

THE DEVELOPMENT OF ETHEL WILSON'S *SWAMP ANGEL*:
AN ASSESSMENT OF THE CURRENT STATE OF KNOWLEDGE
AND AREAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

This project analyzes the development of Ethel Wilson's *Swamp Angel* and assesses the ways in which a future critical edition of the novel could be more comprehensive than previously published editions. The history of this canonical Canadian novel has been left mostly unexplored and may have been intentionally concealed in some published editions. By inspecting archival materials, including Wilson's correspondence, I examine how Wilson's relationships with her editors influenced the different published versions of the novel, which feature two different endings to the story. This paper considers how Wilson's friendship with John Gray, her editor at Macmillan, may have helped to produce a more poetic and Modernist version of the book in the original Canadian edition than in the American edition published by Harper, which were simultaneously published in 1954. The project also considers how some of Wilson's publishers may have prioritized lower printing costs or convenience over publishing what they deemed to be the better version of the novel. Additionally, by examining Wilson's manuscript, I discover that more than four different versions to the end of Wilson's novel may have existed, as opposed to just two. Having studied ten versions of Wilson's novel first-hand and the secondary resources most relevant to the development of *Swamp Angel*, such as the critical edition of the novel by Li-Ping Geng and the critical biography of Ethel Wilson by David Stouck, I suggest how a future critical edition of the novel could be more useful to scholars and more descriptive regarding the novel's evolution.

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DEDICATION

To Laurie and Ann Marie Schramm, whose boundless support makes anything possible.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- H The 1954 Harper edition of *Swamp Angel*, which was published in New York.
- M The 1954 Macmillan edition of *Swamp Angel*, which was published in Toronto.
- MS Ethel Wilson's hand-revised 1952 *Swamp Angel* manuscript, the typescript copy, that is housed by the University of British Columbia (UBC) Library: Rare Books and Special Collections.
- N62 The first New Canadian Library edition of *Swamp Angel*, published in Toronto by McClelland & Stewart in 1962.
- N90 The updated New Canadian Library edition of *Swamp Angel*, published in Toronto by McClelland & Stewart in 1990.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF ETHEL WILSON'S *SWAMP ANGEL*:
AN ASSESSMENT OF THE CURRENT STATE OF KNOWLEDGE
AND AREAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Ethel Wilson's *Swamp Angel* is a canonical Canadian novel. Despite this, much of the history of this work has been scattered, unacknowledged, and even concealed. To evaluate how a new critical edition could contribute to the body of knowledge currently available, this project assesses some of the secondary resources most relevant to the development of *Swamp Angel*, such as those by Li-Ping Geng and David Stouck. I analyze changes that occurred during the evolution of Wilson's 1952 manuscript. I identify relevant archival repositories and their contents so that these documents can be considered for future research. This paper also demonstrates the benefits of comparing versions of Wilson's novel, including the 1954 Macmillan and Harper editions. Finally, the project explores the impact Wilson's relationships with her editors had on the differing editions, including their alternate endings.

This paper begins to examine how this novel has evolved over time, how current resources for the text are lacking, and how an improved critical edition could be developed. A rare abundance of evidence pertaining to this novel's development has survived. However, with one exception, none of the editions of the novel acknowledge this evidence or the novel's unusual publishing history. Furthermore, no single resource offers a comprehensive commentary on the development of this novel. A more comprehensive critical edition of the novel is needed. This edition would present all relevant primary resource material related to *Swamp Angel* as well as an extensive critical analysis. Such an edition would provide a more complete and reliable resource for researchers and students to draw upon.

Available Resources

A future edition could further assist researchers by being explicit about what primary and secondary materials are available, what types of documents these include, what condition they are in, what information they provide, and where they are located. Ideally, this edition of the novel would reproduce the few very most important surviving primary archival materials. No current resource fully describes or reproduces the archival materials available, details the variations between all published editions, or provides a full explanation of this novel's evolution. There are more than ten versions of the novel, including Wilson's unpublished manuscript at the University of British Columbia Library, and only Geng's critical edition provides a bibliography.

However, even Geng's bibliography does not explicitly cite Wilson's manuscript¹. An improved edition would make it easier for interested readers to find additional sources related to the text.

As I consider how a future edition could improve upon the current resources available, it is important to know of what most readers would already be aware and how most readers experience the novel today. For example, a typical audience would be unaware of key changes that occurred in the manuscript because the document has not been published and the secondary resources that are available in local libraries do not acknowledge many of these changes. By focusing on the most readily available literature, one can begin to understand what is best known about the novel and its development. However, the texts that are less readily available are also of great significance.

The Manuscript

Wilson's manuscript can show how the text has evolved over time. The University of British Columbia (UBC) Library: Rare Books and Special Collections houses Wilson's hand-revised 1952 manuscript, the typescript copy, for *Swamp Angel* (MS). Geng notes that this is the "sole surviving complete manuscript" ("The Making of *Swamp Angel*" 244). The UBC website offers little indication of the condition or contents of the MS (such as Wilson's revisions), but this version of the text provides valuable information to a researcher. The MS is generally easy to read as most of the document is a typescript. However, one is also offered a snapshot of Wilson's writing and editing processes as the typescript was later revised by hand by Wilson.

