stories republished in *Fires* and *Cathedral* were his own “revisions” (CWRC 229–235). Even in the spring of 1988, during one of the final interviews of his life, Carver was describing his later stories as “more companionable” and “more affirmative” than his early ones (CWRC 245). Even if we leave aside speculations about the way in which personal feelings may have lingered,

relating to the couple's time together, published in 2000), provides an overview of their “creative collaboration” and contains a reproduction of the relevant draft page from “Errand” (1–11).

then, we can see that the success of Carver's work with Lish, and its importance in defining the parameters within which his subsequent work would be judged, ensured that the relationship remained a continuous presence in the author's public life. The after-effects of these editorial experiences, I suggest, echo within Carver's post-*WWTA* writing, much of which reflects upon processes of mediation and textual negotiation.

The title story of *Cathedral*, for example, has been tentatively considered in these terms by a handful of Carver critics. The narrative, which depicts a churlish, unlikeable narrator achieving a moment of unexpected transcendence when his wife's blind friend offers to help him draw a cathedral, could be read as depicting a process of co-authorship. Runyon, for example, argues that the story "invites us to reflect on artistic collaboration" and notes that "the blind man . . . learned from the television program that a cathedral is a collaborative effort among generations" (170). He explores a connection, first made at the close of Max's 1998 piece, between the story and comments that Carver made during a question-and-answer session at Akron University in the spring of 1982, after the story had been first published:¹⁹²

So take advice, if it's someone you trust, take any advice you can get. Make use of it. This is a farfetched analogy, but it's in a way like building a fantastic cathedral. The main thing is to get the work of art together. You don't know who built those cathedrals, but they're there.

Ezra Pound said, "It's immensely important that great poems be written, but makes not a jot of difference who writes them."

That's it. That's it exactly. (*CWRC* 23)

Runyon notes the loss of "control" so necessary to collaboration, claiming that at the story's close, "their joint effort becomes something more like a true collaboration, the kind of collaboration that made cathedrals possible" (171). He notes the way that the

¹⁹² Sklenicka dates the composition of the story to the summer of 1981, noting that it was bought for publication by *Atlantic Monthly* in July of that year (371–372). It was published there in September 1981, and republished in *Cathedral* in 1983.

controlling image of the blind man's fingers at the close of "Cathedral" – "his fingers rode my fingers and my hand went over the paper. It was like nothing else in my life up to now" – echoes the moment at the close of the previous story, "The Bridle," in which the narrator (upon finding an abandoned horse's bridle left in her motel by a guest) muses that "Reins go up over the head and up to where they're held on the neck between the fingers" (171;CS 513, 528).¹⁹³ Craig Raine reads the story's conclusion in a less positive light, arguing that the narrative is a self-revelatory one displaying exactly "what Carver thought of Gordon Lish":

It is a story about writing, a story about the editorial process – in which someone without talent is used by someone else to write. The major contributor is the blind man. . . It was brave of Carver to write the story. And it is odd that no one, I think, has seen what it is about – mainly because it tells us something we'd rather not know – that Carver had courage to disclose the raw material, this kind of self-exposure, but Lish had the literary talent. (n.p.)

The narrative, he suggests, is an oblique confession that implicitly credits the editor with the skills of literary artifice that enabled the achievement of Carver's stories. Without accepting Raine's harsh value judgement on Carver's technique (or necessarily accepting the neatness of the analogy) we may nevertheless note the correspondence between literary collaboration and the narrative presentation of two agents jointly holding the pen. Indeed, read at this remove, it is difficult not to read "Cathedral" as a meditation (oblique at the time, but rather less so in the light of the biographical evidence) upon the uncomfortable dynamics of multiple authorship.

The presence of Lish's "fingers" (to pick up on Runyon's metaphor) in "Cathedral" is less pervasive – and, as the correspondence and drafts show, more consensual – but nevertheless present in the version of this story published in the eponymous collection

¹⁹³ Saltzman also notes that "the bridle is a clear symbol of restraint, of being controlled from without" (142).

(and later republished in *Where I'm Calling From*). Moreover, the story itself allegorizes writing as a social act and also gestures towards the institutional structures – the “cathedrals” – that surround these acts: a recognition that “literary production . . . is a social and institutional event” (McGann, *Critique* 100). While the scene of the men’s collaboration is private and domestic, it does not require a great interpretive stretch to link their shared efforts to the social processes of the writer-editor relationship or, as McGurl does with Carver’s oeuvre as a whole, to the institutionalization of literature as a university-based activity in the years spanning the author’s career. Carver Country, as McGurl notes, was located as much on a campus as in a trailer park, and he reads Carver’s valorization of literary craft as exemplary of the “dialectic of shame and pride” structuring “American educational theory and practice” (*PE* 281–284). The analogy between the act of creation accomplished by the men in “Cathedral” and the works of fiction jointly produced by Carver and Lish is, though, incomplete. The story itself ends in transcendence, depicting only the moment of joyful artistic achievement, without the contentious aftermath. The stakes for the men’s fictional act of creation are low indeed: we assume that the image of the cathedral resulting from their collaboration will not enter the artistic marketplace, and that the attribution of the work will not be contested. The disjunction between the processes of social literary production – the acquisition of “craft” through shared knowledge and practice, the communal energies of the editorial office and the university classroom – and the singular attribution of a work of fiction on the literary marketplace is not dramatized. This division, I suggest, shows itself later in Carver’s work, to a degree largely unexamined in criticism thus far.

Speaking on the occasion of the publication of Carver's *Collected Stories* in 2009, Gallagher suggested that the author's long letter to his editor on July 8th 1980 shows an awareness of a textual shift that will be both shameful and irrevocable:

His torn state of mind is clearly evident in that letter to Gordon Lish. Ray understands that he owes a great deal to his editor. He also knows that his vision and accomplishment in the stories have been altered so radically that the result will separate him from his work in a painful, compromising way. (Kelley 2–3)

The editorial incursion into his stories was, she suggests, a discomfiting and traumatic one: "I do think he felt the story had been violated" (Kelley 4). Elsewhere, Sklenicka frames the arrangement in terms that point to a similar sense of complicity and shame: "Lish's influence on Carver's work became a kind of Faustian secret for Carver" ("Conversation" n.p.). We might recall that in the letter to which Gallagher refers here, the author suggested that some of the stories were, autobiographically and emotionally, "too close" for an extensive edit to be acceptable to him: "my very sanity is on the line here." He described the prospect of accepting the editorial intervention as a kind of authorial transgression, suggesting that the result would be a sense of separation affecting his relationship to the very act of writing:

If the book comes out and I can't feel the kind of pride and pleasure in it that I want, if I feel I've somehow too far stepped out of bounds, crossed that line a little too far, why then I can't feel good about myself, or maybe even write again; right now I feel it's that serious, and if I can't feel absolutely good about it, I feel I'd be done for. I do. (08 July 1980)

We might also recall Carver's fear, as he expressed it to Lish two years later, that if he expected the editor to "re-write" his subsequent stories "from top to bottom," he would be fatally "inhibited": "the pen will fall right out of my fingers, and I may not be able to pick it up" (11 Aug 1982).

