Chapter-IV

THE DEMOCRATIC DREAM – SELF, SOCIETY AND NATION

In a process of constant development, the authorial self negotiates with the society and the nation in an attempt to concretize his democratic dream. On one hand, there is the world of Wolfe’s inner self, a world structured of consciousness, of emotions, of impressions, of nostalgic memories, brooded over by a sense of the irreversible onrush of dark time. The inner self, groping for meanings, attempts to understand itself while struggling to establish meaningful relations with others, a private world that Wolfe calls the buried life. On the other hand is the literal, social context represented with great accuracy but often with satiric exaggeration. The self in its insulated dream of time is unable to find the door by which to enter its social context, and early in his career, Wolfe felt contented in allowing these two worlds to exist in contradictory opposition. As he matured and developed he began attempting reconciliation between the inner world and the outer world, holding them together in a national vision. This is the world of the artist where he attempts to fuse the two into a permanent expression of something
significant about life. His intention is that in this larger world, the self and the social world will be merged in an expression of the national ideal, as in case of Whitman: "One's self I sing, a simple separate person/Yet utter the word Democratic, the world En Masse" (Whitman, 1975: 37). Thus, Wolfe's quest is to successfully integrate the three worlds of self, society and nation.

For Wolfe art is the only means that could integrate contraries. He always discovers things in patterns of opposites or binaries. Being a declared believer in romanticism, Wolfe's subjectivity is unquestionable. Inseparable with it is his flair for dramatic presentation of situations and scenes galore in society. The social "man-swarm" attracted him to rapt fascination. He is fascinated even by mankind's propensity to and capability of evil. This simultaneous proneness to attraction and the vehement criticism of that fascination is his typical characteristic. It is this duality that had mostly guided his writing. It would probably be of significance to treat Wolfe as a split personality. He had attempted to discover his own identity and through it make meaning of the social milieu and the nation, uncontrollably adrift on the river of time, while nature
remained unmoved and static passively observing humanity drawn inexorably towards fate.

The works under the first section — "self" — deal with discordant relationships with Wolfe as the central character. But Wolfe does not confine himself only to personal themes. He also feels that as a writer, he is responsible to his society. The works discussed under the section "Society" discover Wolfe deeply troubled by social problems. The feeling of responsibility is carried further when he visualized himself as a representative writer of the American people. As a Southerner, Wolfe desired and attempted to project himself as a writer of the likes of Walt Whitman and Sinclair Lewis. The image of the 'nation' he had and his obligation to project it was supreme in his consciousness. He thus struggled to emerge out of the petty label of a Southern writer and establish his identity as an American writer.

SELF

Most of Wolfe's writing emerge from intense personal experience. The process of self-actualization is narrativised in dramatizing those
experiences where the authorial self occupies the center. Not only is the ‘self’ recognized in its various manifestations, but it also expands in the network of relationships.

Wolfe asserted that no man could know his brother. His sense of alienation and isolation informed his consciousness. But the paradox is worth noting – Wolfe described his fellowmen with deep understanding. Wolfe, whose subject seemed always to be himself, has drawn characters in large measure from real life rather than from imagination, and has portrayed his world chiefly through the consciousness of his autobiographical self or alter-ego. Through the process of interaction and friction with the self, Wolfe has created a mass of characters so fully realized and vibrant that they live with great vigour.

*Look Homeward, Angel,* assuredly Wolfe’s autobiographical novel, has Eugene Gant as the sentient center through which we experience the Wolfian world. Yet, the protagonist is a much less vivid person than the members of his family. It is W.O. Gant (Eugene’s father), Eliza (his mother), his sister Helen and brother Ben apart from innumerable minor
characters who glow with life and absorb our imagination. Eugene himself is more a web of sensibility, a communicating medium than a person. He seems to us more nearly ourselves rather than someone whom we are observing.