Wilson hired a typist, Mrs. Bell, to type her manuscripts, according to Stouck (*A Critical Biography* 185). Bell had her own influence on the *Swamp Angel* text. In some instances, she altered the text by not replicating Wilson's punctuation. Geng notes that Wilson wrote to Macmillan of Canada, saying, "The charming woman who types for me used to correct my punctuation. But as I always intend it for purposes of phrasing and significance, she blindly

¹ Geng's article mentions the manuscript ("The Making of *Swamp Angel*" 244), but his Works Cited for the article only references the "Ethel Wilson fonds" at UBC (264) and does not reference the manuscript itself. The bibliography for Geng's critical edition of the novel makes the same mistake. Stouck's bibliography for *Ethel Wilson: A Critical Biography*, from which Geng's bibliography was adapted, similarly makes no specific mention of any manuscripts or their locations in the section of the bibliography labelled "Archives and Unpublished Manuscripts" (332-4).

copies it now” (“The Rival Editions” 83)². Bell also influenced the production timeline for the novel. Stouck notes that, in a letter from Wilson to John Gray (Wilson’s editor at Macmillan) in January 1953, “it becomes clear that a first draft [of *Swamp Angel*] has been completed and [Wilson] is waiting for her typist, Mrs Bell of the Hotel Vancouver, to finish preparing a clean typescript to send off” (*A Critical Biography* 185). The speed with which Bell returned fresh typescripts affected when Wilson and her editors could access the most recent drafts. Additionally, through her comments, she may have affected the contents of the novel and Wilson’s impression of how it would be received. Stouck notes that Wilson was reticent about the MS (*A Critical Biography* 186). Bell may have been aware of Wilson’s apparent need for reassurance. Stouck says, “Mrs Bell, who had typed [Wilson’s] earlier works, was very enthusiastic and appended a note to the typescript when she finished: ‘I do hope John Gray will like “Swamp Angel” – shouldn’t be surprised if he’d like it even better than its predecessors”’ (*A Critical Biography* 186). Bell thus likely influenced the novel through the feedback she offered Wilson.

The MS provides a wealth of information about how the text was altered. Wilson crosses out paragraphs, such as on page 6 or 207, and adds long sections by hand, such as pages 163-180. An ideal critical edition of the novel would include a full set of scans of this MS as well as the other archival documents related to Wilson, such as her letters. UBC holds the copyright to Wilson’s unpublished and published literary works (*A Critical Biography* 333). As a result, one must request permission from UBC, negotiate an agreement, clear copyright, and pay a commercial-use fee to publish any of Wilson’s intellectual content. Even if copyright laws were to no longer apply, one would still need to pay expensive fees to the university, which would make reproducing many scans of Wilson’s archival materials unfeasible. However, it may be possible to transcribe and describe the most important of these archival materials, and certainly the original MS. Economically, this may be the best option for a future critical edition of the novel. At a minimum, any edition, critical or otherwise, should reference the existence of this important document. However, only one published edition of the novel acknowledges that this MS has survived.

² Geng says that this passage is quoted “from the script of Gray’s speech on 10 November 1961 at the party celebrating Wilson’s winning of the first Canada Council Medal” (“The Rival Editions” 88n19). However, he does not cite the location of this document.

Relevant Archives and Bibliographies

There are numerous archival materials related to the development of Wilson's novel that are less well known and less easily accessed, including Wilson's correspondence. Stouck points out that the Rare Books and Special Collections at the University of British Columbia Library houses the largest collection of archival materials related to Wilson (*A Critical Biography* 333).³ In *Ethel Wilson: A Critical Biography*, he describes these materials:

[The] Wilson papers [form] part of the Macmillan Company of Canada Collection. This is an extensive correspondence between author and press that includes information about readers' reports, editorial revisions, jacket designs, publication, promotions, royalties, serializations, radio broadcasts, and film rights. Also included are copies of speeches, and published and unpublished articles. Some of these papers are at the McMaster University Library, but most of them are at the University of British Columbia Library. (333)

He also briefly comments on the condition of some of the materials, noting for example that the Mary McAlpine Collection at UBC includes Wilson's photograph albums and that these "have been damaged and pictures are missing" (333). Stouck's bibliography is informative, yet it would be even more helpful if it provided longer descriptions of all the resources.

In May 2017, I embarked on an archival research trip⁴ to the UBC Library to assess and document materials related to Wilson. There is a surprising abundance of documents, particularly correspondence written both to and from Wilson. However, these materials, though carefully housed by the library, are not well organized. The letters are stored loosely in folders and likely become repeatedly reordered as visitors view them. It would take significant effort to order the letters chronologically, identify which letters correspond to one another, and (due to the nature of the handwriting) decipher their contents for transcription. However, this work would add to the body of knowledge available on this influential Canadian author, her unique relationships with her publishers, and the development of her novels.

³ In *Ethel Wilson: A Critical Biography*, Stouck notes that the UBC library contains relevant documents in the Margaret and Geoffrey Andrew Papers, Alan Crawley Papers, Ronald Hambleton Collection, Irene Howard Papers, The Macmillan Company (Canada) Collection, Mary McAlpine Collection, R.E. Watters Papers, and the Ethel Wilson Papers (332-3).

⁴ I am grateful to the University of Saskatchewan for the 2016-2017 Dr. Edward McCourt Memorial Award and the 2017 U of S Student Travel Award that helped to fund my archival research trip.

Other archives carry relevant material about *Swamp Angel*⁵. Stouck provides an extensive bibliography that lists these archives, secondary sources, Wilson's published works, and her unpublished works (*A Critical Biography* 329-338). He also provides a brief description of the UBC archival materials, how they were deposited at UBC, and a short description of what a researcher can expect from that archive. This is useful; however, Stouck does not provide similar descriptions for each of the archives and materials that he lists, offering only an "abbreviated" description of primary sources (329). A future edition could include an extensive annotated bibliography and thus improve upon Stouck's bibliography.

Materials related to Wilson are available in several locations in Texas. The Harry Ransom Center (at the University of Texas at Austin) houses a Harper publishing house collection that contains one folder for Wilson that includes about sixty pages worth of correspondence from varying stages of the publication process. The Briscoe Center for American History (at the University of Texas at Austin) carries the Patsy Cravens Photographic Archive, which contains photos of Wilson. The University of Texas at San Antonio has the Institute of Texan Cultures: Oral History Collection, which contains some digitized interviews with Wilson. With reference to Wilson's *Lilly's Story*, Stouck notes, "Elizabeth Lawrence at Harper's made some editorial suggestions, and Wilson says she 'threw out a shovelful of 'ands.' There is a friendly correspondence consisting of eighteen letters from Wilson to Lawrence preserved in the archives at the University of Texas at Austin" (*A Critical Biography* 308). However, Stouck does not provide a detailed description of the materials available at the University of Texas, including if there is correspondence between Wilson and Harper representatives related to the editing of the Harper edition of *Swamp Angel*.