Some of the dynamics on display here reveal themselves, I suggest, at key moments in Carver's later stories. Several of these contain a more ostentatiously

metatextual dimension than the bulk of Carver's early work: the narrator of "Intimacy," for example, visits his ex-wife in order to gather materials for his fiction, while the late story "Errand" dramatizes the final hours of Chekhov.¹⁹⁴ However, my focus here will be on "Blackbird Pie," which was first published in the *New Yorker* on July 7th, 1986 (Sklenicka suggests that it was written earlier the same year (442–43). The narrator of the story begins by describing a night in his study when, upon hearing a noise in the corridor, he looked up to see "an envelope slide under the door" (CS 598). The envelope, the narrator tells us, was addressed to him, and the nature of the letter inside (and of the story's plot) immediately becomes apparent to the reader:

I say "purported" because even though the grievances could only have come from someone who'd spent twenty-three years observing me on an intimate, day-to-day basis, the charges were outrageous and completely out of keeping with my wife's character. Most important, however, the handwriting was not my wife's handwriting. But if it wasn't her handwriting, then whose was it? (CS 598)

This problem will structure the remainder of the story, even as the reader comes to realise its illusory and absurd nature. The narrator proceeds to quote from the letter, which announces his wife's desire for an amicable separation, but breaks off repeatedly to address what Sklenicka calls the "impossible textual puzzle" facing him (443): even while he acknowledges the unlikelihood of any third-party interference and the implausible nature of his disbelief – "How much more can I say and still retain credibility?" – he insists that he remains, even after many years, "convinced" of the fact that "it was not her handwriting that covered the pages of the letter" (CS 601). He cites

¹⁹⁴ Claire Fabre-Clark notes the increased prevalence of "writer-characters" in Carver's late work (173–74). A metatextual awareness, it should be noted, is not entirely absent from the author's early work: indeed, McGurl shows how "the theme of the writing life as an occupation" underlies early stories such as "Night School," and "Put Yourself in My Shoes" (PE 273–81). However, the presence of self-referential literary tropes within the stories is, for the most part, far more prominent in those written after 1980.

his familiarity with his wife's handwriting as well as his conviction that she would never underline words for emphasis (as the writer of the letter has done), finally stating his case clearly:

What I want to say, all I want to say, is that while the sentiments expressed in the letter may be my wife's, may even hold *some* truth – be legitimate, so to speak – the force of the accusations levelled against me is diminished, if not entirely undermined, even discredited, because she *did not* in fact write the letter. Or, if she *did* write it, then discredited by the fact that she didn't write it in her own handwriting! Such evasion is what makes men hunger for facts. (CS 601–602, italics in original)

The narrator presently leaves the house, finding his wife – who is holding her suitcase – in the yard, and the remaining pages of the story provide ample evidence of his delusion as she refers repeatedly to her “letter” and proceeds to leave their home (and, presumably, marriage). A dreamlike atmosphere prevails as several horses graze in the couple's yard and the local sheriff and deputy arrive to convey the wife elsewhere: watching her leave, the narrator still finds “the handwriting business” a “bewilderment” (607-613).

In “Blackbird Pie,” then, the authorial status of the written document is central to the plot, and the protagonist's inability to accept its attribution is a structural feature; our narrator reads the text with the uncanny, unshakeable conviction that it has been inexplicably separated from its author. The separation of the writer from the work is a “bewilderment” that the narrator is unable to surmount. Sklenicka reads the story biographically, noting its place in a “run of stories” drawing on family material and dealing with marital separation (442-443) and suggests that the husband's inability to recognise his wife's handwriting indicates his emotional paralysis: the story, she writes, demonstrates the “well-worn truth” that “people change and are no longer recognizable to their own spouses” (443). It is, however, possible to read it as a metafictional meditation on writing in which the threat of textual mediation hovers as an unresolved

and inexplicable difficulty. The textual integrity of the letter has, in the mind of the narrator, been violated, and the written word is suspected of being uncannily unstable. The reactions of his wife suggest a similar discomfort on her part with the reliability of the document. When he demands explanations, she exclaims ““You didn’t read my letter, did you? You might have skimmed it, but you didn’t read it. Admit it!”” (607). She refers to the letter several times, stating ““it’s all in the letter you read’,” and anxiously repeats: ““It’s all in the letter – everything’s spelled out in the letter. The rest in is the area of – I don’t know. Mystery or speculation, I guess. In any case, there’s nothing in the letter you don’t already know”” (CS 608, 611).

The story dramatizes the persistent failure of language and the instability of textual communication. Recalling the couple’s silent dinner on the night in question, the narrator suggests that “something – a few words maybe – was needed to round things off and put the situation right again,” and the departure of his wife results in an unprecedented linguistic failure: “for the first time in my life I felt at a loss for words” (CS 603, 611). This failure of language is most evident, however, in its written transmission. The narrator performs his own act of mediation throughout the story, presenting three excerpts from his wife’s letter (which, he tells us, he can reproduce because “things stick in my head” (599)). His selectivity is clear, as he reproduces her words only “in part” (599), and, by the time he presents her third extract, he has decided to deliberately perform an act of editorial fragmentation:

But now here’s the curious thing. Instead of beginning to read the letter through, from start to finish, or even starting at the point where I’d stopped earlier, I took pages at random and held them under the table lamp, picking out a line here and a line there. This allowed me to juxtapose the charges made against me until the entire indictment (for that’s what it was) took on quite another character – one more acceptable, since it had lost its chronology and, with it, a little bit of its punch. (CS 605)

The text that follows is fragmented and presents a kind of hallucinatory poetic collage of domestic destruction (or, perhaps, deconstruction):

. . . withdrawing further into . . . a small enough thing, but . . . talcum powder sprayed over the bathroom, including walls and baseboards . . . a shell . . . not to mention the insane asylum . . . until finally . . . a balanced view . . . the grave. Your "work" . . . Please! Give me a break . . . No one, not even . . . Not another word on the subject! . . . The children . . . but the real issue . . . not to mention the loneliness. . . Jesus H. Christ! Really! I mean . . . (605–606, ellipses in original)

The narrator thus enacts a textual interference of his own as he deliberately rearranges and excises the words on the page; the domestic trauma depicted in so many of Carver's stories is conveyed here in unprecedentedly linguistic terms.

