CHAPTER VI
CONCLUSION

Twentieth Century is a climatic era in the history of American Literature, the period in which the process which had been germinating for two hundred years at last reached its fruition. A study of American Literature in the twentieth century, therefore, must first concern himself with identifying those national characteristics which set it apart from the other literature out of which it developed. American Literature in the twentieth century exhibits at least two qualities which make it distinctive, it is Iconoclastic and Individualistic, that is, it is above all a literature of rebellion against conventions, whether social, moral, or literary, and it is marked in technique and style by A Search for a National Vernacular.

The study of the evolution of literature is analogous to the study of evolutionary processes in living organism, each literary generation derives from the preceding one just as generations succeeded each other in the biological life process. At the same time the process of evolution in a literature is in one sense more complex literary movements long dormant are frequently revived and renovated to fit the age so that the influence of a literary
movement may be felt across the gap of centuries. Medieval art, neglected since the Renaissance, was revived to inspire the British poets of the nineteenth century pre- Raphaelite Movement and the Trecento Italian Poetry of Dante and Cavalcanti served as a model for the new poetic technique of Pound and Eliot in the twentieth century.

Undoubtedly, the dominant phenomenon in nineteenth century European Literature was the emergence of Realism. From a literary point of view the triumph of realism was the triumph of novel, in which it found its most apt expression. The beginning of realism can naturally be traced as far back as Homer; but in modern times a convenient arbitrary point of departure is to be found in the work of Stendhal. In England the Realistic Movements, latent in Defoe, Fielding and Richardson, begins in earnest with Charles Dickens. Perhaps the most powerful of the European realistic novels were those of the Great Russian triumvirate: Fyodor Dostoyevsky (1829-1910), Ivan Turgenev (1818-83), and Count Leo Tolstoy (1829-1910).

Towards the end of the century the Realistic Movement on the continent began to metamorphose into the school known as Naturalism. Compared with mid-century realism, naturalism
tended to be more militantly scientific in its approach and even more concerned with degraded, often sordid, with the critic Hippolyte Taine the honour of founding the naturalist school. Zole sought to make literature into a branch of the social behavior as the chemist studies the behavior of compounds in a test tube.

Many names might be cited in a list of American authors who anticipated the Realistic Movement of the twentieth century. The immediate founders of the realistic school, however, are four authors who dominated the period between 1880 to the First World War: W.D. Howells, Henry James, Frank Norris and Stephen Crane. Where the main body of European novelists had turned to realism in the nineteenth century and then reacted again in the twentieth century, the Americans, following their example a generation behind them, arrived at the peak Realistic Movement around 1914.

Although naturalism is foreshadowed in the work of Stendhal, Balzac, Ibsen and others, the school properly speaking was established by Emile Zola (1840-1902). In twentieth century American Literature, a new school of fiction in rural settings has appeared a movement which has little connection with the
nineteenth century local colorists and which is connected instead to the dominant school of naturalism in modern fiction.

One of the outstanding characteristics of the twentieth century is its cultural heredity. It is an era in which a confusion of contradictory systems, attitudes, and philosophies exist side by side. The fact that English and American novels are written in a common language often blinds us to the differences between them. In individual instances, of course, these differences may be so slight as to be almost indistinguishable. When one turns from individual novels to the body of what seem representative novels of both countries, broad and well defined differences between them are immediately apparent, differences that reflect differences in historical experience and in the national character history produces.

These differences are not recent in origin. They were just as strongly marked in nineteenth century fiction as they are in that of today. From the very beginning, American novelists themselves have been aware of their divergence from the English tradition. Awareness was forced upon them by the nature of the society in which they lived as compared with that of Britain. The great theme of European novel has been man’s life in society: more
precisely, the education of men and women, in the sense of their learning to distinguish, through their inescapable involvement in society, the true from the false of both in them and in the world about them. The Classic American was a man who had opted out of society anything but in the simplest form. For many Americans, the repudiation of Europe and the past of tantamount to a repudiation of all external restraint upon their individual. The classic American novel has dealt not so much with the life of man in society as with the life of solitary man alone and wrestling with himself. Characters are not in process of discovering the nature of society and of themselves in and through society but are, on the contrary, characters profoundly alienated from society. Another abiding factor in the American novel is a constant preoccupation with the meaning of being an American, by virtue of his being an American, with all that which entails, must come to terms with his Americanness and seek to define it. The theme of many of the best American novel is American itself.