Li-Ping Geng improves on previous editions of the novel by including a bibliography, which he notes is based on the one by David Stouck in *Ethel Wilson: A Critical Biography* (*A Critical Edition* 265). However, while Stouck includes short descriptions and extra information about additional resources, Geng does not, and thus his bibliography is less helpful than Stouck's. Despite being published two years later than Stouck's work, Geng's edition does not

⁵ These include the McMaster University Library in Hamilton, National Archives of Canada in Ottawa, Queen's University Library in Kingston, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library in Toronto, York University Library in Toronto, University of Calgary Library in Calgary, and University of Texas at Austin in Austin.

provide additional secondary sources and lists fewer sources. A detailed annotated bibliography with an updated list of more recent publications would improve upon both of these bibliographies.

As archival materials related to Wilson are spread across Canada and the United States of America, it is difficult for researchers to access and analyze them. Also, as some of these collections are private⁶, some materials are unavailable to researchers. Ideally, selected copies or detailed descriptions of these documents would be included in a future critical edition of Wilson's novel.

Different Editions of the Novel

Comparing the different versions of the novel reveals that the text has evolved significantly over time. However, most of the editions of Wilson's novel do not include a commentary on its evolution. Geng's critical edition of *Swamp Angel*, which includes his essay entitled "The Making of *Swamp Angel*," is the only edition that has acknowledged and begun to dissect this history. Other editions include either a one-sentence note hidden in the fine print or no mention of the novel's development.

Geng's edition further improves upon earlier editions by including ninety-three pages of supplementary information and critical articles. He states that "few readers are aware that two different versions of the novel coexist, complete with different endings" and that "little critical attention has been paid to the intriguing editorial complications that such an event is bound to create" ("The Making of *Swamp Angel*" 240). He also notes that "this publishing event is rare in the history of Canadian literary publication and invites detailed examination" (240). His edition draws attention to this publishing history.

The analysis of *Swamp Angel* in Geng's edition improves upon other published versions, yet it also lacks important details. He says, "While teaching [*Swamp Angel*], I came to realize that there had not been a reliable text upon which students and scholars of Canadian literature might base their research. This scholarly edition of *Swamp Angel* is meant to meet their need" (*A Critical Edition* vii). Since it is the only critical edition of the novel, students may be inclined to rely heavily on this text. However, other secondary resources provide valuable information that

⁶ Stouck notes that the following collections are private: the Ernest and Amy Buckerfield Collection in Vancouver and the David Malkin Collection in Georgia (*A Critical Biography* 332).

Geng's edition lacks. Furthermore, beyond what any of the current resources offer, much is yet to be discovered about this novel.

Geng claims to have collated the Macmillan 1954 (M), Harper 1954 (H), and MS editions of *Swamp Angel* ("The Making of *Swamp Angel*" 244). A collation suggests that he has noted all instances of agreement and disagreement between the texts, which is not the case. He is not clear about what variants he has collated throughout his edition. Even though the MS is inherently a hand-revised document, Geng collated only the variants between the M and H editions against the MS with all of Wilson's revisions accepted. In the majority of instances, Geng does not document the revisions themselves as variants, even though they are an important part of the document. Many readers would mistakenly believe they were aware of all the variations between the MS, M, and H after reading Geng's edition of the novel.

The number of variants Geng has collated is also unclear. In "The Making of *Swamp Angel*," Geng says his collation of M and H editions has yielded "some" 400 textual variants, of which "about" 250 are accidental variants and "the rest" are substantive variants (244). Additionally, his collation of the MS against these two editions yielded "nearly" 100 more differences, of which "the majority" are substantive variants (244). He further confuses the values when he references "350 or so substantive variants," a number that does not match his previously stated figures (246). Geng lists these variants in footnotes throughout his edition. As these footnotes are only numbered within their respective chapters, one must add up all 476 footnotes to assess the total amount. To further confuse things, it is unclear whether Geng counts footnotes that include multiple differences as one or more variants (e.g. 107n2). Since he does not explain what and how many variants he has collated, it is difficult to corroborate Geng's collation claims and engage with the differences between the editions of Wilson's novel.

Geng further confuses what he has collated and why he has done so when he references a few of Wilson's MS revisions in the footnotes and his essay at the end of his book. For example, he states in an early footnote that "Wilson used a period initially [in the MS] but turned it into a question mark" (8n19). This reference seems an arbitrary selection when other significant revisions go unreferenced. A few examples of significant alterations made to the MS that Geng omits from the 476 footnotes of variants include: the change to the novel's title (A), the deleted dedication (A), a deleted chapter title (145), alterations to chapter numbers (e.g. chapter XXV on page 148 was changed to XXVIII, then to XXIX, and finally to XXVIII), numerous modified

page numbers (e.g. page 68 was changed to 66 and then to 65), eliminated content (e.g. more than a paragraph on page 71⁷), and added material (e.g. a paragraph on page 189). Geng also references some MS revisions in his article to support his arguments about authorial intent and his theory that the H edition was set from an earlier version of the typescript than the M edition (“The Making of *Swamp Angel*” 256-7). Geng acknowledges how analysis of the MS revisions can offer important insights into the novel, yet he does not offer his readers the opportunity to investigate further when he excludes the bulk of these instances from his collation.

Even though Geng chose not to collate the MS revisions, he makes arguments that could support such a decision. He states that he used the MS as the “copy-text [for his edition] because it proves to be the final revised version bearing beyond doubt the stamp of Wilson’s independent authority” (258). Ironically, Geng chose the MS as the foundational text for his edition due to its revisions made by Wilson, only to then hide these revisions from his readers. Geng also states that substantive variants “derive from differences in punctuation, spelling, capitalization, choice of word as well as deletion or addition of word, phrase, sentence, or even paragraph. Every one of these variants affects our understanding of the novel, either locally in terms of detail or broadly in terms of theme, character, and plot” (246). The substantive variants created by Wilson’s revisions to the MS have just as much impact on the novel as the substantive changes created between the 1954 M and H editions of the text. The MS revisions were key decisions that Wilson made by hand for various reasons and that contribute to one’s understanding not only of the novel itself, but also of the author and her writing process.