The text is studded with clichés which are conspicuously italicized, as the narrator himself appears to register a sense of the instability of language: "But there was *something else afoot* tonight"; "I was, I think, *in a rage*"; "It was at that moment I heard *the muted sound of a doorknob being turned*"; I found it *worth noting* that both men were wearing hats"; "then *I took heart* and said to my wife . . ." (604–611, italics in original). The story is pervaded by a metafictional impulse that continually draws attention to its own language. During an interview conducted soon after the story appeared, Carver was asked about "the deconstructionists," and his answer was unequivocal: he professed no affinity with their approach to literature ("we don't share any common assumptions") and described their "way of thinking" as "downright creepy" (CWRC 159–160).¹⁹⁵ In "Blackbird Pie," though, we see some of the most celebrated ideas

¹⁹⁵ In answer to John Alton's question (posed during an interview conducted in October 1986), "Do you know much about the deconstructionists?" Carver replied: "A little. Enough to know that they're crazy. They're a very strange bunch. They really don't have that much to do with literature, do they? They don't even *like* literature very much. I don't think they do, anyway. They see it as a series of texts and textual problems and writers as signifiers and such like." He went on to assert that while the deconstructionist

of poststructuralist thought figured as literary motifs: the text seemingly divorced from its author, words ostentatiously estranged from their referents, and a continual sense of language evading the subject's grasp. This textual instability is presented as an uncanny (even, perhaps, "creepy") event that causes the narrator "to feel *uneasy*" and soon to experience anger and "panic" (CS 604, italics in original). The sense of textual mediation – called forth by a letter, which could be said to exemplify the text on the point of being socialised¹⁹⁶ – hovers throughout the narrative as an opaque and inexplicable threat.

Even as the narrator's wife leaves, the couple seek stability in language, as the wife promises to "write after I'm settled" and the narrator notes (commenting on the suitability of his word choice) that the deputy sheriff "tooted" his horn on his way from the house (612). At the story's conclusion, he concedes that "the letter is not paramount at all – there's far more to this than somebody's handwriting," but his closing remarks return the focus towards the written word:

It could be said, for instance, that to take a wife is to take a history. And if that's so, then I understand that I'm outside history now – like horses and fog. Or you could say that my history has left me. Or that I'm having to go on without history. Or that history will now have to do without me – unless my wife writes more letters, or tells a friend who keeps a diary, say. Then, years later, someone can look back on this time, interpret it according to the record, its scraps and tirades, its silences and innuendos. That's when it dawns on me that autobiography is the poor man's history. And that I am saying goodbye to history. Good-bye, my darling. (CS 613)

The focus, here, returns to the material documents of a life, and the narrator seems, while claiming to be "outside history," to hold out hope for the persistence of written

critics with which he was familiar were "very cordial, very smart, immaculate dressers, and all that . . . we're not even talking about the same thing when we talk about literature" (CWRC 160).

¹⁹⁶ Churchwell notes, in her analysis of Ted Hughes' *Birthday Letters*, the way in which letters "ambivalently bridge the public and the private": "letters," she suggests, "could be said to literalize the move from the private to the public, as they move from the sender 'out' into the world" ("Your Sentence" 279).

communication. The writings that make up an archive (or a genetic dossier), he hints, will remain – “more letters,” “a diary” – and the textual evidence will be “interpreted” in his absence.

4.2.2 “A recipe for a brick”: *The Pale King* in Progress

On the 6th of December, 2000, Wallace took to the podium in the Lensic Performing Arts Center in Santa Fe as part of a Lannan Foundation event in order to read portions of his as-yet unpublished work. During his brief introduction to his reading, he explained:

I’ve almost got a picture or a recipe for a brick in my pocket – I’ve got four fragments, two of which are fragments of a larger fragment, and one of which I’ve been told is too disturbing to read out loud” (J. O’Brien).

These fragments were two parts of the “kissing boy” narrative, which Wallace read either side of the story on Stecyk’s childhood (later §36 and §5 of *The Pale King* respectively) and the story that would later be published as *Oblivion’s* “Incarnations of Burned Children.” Wallace’s comments here are suggestive for a number of reasons – the aside at the end of the sentence, for example, demonstrates evidence of (probably informal) editorial advice and serves as a reminder of the fact that Wallace frequently anticipated the responses to his own work within that work’s presentation. However, I will focus here on the phrase “a picture or a recipe for a brick,” a revealing description that shows the author’s own tentative description of his work in process. The word “brick” suggests that Wallace was, at this relatively early stage, thinking of the final work as a lengthy one and an object perhaps physically dense enough to rival its predecessor (a novel often described as a “doorstop” by critics (Clark; McGurl, “Institution” 36)). The hedging in his description of the fragments, meanwhile – “a picture *or* a recipe for a brick” – highlights the difficulty, even for the writer himself, of classifying the work in progress.

Writing in development, after all, may exist in a number of iterations and states of completion and its provisional nature means that it always resists categorisation: critics are invariably led to metaphorical descriptions in their attempts to represent it. Daniel Ferrer explores a number of these in his reflection on the empirical status of writers' manuscripts, suggesting that the draft page:

. . . can be compared to a musical score, which is not melodious, not even sonorous, but engenders music; or to the colour names jotted down by the painter on a rapid pencil sketch, which are not pictorial elements in themselves . . . but instructions towards a future picture (n.p.).

Several reviewers of *The Pale King* described the published work in terms that also evoke uncompleted works in other modes of art; John Jeremiah Sullivan invited the reader to "think of a big mural that was half done" and Hari Kunzru invoked the image of "the broken columns beloved of Romantic painters" while Lev Grossman's description mixed metaphors of architectural structure and the human body: "a construction site of a novel . . . with the barest skeleton of a plot" (J. J. Sullivan n.p.; Kunzru n.p.; Grossman n.p.). The difficulty of conceptualizing a writer's work in process is illustrated in Wallace's papers for *The Pale King*, which demonstrate the range of tools, tricks and techniques that constitute written drafts: these highlight the fact that manuscript documents cannot, as Hannah Sullivan notes, be assumed to possess "a similar quality of draftliness," since they often "represent many different strata of composition" (WOR 127–28). Some textual elements, for example, could perhaps be understood as pieces of scaffolding intended to bolster a future structure, implicitly provisional parts to be removed before completion: examples of these include placeholder names, notes at the head or close of sections, and the author's questions and instructions to himself. Early drafts of the Fogle monologue show several examples of these types of notation, with the first page of one draft

displaying tentative plot ideas, a bullet-point list of details to be included (e.g. “choker of wooden beads”) and updated or alternate character names (a note in blue pen mentions “R. Van Note” while an adjacent note appears to suggest amending the name to “Denny Shinn”). Notes throughout the drafts, too, contain what are clearly questions and instructions towards future revisions or clarifications and sometimes give messages of self-encouragement. These notes tend to appear either in the margin (beside a specific section of text) or embedded within the text (with brackets and bold face distinguishing them from the text itself): examples from different pages include “Compressable”; “Bad prose alert”; “are they divorced?”; “This is pretty good” (38.6, 39.6).

