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Maxwell Perkins

[Correspondence]: Twenty-six Letters from Maxwell Perkins to author Alan Kapelner

New York

\$6500



Twenty-six Typed Letters Signed (“Maxwell Perkins” or “Maxwell E. Perkins”). Octavos. 32 pages total on Charles Scribner’s Sons stationery in New York dated between 16 December 1942 - 4 November 1946. Some light creasing and soiling, one letter trimmed, the removing letterhead and date, else near fine or better.

A series of letters from Maxwell Perkins, the legendary literary editor of Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and Wolfe, to his young protégé Alan Kapelner, mostly concerning the publication Kapelner’s first novel, *Lonely Boy Blues* a jazz-paced novel about a muscular young man who is about to enter the Army and who wants to become an intellectual, at odds with society’s and his family’s expectations that he inhabit the physical world, a wartime title published in 1944.

In a letter of 4 November 1943, Perkins, while hedging his enthusiasm for the manuscript’s commercial potential, does praise it as revealing “a most unusual talent in narrative, in dialogue, and in perception.” Publication is set for mid-September 1944, and a series of letters follow documenting edits, copyright issues and book design (“We strengthened the wrap a great deal ... It was weak and feminine, but it isn’t now”). Several letters also deal with Kapelner’s requests for a job at Scribners and his unsuccessful applications for Guggenheim and Yaddo fellowships.

Lonely Boy Blues, set in contemporary 1940s New York, was generally well received (“I read the Saturday Review piece and I agree with you. — That man understood the book perfectly. I have kept the clipping to show it to Mr. Scribner. — But there were a number of other reviewers whose perceptions were right too”), but a negative review in the Tribune prompted Perkins to recollect, “Thomas Wolfe used to want me to go out and beat up critics — who often were bigger men than I — but I never could see that any particular good could come of that.” Kapelner immediately began work on his next novel, referred to here as *Strangers in a Midnight World*, but his second novel, *All the Naked Heroes*, was not published until 1960, long after Perkins’ death.

A substantial correspondence showing Perkins’ hands-on approach and attention to detail. A selection of images follows. [BTC#421948]

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
PUBLISHERS
597 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK

June 26, 1944

Dear Mr. Kapelner:

I followed your advice, taking out the OL' MAN RIVER line^s; - did as you said. I don't think much harm comes of it, and it enabled me to send all the proofs back to the printer. I am mighty glad to hear what you say of the way the book goes.- And by the way, though it is better for you not to take an advance now unless you need it, we could on the basis of the first seven chapters, presumably give you one. So if your predicament is too trying, there is always that way out.- I think "In at the Kill" is an excellent title. I'll look it up and see if it has been used, but certainly it hasn't been

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
PUBLISHERS
597 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK 17, N.Y.

August 19, 1946

Dear Mr. Kapelner:

We enclose our check for two hundred dollars as an additional payment on an option on your STRANGERS IN A MIDNIGHT WORLD. We understand that if we do not take up the option on this book, the total of nine hundred dollars will be repaid to us from the first monies earned by the book if published elsewhere.

Will you sign the enclosed copy of this letter as an acceptance of our agreement?

Sincerely yours,

Maxwell E. Perkins
for Charles Scribner's Sons

To Mr. Alan Kapelner

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
PUBLISHERS
597 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK 17, N.Y.

Dec. 6, 1944

Dear Mr. Kapelner:

The trouble is that a recommendation on the basis of reading LONELY BOY BLUES is not what these Guggenheim people want. They feel that they can judge what you have done. They only want recommendations from people who know you. Haven't you some old teacher, or professor, or friend who is now a writer? It is from such that they want to hear. They can see the reviews of LONELY BOY BLUES, and the book itself, and such as Edmund Wilson could not add much of anything to what they can thereby learn as to that book. Try hard to think of somebody who could write about you from personal knowledge of some sort, and not only from a knowledge of LONELY BOY BLUES.

Always yours,

Maxwell Perkins

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
PUBLISHERS
597 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK

May 31, 1945

Dear Mr. Kapelner:

I do think that was a rotten deal about Yaddo, and I don't understand it.- But anyhow, you must remember that I am to send you \$200 more, and will do it whenever you say. I would send \$100 now except that you told me you would tell me when you needed it. Tell me if you do.

Yours,

Maxwell E. Perkins

To Mr. Alan Kapelner

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
PUBLISHERS
597 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK

June 20, 1944

Dear Mr. Kapelner:

I think there is no doubt but that we shall publish in the fall.- That is what we aim to do, and it can't be long now before the song question is straightened out so far as it can be,- though I am afraid we may have to cut out "Old Man River" or modify it somehow. I do not myself think that you need see what has been done, because I think it is not so very important, and nothing could be done anyhow. We strengthened the wrap a great deal, but I'll send you one as soon as possible. It was weak and feminine, but it isn't now.

I was greatly pleased to hear what

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
PUBLISHERS
597 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK

June 13, 1944

Dear Mr. Kapelner:

I was much pleased with your note. If the book is going well, it will be good, I am sure of that.

I am having trouble about the songs. I have had to modify a number of them, and I have had to omit two. I'll show you proofs indicating the changes. I don't think much harm has been done, and anyway I got a very generous permission to use the long, two stanza song, without anything but credit. I could have got permission for two that I modified, but it would set such a bad precedent for the whole publishing business to pay twenty-five

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
PUBLISHERS
597 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK

May 18, 1944

Dear Mr. Kapelner:

I struck out one detail,- a short sentence in the part about the daughter. I realized that it spoiled the rhythm of the paragraph and it would have to be adjusted, but it struck me as being too revolting, and I hoped that in the page proof you might replace it in some way. Otherwise you have a perfect right to put it back. The proof reads beautifully I think.

Ever sincerely,

Maxwell Perkins

Mr. Alan Kapelner

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
PUBLISHERS
597 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK

Nov. 24, 1943

Dear Mr. Kapelner:

I shall not be able properly to read your book, "Lonely Boy Blues", until this weekend. I must not make you feel hopeful of our decision though, because in looking about in it I did think it very doubtful if it had the qualities which would justify us in publishing it from a commercial standpoint. I hope I am wrong because I do think it reveals a most unusual talent in narrative, in dialogue, and in perception. I am writing you this for the purpose of telling you this and to explain that I only get a chance to read carefully on weekends, and that I should never think of making a decision on a book

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
PUBLISHERS
597 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK

July 1, 1943

Dear Mr. Kapelner:

I wish very much that I could be helpful to you, but the truth is there is not a single opening in this house at the present time, and I cannot think of one that is likely to be in the near future. Of course if an occasion should arise, I should be only too glad to let you know about it, but I cannot let you be hopeful.

If there is any part of your novel in a fairly finished form, I should be glad to read it if you wanted me to, and I do at any rate look forward to seeing it whenever it is done.

Ever sincerely yours,

Maxwell Perkins

To Mr. Alan Kapelner