By focusing on only two published versions of the novel, Geng further limits his study of *Swamp Angel*. He asks, “[Is] the Harper edition superior to the Macmillan edition?” (“The Making of *Swamp Angel*” 240). Although this is a legitimate question, it would be more important to ask which of the many editions of Ethel Wilson’s *Swamp Angel* is superior.⁸ Geng

⁷ The page was originally labelled page 71. This is not to be confused with page 74, which was changed by hand to be page 72 and then page 71.

⁸ I examined the following versions of *Swamp Angel*: Wilson’s 1952 manuscript, the typescript copy (MS); the Canadian 1954 Macmillan edition (M); the American 1954 Harper edition (H); Macmillan’s 1955 reprint (with the M version); McClelland & Stewart’s 1962 (N62) edition (M version); McClelland & Stewart’s 1990 (N90) edition (with the H version); Fitzhenry & Whiteside’s 1996 edition (H version); Geng’s critical edition published by Tecumseh Press in 2005 (his edition shows both the M and H versions of the novel); as well as McClelland & Stewart’s 2009 print and Kindle editions (both use the H version of the novel). I will explain the

prioritizes the earliest editions of the novel, without justifying his decision to exclude the later editions. The novel has been presented differently each time it has been published, even in reprints. Studying subsequent editions can provide insight into how the novel has been received and marketed, and how it has evolved since it was initially published.

Geng's method for answering his research question about the relative merits of the 1954 Harper and Macmillan editions is also problematic. He attempts to determine which edition is superior by asking, "Which [of the two editions] in fact represents a fulfilment of Wilson's intentions?" ("The Making of *Swamp Angel*" 241). He uses the "fundamental principle in the classic editorial tradition of preserving authorial intent" in his analysis (240-1). However, there seems to be no explicit statement from Wilson on this matter, and identifying Wilson's opinion as to her preferred edition does not help to determine which edition is best. Indeed, determining the "superior" edition of the novel will always be to some extent a subjective matter, depending on the particular reader. Geng conveniently dismisses "critics such as Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault" ("The Rival Editions" 83). In Barthes' essay "The Death of the Author" he concludes that the "birth of the reader must be ransomed by the death of the Author" (6). If we follow Barthes' theory, we would not take Wilson's opinion of the text to be sacrosanct. Furthermore, Wilson would not have been able to comment on the ideal edition of the novel in the same way that current readers are able to, as she died in 1980. Since that time, five more versions of the novel have been published.

The Macmillan and Harper Versions

The two distinct versions of Wilson's novel that were launched in 1954 have received the most attention from scholars. Geng states that the first editions of *Swamp Angel* were published "simultaneously" in 1954 by Macmillan in Canada and England as well as by Harper in the United States ("The Making of *Swamp Angel*" 240). The major difference between the 1954 M and H editions is that the H version has two additional chapters (12 and 44) and a different ending. Chapter 12 focuses on Vera Gunnarsen's unhappy family upbringing, chapter 44 shows how Maggie continues to help Vera recover from her suicide attempt, and a new final paragraph is added to the end of the novel in which Maggie rows towards the lodge from the lake. The H

main differences between the M and H versions in the upcoming section entitled "The Macmillan and Harper Versions."

version, with its additional material, and the M version of the novel have quietly competed for dominance since they were published in 1954 and have influenced future editions.

The Canadian (and English) Macmillan 1954 editions do not include H's additional chapter 12 because, by the time Wilson had informed Macmillan that she had written it for Harper, Macmillan had already gone to print. In a letter written by Wilson to Desmond Pacey, dated September 16, 1954, she says, "I thought oh my goodness I'd better see if Macm's want [H's extra chapter 12] too. I did, by the time the answer Yes came, the Macmillan book was in the press. I just lamented when Macmillan in London told me, as by this time I realized that the chapter improved the book" ("The Making of *Swamp Angel*" 241). It is not clear if Wilson would have also wanted Macmillan to include Harper's chapter 44 and the additional final paragraph in the M 1954 edition. According to the same letter written to Pacey, Wilson was travelling in Portugal when she was too late in telling Macmillan about the additional material that would appear in H ("The Making of *Swamp Angel*" 241). When *Swamp Angel* was first being published, neither Wilson nor her publishers at Macmillan prioritized publishing what they deemed to be the better version of the novel.

When in 1955, Macmillan decided to print and sell more copies of the novel, they did not switch to the H version. Staying with their own 1954 M version made the 1955 reprint easier and cheaper for Macmillan to produce as there were hardly any changes to make.⁹ Furthermore, as Macmillan had already published the M version in 1954 without the additional H sections, switching to the American version of the novel for their 1955 reprint could have cast doubt on Macmillan's reputation as a publishing house. If Macmillan had switched to the H version in 1955, then the Canadian company would have effectively acknowledged that the American publishing house had produced a better edition than their own. Implementing the change could have made their publishing company look as if it had put parsimony ahead of responsibility to the integrity of the novel's text in 1954. It is clear that Macmillan would have preferred to

⁹ The cost to print the 1955 version also would have been more expensive than Macmillan of Canada had anticipated for another reason. Geng says that "2,000 [copies of 1955 version] were to be ordered in [1955], but the Trade Department manager [in Canada] was told, to his dismay and indignation, that Macmillan of London, without consulting its Canadian branch, had dispersed the type, so the novel had to be reset, resulting in a higher unit price . . . Macmillan of Canada, a little unhappy about the lack of consultation, decided to order only 1,000 further copies from its parent company" ("The Making of *Swamp Angel*" 260n3).

include at least some of the additional sections present in the H version, as evidenced by their “answer Yes” when Wilson asked Macmillan this question (“The Making of *Swamp Angel*” 241). However, Macmillan seems to have decided not to include these sections in 1955 to reduce printing costs and because they wished to avoid any embarrassment to their brand over having produced a version of the book that they thought to be inferior.