The consciousness of the protagonist, as he grew up during childhood, is adrift on time, and observes its surroundings with awe:

The mountains were his masters. They rimmed in life. They were the cup of reality, beyond growth, beyond struggle and death. They were his absolute unity in the midst of eternal change. Old haunt-eyed faces glimmered in his memory. He thought of Swain’s cow, St. Louis, death, himself in the cradle. He was the haunter of himself, trying for a moment to recover what he had been part of. He did not understand change, he did not understand growth. He stared at his framed baby picture in the parlour, and turned away sick with fear and the effort to touch, retain, grasp himself for only a moment ... And it was this that awed him — the weird combination of fixity and change, the terrible moment of immobility stamped with eternity in which passing life at great speed, both the observer and the observed seem frozen in time. There was one moment of timeless suspension when the land did not move, the train did not move, the slattern in the doorway did not move, he did not move. It was as if God had lifted his baton sharply above the endless orchestration of the seas, and the eternal movement had stopped, suspended in the timeless architecture of the absolute. (1929: 158-9)

Eugene continues his daydream:
He believed himself thus at the center of life; he believed the mountains rimmed the heart of the world; he believed that from all the chaos of accident the inevitable event came at the inexorable moment to add to the sum of his life. (1929: 160)

Eugene’s consciousness presents his childhood memories, memories of family life with its happiness and fissures. The image of his father stands out in true animation, a person of immense egotism, with a burning desire to assert himself against the drab world. He is a person of vast appetites and ambivalent needs, and one of them is indulgence in rhetorical abuse of his wife Eliza, with whom he could never establish any harmony:

His turbulent and undisciplined rhetoric had acquired, by the regular convention of its usage, something of the movement and directness of classical epithet: his similies were preposterous, created really in a spirit of vulgar mirth, and the great comic intelligence that was in the family — down to the youngest — was shaken daily by it. The children grew to await his return in the evening with a kind of exhilaration. Indeed, Eliza herself, healing slowly and painfully her great hurt, got a certain stimulation from it; but there was still in her a fear of the periods of drunkenness and latently, a stubborn and unforging recollection of the past …

Gant was a great man, and not a singular one, because singularity does not hold life in unyielding devotion to it.

As he stormed through the house, unleashing his gathered bolts, the children followed him joyously, shrieking
exultantly as he told Eliza he had first seen her “wriggling around the corner like a snake on her belly”, or, as coming in from freezing weather he had charged her and all the Pentlands with malevolent domination of the elements. (1929: 51-52)

Eliza suffered from hyper acquisitiveness – a property mania that gripped her and engrossed her. She neglected her family, moved out of Gant’s house to run a boarding house, and lived a life of miserliness:

Eliza saw Altamont not as so many hills, buildings, people: she saw it in the pattern of a gigantic blueprint. She knew the history of every piece of valuable property ... (1929: 104)

Eliza’s miserliness is evident when she forced Eugene to wear shoes much too small for him just because “It would be a pity to throw away a good pair of shoes.” (1929: 188)

But she had strange fits of generosity. She not only gave money to an unknown Mrs. Morgan but allowed her accommodation in her boarding house as she awaited the birth of her presumably illegitimate child. Eliza liked men who were house-broken, kind and tame, and could be dominated upon. She was good to a little man with a moustache who was out of job. Eliza never bothered him about money.
Childhood memories of the relationship between his father and mother gave Wolfe no sense of security and harmony. His father, represented as W.O. Gant, is a man of overt animality. He would frequent the pubs regularly, and thereafter the brothels of town from where he had to be retrieved by his sons to the relief of the group of trembling, exhausted prostitutes. He leered lecherously at the attractive female boarders of Eliza’s Dixieland, and he found a faithful loyal in his daughter Helen, who condoned, encouraged and promoted the old man’s indecencies.

We see Gant in conversation with “Queen” Elizabeth, the elegant, well-to-do brothel keeper. He enquires after her girls: “‘How are all the girls, Elizabeth?’ he asks kindly”. Elizabeth had come to buy a statue to decorate the grave of a young prostitute, and she chooses the statue of an angel. The meeting stirs old memories: “‘It’s been a long time, Elizabeth,’ he said” (1929: 222). The poignant tenderness of the emotion between Gant and Elizabeth, howsoever illegitimate, is true. There existed nothing akin to this sentiment between Gant and Eliza. Gant relapses into a reverie
of time past, events past, and the onrush of time which will relentlessly catch up with the temporareity of human life: "where now? where after? where then?" (1929: 223)

Throughout *Look Homeward, Angel*, the self of the writer is present as it traces a process of maturing from childhood to youth. He has to suffer the ignominy and exhaustion of being a newspaper route-boy, delivering papers much before dawn in the Negro quarters of town. He harried his defaulter subscribers for payment with wild tenacity. On such a mission, he came into contact with Ella Corpening, a mulatto girl of twenty-six:

"You come roun' in de mawnin'," she said hopefully. "I'll have somethin' fo' yuh, sho. I'se waitin' fo' a white gent'man now. He's goin' gib me a dollah." She moved her great limbs slowly, and smiled at him. Forked pulses beat against his eyes. He gulped dryly: his legs were rotten with excitement. "what's — what's he going to give you a dollar for?" he muttered, barely audible. "Jelly Roll", said Ella Corpening. (1929: 252)

Eugene's contact with the murky world of easy women had originated in the retrieving missions to bring back his father from the brothels. Now he comes into personal contact with Ella, but desperately struggles to escape
from her drowning naked embrace. The pending subscription for newspapers is never paid.

His earliest and most beastly experience of sex consciousness happens when he surprises his degenerate brother Steve with one of Eliza’s woman boarders. Steve, a character almost intolerably repellant and unlit by any spark of the charity so pervasive elsewhere in Wolfe’s writing, symbolizes the horror that Wolfe found in closer family relationships. Eugene is fifteen when he has a sexual experience with a pleasant and discreet little waitress at a hotel. The Eugene-Saga continues in *Of Time and the River*, where he is enamoured of a waitress who “was no longer young” — “but that woman became the central figure of one of those glittering and impossible fantasies young men have” (1935: 153). In another involvement with Eliza’s boarder Miss Brown, Eugene has to part with all the medals he had won at school because he has nothing else to pay Miss Brown with. “It was, she said, not the money: it was the principle of the thing” (1929: 392). So, in lieu of money, he gave her his medals as pledges. “‘If you don’t redeem them’, said Miss Brown, ‘I’ll give them to my own son when I go home ... He’s eighteen years old. He’s almost as
tall as you are and twice as broad’” (1929: 393). Eugene turned his head away, whitening with a sense of nausea and horror, feeling in him an incestuous pollution.

At the university, his friend Jim Trivett, a self-appointed corruptor of chastity, takes Eugene along on a bawdy adventure which results in Eugene retching violently and contracting venereal disease: “No more of him, he felt, could be lost” (1929: 343). It is the lapse, the loss of innocence and bliss.

But the most memorable teenage involvement of Eugene was with Laura James, which caused him an enormous psychic upheaval. Laura was another of Eliza’s boarders, twenty-one years of age, while Eugene was sixteen. One of the W.O. Gant’s explosive alcoholic serenades had Eugene badly wounded and bleeding. Laura tenderly nursed him and bandaged the wound. This brought them close, and Eugene blurted out his confession of love at Laura’s sweet provocation. Laura and Eugene get entangled in an intense relationship. Laura mildly protests that she is a grown up woman who might get married, occasioning a frenzied outburst of passion and
jealous hysteria from Eugene. It is noteworthy that almost all of Eugene’s involvements were with much older women and later when Wolfe replaces Webber and his alter-ego, we find the culminating involvement with Esther Jack, a lady of thirty-five when George Webber is twenty-five. In real life, Mrs. Aline Bernstein was eighteen years senior to Wolfe. Some deep psychic fixation made Wolfe respect the story of Oedipus as “one of the greatest plays in the world” (1929: 351), and his attraction for older women seemed inevitable, which “wreaked upon him the nightmare coincidence of Destiny” (1929: 351). Inevitable Destiny drew away Laura, who went away with a promise of early return, but instead sent a letter of devastating truth:

Richard came yesterday. He is twenty-five, works in Norfolk. I’ve been engaged to him almost a year. We’re going off quietly to Norfolk tomorrow and get married. My dear! My dear! I couldn’t tell you! I tried to, but couldn’t. I didn’t want to lie. Everything else was true. I meant all I said. If you hadn’t been so young, but what’s the use of saying that? Try to forgive me, but please don’t forget me. Good-by and God bless you. Oh, my darling, it was heaven! I shall never forget you. (1929: 383)

After the break with Laura, Eugene sought refuge in Irene Mallard who was teaching him to dance: again, a lady elder to him. She was the
anodyne against the wound named Laura, but whenever Randolph Gudger, the bank president, came by, the boy went sulkily away until the rich man should leave.

The separation with Laura oppresses Eugene, and he gets very drunk for the first time in his life, and faces the first major crisis of his adult experience. When his family start nagging him, Eugene, driven beyond endurance, falls physically upon Ben and Luke, and there follows a crazy fight. He charges his brothers with having shut him out of their lives:

Have you ever told me anything of yourself? Have you ever tried to be a friend or companion to me?