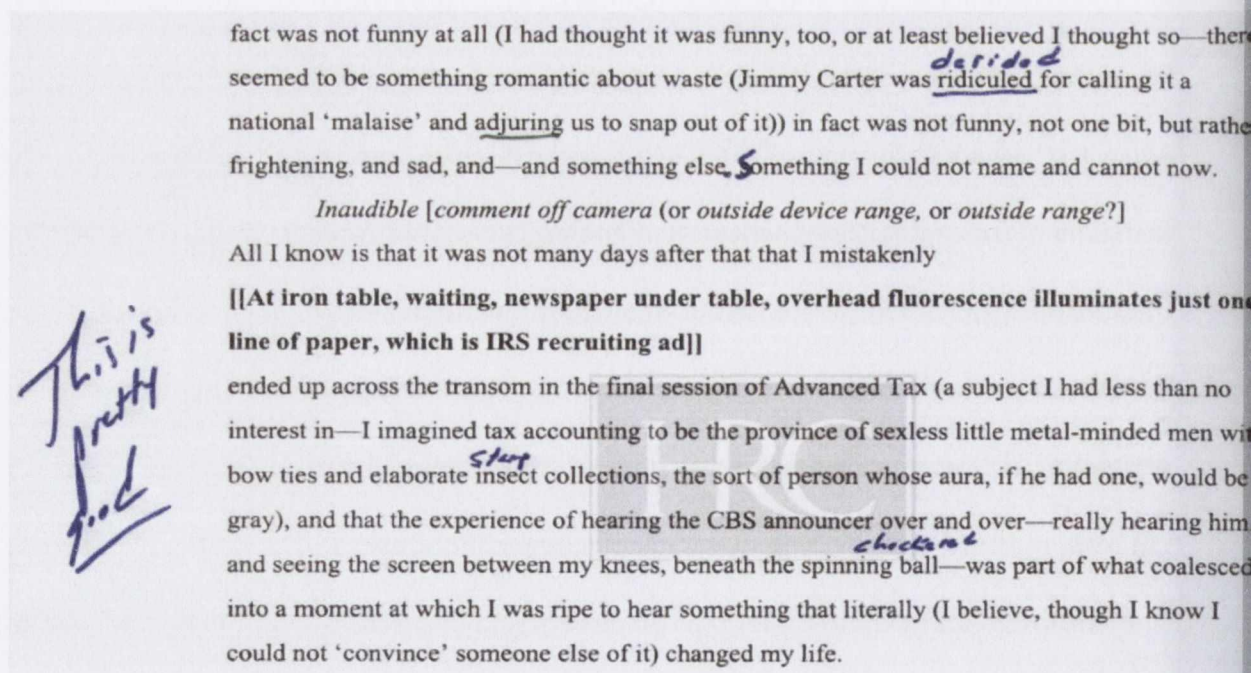


Figure 10: Excerpt from a draft of Chris Fogle’s monologue (Wallace papers 39.6)

The notion of a sketch for a painting could perhaps be useful in understanding handwritten drafts or Wallace's "zero drafts," which were sometimes typed with explicit definitions or reminders of their tentative nature. An early draft of the "Happy Hour" chapter of the novel appearing to date from 2005, for example, is headed with the words ">0 Draft of Drinion and Meredith Rand **VERY ROUGH; .5 DRAFT> NOT EVEN A FIRST DRAFT**" (39.7) (Bold face in original). Other elements such as those often found in Wallace's notebooks – research materials, lists of possible character names, intertextual references, snatches of descriptive prose – could be likened to the raw materials for a meal; namely, elements that will be present in the work's final form, if only as a trace. The "Klimt Notebook," for example, contains quotes and references from what may be source texts (one page lists quotes from Brecht, Hegel and Gibran), jottings on character names that would end up in later drafts ("Last name: Lehr!"), and similes and one-liners probably intended for later use ("Trying to teach an accountant marketing is like trying to teach a fish about fire") (41.6). This type of material can also be found in early chapter drafts: one of the early iterations of the Fogle chapter contains several pages of printouts from Wikipedia pages for drugs like Adderall and Cylert, research that most likely informed the descriptions of the Obetrol that Fogle adopts as his drug of choice in college. A "recipe," meanwhile – to return to Wallace's word – will of course contain instructions on both the superstructure of the final meal as well as details on the placements and proportions of individual elements. In fact, it seems that this "recipe" was precisely the element with which Wallace had the greatest difficulty: as Pietsch notes, the work is lacking "an outline" or anything "that could be called a set of directions or instructions" ("Editor's Note" vii–xii).

Genetic criticism can be useful here precisely because of its ongoing interest in these questions. Indeed, Ferrer's description of a draft as "a protocol for making a text" is a particularly suggestive phrase when applied to *The Pale King*, a novel in which the word "protocol" appears repeatedly (Reynolds and Sylvanshine negotiate a protocol for the following week in their conversation, for example, while David Wallace tells us that he is "making it a point to violate protocol" and address the reader directly (TPKb 371–2, 69)). The word's primary meaning refers to established rules governing specific social practices – the OED refers to "the accepted code of procedure or behaviour in a particular situation" – and is clearly relevant to the way in which the work's metafictional sections interrogate the exchange between writer and reader. The word's resonance to the world of computing is surely deliberate, too (OED: "a set of rules governing the exchange or transmission of data between devices") in a novel that dramatises the onset of the computer age and questions the way in which data is exchanged and processed. However, the second meaning given by the OED – "the original draft of a diplomatic document, especially of the terms of a treaty agreed to in conference and signed by the parties" – is also highly suggestive here. A protocol in this sense suggests an ongoing process subject to negotiation between competing interests, and these interests may not only take the form of external pressures (such as commercial and editorial demands) but also of internal ones, such as the different intentions put into play by the varying creative impulses of the writer as well as the demands of the different chronological stages of composition. If a writer can be said to be his or her own "first reader" (Van Hulle, *MM* 11), he or she will inevitably (and repeatedly) return to the work with an auto-editorial perspective. As the writer becomes an editor, therefore, the fracturing of writerly selves means that the draft page becomes a diplomatic document taking on a dialogic character:

this is what Ferrer refers to when he claims that “the draft page is the locus of a dialogue between the writer and his later self or selves” (n.p.).

from Ron if you want to smoke, [because Meibeyer’s has had problems with ashtrays disappearing, hard as that is to really believe given their chintziness.] She extinguishes the cigarette a bit more thoroughly and emphatically than she usually does, in order to reinforce a certain tonal impatience in what she says as she puts the cigarette out: ‘All right then.’

[DW: WAY TOO MUCH DESCRIPTION AND EXPO INTERRUPTING THE DIALOGUE. A LOT OF THIS CAN BE CONSIDERED NOTES TO SELF AND WILL BE CUT FROM ACTUAL SCENE IF THIS GETS USED.]