The American novelists, on the other hand, are probably more ambitious and more daring; and also, perhaps more crude. They are relatively unconcerned with or impatient of style in the
narrow sense of elegance of expression and of subtlety psychological analysis, of what, Thomas Wolfe dismissed as the ‘European and fancy’. If the gap between ambition and talent is marked, he shall seem more pretentious.

As a witness to the changing America from year 1910 to 1940, a talented generation of American novelists is available. To name, only eight from a list that might be made much longer, Sinclair Lewis, F. Scott Fitzgerald, John Doss Possos, William Faulkner, John Steinbeck, James T. Farrell and Richard Wright came to maturity during these years. Although all but Wolfe and Fitzgerald were alive and still writing after World War II, they had already done most of their best work. Their novels, for the most part, dealt either with the years of their remembered youth, just before and during World War I, or with their years of adulthood in the twenties and thirties. All of them were acutely aware of the strong forces of change bearing down upon their familiar world.

Wolfe’s subject was always himself and his experiences, transmuted by the imagination and elevated by the power of his rhetoric. His effort to put a person, himself, fully on record through the guise of fiction was a major and masterful accomplishment in the American novel, and at the time of his
death he was ranked among the top three or four twentieth-century American novelists. His critical stock has fallen severely since his death in 1938, yet his command of language, the strength of his characterization, and the power with which he could describe the experiences and feelings of youth were all such that his place as a permanent figure in American writing seems assured.

Thomas Wolfe was a long-winded playwright before he took to writing long-winded novels, which he did at least in part because he couldn't get anyone to produce his work for the stage. *Welcome to Our City*, a play, he wrote while in graduate school at Harvard, was performed twice by his fellow students in 1923 and only once after that, in Zurich in 1962, translated into German. This, in any case, is the claim of the Mint Theater Company, which has resurrected the work in honor of the centennial of Wolfe's birth on Oct.

There are two possible interpretations for such a sparse production history, the more reverential one being the Mint's: that this is a worthy work lying undiscovered and waiting for rescue from oblivion. It is also the wrong one, for *Welcome to Our City*, an outraged treatise on race, class and the evils of American
capitalism, is written with all the vociferous self-righteousness of
the smartest kid in the class; unhappily, it's also presented that
way. Set in Altamont, the fictionalized town that Wolfe based on
his home, Asheville, N.C., and where he would set much of his
later work, the play depicts a place in the middle of a real estate
boom, where flush times have encouraged a narrowing of the
minds. Jews are disparaged, the local university professor who
teaches evolution has been dismissed and the governor is willfully
superficial.

Gentlemen, in my opinion, God and good weather are
the two greatest campaign issues the Democratic Party
has ever had, a country club dining room full of
toadying supporters. As you know, in my campaign I
came out in favor of both. Such is the subtlety of the
play's satire.¹

The plot is driven by the desire of the city's autocrats to
relocate the enclave of black citizens away from the centre of town
by buying up the homes they live in and evicting them. The plan is
thwarted by the refusal of one man to sell; he's a black doctor who
owns his own home. He's reviled, of course, by whites for
presuming to live above his station, and he also happens to have a
daughter who happens to be carrying on with the son of the man
who is trying to force him to sell. Friction ensues, then conflagration. At one point, the wife of the leading white character asks her husband, referring to the city's blacks: “What are we going to do with those people, Will? His reply: It begins to look, honey, as if we're going to have to understand them.' Get it?”

