

Persevere: Advice for practioners of the 'lonely arts'

By SUSAN TAUBER

Andrew Scott Berg, known as Scott, has a legacy from a former editor at Charles Scribner's Sons, Publishers and Booksellers that he's sharing with the world.

He travelled to Oakland University for a few days to talk about what he's learned from, and about, Max Perkins, the 400 people who attended the Sat-

urday Oct. 21 session of the 17th annual Craftsmanship of Creative Writing Conference co-sponsored by OU Conference Department, Continuing Education and Detroit Women's Writers.

Berg, who will be 29 in December, held the audience spellbound as he described how he unleashed the history and personality of a man who shaped the literature of the early 1920s

and the careers of authors such as F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway and Thomas Wolfe.

Berg's fanaticism to learn all he could about Perkins, the man behind the scenes, wasn't a case of an author seeking a topic.

It occurred in an eerie way—a legacy left him by his mother and from a temperament given to him at birth that, Berg said, "matched temperaments with Perkins."

The son of Barbara and Richard Berg, formerly of Norwalk, Conn. and now living in Los Angeles, Berg was named Scott after F. Scott Fitzgerald because of his mother's love for the author's writings.

WHEN IN HIGH SCHOOL, Berg came home and announced to his family he needed to do a story on an American author and didn't know any.

His mother, he said, suggested Fitzgerald. His reply was, "F. Scott who?" Mrs. Berg ran to the attic and retrieved her copy of "The Far Side of Paradise" by Fitzgerald and Berg's fascination with the author began.

"By the time I graduated from high school I had read everything by and about Fitzgerald. I even applied to his alma mater, Princeton in New Jersey, and put on the application that if they didn't accept me, I was coming anyway," said Berg, an avid swimmer, tennis player, piano player and singer of 20s and 30s music.

Accepted at Princeton, Berg went, never having seen the campus. He continued his study of Fitzgerald, reading anything he could find in libraries' rare books and manuscript rooms.

Throughout his research, Berg kept coming across references to Maxwell Perkins—always in the shadows.

Berg visited Carlos Baker at Princeton. Baker had spent seven years writing a book about Fitzgerald. He asked him about Perkins.

"I know as much about Perkins today as I did seven years ago," was Baker's reply. He encouraged Berg to search out the man and write his senior thesis on the unknown editor, a man who sheped the writings of so

many authors other editor's wouldn't handle.

THE PROJECT led to a dedication on Berg's part that lasted through his college days until July when his first book, "Max Perkins: Editor of Genius," was published by E. P. Dutton.

Berg became a member of what he said every writer belongs to, "The Lonely Arts Club."

He lived in libraries, reading thousands of books, and he collected authors covering a span of 20 years. He sorted through 50 boxes of letters on Fitzgerald, another 30 on Thomas Wolfe, and 100 handwritten letters hidden under the bed of Perkin's platonic love, Elizabeth Lemonson.

Berg visited Perkin's ancestral home, Paradise, in Windsor, Vermont, once he was through researching. He had made a list of 100 people to visit and interview.

"I talked and talked for two days with the eldest of Perkin's five daughters. She said her daddy would be very upset if he knew someone was writing a biography about him—but that daddy liked new writers and she thought he'd be glad a young man was writing it."

"Mr. Berg, are you a writer?" she asked him after giving him the blessing.

Berg said no. It wasn't until after his book was published, after living with the growing image and personality of Perkins every day for seven years, did Berg acknowledge that he was a writer.

"I never wrote short stories or kept journals when I was young," he said.

During his efforts, Berg corresponded and met with people whom others consider unreachabile. They included Sheila Graham, Katherine Hepburn, Theodore Roosevelt's daughter Alice Longworth, and author James Jones.

He has funny and emotional stories to tell from the research he did and the people he met.

But what the author tried to give to the potential writers at the conference was the wisdom Perkins gave to each writer he worked with. The advice was always simple and gently made. And it

came from a man who believed in the talents of his writers and who could draw the best out of them.

"Perkins found gifted authors and helped structure them into writers," said Berg. "I found advice from his

letters to the likes of Hemingway that I want to pass on to you."

In his expressive way, Berg told how Perkins suggested to Marjorie Rawlings, author of "The Yearling," that a book must be written according to the writer.



Scott Berg

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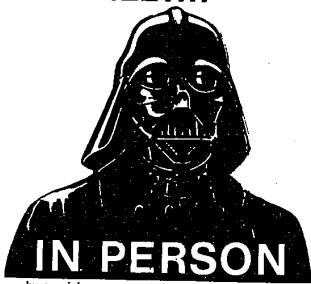
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