Drinion rotates his upper body slightly in his chair to see just where Keith Sabusawa is at the bar. Rand is ninety percent sure that the movement isn’t any sort of performance or anything that is meant to communicate something nonverbally to her. Outside in the sky to the northwest are great sheer walls of rimlit sunset clouds in whose interior there is sometimes muttering and light. None of the people in The Hat can see

Figure 11: Excerpt from a draft of The Pale King (Wallace papers 39.7)

The writing process thus makes the resulting work auto-dialogic. It is not difficult to identify this quality as a characteristic one in Wallace’s work, and critics have long noted the extent to which his work dramatizes competing energies and ideas: as far back as 1997, James Wood noted that *ASFTINDA* displayed “the zeitgeist auto-grappling, in all its necessary confusions” while more recently, Kelly took Bakhtin’s concept of dialogism as the framework for a detailed discussion of the progression in Wallace’s use of dialogue in his novels (Max, *ELS* 228–29; Kelly, “Dialogue”). A.O. Scott’s influential essay from 2000 on the author, in fact, adapted Bloom’s formulation to suggest that Wallace was afflicted by a “panic of influence” with regard to his precursors, pointing to the way in which the author’s fiction portrays “the self-dramatizing frustrations of the creative process”

("Panic of Influence" n.p.). A genetic view allows us to consider the link between the inevitable layers of auto-revision involved in literary composition and the competing energies and ideas animating fictional productions and thus to see the dialogic nature of Wallace's work, at least in part, as both a result of and response to the writing process itself. Drafts can allow us not only to see the inherent "fluidity" of literary texts (which, as John Bryant notes, is usually hidden from readers) but to examine the way, as Bradley puts it in his discussion of the drafts of Ellison's final novel, to see "writerly conflicts" as a force within the "living text" opened up by draft material (Bryant, *FT* 64–6; Bradley 4–15).

I have referred to studies by Fordham, Sullivan and Van Hulle that focus on the way in which process informs product and revision informs the meaning of the literary artwork. This type of investigation can also be productively applied to Wallace's work: Fordham notes that Joyce's work demonstrates "how art forms life" and "even provides the model of forms of formation" (223) and it is worth noting here the echo of these words in the epigraph of *The Pale King* (Frank Bidart's "We fill pre-existing forms and when we fill them we change them and are changed"), which immediately suggests the way in which work shapes identity. Fordham's analysis of Joyce's "process of layered revision" in the writing of the "Circe" chapter of *Ulysses*, for example, argues for a correlation between Joyce's compositional techniques and his textual interest in multiple identity, using the textual artefacts of Joyce's drafts to conduct a "genetic biography" and arguing that "the processes of art . . . provide a paradigm for self-transformation and multiple selves" (213–226). As I have demonstrated, the identities of several of *The Pale King's* characters seem to shift and mutate throughout its drafts, leaving a problematic dissonance in the characters of Drinion and Fogle/Shinn, for example. The novel also explicitly dramatizes a problem of mistaken identity in its plot, and a draft note

suggesting that there will be “3 David Wallaces” in the novel is revealing: Fordham notes that identities “multiply like rabbits” in the “Circe” chapter of *Ulysses*, and Wallace’s work could be said to show the same continual fracturing of selves (38.4; Fordham 217).¹⁹⁷

The stylistic tension between different sections of the work, meanwhile, may be partly due to the different stages of composition as well as the author’s own attempt to take discordant approaches to his material. John Jeremiah Sullivan characterised the clash of styles in *The Pale King* in terms of a writer’s internal argument, suggesting that “it’s as if he [Wallace] had inside his head a fully formed hostile critic who despised his own work” (J. J. Sullivan). This antagonism to narrative techniques associated with the author’s own writing is incarnated in moments where the novel’s characters criticise each other’s diegetic strategies: “David Wallace” refers dismissively to Fogle’s habit of “foundering in extraneous detail” while Reynolds loses patience with Sylvanshine’s habit of making him listen to “incidentals” rather than supplying “useful data” (*TPKb* 273, 362). Several chapters also display Wallace’s second-guessing strategies and his habit of pre-emptively incorporating possible responses to the narrative: Fogle displays an awareness of his own digressive storytelling technique (“Does this make any sense?” 216) while the Happy Hour scene includes Rand’s observation that her conversational partner is “tiring,” Drinion’s admission that he is “confused” by her narrative, and her own worry that her story is “boring” (463, 497, 503). The narrator of this scene, in fact, interjects to note the frustration of Rand’s co-workers with her communicative abilities (their judgement is that

¹⁹⁷ An intertextual allusion suggests the extent to which the author was aware of this development: in drafts of the section on Cusk’s childhood (§13 of *The Pale King*), the book the protagonist is reading changes from “*Bleak House*” to “[The Picture of] *Dorian Gray*,” a work far more explicitly structured around the notion of split personality. This change occurs between log#23 and the apparently later draft designated log#6 (both drafts appear to have been composed from May 2006 onward) (36.2, 36.4).

she “just won’t shut up if you get her started” (491)). Fogle and Drinion both cause their conversational partners to rotate their hands in frustration (273, 495).

A hostile critical commentary – indeed, a quasi-editorial, minimalist one – is thus embedded within the narrative at several points, and this is sometimes clearly directed at the author-figure himself. The self-mocking exaggeration of authorial style in the “David Wallace” chapters (Pietsch suggests that the author was “having fun with his persona” in these sections) also incorporates a comical hint of self-disgust in the repeated references to “Wallace”’s horrible skin problems and inability to realise his mistaken assignation (Pietsch, “Feldman”; *TPKb* 288, 311, 337, 339). Even without Pietsch’s posthumous intervention, therefore, it seems likely that any iteration of *The Pale King* would have encoded the process within the product, like ostentatious sketch lines left in a painting. Indeed, a comparison with the self-editing techniques of the high modernists is instructive here. Sullivan writes of modernist writers’ propensity for “leaving traces of the revision in the final product” (*WOR* 22) and discusses the “thematized self-critique” in Jake’s narrative in Hemingway’s manuscript of *The Sun Also Rises*. Hemingway, she reports, also wrote anxious notes to himself about narrative technique within his drafts, and the novel’s genetic development reveals that the writer eventually removed Jake’s “hesitant and self-reflective monologue”; this, by contrast, is exactly what Wallace amplified in *The Pale King* (115–116).¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁸ In a recent review of *The David Foster Wallace Reader*, Paul Quinn alluded to Hemingway with the observation that in “The Planet Trillaphon,” there are “early flexings. . . of what will become familiar Wallacian rhetorical ploys, like the frustrated claim that one can only describe the tip of some informational iceberg, before proceeding to narrate a tip of iceberg proportions” (3); Wallace’s drafts provide genetic confirmation of the comparison.