When McClelland & Stewart, another Canadian publishing house, decided to print the first New Canadian Library edition of *Swamp Angel* in 1962 (N62), they published the M version of the novel. This decision may not have been well informed as they may not even have been aware of the additional material in the H 1954 edition. McClelland & Stewart may have simply focused on the M 1954 version because they were also publishing for a Canadian audience. However, the 1990 New Canadian Library edition (N90) was published with the additional sections that were present in the H edition, instead of keeping with the M version. This decision influenced future Canadian editions of the novel, which were all printed using the H version. The N90 provided only a brief explanation for this change, despite the fact that this edition was a substantively different version of the novel. Hidden in small font amidst the publishing information, the N90 states, “In accordance with the author’s wishes, the text is reprinted from the American edition, published in 1954 by Harper & Brothers Publishers” (par. 5).

Geng illuminates the history behind McClelland & Stewart’s decision to switch to the H version for their updated New Canadian Library (N90) edition (“The Rival Editions” 85-86n6). However, his analysis of this history is placed (ironically) in an equally inconspicuous place: an endnote. I hypothesize that McClelland & Stewart intentionally concealed this decision in a discreet manner on the publishing information page due to the embarrassment of admitting the apparent superiority of the 1954 American edition of *Swamp Angel* over their original New Canadian Library edition of 1962 (N62).

Although the evidence he presents would better support the opposite argument, Geng argues that Wilson preferred the M 1954 edition over the H 1954 edition. He notes that in a letter to Wilson’s foster daughter Audrey Butler dated September 16, 1954,¹⁰ Wilson wrote, “I’ll send

¹⁰ According to Stouck, “[During] the Second World War, the Wilsons took into their home a girl evacuated from England [named Audrey Butler], whom they would refer to as their daughter and whom they remained close to, and anxious about, as if she were their own” (*A Critical Biography* 71).

you the Harper's edition, for I regret to tell you in real confidence that the American ed. has some distinction, and, to my mind, my dear Macm's has not" ("The Making of *Swamp Angel*" 241). Additionally, Geng notes that Wilson said, "Harper's edn has extra chapter (no. 12) which is to my way of thinking the best chapter in the book (how I wish it were in the English and Canadian editions[...])" (241). Despite this evidence, Geng argues that "her passing remarks do not constitute a conclusive evaluation of the two editions" (242). Geng is right to be cautious, but his evidence, such as this letter, suggest that Wilson preferred the H version. After all, when she had the choice to send the H version, M version, or both to Audrey Butler, whom she loved and trusted, she chose the H edition. However, for Geng's own critical edition of the novel, he uses primarily the MS or M rather than the H version when there are discrepancies. Geng may have let his personal preference for the M and MS versions affect his editing decisions and his interpretation of Wilson's preferences.

Stouck presents further evidence that indicates that Wilson preferred the H 1954 edition: "She liked the type and general finish of the Harper's book, and thought the running heads and binding had great charm" (*A Critical Biography* 192). Stouck adds that the M edition had a "cartoon-like" cover, an unflattering photo of Wilson, and an author's note mentioning that Wilson's previous novel, *Lilly's Story*, was being made into a film, which she "may have winced" at because, "in fact, interest in the project by that time had pretty much dried up" (192). Stouck does not, however, provide a source for these claims, such as unpublished letters. Thus, both Stouck and Geng's discussions of Wilson's preference for an edition of *Swamp Angel* are incomplete. A new edition could better elucidate this matter by providing more citations and evidence.

Wilson's statement about preferring the added chapter 12 of the H edition, as quoted above, deserves further analysis. Pacey notes, "One aspect of Ethel Wilson's skill as a narrator is her ability to arouse our interest in and compassion for the most apparently unsympathetic of characters" (99). Through the course of the novel, Vera Gunnarsen is generally unhappy, ungrateful, and selfish. Vera also makes others miserable, so much so that she almost drives Maggie away from Three Loon Lake. Chapter 12 of the H edition provides background information about Vera's tragic life story that is not included in the M edition. The narrator reveals, "It is well known that young people need and love love, and Vera did not receive love, unless you could call the lazy intolerance of her father 'love.' Her mother's partiality for Surl

[Vera's brother] caused Vera's face often to have a bitchy look" (H 58). Maggie has earlier left Edward Vardoe, who is an unsympathetic character, and has gone on a moral pilgrimage to nature. Maggie shows personal growth when she does not abandon Vera, an unsympathetic character, as she did Edward.¹¹

The key aspect of chapter 12 is that it allows the reader to sympathize with Vera while Maggie remains unaware of Vera's pitiable childhood. In this way, the novel calls for the reader to be compassionate towards Vera, and to consider moral philosophy just as Maggie does. It also makes Maggie's kindness towards Vera seem more just and pure since Maggie is provided with fewer reasons to be kind to Vera than the reader. Chapter 12 of the H edition of *Swamp Angel* adeptly underlines the novel's commentary on moral and social responsibility, which is likely why Wilson wrote that she liked it the best. Since a representative at Harper, presumably John Fischer, convinced Wilson to add this additional chapter, perhaps the same person convinced Wilson of the chapter's merit. Wilson appreciated praise of her work from others such as reviewers and Gray, as evidenced by her letters. Thus, it would follow that Wilson would appreciate Harper's admiration for her work, especially since their final approval for the novel was less easily achieved than at Macmillan.¹²

Little information is available in secondary sources regarding Wilson's interactions with her publishers at Harper and it is not clear how much is available to discover. I presume that John Fischer was Wilson's main contact at Harper because of a few brief references to him in Stouck's books. Stouck says that "after eight months of circulating the manuscript, [Ruth May, Wilson's literary agent, who worked for Macmillan] received a phone call from John Fischer at Harper's to say they wanted to publish [Wilson's] 'Lilly's Story' as a short novel on its own" (*A Critical Biography* 149). Fischer is also mentioned in some correspondence between Wilson and Macmillan's John Gray. In a letter from Wilson to Gray, dated July 25, 1953, Wilson says, "Mr. Fischer of Harper's the other day wrote and suggested I send him what I had done [on the *Swamp Angel* manuscript], and they would like to look at it and express themselves frankly" (*Letters* 186). Significantly, Wilson informally addresses this letter "Dear John" and formally refers to

¹¹ It is problematic to compare Maggie's abusive relationship with Edward to her relationship with Vera. Nevertheless, the comparison seems to be encouraged by the plot of the novel.