Eighty years ago, there was, no doubt, a measure of bravery in the play's critique of middle-class white American values and even some prescience in its prediction of race warfare. Certainly Wolfe himself thought so. But righteousness and foresight aren't terribly powerful or interesting when they're dramatized so clunkily, when the dialogue is almost exclusively written in expositional paragraphs, when not a single character has an idiosyncrasy to distinguish him from his stereotype. It's difficult to overstate the medium of the text, which is the main execration that Wolfe should ever have had hurled at him.

Thomas Wolfe a bulking slow moving giant of a man conscious of standing six foot six in a world of five foot-eight came close to creating the Great American Novel that critics have dreamt of a work epitomizing the life, spirit, and character of the United States, living on canned beans, coffee, and cigarettes, working by day and writing by night, Wolfe
captured the essence of a cross section of America, drawing from the experience of his own lonely life to write one of the classics of modern American Literature, *Look Homeward, Angel*.

Although *Look Homeward, Angel* purports to be a novel, it is, in fact, a thinly veiled autobiography of Thomas Wolfe’s unhappy boyhood and his native city of Asheville, North Carolina. It is also the story of Wolfe’s violent tempered father and shrewd, tight fisted mother, who were separated when Tom was seven years old. Wolfe also portrayed in *Look Homeward, Angel* other relatives, friends and acquaintances who lived in his home town—all painted larger than life, their characters laid bare for all to see. It was only natural, therefore, when Wolfe’s novel was published in 1929 that the people of his home town would be furious. Asheville was known then, as it is today, as a picturesque, peaceful mountain resort. Many of its citizens feared that the bad publicity Wolfe had given the famed resort would hurt its business.

Thomas Wolfe’s novels are autobiographical, and he could not handle experience that were not directly his own. He was
therefore doomed to repeat himself endlessly. Eugene Gant and George Webber, the two heroes of his four novels, grow up in the same Southern town, have the same feelings of alienation, attend the same university, come North in search of fame and fortune as writers, and react to everything with the same kind of exaggerated emotional frenzy. In all this they are simple doing what Wolfe had just weeks short of his thirty eight birthday, was surely a tragedy in personal terms, but it was not a tragedy in personal terms, but it was not a tragedy in terms of his art since that art had no where to go except over its own well-worn track.

Some wrote to Wolfe: “threatening to kill him if he ever came home”\(^3\). One old lady who had known Wolfe all his life, wrote him “she would like to see his big Overgrown Karakuls (over grown Carcass) dragged across the public square”\(^4\) . Wolfe had anticipated the storm of protest over publication of Look Homeward, Angel and tried to soften it in a foreword, he said:

> Was written in innocence and nakedness of spirit. We are, he added. The sum of all the moment of our lives...and if the writer has used the clay of life to make his book, he has only used the clay of
life to make his book, he has only used what all man must.\footnote{5}

If Wolfe’s *Look Homeward, Angel* was nothing less than life itself, it can be said of him that through rich literary gift he was able to transform relatives, friends, and acquaintances into a great gallery of portraits, each finely modeled and shaded. What makes the book great, however, is Wolfe’s success in using people and situations to illuminate fundamental truths.

In the Gant household about which Wolfe wrote, “the evil that pervades the family and warps the lives of all who came in contact with it, is selfishness. Love might have dispelled the evil, but each Gant was too busy with his own affairs to look into the hearts of others.”\footnote{6} Thomas Wolfe possessed a singularly delicate sensory perception, a remarkably retentive memory, a passionate concern with the nature of experience, a deep patriotic strain, a commitment to self expression, and a powerful rhetorical style. These elements combined in his work to produce quest, sprawling epic of one man’s experience in America. For more than thirty-five years, the novels of Thomas Wolfe have been regarded by critics as narrowly autobiographical, severely limited by his bigotry, his
provincialism, and a persistent adolescence which he failed to outgrow. Any one who writes about Thomas Wolfe has to deal with the fact that nearly all of his work was, in greater of lesser degree, autobiographical.