The dialogic nature of composition thus sometimes renders the experience of reading Wallace's drafts like looking at minutes of a protracted board meeting. While this sense of internal division may be a source of dramatic tension in the aforementioned scenes, it appears to have resulted in a kind of structural stalemate at a wider level. Indeed, if we treat *The Pale King* as the result of a dialogue between the writer's many selves, then Wallace's conversation with himself became, primarily, a conversation about the difficulty of completing the work. The work is, after all, studded with images of incomplete or damaged structures. Examples include the "slapdash and unsound tree house" that Sylvanshine and "the Roman Catholic boy" had attempted to construct as children; the "abortive SSP [Self-Storage Parkway] construction" caused by a "horrific mess of litigation and engineering mishaps"; the "easily correctable institutional idiocy" that causes a "snafu" resulting in the complicated floor layout in the REC; the complicated carts of the "turdnagels," whose "jerry-rigged" nature causes them to clatter distractingly; and the "big structural crisis" that Fogle gets "stuck dealing with" during the Chicago blizzard of '79, as he is attempting to "make a meaningful, real-world choice" (TPKb 14, 237, 298, 307, 239). The language in other instances seems to hint less obliquely at the difficulties of novelistic practice as, for example, Sylvanshine's struggle to organise a study structure is identified as primarily a narrative difficulty: "what killed him were the story problems" (11). Fogle notices, in the IRS recruiting station he visits, an "overfull wastebasket, around which a litter of balled-up papers suggested idle hours of trying to throw balled-up papers into it – a pastime I knew well from 'studying' at the UIC library" (TPKb 245). Lane Dean's despair as he toils at his desk is accompanied by the sound of tearing paper, summoning an archetypal image of writerly frustration (380–381).

Genetic criticism has, as I noted in my first chapter, sometimes been faulted for an overly biographical approach, but a study of the available material here makes it difficult to avoid the conclusion that in this case, at least, formation has significantly shaped content. Max, after all, quotes several letters from Wallace to Franzen, dating from November 2005 to June 2007, in which the author discusses the difficulties of structuring and revising his novel. In one, Wallace writes of his difficulty in confronting “the idea that I’ll have to write a 5,000 page manuscript and then winnow it by 90%” and uses the image of torn paper as the physical embodiment of the failures involved in this attempt: “stuff literally goes right into the wastebasket after being torn from the top of the legal pad” (*ELS* 289). The aforementioned chapter featuring Lane Dean’s workplace struggles (§33) appears to have been written primarily during this period and while it may not be possible to date the first handwritten draft of the scene, Pietsch’s index indicates that several revisions took place in April 2007.¹⁹⁹ According to Pietsch, Wallace described working on the novel as akin to “wrestling sheets of balsa wood in a high wind,” a description echoed within the novel in Sylvanshine’s failure to study effectively: “It was like trying to build a model in a high wind” (“Editor’s Note” viii; *TPKb* 11).²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁹ The fact that these drafts were almost all composed in a digital medium, of course, highlights the artifice of the ripped-paper image and lends an ironic awareness of compositional medium to the metafictional trope.

²⁰⁰ The drafts of the Sylvanshine chapter appear to have been written in 2005 and 2006. The author’s notes in drafts dated between 1999 and 2001 contain an earlier version of this image: “TRYING TO REVAMP IRS SYSTEM/PERSONNEL SYSTEM/COMPUTER SYSTEM IS LIKE TRYING TO BUILD A CHICKENCOOP IN A HURRICANE” (40.3, capitals in original). Wallace adapted the formulation from Faulkner, as he acknowledged in a letter to DeLillo written while he was struggling to write the essay that would become “Authority and American Usage”: “Different people have quoted to me something Faulkner apparently said about writing being like trying to build a chicken coop in a hurricane, and it’s never quite resonated with me until now” (25 Nov 1998).

Wallace thus used various narrative techniques to deliberately inscribe his working difficulties within the work, and *The Pale King* illustrates the operations of what Bryant refers to as the “self-collaborative feedback” implicit in the creative process (FT 99). In his study of Joseph Conrad’s *Under Western Eyes*, Eggert describes how the author’s manuscripts show that “composition and revision would proceed in unison,” arguing that “a typescript emerged from the ruptures and counteracting continuities of composition, typing, and revision.” By looking at Conrad’s working methods, he argues, we may see how the published version of the work is not “a teleologically preordained one”: a study of the work’s textual journey can allow us, instead, to apprehend “a writer who is not so much looking steadily at the final destination as trying to work out, at every point, where to go next, to discover what the next step will be” (“Conrad’s Working Methods” 10–17). The manuscripts for Wallace’s final novel show a similarly hesitant, painstaking process as the author repeatedly inscribes his frustration and self-doubt within an auto-editorial commentary: in 2006, he wondered, “what if this book just isn’t supposed to be that long?” (36.1).

	it is this boy who dons the bright-orange bandolier and shepherds the really small ones through the crosswalk outside school.”				
357	WIPrevelation “WHAT IF THIS BOOK JUST ISN'T SUPPOSED TO BE ALL THAT LONG?”	1	<i>The Pale King – desktop</i>		2/9/06
358	WPF101 “Look at the Internal Revenue Service agents coming to work at the Peoria/Lake James IL post at 116A-E Reed Road in 1989’s first quarter.”	3	<i>The Pale King – desktop</i>		10/25/04, notes 10-1 to 3-99

Figure 12: Excerpt from Michael Pietsch’s index of documents for *The Pale King* (Wallace papers 36.1)

§9, of course, consists of “David Wallace”’s lengthy semi-explanation of the “tortuous backstory” behind his struggles to publish the book we hold in our hands, a struggle involving a “microscopically cautious [legal] vetting process” instigated at the behest of the publisher and its “corporate counsel” (*TPKb* 70–72). Max writes that by 2005, Wallace’s failure “to write the book had itself risen to a meta-level” (*ELS* 292) and it is not difficult to see the counterfactual “Author here” chapters as a lengthy meditation on the difficulties of telling a story (the “trials and tribulations of process,” in Fordham’s words (2)). The various institutional tensions and publication difficulties could be seen to stand in for the writer’s own working problems here, as the legal delays lamented in the pseudo-autobiographical sections of the narrative echo the discarded pages from Wallace’s “legal pad.” The work certainly seems to have taken on a more metafictional cast as it progressed: the “Author here” chapters were written in the later stage of its composition, and drafts of these chapters (such as the ones numbered 104, 105 and 107 in Pietsch’s index, last saved to disk in August of 2007) are among the latest material visible within the papers in the Ransom Center’s holdings. Metafiction fundamentally depends on the fracturing of selves implied in the act of self-reference, and a chronological, genetic view of the manuscripts of *The Pale King* allows us to view this deliberate multiplication of authorial selves as a process that intensified in response to the increasing difficulties involved in writing the novel. Drafts of §9 show Wallace making explicit links to the metafictional legacy of his postmodern predecessors, and suggest that the author was drawing on this legacy as a result of the problems (here figured as legal necessities) involved in telling his story: in the second draft, the words “the last thing in the world this text is is some kind of precious metafictional titty-pincher” are accompanied by a footnote, crossed out by Wallace in the same draft, reading:

In fact [the] last Barth or Coover I ever read all the way through was 1985, which was also the year I worked at the IRS's Regional Examinations Center in Peoria, IL, where the job was so incredibly tedious and dry that even avant-garde metafiction seemed like a treat in comparison ("Chapter 9").