For his mother, he has the ancient cry of every child badgered by the awful demand of gratitude: Did I ask to be born?

"Yes, I have a great deal to give thanks for," said Eugene. "I give thanks for every dirty lust and hunger that crawled through the polluted blood of my noble ancestors. I give thanks for every scrofulous token that may ever come upon me. I give thanks for the love and mercy that kneaded me over the wash tub the day before my birth. I give thanks for the country slut who nursed me and let my dirty bandage fester across my navel. I give thanks for every blow and curse I had from any of you during my childhood, for every dirty cell you ever gave me to sleep in, for the ten million hours of
cruelty or indifference, and the thirty minutes of cheap advice.” (1929: 421)

He tells them that at last he is free of them all, at last he owes them nothing. As discussed in Chapter III, Eugene is the alienated self trapped in an existential world of being. He is attempting to exercise his choice, but all attempts for release must necessarily be through death.

The relation of Eugene and Ben was so intimate that they loved each other, fought each other, and still loved each other. Ben was like a guardian angel to Eugene. It is understandable why Ben’s death was so momentous to Eugene, and his hysterical comment is cathartic:

“By God!” he said. “That’s one thing Ben’s out of. He won’t have to drink mama’s coffee any more.” (1929: 467)

Still obsessed by the memory of Laura James, Eugene goes in search of her. When money runs out he takes a job as a “checker” at Newport News. He gambles his wages, starves, falls ill, and has a brush with death until one of the checkers befriends him and pulls him together. At last he feels free of Laura, and abandons the search.
Death and time are woven into one fibre, and dealt with at length in Chapter III. Death is a part of the consciousness of the self of the protagonist, as it grows from childhood. Grover, the twin of Ben, dies of typhoid in St. Louis, and Eugene, aged four, was deep asleep at midnight. He was awakened by Helen:

“Do you want to see Grover?” she whispered. “He’s on the cooling board.” He wondered what a cooling board was. (1929: 47)

At the university, his room-mate, Bob Sterling, suffered from heart disease. He was fated – “Nothing could be done about it” (1929: 401), and his mother took him home. Then one day, he died quietly.

“Two weeks later the widow returned to gather together the boy’s belongings. Silently, she collected the clothing that no one would ever wear. She was a stout woman in her forties. Eugene took all the pennants from the wall and folded them. She packed them in a valise and turned to go.

“Here’s another,” said Eugene.

She burst suddenly into tears and seized his hand.

‘He was so brave’, she said, ‘so brave. Those last days I had not meant to — Your letters made him so happy.

She’s alone now, Eugene thought.” (1929: 401)

This quiet incident allows us to see Eugene as he was to Bob Sterling, and after his death, Eugene’s sensitivity makes him look beyond the
immediacy of Bob’s death to the permanency of loneliness that awaited Bob’s mother.

Death is such an inevitable experience, approaching steadily closer every minute of human life, yet uncertain of the hour of visitation. This relentless approach is overlooked in healthy young people, but an incurable malady makes death a palpable reality which inflicts mental anguish as well as physical torture. The diagnosis of W.O. Gant’s prostate cancer, his howling suffering, the death-in-life existence, all together remain etched in the memory of Eugene:

All day, with fear-stark eyes, Gant had sat, like a broken statue, among his marbles, drinking. It was a cancer. (1929: 360)

Eugene’s self – the product of the fusion of his father’s and mother’s, had grown up within the schism of family disharmony. Gant and Eliza could never live in bliss, and Eliza had moved out to her boarding house to the wrath of Gant:

Woman, you have deserted my bed and board, you have made a laughing stock of me before the world, and left your children to perish. Fiend that you are ... You have deserted me in my old age; you have left me to die alone. (1929: 108)
But, on his death-bed, Gant reaches across the chasm of misunderstanding to pay tribute to Eliza’s culinary expertise:

‘Ah-h! Your mother is a good cook, Helen. You’re a good cook, too — but there’s no one else can cook a chicken like your mother!’