The Life of Eugene Gant, as presented in *Look Homeward, Angel* and *Of Time and the River* is remarkably like the history of Thomas Wolfe. He created something new and something meaningful through a transmutation of what he saw, heard, and realized. Yet neither Wolfe nor Perkins could deny that the novels often transcribed real events with embarrassing fidelity. Wolfe’s Second major work, *Of Time and the River* was equally autobiographical in following Eugene Gant’s graduate training at Harvard, his university teaching in New York City, and his wanderings in Europe. Although the novel was well reviewed, certain critics began to deprecate Wolfe’s inability to do more than write down at inordinate length the minutia of his own experience and thoughts. They attributed such form as the novels had achieved to the editorial genius of Maxwell Perkins, who had extracted the better passage from truckloads of rambling manuscripts: a sensitive man, Wolfe was upset by this attack.
He informed Perkins that his next novel would be a completely objective non-autobiographical work.

Emotionally he never developed beyond late adolescence. The key word in adolescence, as in childhood, is ‘I’, a pronoun to which Wolfe’s writing remained totally loyal. The egotism of his young protagonists overhead, hypersensitive, voracious dominates the novels and forces them into its single restrictive channel. Their life aim is cosmic: to absorb totality, read all the books, travel over the entire earth, eat and drink in vast quantities, make love to all women, and see the whole world into themselves. Wolfe’s favorite mythical figure is Faust, the man eager to sell his soul in exchange for the freedom to experience everything, and one of his favorite adjectives in “Faustian”.

His novels are not really works of art but loose explosions of verbal energy. Wolfe kept detailed notebooks and journals as he went along, and was forever jotting down as usable material, everything that occurred to him as soon as it happened. As a writer Wolfe is almost wholly derivative. The feverish cultivation of his own genius and the abnormal longing for fame he gets from Keats. Shelley Supplies him
with a passion for absolutes and, in the later novels, his growing interest in social reform.

Even Wolfe’s way of throwing himself burningly into every moment, even his dying young link him to these Romantic Poets. His dominant subject was the search for the lost father, Wolfe’s heroes search furiously for a good many things. But the established theory about all these guests is that their real goal is a powerful father figure. Wolfe’s own father, W.O. Wolfe, and his fictional self in the early novel, Oliver Gant, were men tremendous energy, potency, and magnetism, but ruined by illness, drunkenness, irresponsibility, gigantic defects of various kinds.

His one dimension is gigantism, and his novels are to be read as fervid obsessions with bulk, quantity, inflation the outpourings of an outsized man. Wolfe was abnormally conscious of his own height and once wrote a short story, Gulliver. On how it felt to be six feet six in a world filled with men who were five feet eight. His swollen perspective was encouraged by geography. The town in which he grew up Asheville, North Carolina was surrounded by a towering ring of mountains. The vast continental sprawl of the United States,
with its huge river running on for hundreds of miles, it
dizzying mountain ranges and divide, its seemingly endless
space, became Wolfe’s natural subject.

He was riddled with vicious prejudices. Jews and Negroes
were his favorite targets, but he had enough hate left over to
spray almost every immigrant ethnic group from Ireland to
Slovakia. Another, perhaps the most powerful of his obsessions
was time. Time devoured reality and consigned it to the dead past.
It could be brought back to life only through memory, but
memory was limited and unreliable, so that much of our
experience was doomed to be forgotten. Wolfe strained and
sweated to remember, he struggled for total recall:

I would be sitting, for example, on the terrace of a
cafe watching the flash and play of life before me
on the Avenue de l’ opera and suddenly I would
remember the iron railing that goes along the
boardwalk at Atlantic city. I could see it instantly just
the way it was, the heavy iron pipe; its raw, galvanized
look; the way the joints were fitted together. It
was all so vivid and concrete that I could feel my
hand upon it and know the exact dimensions, its
size and weight and shape.
No fleeting or fugitive thought was too small for him to snatch at and pin down in his crowded notebooks. The frenzy of his prose was simply the mark of his agonizing effort to get hold of life before it vanished. Yet all the while he was seized by the sense of failure, that no matter how hard he tried a significant portion of everything would get away. Most human beings fear death as an unavoidable point in the future. Wolfe feared it as a remorseless movement into the past.