Indeed, the drafts allow us to see Wallace's own response to this deliberate imbrication of his authorial persona within the story, and to trace the auto-dialogic nature of even the act of this imbrication: in the first draft of §9, a note-to-self at the bottom of the final page asks "Dumb? The real-or-fiction theme is cool. But it could get annoying, especially if it keeps interrupting the narrative." This multiplication of selves is intricately linked with the awareness of the pressures and processes involved in eventual publication. The first draft names his (fictional) literary agent – "Janet Lear of Turner and Lear" – and also mentions that the manuscript is making its way around "the big New York publishing houses"; a note in the margin suggests that part of the way through the chapter will come the news that the manuscript has been accepted and that it is "to be co-edited by Little, Brown's legal dept. along with Mr. Michael Pietsch, to whom I am deeply indebted" ("Chapter 9").

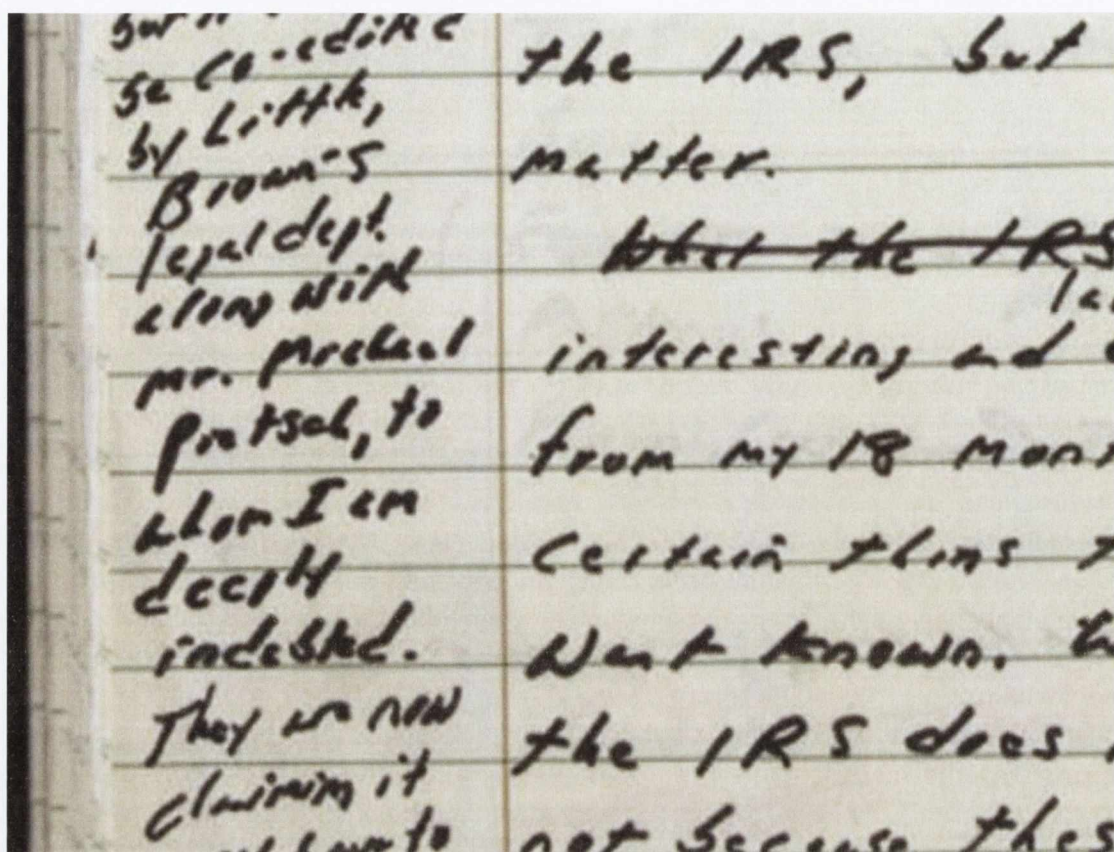


Figure 13: First draft of Ch. 9 of *The Pale King* (Wallace, "Chapter 9," HRC website)

The author thus names his own editor within an early version of the chapter, and the drafts of the pseudo-memoirist's lengthy meditation on the difficulties involved in telling his story begin with specific references to the material circumstances in which *The Pale King* (called, at the time of this first draft, *Net of Gems*) will appear. The fact that the editor appears as a character in the author's fiction suggests the degree to which Wallace internalised the struggles of editorial processes and attempted to subsume these within a metafictional, auto-editorial performance. S.E. Gontarski writes, about the complicated genesis of Beckett's *Not I*, that "the problems Beckett encounters in writing often become the subject of his writing" (*Intent* 148): a similar process is clearly in play here, as editing becomes the most intractable problem of *The Pale King's* process and appears as a recurring trope in the work.

We know from numerous biographical sources, of course, that the account of the specific publishing difficulties related by the narrator in these chapters is entirely untrue – Pietsch claims that “at the time of David’s death . . . I had not seen a word of this novel except for a couple stories he had published in magazines” (“Editor’s Note” viii) – and it is perhaps not too speculative to suggest that Wallace here is using the entire systemic apparatus behind the production of literary fiction as an expression of his own difficulties in finding a way to bring his work to a conclusion, with the publisher and the “corporate counsel” being together invoked as a kind of authorial superego regulating the limits of production. The knowledge of future socialisation, as McGann suggests, clearly constrains and “impinges” upon the textual condition (TC 95) and inevitable publication seems, in this novel, to be anticipated to a suffocating degree: notes in the drafts of §9 read “Some parts blacked out by publisher’s lawyers,” and “Cross-outs & black-outs in actual book,” suggestions which would have encoded the visible marks of the impending editorial process onto the pages of the final product (“Chapter 9,” underlinings in original). The work here becomes a contested document publishable only under conditions of farcical compromise, and the editor occupies the role not only of necessary mediator but also of executive “Decider.” If we can view *The Pale King* as a diplomatic document, then, a protocol subject to negotiation between multiple competing and even hostile authorial selves, it remains unsigned: its editor’s role, ultimately, was to force a compromise between absent and perhaps unwilling parties.

4.2.3 Summary

In both of the cases I have studied, the importance of the editor’s contribution is clear. Many of Lish’s and Pietsch’s activities – the former’s aggressive and perhaps even

coercive textual changes, the latter's assumption of an executive role in the absence of the author – clearly go beyond an auxiliary role; however, we can also detect a more subtle process whereby editorial activity feeds back into the dynamics of writing.

In Carver's case, the work produced late in his career bears submerged traces of the lengthy editorial relationship so essential to his early success. The stories written after his break from Lish display this editorial anxiety in displaced allegories of co-creation and textual change in which the process of textual mediation haunts the compositional process. Wallace, meanwhile, appears in *The Pale King* to subsume the editorial function into his authorial performance: figures who might be described as editorial proxies (not to mention, as we have seen, the editor himself) become characters in the work, and the problem of managing textual, informational and structural excess arguably becomes its central theme. The bulk of the would-be novel appears to have remained in what De Biasi refers to as the "compositional phase" of writing, and its author approached the prospect of the text's socialization with extreme hesitancy (34–35).²⁰¹ Wallace appears to have worked for over a decade on his final novel without inviting editorial comment, and the resulting internalisation of editorial pressures and anxieties is so visible in the extant work that it could be said to define it.