And stretching out his great right hand, he patted Eliza’s worn fingers with his own. (1935: 256)

Eugene silently participates in this moment of beauty, which was unusually complex with the presence of Helen, who had wielded greater authority over Gant all her life, the only one who could control Gant during his alcoholic sprees. Eliza runs away, blind with tears, and keeps on repeating the words of her dying husband’s praise which had put her on a pedestal and demolished her daughter Helen. And Helen, following her mother, feels a deep well of sympathy for Eliza. This is Wolfe at his complex, ambivalent best:

... her own eyes were also wet, the bitter possessiveness that had dominated all her relations with her father, and that had thrust Eliza away from him, was suddenly vanquished.

‘Well’, she thought, ‘I guess it’s all she’s had, but I’m glad she’s got that much to remember. I’m glad he said it: she’ll always have that now to hang on to. (1935: 257)
Gant’s death is a definite possibility which is kept in abeyance in *Look Homeward, Angel* and actualized in *Of Time and the River*. In *Look Homeward, Angel*, we see Eugene shattered by the experience of Ben’s death. As Ben lies like a rotting corpse, the ugliness and discomfort of death choked Eugene.

... the swarming family, whispering outside the door, pottering uselessly around, feeding, with its terrible hunger for death on Ben’s strangulation made him mad with alternate fits of rage and pity. (1929: 453)

The family members all indulge in posturings and blaming each other. Eliza vents her ire on Mrs. Pert, the only person who had taken care of Ben and nursed him. For her love of Ben, Mrs. Pert is turned out of Dixieland. And Eugene, witness to the drama, gives words to his thoughts:

We can believe in the nothingness of life, we can believe in the nothingness of death and of life after death — but who can believe in the nothingness of Ben? Like Apollo, who did his penance to the high god in the sad house of King Admetus, he came, a god with broken feet, into the gray hovel of this world. And he lived here a stranger, trying to recapture the music of the lost world, trying to recall the great forgotten language, the lost faces, the stone, the leaf, the door. (1929: 465)
Growing up has its multifarious problems, and no one is as acutely conscious of it as Eugene, whose mother tried to keep her control over him and refused to accept him as anything but her baby. Well into his eighteenth year, Eugene asked Eliza to let him learn to drive the car she had bought. “Wha-a-at! Why, you’re my ba-a-a-aby!” (1935: 351) was her response. This throttling hold of his mother or his father’s example might have encouraged Eugene to seek release through drinking. Eugene’s exultation after being wonderfully drunk reminds us of the drunken duo in *The Tempest*:

> In all the earth there was no other like him, no other fitted to be so sublimely and magnificently drunken. It was greater than all the music he had ever heard; it was as great as the highest poetry ... why, when it was possible to buy a god in a bottle, and drink him off, and become a god oneself, were men not forever drunken? (1929: 411)

However, drink is not godhead — and Eugene learnt this the hard way, through arrest and imprisonment because he was drunk with friends driving in a car. He faces the derision of his family because he had grown up, wasted time and money in Harvard, and is ultimately put in jail. Helen
snickered, and ceremoniously presented Eugene to Eliza: "Here's your Harvard boy ... What do you think of your baby now." (1935: 399)

locked in a cell with a Negro, a submerged and unsuspected colour-feeling roars up in a flood of shame and degradation. And that drives home the weight of his lapse. Eugene is sick with horror at the stranger who controls him from within.

Eugene has to suffer the criticality of his family because he wanted to be a playwright, and they thought him to be queer. He had sent some plays to publishers, and as he eagerly awaited their response,

... his family looked at him with troubled question in their eyes. His enthusiastic hopes and assurances of the great success that he would have from writing plays seemed visionary and remote to them. (1935: 353)

And when finally a letter arrived expressing regret at rejecting the play, Eugene feels crushed:

It seemed to him that all was lost, that he had been living in a fool's dream for years, and that now he had been brutally wakened and saw himself as he was — a naked fool — who had never had an ounce of talent, and who no longer had an ounce of hope — a madman who had wasted his money and lost precious years when he might have learned some work consonant with his ability and the lives of average
men. And it now seemed to him, that his family had been terribly and mercilessly right in everything they had said and felt, and that he had been too great a fool to understand it. His sense of ruin and failure was abysmal, crushing and complete. (1935: 361)

When Eugene obtains a teaching post in the School of Utility Cultures, his class-room experiences alienate him further. Here, in fear and contempt, his own dread of the crowd making him shake and tremble, he tries to drum a love of literature into thick and ugly and derisive heads, Jewish heads for the most part — as his deep-lying anti-Semitism assures him — and one of them is Abe Jones, who felt that Eugene’s teaching was deficient, and he was not getting his money’s worth:

... that gray-faced Yiddish inquisitor hung doggedly to his heels, the more he gave, the more Abe wanted; he fed on Eugene’s life, enriching his grayness with an insatiate and vampiric gluttony, and yet he never had a word of praise, a sentence of thanks, a syllable of commendation. (1935: 444)

Another class-room observation of Eugene reveals his deep-rooted ambivalent attraction cum repulsion towards Jewesses:

Their dark flesh had in it the quality of merciless tide which not only overwhelmed and devoured but withdrew with a powerful sucking glut of all rich deposits of the earth it fed upon: they had the absorptive quality of a sponge, the power of a magnet, the end of each class left him sapped, gutted,
drained, and with a sense of sterility, loss and defeat … (1935: 478)

The mixed feelings would later be apparent in the turbulent relationship between the protagonist and Esther Jack, which started at the end of *Of Time and the River* (1935) and continued through *The Web and the Rock* (1939).

Eugene has a unique experience while living as paying guest in a house in England. The family who owned the house had some mysterious antecedent, which was known by all in town, but Eugene could never manage to learn the secret. This secret made the Coulsons the butt of silent jeer, but Eugene as a tenant found them to be wonderful people. It is the Coulsons’ daughter Edith, who makes certain approaches which suggest that she has certain shady activities, but Eugene’s gentlemanly behaviour and unbiased approach create a weakness in her heart: “One night … he came upon her suddenly standing in the shadow of a tree” (1935: 644). Later, when Edith expresses her unrealizable desire to leave England and migrate to America, Eugene blurts out a frenzied proposal for Edith to
come along with him to America. Although she is steeped in failure and defeat, she however, feels grateful:

“You opened a door that I thought had been closed forever”, she said, “a door that let me look in on a world I thought I should never see again — a new bright world, a new life and a new beginning — for us all. And I thought that was something which would never happen to any one in this house again.” (1935: 651)

The barrier seems unsurmountable, and Edith tells him that “For some of us there’s no return” (1935: 652). Eugene does not reciprocate her sentiments towards him, or cannot articulate his own. She bids him farewell, with a plea for remembrance. Later on he reflects:

Although he had never passed beyond the armour of their hard bright eyes, or breached the wall of their crisp, friendly, and impersonal speech, or found out anything about them, he always thought of them with warmth, with a deep and tender affection, as if he had always known them — as if, somehow, he could have lived with them or made their lives his own had he only said a word, or turned the handle of a door — a word he never knew, a door he never found. (1935: 652)

It is the incommunicability of experience that haunted Wolfe like the feeling of alienation. The girl cannot cross the barrier because she has suffered some loss, which has closed the door of life forever on her.
It is interesting to note that Wolfe feels some urgency to change his alter-ego from Eugene to George Webber in *The Web and the Rock*. From the tall and handsome Eugene, we get a simian, gorilla-like, darkish, slant-eyed and shorter in height George, whose nickname is Monk. Critics have commented variously on the possible reason behind this change. Some have felt that Wolfe had grown tired of Eugene, and after the bitter reception of *Look Homeward, Angel* (1929) in his hometown Altamont, he felt the need to change the protagonist. Pamela Hansford Johnson has commented that various episodes in the childhood of Wolfe had not been accommodated in *Look Homeward, Angel*, and Wolfe needed a fresh beginning. But no critic has noticed the nature of experiences that Wolfe went through in *The Web and the Rock* that underlined the change in the protagonist. *The Web and the Rock* describes the violently passionate, sensuous relationship between Wolfe and Aline Bernstein. The relationship with Mrs. Bernstein, eighteen years senior to Wolfe, and the mother of two grown up children is more of an incestuous relationship than a regular one. Earlier, in *Look Homeward, Angel*, Wolfe had felt guilty in a relation with Miss Brown, who had a son of his age. Mrs. Aline
Bernstein had come into Wolfe's life at a critical moment when he was groping for a foothold in literary circles. Mrs. Aline Bernstein was a Jew, and exercised a terrible attraction in conjunction with a strong repulsion on Wolfe. Her contribution to Wolfe's success is undeniable.