To evaluate Wolfe fully, it is important to be aware of the range of narrative techniques. Wolfe employed and to judge their success. Certainly he was influenced by Joyce’s experimentation in *Ulysses*, which led him, for example, to employ sound devices, word play, and stream-of-consciousness techniques. The broad scope of his work, his attempts to hear and see and telling everything, accounts for his use of varying stylistic method of experience. Although he used conventional devices—smiles, metaphors, images, symbols, allusions—in conventional ways, his style is nonetheless lightly individual.

His individuality is, however, unfortunately marred by his self-indulgent rhetoric. Many techniques were successful. For
example, Wolfe, a compulsive listener, reproduced speech accurately: pronunciation, regional accents, and conversational patterns. His purpose was often to use speech to represent a character fully. At times, however, Wolfe implicitly satirized characters by their manner of speaking. Wolfe knew the Brooklyn dialect well and he frequently could use it in writing.

The Brooklyn native’s speech reveals his narrow outlook and suggests a less-educated background than that of the outsider whose faith in the map suggests his trust in reason and order. Of Time and the River has a short episode in which Wolfe lets a character revel in meaningless abstractions. Dr, Thornton, retired physician living at the Hotel Kopold, says to her fellow residents:

I see nothing but order and harmony in the universe. I lift my eyes upto the stars’ ...at the same time lifting her face in a movement of rapturous contemplation toward the ceiling of the hotel lobby. 8

She continues a rhapsody about the noble creature, man; however, her audience is composed of common place guests and workers, who embody few, if any, noble attributes. In other episode, a news paper reporter calls in a story about Park Avenue fire. The reporter shouts:
Cordon, I say! C-o-r-d-o-n ... How long have you been working on a newspaper, any way? Didn’t you ever hear of a Cordon before? 9

Apparently the night clerk never had and Wolfe implies that with the word “Cordon” the reporter is over writing. It is true that Wolfe often patterned his characters on earlier ones, and speech patterns are a primary due to this. Another device Wolfe uses effectively is associating particular words or expression with specific characters. Eliza’s expression:

Pshaw, now! is her most frequent exclamation and her clairvoyant moments are introduced with I just had a feeling. I don’t know what you’d call it...is Jesus God... It’s begun again, Luke Gant stutters, ands Helen’s voice far too has its old cracked note of hysteria. 10

When Eudora Wetly gives readings from losing Battles, She tells audience not to bother with keeping the individual voices straight. Better, she says, to consider them as a chorus. Indeed, the members of the Beecham family in losing battles do seem to speak. But the members of the Gant family do not, and neither does any other group of characters on Wolfe’s fiction. These
characters are highly individual and often antagonistic toward each other; their voices are singular.

Certainly one of the Wolfe’s most successful techniques, especially in *Look Homeward, Angel* is burlesque. The description of the woman who rents part of Gant’s house after Eliza opens the boarding house is a good example:

A grass widow, forty nine, with piled hair of dyed henna, corseted breasts and hips architecturally protuberant in sharp diagonal, meaty mottled arms, and a guiched face of leaden flaccidity puttied up mightily with cosmetics, rented the upstairs of Wodson Street while Helen was absent. 11

The effect is comic even if the modifiers are exaggerated and the tone farcical. Among Wolfe’s least successful devices are his hyphenated modifiers, numerous present participles, and unconventional adjectives. A single page from *Look Homeward, Angel* provides these examples:

A Great tree of birds will sing ...burgeonging richly, filling the air also with warm-throated plum-drooping bird notes; and the harsh hill-earth. 12

These modifies occur frequently, but never more so than in these passages:
The stilted Cadillac gasped cylindrically up the hill. Eugene drops his nickel in the Sunday school collection plate. Since he usually had enough left over for cold gaseous draughts at the soda fountain.\footnote{13}

These passages are unnecessarily fancy for all car climbing a steep slope and a boy buying a 5¢ soda. By means of elevated diction and inverted syntax, Wolfe sometimes describes extraordinary qualities to ordinary events. For instance, when Eliza Gant awakens early at Dixieland, the description suggests that a goddess has awakened: Roofing the deep tides, swinging in their embrace, rocked Eliza’s; life sargassic, as when, a morning, a breath of kitchen air squirmed through her guarded crack of door, and fanned the pendant clusters of old string in floating rhythms.