¹² Wilson faced more negotiations regarding her novel with her editors at Harper than with John Gray at Macmillan. I will provide more detail about these negotiations in the upcoming section entitled "Negotiations with Wilson's Editors."

“Mr. Fischer” (186). Wilson seems to have been much more familiar with her contact at Macmillan than with her contact at Harper.

Wilson’s correspondence is a key resource when considering how the text evolved in its early stages, especially as it moved from its initial form as a manuscript to the first 1954 Canadian and American published editions. Stouck’s *Ethel Wilson: Stories, Essays, and Letters* provides complete transcripts of some of her letters (as opposed to the excerpts that can be found in Geng’s edition). Although readers assume the risk of depending on the transcriber’s interpretation of her difficult handwriting, this seems more fruitful than having to depend on letters that are sometimes unintelligible. Ideally, scans of the letters could also be made available so that the handwriting itself could be interpreted.

A complete correspondence of incoming and outgoing letters between Wilson and Gray survives. Stouck calls it a “splendid record of a publisher and writer working together in a harmonious, productive relationship” (*Letters* 115). However, Stouck includes only some of the letters that Wilson sent and excludes all the letters that she received. Stouck’s reader is privy to only one side of her conversations, and Stouck includes only the letters that he feels are “of interest to the readers of Wilson’s fiction, covering the years of her literary fame and shedding light on her mind and work” (*Letters* 115). However, Stouck does not include the letter, which Geng mentions, that is “dated 11 June 1966” in which Wilson explains how the H edition came to include more material than the M edition (“The Making of *Swamp Angel*” 241). This significant letter would certainly be “of interest to the readers of Wilson’s fiction” (*Letters* 115). A better resource would include all of Wilson’s key correspondence, incoming and outgoing, organized in chronological order and indexed based on their content for the convenience of the reader.

Stouck notes that Wilson’s letters and the replies of her correspondents were separated into different boxes at the UBC library, with a result that “is frustrating for the researcher, who has to search (sometimes for hours) to match the letters that address and respond to each other” (*A Critical Biography* 333). This disorder could help to explain why Stouck included only outgoing letters. Since they were separated, it would be a great deal of work, and sometimes impossible, to match the corresponding letters, especially those that are undated. Nevertheless, including a selection of Wilson’s relevant letters in a new edition of *Swamp Angel* would be helpful to researchers.

Stouck's *Ethel Wilson: A Critical Biography* is a useful resource; however, it is a general resource for Wilson's works and does not provide enough information for a researcher who is focused solely upon a given novel, such as *Swamp Angel*. A comprehensive edition of *Swamp Angel* would include information from Geng and Stouck's sources and more, as each is useful, yet incomplete on their own.

Introducing New Errors into *Swamp Angel*

Geng's *Swamp Angel: A Critical Edition* introduces several new errors to the text. These mistakes are what Geng would describe as "accidental errors" as they are likely due to editing lapses or misprints. Examples of these errors include: Maggie sees the "tops of tall fires" instead of "firs" (24). Angus Quong is big enough and smart enough "o take messages" instead of "to take messages" (35). Greta has a "permanen" rather than a "permanent" (35). Maggie settles down beside a "widow" instead of a "window" (27). Maggie hurries back up "he slope" instead of "the slope" (57). While a few errors are inevitable, they are particularly ironic in Geng's edition since he focuses much of his analysis on errors and minute differences between editions.

The surname of Eddie and Maggie in the body of this edition is also inconsistent. Most commonly their surname is presented as "Vardoe," yet at other times it is "Varcoe"¹³ and still other times it is "Vardow."¹⁴ This may be a typesetting error or may have occurred due to Geng's method for creating his edition, which would have involved constantly comparing different editions for variations. This inadvertent error highlights an inconsistency amongst different drafts of the novel. Geng notes, "'Varcoe' was the surname of the character in earlier drafts and the surviving typescript MS, but the M and H editions had 'Vardoe' (the proof copy sent by Harper to Wilson also had 'Vardoe'). It is not clear when the changes took place and who initiated it" (*A Critical Edition* 1). Although Geng is careful to note this variation, the spelling does vary.

It is unknown why Wilson would have originally chosen the surname of "Varcoe" for Edward and Maggie, or why it would have later been changed to "Vardoe." It is possible that Wilson was convinced to change it by one of her publishers. Geng speculates that the "substitution of *d* for *c* must have been a last-minute act" ("The Rival Editions" 87-88n17). However, I think that it could not have been completely last-minute because the substitution is

¹³ Such as on page 44, for example.

¹⁴ Such as on page 24, for example.

present in both the M and H editions. Since Harper continued to ask Wilson for changes, while Gray at Macmillan did not, one could speculate that Harper asked for the change to the surname.

Regardless of who initiated the change, the fact that the surname “Varcoe” was changed to “Vardoe” suggests that the surname is significant. Maggie leaves her abusive marriage with Edward Vardoe to return to nature, where she reinvents herself as “Maggie Lloyd” or just “Maggie.” Since a “var” is a Canadian tree and a “doe” is a female deer, the surname “Vardoe” seems to symbolize nature. However, Maggie and Edward’s marriage was set in the city and, as such, the surname reflects the disjointed nature of their marriage. The *OED Online* defines a “var” as a “balsam fir” (“var, n.”) and “coe” as a “disease in sheep, the rot” (“coe, n.2.”). Thus, the surname “Varcoe” evokes diseased nature, subtly evoking the unhealthy dynamics of their relationship. Edward and Maggie each make up one half of their marriage. Similarly, Maggie’s passion for nature suggests that she is the “var,” or natural half, while her abusive husband is the diseased “coe” half of their shared married name. When Maggie flees towards nature, she sheds her husband and her married name, ridding herself of the disease. Wilson’s novel was originally published in 1954, a time when it would have been unconventional for a woman to leave her husband. By giving Maggie’s married name a meaning that indicates that the relationship with Edward was ill-fated, Wilson indicates a desire for her audience to be sympathetic towards her modern protagonist.