²⁰¹ Apart from those excerpts published in magazine form, little of the work appears even to have entered the "prepublishing phase" characterised by the presence of "definitive manuscript"[s] (De Biasi and Wassenaar 34–35).

CONCLUSION

Considering the Editor

In surveying studies of literary collaboration, Stone and Thompson criticize the tendency to construct “an overarching historical theory from a small number of examples limited by genre, gender, race, and historical context” and suggest that “historical and empirical research” can be more fruitful than theoretical approaches in challenging assumptions about the way working relationships function (310–20). This study has proceeded on the assumption that the workings of the editorial processes in questions can best be illuminated by close attention to material evidence, and that detailed genetic analysis can be more fruitful than theoretical abstraction in clarifying the various tensions and conflicts involved. As such, I hesitate to generalise on the basis of these highly specific interactions (which, of course, are limited by all of the above factors). Lish, for example, is a deeply singular figure: even McGurl’s analysis of the way in which he exemplifies a kind of “programmed” creativity acknowledges the idiosyncratic nature of his own production (Lish’s stories, he writes, are “inconceivable except as the product of Gordon Lish” (*PE* 292)). Pietsch is not as obviously idiosyncratic in his aesthetic or working methods but is described by Gessen, nevertheless (due to his simultaneous dedication to commercial imperatives and author satisfaction), as “not a typical editor” (846). Wallace’s distinctive drafting process, as I have discussed, cannot comfortably stand in (as Hannah Sullivan attempts to make it do) for the compositional methods of his generation, and his work can be better understood through inquiry into the specifics of his drafting process. A similar desire for precision lies behind my inclination to preserve a distinction between

authorial and editorial roles. While the two undoubtedly overlap at crucial moments – we have seen, for example, Lish’s “authoring” of the endings of certain Carver stories, as well as Wallace’s increasingly fierce channelling of auto-editorial energy – I argue that this overlap contributes a highly particular dynamic to the writing as well as serving to highlight the problematically liminal position of the editorial role. By preserving the designation “editor” and resisting the urge to dissolve this work into a vaguely-defined “co-authorship,” we maintain a sense of the conflict and struggle that clearly informs the processes of textual development.

I will conclude, however, by offering some brief observations on the way in which the editorial role operates within different generic modes: the role of the editor in the production of the minimalist short story, after all, clearly differs from its involvement in the maximalist novel. In the case of Carver’s stories, Lish’s work was a palpable force, and the severity of textual excision was essential to their stylistic effect: McGurl notes that the discernible “excess of negative narrative space” in Carver’s most heavily-edited stories paradoxically signals the editor’s “overbearing presence” (*PE* 292). Here, we could say that Lish was, in the case of several of the stories, acting at times as something like an equal partner in the dialectic of creation and destruction, composition and decomposition, that structures the development of writing. Lish’s place as an outlier on the spectrum of editorial mediation – as an editor, that is, disposed not only to impose his own vision upon an author’s work to an unusual extent but also to expect public recognition for doing so – served both to drive the influence of the Minimalist mode and also to make the position of the author in that mode more fraught. Despite the accusations of the mode’s reliance upon the systematized methods of the workshop, the figure of the solitary author is central to the successful Minimalist narrative production, as the

ostentatiously stylised and compressed piece of short fiction implies a single creator linked to a history of individualised creation.²⁰²

In the case of maximalist fiction, though, the editor's role appears closer to the traditional self-effacing presence that Perkins imagined himself to be: this is the editor as silent partner, as midwife, as (to recall Perkins' own words) "a little dwarf on the shoulder of a great general advising him what to do and what not to do, without anyone's noticing" (Berg 155). The editor becomes a co-manager of excess rather than a merciless surgeon: indeed, Pietsch was so successful in this role that Wallace began to write him as a character into his final novel. The work of the editor of maximalist fiction is not palpable at the level of style, and the role is consequently less problematic for reader and author. While Carver clearly struggled all his life with the fact of Lish's influence, Wallace was able to make, in the spirit of a boast, the (probably exaggerated) claim that his editor had cut 500 pages. Every word counts in a short story (indeed, in "On Writing," Carver approvingly cited a line by one of Babel's narrators hailing the power of "a period put just at the right place" (CS 730)): on the other hand, if a page – or even several hundred pages – is cut from a thousand-page-plus novel, it is less clear that the reading experience is altered in such a fundamental fashion. The editor appears here more in the role of a studious curator of the author's words rather than an intimidatingly powerful impresario. Pietsch's influence on Wallace's work – and, by extension, the revival of maximalist fiction – is clear, though, even within Wallace's lifetime. His eagerness to publish, as he put it to his superiors, the next wave of literary "grandmasters" (05 June 1992), his decision to make

²⁰² Suzanne C. Ferguson notes that "by and large . . . the great short story writers have reputations as outstanding stylists, and much of the praise for their style, in terms of its 'jewelling' or 'polish', arises from a sense of the care lavished in the search for 'le mot juste'" (226).

length and difficulty a commercial selling point, and his implicit willingness to publish a book whose size would test the limits of the commercial book production and marketing machine: all were essential factors in the immediate success and subsequent impact of *Infinite Jest*. Since 2008, his importance to Wallace's reception is difficult to overstate. He has worked as the custodian of the author's reputation and of his aesthetic, producing a Pulitzer-nominated novel for which he personally performed publicity duties, and curates the author's legacy from the position of CEO of one of the major publishing houses of English-language fiction: the most recent example of this is *The David Foster Wallace Reader*, a 2014 sampler aimed at future students.

Pietsch's introduction to *The Pale King* offers readers the chance to "see what [Wallace] created . . . to look once more inside that beautiful extraordinary mind" (TPKb ix; TPKCD 1.2). I return to this quotation here as it serves to exemplify several of the themes within this study: the layers of textual mediation hidden beneath the smooth surface of the reading text, the continuing reliance among literary producers and readers on a conceptual model of solitary authorship, the editorial tendency towards self-elision, and the critical importance of examining the genesis of writing in order to make this mediation visible. The emergence of a corpus of archival materials around Carver's and Wallace's canonical works – what Gontarski refers to as an author's "grey canon" ("Greying the Canon" 143) – will undoubtedly inflect future criticism in complicated ways. The status of this canon is uncertain (in Wallace's case, it is only beginning to be negotiated) and it is necessary to read these materials with the same degree of critical engagement as published texts rather than using manuscripts as a way of (as Daniela Caselli, also discussing the "issue of marginality" in Beckett's oeuvre, puts it) "bringing interpretation to a close" (13–14). However, manuscripts can, as this study has shown,

shed necessary light on what Eggert refers to as “the central roles of agency and time” in the textual development of works whose complicated provenance is easily ignored, allowing us to see the editorial interventions as vivid, decisive events rather than abstract concepts (*Securing* 237). Understanding the temporal and material dimension of texts allows us to see the competing forces operating upon the text in process, and to appreciate the fact that even “extraordinary minds” never work alone.

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