Detail is the means by which a writer fixes a character’s face, brings to life the sight of a holiday table, or make memorable the individual sounds of human voices. Although Wolfe is at times too profuse with details, he usually selects those that are apt. His success comes in part from his almost total recall. Furthermore, he was sketched hands; building spires, and faces details he had remembered. He was unusually adept at using details of clothing to reveal characters personalities.
For example, Jim Trivett’s clothing shows the fashion at pulpit Hill at least the fashion of a country boy comes to college. The son of a rich tobacco farmer, Trivett’s unruly hair, tobacco juice stains and bad teeth contrast sharply with his all American college man dress, circa 1920:

Skin tight trousers...ended on inch above his oxford shoes exposing an inch of clocked shoes, a bobtailed coat belted in across the kidney’s large striped collars of skill under his coat; he wore a big sweater with high-school numerals. ¹⁴

Clothing details are also important in describing Eugene’s fellow workers in the Norfolk shipyards. Many of the workers are Georgia farm boys who have never before earned ten, twelve, or eighteen dollars a day. At night, these same boys appear on the streets dressed extravagantly in $18.00 leathers, $80.00 suits, and $8.00 silk shirts, with broad alternating hands of red and blue. Ironically, in spite of having more money than most other Altamont citizens, Eliza Gant rarely wears becoming clothes. Indeed, she does her bargaining outfit when she buys and sells real estate, seeing a distinct advantage in not dressing too well when trading.
Even at home, where she nags everyone to turn off lights to economize, she wears shabby sleepwear. The narrative voice describes her as ‘clothed in a tattered old sweater and indefinable under lappings. In contrast, Laura James dresses elegantly in short plied skirts and waists of knitted silk. The family of Joel Pierce and their Hudson River neighbors pay much attention to dressing properly, gentleman will wear white flannels. But Wolfe’s most elegantly dressed character of Francis Starwick. Clothes not only mark Starwick as a poseur but also are one means of revealing to Eugene that Starwick is homosexual.

On the steps of the Eugene by chance meets Starwick, wearing a Russian blouse of soft blue wool which snuggled around his neck in voluptuous folds and had a kind of diamond shaped design of crimson threads along the band. Still carrying and indolently twirling his cane, Starwick is an elegantly dressed, as always, in casual beautifully tailored, brown tweed garments.

Wolfe’s most extensive use of details, however, is the catalogue. Because he liked its inclusiveness, he used frequently; catalogeous of odors, boats, American cities, occupations, vagrants, names, sports, farm products, flower, mountain, towns and gaps and gorges, sounds, authors name, book titles,
Altamont citizens, window displays and above all foods. Except Whitman, few American writers have used the catalogue as extensively or as effectively as Wolfe.

Throughout his writing, Wolfe never tires of cataloguing food—its appearance, aroma, and taste. First Wolfe uses precise description of food and its selection as a means of revealing character’s backgrounds. In *Look Homeward, Angel*, for example, the Gant’s beautiful table bears food that the middle class would normally have. Indeed, in most southern household, figs, raisins, mixed nuts, and Florida fruits are associated with holidays, not with everyday menus. Such foods are auxiliary dainties and strange foods and fruits that arrive in the grocer’s boxes a few days before celebrations. Although Joel Pierce’s mother is Southern and sometimes serves dishes Eliza’s broader would have expected, Mrs. Pierce’s kitchen regularly stocks anchovies, Austrian hams, and herrings. Esther Jack carefully shops for the tenderest lettuces, the freshest vegetables, the best meats. The meals she prepares for an emblem of their courtship. And Thomas Wolfe declared once that he himself had eaten more T-bone steaks and baked potatoes than anybody else in American.
Another writing technique that Wolfe used was the imitation of sounds and rhythms. It is the sound of the train that he often used as in the opening *Of Time and the River*. Here violent coupling and sudden movements are conveyed through onomatopoeic words written on upper case letters:

WHAM! SMASH! Once the train is moving along at a fast clip, the sounds fall into variations of repetitive nonsense patterns. Click, Clack, Clackety Clack ... Stip, Step, Rackety Rack. Action verbs personify the train’s movements and sounds: rock, smash, swerve...left her shirr and let her purr, at eighty Per. The calmness that comes when the ride is well underway produces a different set of sounds in the moonlight.  

As the train passes Virginia countryside; Wolfe introduces the rhythmic phrase, dreaming in the moonlight. He then repeats the phrase several times but varies the participle by using “beaming”, “Seeming”, “gleaming”, and “Streaming”. The passage ends with the song like repetition of “-Mo-hoo-oo light—oo light oolight oonlight ...To be seeming to be dreaming in the moonlight.”

As the night draws to a close and the train nears the Baltimore station, Wolfe introduces the personification like pale
pity and lean death, who forever keep time with the train. Now sounds and rhymes of obtain words are used the-end the whole sequence. This passage of fifty-odd Latinate words must be heard for its full effect; however, it illustrates visually Wolfe’s experiments in suggesting the sounds of the train.

Wolfe’s rhetorical questions are numerous; he uses personification freely, he intersperses Latin, Greek, French and German words. He quotes stanzas and tag lines from songs and poems; he writes day dreams, parodies, and burlesque. Any one of his four novels contains all these techniques; all four display his indulgence as well as his lyricism that characterized of his best writing.

For example the stream of consciousness section that focus the opening chapter Of Time and the River has a lyrical quality as well as a series of mental associations triggered by familiar poem and song tags. The setting of Arles, France, seated in a café, Eugene ruminates upon time, each mental relate to the word time. Wolfe usually made good use of contemporary allusion which adds reality to his fiction. For instance, William Jennings Bryan visits Altamont and in New York, Joel Pierce’s mother visits her Hudson River neighbors the Franklin Roosevelt’s. On other
occasions Wolfe uses the actual names of Prizes fighters, baseball players, writers, literary cities, and political a business officials. Such names and details convey much about the 1920s and 1930s that would have been features in every city newspaper at the time. Perhaps more interesting are Wolfe’s literary allusions, which he uses for many purposes often comic.

In *Look Homeward, Angel* when a milliner with the pedestrian name of Mrs. Thelma Jarvis drains her sodas glass at the drugstore fountain the narrator say, Drink “to me only with the eyes, a poetic suggestion Thelma would not understand.” As she leaves, making her way through the crowded tables, the narrator quotes a starling line from Donne’s poem, *The Canonization*: Certainly “neither Thelma nor the other customers would understand this junction.” Allusions to paintings occur frequently, too, usually, to Wolfe’s favorite artists: Hogarth, Brueghel, Van Gogh Caranch, Grunewold, Turner, Musical Allusion, however, do not appear often and often opera was usually a source of satire for Wolfe.

For example in *Of Time and the River* Wolfe explains the homosexual Starwick’s aberrant behavior as fitting only in a world of Opera. Unquestionably, Wolfe has real touch for comic
exaggeration.” For example, he writes about day dreams in which Eugene Gant imagines himself as hero and rescuer, calling him “Bruce-Eugene” and “the Dixie Ghost”\textsuperscript{19}. In such roles he projects himself as the stereotypic heroes of novels. The effectiveness of Wolfe’s exaggerated humour is evident in other scenes. Among the best examples from \textit{Look Homeward, Angel} is further funeral parlor scene with the obsequious undertaker, Heroes Hines, other moments of comedy are Mr. Leonard’s Bumbling attempts to teach Latin and German and Eugene’s outrageous appearance as Prince Hal during the \textit{Altamont Shakespeare celebration}.