Maggie is prompted towards philosophical thought and healing when she is in nature, as opposed to when she is in a civilized structure or a city. The *OED Online* also defines the word “coe” as a “little hut built over a mine-shaft, as a protection to the shaft, or as a repository for ore, tools, etc.” (“coe, n.1.”). If Maggie’s marriage is represented by a civilized space such as a hut, then this would reflect how Maggie is not well suited to the marriage. Similarly, the word “vardo” is defined as “a waggon” (“vardo, n.”). Again, a waggon would represent a civilized, hand-crafted space instead of a natural one. Therefore, the surnames “Varcoe” and “Vardoe” both reinforce the suggestion that Maggie is unsuited to her marriage with Edward. For this reason, Wilson may have easily accommodated a request to change the surname from “Varcoe” to “Vardoe.” Perhaps the name “Vardoe” was preferred because it phonetically suggests the word “vardo,” while there is no lexical equivalent for the name “Varcoe.” Wilson’s publishers at Harper may have been concerned that the reference was too subtle and wanted to make it slightly more clear.

Negotiations with Wilson's Editors

Wilson's relationships with her editors had a significant impact on the novel. Geng says, "In fact, she implemented all of Gray's recommendations about the composition of *Swamp Angel*" ("The Making of *Swamp Angel*" 243). However, this "fact" is actually a point of contention. According to Stouck, "What seems to be a second draft suggests that she did not make a great number of changes," despite having received a request for alterations from Gray (*A Critical Biography* 188). Stouck asserts that Wilson held out "for her version of her work" (189). I would agree with Stouck, as the novel still contains aspects that Gray wanted altered. Although Wilson adopted some of Gray's suggestions, eliminating sections and not killing off the character of Vera, Wilson also ultimately rejected some of Gray's other requests, such as lengthening the novel or moving the novel's final scene, in which Maggie throws the gun in the lake, to the middle of the book (Stouck, *A Critical Biography* 190). Wilson likely adopted some of her editor's suggestions because she respected his opinion and wanted to show a reasonable willingness to compromise. However, she also seemed to have strong opinions about writing, which would explain the parts of the novel that she left unaltered.

As I have indicated throughout this discussion, the H edition of the novel is significantly different from the M edition. Besides small variations, such as American spellings instead of Canadian, the H edition has two added chapters and a different ending. Stouck says, "The readers for Harper's had felt like John Gray that the story was not long enough, the characters not fully developed. Negotiations resulted in Wilson writing two more chapters that would develop the character of Vera" (*A Critical Biography* 192). Even though Wilson's editors at Harper and Macmillan each wanted similar changes, the H edition is closer to what both editors wanted. The evidence suggests that Harper achieved these changes while Macmillan did not because Harper pushed harder. While Wilson went into "negotiations" with Harper, Wilson's editor at Macmillan did not push the issue. According to Stouck, "Gray seems to have overlooked the fact that Wilson did not revise *Swamp Angel* extensively and that it remained short" (190). Whether this resulted in a better edition of the novel is up for debate, but Wilson's unique relationship with Gray clearly had a significant impact on the outcome of the M edition.

Based on their letters, Gray and Wilson had mutual respect and admiration for one another. They were friends as well as colleagues. Wilson signs her letters to Gray "Affectionately" (*Letters* 186) and "with love" (196). Wilson resists Gray's recommendations sometimes, while at

other times she trusts his advice. In the previously mentioned letter that Wilson wrote to Gray on July 25, 1953, she said, “Mr. Fischer of Harper’s . . . suggested I send him what I had done [on *Swamp Angel*] . . . However, I do not want to send to Mr. Fischer until you have seen and spoken” (186). Wilson welcomed Gray’s advice over Harper’s because she was more closely acquainted with him and consequently trusted him more. Likewise, Macmillan may not have pushed Wilson for alterations to her novel as much as Harper because Gray trusted Wilson more than Harper’s representatives trusted her. This is not to say that Wilson or Gray did not have to compromise. Wilson mentions Mr. Fischer of Harper to Gray after saying, “I am sorry it is so short” (186). Wilson agreed to keep the manuscript with Macmillan and away from Harper temporarily, while potentially hinting that Gray might compromise on the length of the novel in return. Gray and Wilson negotiated, yet trusted one another in a way that was unique to their special working relationship.

Wilson’s editors had a significant impact on the novel. Stouck says, “What does seem clear is that the novel developed from . . . at least three separate stories that were eventually incorporated into the larger work” (*A Critical Biography* 184). As I continue to study *Swamp Angel*, I intend to examine these stories and compare them to the editions of the novel. I will also consider the impact that Wilson’s editors had on the alteration of these sections of the work. Stouck notes that material from one of these stories “would eventually be almost wholly excised by her editors in Toronto” (185).

The Multiple Alternate Endings for *Swamp Angel*

An ideal critical edition of the novel would also include an analysis of how the current editions differ, and the significance of those differences. For instance, after comparing the endings of the MS, M, and H editions, several deductions can be made. Geng addresses the issue that few people know there are two different endings to the novel, as it was published in the M and H editions. However, I assert that there are at least four distinct endings to the novel. The MS reveals a third, earlier version of the conclusion, with more than a paragraph that is not present in either the M or H editions. In the MS, Wilson has crossed out this section¹⁵ by hand.

¹⁵ The section that is crossed out in Wilson’s MS on page 207 (previously page 122) reads:
centre of Three Loon Lake her eyes were on the little revolver at her feet. At last she looked around her and shipped her oars. She picked up the revolver.
Objects and animals which have been loved by people acquire a virtue of their own – houses, dogs, jewels, weapons, a mirror, little tools. Maggie now possesses only a yellow

She does so with not one, but six slash marks. Presumably, Wilson used the unnecessary number of marks to make it unmistakably clear to her typist, Mrs. Bell, not to include the section in the next draft. Unlike Geng, Stouck quotes this eliminated section, although not in its entirety (188-9). Furthermore, Stouck merely mentions this section as an example of Wilson taking Gray's editing advice. Neither Geng nor Stouck acknowledges that this additional section in the final chapter of the MS forms a third, distinct ending to Wilson's novel.