Also undeniable is Wolfe's egotism as a white American having strong colour consciousness and repulsion towards Jews. The sensuality described in *The Web and the Rock*, howsoever true, could not be ascribed to the white angelic (fallen angel, no doubt) Eugene. Hence, the substitution of Eugene with George Webber is a natural outcome. Webber, Simian, slant-eyed, with gorilla-like arms, is a protagonist with Afro-Oriental appearance which matches the violent passion to be described in *The Web and the Rock*.

Upon Webber's return to New York, his longing to see Esther prompts him to write a long, pompous, self-deceiving letter, in which he offers to renew the acquaintance so long as she realizes that he has no intention of "trukling" (1939: 318) to the rich.
Webber is seen searching for some ideal love, some final sexual homecoming. He is rejected by Laura in *Look Homeward, Angel* and by Ann in *Of Time and the River*. Now Esther reciprocates and returns his love, and a period of violent passion erupts. She offers her whole life to the bombastic, verbose and frequently detestable young man because she loves him and believes he has genius. He *howls, bellows, yells, breathes stertorously*. His mania for food gives a cannibalistic slant to his lovemaking:

Deliberately he would step forward again, bending over her; then, tentatively, he would take her arm and pull it gently like a wing.

‘Shall it be a wing?’ he would say. ‘A tender wing done nicely with a little parsley and a butter sauce? Or shall it be the sweet meat of a haunch done to a juicy turn?’

‘Or shall it be the lean meat of the rib?’ he continued in a moment, ‘Or the ripe melons that go ding-dong in April?’ he cried exultingly, ‘Or shall it be a delicate morsel now of women’s fingers? ... O you damned, delectable, little plumskinned trollop! ... I will eat you like honey, you sweet little hussy!’ (1938: 445)

Wolfe’s short story “April, late April” presents these same lovers steeped in sensuousness. The young man is full of violent energy and a giant appetite. He is madly in love with his mistress, whom he likens to
food and wishes to devour — so that they become truly united and inseparable and can overcome alienation:

I will eat you, devour you, entomb you in me! I will make you a part of me and carry you with me wherever I go. (1987: 327)

The experiences of the protagonist’s intimate life with Esther holds a sadistic, adolescent pleasure. George gets tired, however, of Esther’s mothering. It has enabled him to complete his novel in comfort, and his debt to it is limitless. But with shocking utilitarianism, after the purpose is served, George wants to cut the apron strings. It is a parable of the literacy break with Maxwell Perkins, and offers a psychological insight upon Wolfe’s mental resistance where any form of guidance or supervision is imposed. Also, his egotism suffered from an inferiority complex, to turn away from successful people until he could meet them on equal terms. And at last he separated from Esther because it was not possible for their worlds to coalesce. It was an actualization of Wolfe’s vision of the diasparactive condition of life.
The Lost Boy (1987) takes up the thread of irreversible loss. The meaning of the statement “You Can’t Go Home Again” – which Wolfe used over and over again in the last year of his life, found an echo in the story. ‘Home’ is a symbol of the past, of what has been lost forever, as Wordsworth would say, of childhood. None of us can return to the lost community, the fading glory, for time carries us inexorably away. One cannot go home again, one cannot recover the pre-Lapsarian state of innocence and bliss.

An extreme situation of alienation is presented in Arnold Pentland (1987), where a mentally retarded cousin of Wolfe leaves his family forever. He changes his identity and erases all connections. Met by the speaker one day, Arnold uttered a long wailing cry of terror, and wrenching free, ran blindly into the rain:

Eugene watched him go with a feeling of nameless pity, loneliness, and loss – the feeling of a man who for a moment in the huge unnumbered wilderness of life, the roaring jungle of America, sees a face he knows, a kinsman of his blood, and says farewell to him forever. (1987: 228)
In *The Bell Remembered*, the speaker remembers his childhood — the courthouse bell, his father the judge going the court, a cripple sitting in front, loathed by his father. The father told the son, quietly, and with conviction, that “a wooden leg is no excuse for anything!” (1987: 287). Long after, the son comes across an account of a famous battle where his father is described in military action having his right leg blown off. Now he realizes that his father, too, is a cripple; not only that his father did conquer the disability, but his pride never allowed him to disclose it to his son.