Many of Wolfe’s attitudes towards life and the role of the artist can be ascertained through his letters and notebooks and to an extent, documented through his fiction. His autobiographical identification with Eugene Gant and George Webber is obvious and often these characters are obsessed with the same ideas and issues that concerned Wolfe. Wolfe celebrated America’s cities and town, people and their occupations, rivers and mountains and plains. However, the frantic desire of Americans to achieve quick fortunes appalled him.

Wolfe was distributed by superficial people who considered membership to civic and social clubs tantamount to success. Form
New York he wrote Mabel that he occasionally saw an Asheville paper and what he read there led him to believe a club existed for everything under the sun, including hog raising.

In dealing with this problem in *Look Homeward, Angel* Wolfe questions phases of the American dream. Not as vituperative as Sinclair Lewis on satirizing America’s middle class life, does scorn much in Altamont and Asheville. Wolfe was the contemporary of Scott Fitzerald and Earnest Hemingway, all three of whom has Max Perkins as their editor. Wolfe, however, shunned the life styles of his two fellow novelists. As a writer, Wolfe worked long, hard hours.

Throughout his last year in New York, Wolfe conferred with Aswell twice a week and saw any one socially. His routine was to rise at about 11.00 have breakfast and start writing. A secretary came at noon to take dictation or to type the manuscript he had ready. He left around 6.00. He worked steadily until he stopped for dinner at around 9.00. Although he took vocations when his nerves could no longer tolerate the pressure, Wolfe was seldom away from his work for long periods.

Wolfe was a man who appeared to be larger than life, a fact appropriate to his great ambition. His death at age thirty seven
has given him the aura of youth unlike his brothers and sisters, he was driven to art and as he wrote in *The Story of the Novel*, he wanted fame as every youth who ever wrote must want it, and yet fame was a shining, bright, and most uncertain thing. The fame came early. In 1936, two years before Wolfe’s death, his mother wrote to John Terry that much of her time was taken up in talking to strangers. These people came to Asheville to see the house where Wolfe lived; they wanted to talk to her about him and his work.

Almost ten years after Wolfe died, Aline Bernstein still spoke of their extraordinary relationship and referred to the glory that she felt in their love. Such an experience was, she thought, rare. But it was Max Perkins, that distinguished editor, with his characteristics New England reserve, who regarded Wolfe with the highest esteem of all. Perkins felt that at the heart of Wolfe’s being was an “Unconquerable archangel, a force that somehow set him apart. Judgments about him could not be made simply or in traditional terms.

Wolfe was a man who expanded inordinate energy in life and in art; his great compulsion for experience in art is undoubtedly responsible for the successes, as well as the failures,
of his fiction nationalities, as well as Blacks, Jews and Indians. He remains an important spokesman for the 1930s, since he portrayed many of the social, artistic, and political concerns of that decade. Most of all, though, Wolfe, is important in conveying the sense of a lost past, in fiction, he successfully rendered the emotions of the loneliness, sorrow, alienation, love and lost love.

He would indeed envision the American novel that would encompass generations and centuries. He will continue to make any readers say of his characters and of their adventures and experience in his note book kept from August, 30, 1936. Until late September 1936. Wolfe wrote the line: “My name is Wolfe, I am an American.”

His name, Wolfe identifies him with his family and with his native region; American speaks of his abiding loyalty and his penchant to celebrate the country in spite of its shortcomings and failures. He was a spokesman for the search for the South and for America. And if he is judged as a failed artist, he was, nevertheless, a man of great talent who, when subject matter, length, and style were harmonious, produced fiction of the first order.
NOTES AND REFERENCES


3 Suzanne Stutman, New Haven, Conan, College & University Press, 1964, p. 73.

4 Ibid., p. 25.


6 Ibid., p. 256.

7 Ibid., p. 257.


9 Ibid., p. 243.

10 Ibid., p. 246.

12 Ibid., p. 250.

13 Ibid., p. 253.


15 Ibid., p. 259.

16 Ibid., p. 260.


18 Ibid., p. 260.