The eliminated section in the final chapter of the MS also reveals a fourth distinct ending to the novel. This section and the page on which it is written start with an incomplete sentence, "centre [*sic*] of Three Loon Lake her eyes were on the little revolver at her feet" (MS 207). The page is labelled "207" in handwriting towards the upper centre. However, in the upper right-hand corner, a faint "122" is visible, which suggests that this section was moved from the middle of the book to the end. This would make sense, as Stouck informs us that Wilson "relocated the throwing of the gun sequence" based on a request from Gray and then Wilson later negotiated moving the scene back to the end of the novel when Gray requested other changes (*A Critical Biography* 190). Based on this information, there would have been a fourth version of the end of the novel that would not have shown Maggie throwing the gun in the lake. This would have made for a truly distinctive version of the book as each published ending to the novel includes Maggie throwing the gun into the lake.

The MS suggests that the text may have been altered further when the gun-throwing scene was moved. Page 130 of the MS was previously labelled page 121 in the upper right-hand corner. This is the location from which page 207 of the MS (formerly page 122) was moved. Page 130 has been cut with scissors at the bottom of the page. It is clear that more text was once included here because the scissor line cuts through the middle of two sets of overlapping handwritten text, one line that is faint and another that is darker. The fainter line is recognizable as one that leads into the scene in which the Swamp Angel is thrown into the lake. One can just

bowl and a fishing rod and a plain gold ring, but they have their own virtue. The yellow bowl might be crushed to dust, the fishing rod might not survive a fire, it might be possible for her plain gold ring to slip and be lost; but all would remain, each with its own properties and its small immortality, because each has, for Maggie, its proper life. To Mrs. Severance, nothing is now left except some memory and love, and these she will retain, if only in their essence. So, now, she has arrived at that place where she is able to lose, and yet to retain, the essence and virtue of the Swamp Angel, too.

make out the first words, “After Maggie had lighted” (MS 130). These words correspond with a line¹⁶ that is present in the final chapter of the H, M, and MS editions. The location of these words in the MS reaffirms that the gun-throwing scene was previously located in the middle of the novel.

It is possible that there was a fifth variation of the novel’s end. The scene in which the gun is thrown in the lake may have been longer at one point. The illegible, cut-off portions of the faint and dark lines at the bottom of page 130 of the MS may have been additional, unpublished material. The page numbers also indicate that the section had been longer at one time. Since page 130 (previously page 132 and page 121 before that) has the page number “121” typed, while page 207 (previously 122) has the page number “122” written in by hand, it is possible that an additional page, or multiple pages, were also removed. The MS has consistent margins and space in between lines. Based on where page 130 has been cut, as many as four typed lines may have been removed from the page, plus hand-written notes, as well as possible additional pages. Therefore, another version of the end of the novel might have existed.

The section of material¹⁷ that is crossed out on page 207 of the MS reveals how Harper pushed Wilson for an ending that she would not otherwise have been inclined to write. Stouck notes that Wilson “wrote to Professor Desmond Pacey explaining that the new novel she was brooding over was again going to be short. ‘I cannot help it. There people’s lives are not epic and if they were, I have not the kind of ability to expand them to anyone’s profit or pleasure’” (*A Critical Biography* 190). Wilson was a succinct writer, so it would make sense for her to decide on her own to eliminate this section in the MS. It contains interesting yet repetitive musings and draws attention away from the final scene of the novel by referencing minor symbols. In the final chapter of the MS, M, and H editions, the narrator says, “[She] knows that this little gun has a virtue which was more than pearl and nickel to old Mrs. Severance; it has its own properties and its small immortality” (MS 207). By removing the preceding section,¹⁸ and retaining this sentence, Wilson retains the section’s sentiment in a more concise manner and keeps the reader’s focus on the novel’s most significant symbol, the revolver. Based on Wilson’s concise writing

¹⁶ In the M edition, prior to the gun-throwing scene, the narrator says, “After Maggie had lighted the fire she went down to the lake with the Angel in her pocket” (215).

¹⁷ See note 15.

¹⁸ See note 15.

style, she likely did not include the additional paragraph that is in the H ending without prodding from Harper's representatives.

The additional paragraph was likely added because Harper's editors did not trust Wilson as much as Gray did. The H ending attempts to make Wilson's untraditional ending more traditional. It endeavours to tie the various characters' plots more closely together, by mentioning Nell Severance, Vera Gunnarsen, Haldar Gunnarsen, and Angus Quong once more. The H ending suggests more strongly that Maggie will remain at Three Loon Lake, as the additional paragraph ends with Maggie rowing in the direction of the lodge. The H ending also makes it clearer that the reader is intentionally left with unanswered questions. The H version states, "Would a recovered but enfeebled Vera return to the lake and to the poignant sight of that memorable and melancholy shore? And if she did not return, could Haldar so far bend his own strong will as to stay with her in town?" (H 215). These questions are unnecessary because they are implicit in the M ending.

In the M version, the gun is out of Maggie's sight, yet she seems reassured that the essence of a person or thing may remain after death. Maggie poetically asks, "Yet does the essence of all custom and virtue perish?" (M 216). The M edition implies that Nell's essence will remain with Maggie after Nell's death, while the H edition makes this comparison painfully explicit. The H edition adds, "The far shore (like Mrs. Severance) would recede until it was nearly out of sight, but it would still be there" (H 220). By making these subtleties overt, the Harper editors show a lack of confidence in Wilson's careful restraint. Based on the H text, it seems the Harper representatives were concerned that the plot was unresolved and worried about their readers' ability to appreciate this unconventional novel. Harper compromised the poetic final lines of the M ending in favour of a more explanatory final paragraph. Gray's unique editor-author relationship with Wilson resulted in a more Modernist version of the novel that many readers preferred at the time and to this day.

The production history of Wilson's *Swamp Angel* is complex and underrepresented by the current editions of her novel. A fully comprehensive, critical study of this history is currently lacking. As I continue my research, I will endeavour to unravel the mystery behind how and why this text has evolved as it has. I will continue to outline how an improved, comprehensive resource text for *Swamp Angel* could be created. The development of this classic Canadian novel deserves a thorough examination rather than concealment of its editing and publication history.

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