*Katamoto* (1987) seems to be a social and political satire in the beginning, but there is an abrupt deviation into the past, triggered by the inscription of a sculptor’s name. There follows reflections and recollections of an association with the Japanese sculptor, Katamoto, which was pleasant yet rather strange. It had terminated suddenly in the death of the sculptor. After ten long years, the inscription of Katamoto’s name tolls a bell, and the protagonist reflects on loss and alienation.
Wolfe uses Civil War material in *Chickamauga* (1987), where the narrator and his friend Jim had gone to war in 1861, while at camp enroute, Jim met Martha and fell in love. He started hating the war, yet fierce fighting continued and Jim got killed. The narrator retrieved Jim’s possessions. Later on, as he recounts the events, he says: “And I would go all through the war and go back home and marry Martha later on, and fellers like poor Jim were layin’ thar at Chickamauga creek.” (1987: 396)

*Nebraska Crane* (1987) records the pathetic anticipation of retirement of a famous but ageing Cherokee baseball player, who meets his childhood friend in a train, and reminisces of the past achievements and ovations, while musing over the bleakness and vacuity of the future. The train — a powerful symbol of continuity of time in Wolfe’s writing, links the past to the present and the future.

*So This is Man* (1987) attempts to philosophize on the problem — “what is Man?” Wolfe traces the process of growth from childhood to maturity through the innocence of childhood, the vanity of youth, the busy life of the adult. But to Wolfe, these are meaningless activities which point
towards the nihilism of the existential world. Man is helpless — gripped by irreversible destiny, and his activities can afford no peace — for there is neither purpose nor fulfillment.

In *The Anatomy of Loneliness* (1987) Wolfe continues his reflection on loneliness which he considers to be the primary condition of man's life. Love is merely temporary, however precious. So "the constant, everlasting weather of man's life" (1987: 498) is not love, but loneliness.

*The Return of the Prodigal* (1987) presents in two parts an imagined and an actual return to his hometown by Eugene. In the imagined return, the unrecognized Eugene takes a room at his mother's boarding house, and wakes up in the middle of the night to hear the voice of his dead brother: "Brother! Brother! What did you come home for? ... You know now that you can't go home again!" (1987: 549). The irreversible loss of childhood innocence was a dominant theme in Wolfe.

In the second part of the story, Eugene stops off at Zebulon, where his mother's people welcome him heartily, and where by chance he is witness to a fatal gun-fight. Back home, everyone is cordial, but something
is lacking, something is lost. The existence of the past has given way to
celebrity status. And his new found status takes his mother six pages just
to explain all the telephone calls that have come for him.

Wolfe's extraordinary sensitivity allowed him to feel and absorb
various dimensions of human life and human relations. The romantic
notion of childhood as a definite but irrecoverable loss, the loss of the
world of innocence upon the altar of experience recur again and again in
Wolfe's writing. Another dominant theme allied to loss is time, the agent
of change. Life fascinated Wolfe in its entirety, but his problem was that of
the radical romantic who, not being able to harmonize the fragments into a
whole, represented them only in fragments. The pulls towards ambivalent
emotions is there. However, the ever-present consciousness of the
mutability of human life casts its shadow on all human relationships,
whether casual or deep. Thus Death emerges as the next theme of
significance in Wolfe's writings. The ever present sensitive "self" of
Wolfe is present in the center of the action, sensing, feeling, wondering,
being hurt, being afraid, moving forward and mapping out experiences in a
very human way.
SOCIETY

Although alienation is to some extent central to Wolfe’s consciousness, he has tried his best to belong to his milieu. From the self to the family, the author looked at the larger society and attempted to find himself in the societal set up among the “man swarm.” The writer’s preoccupation with the authorial self and its sensibility were at striking variance with his fascination for the social milieu. The experiences of the individual, his/her responses and feelings to events on the one hand, and on the other, society’s attitude to individuals provide a valuable insight into Wolfe’s art. Wolfe felt that he had a responsibility towards society, to present the condition and the point of view of the poor and the down-trodden in an attempt to ameliorate it. He was a master in presenting independent vignettes of authentic social life in exacting detail. He could reproduce snatches of conversation heard in passing in its original form. These provide not only a dramatic element, but a living quality to his expressions evoking the social milieu.
Sinclair Lewis, a noted critic and writer, who condemned a materialistic society devoted to bulk, glitter and a conscious disregard of beauty, had a powerful influence on Wolfe. Influence of Lewis’ social criticism in Wolfe’s writing is evident as early as 1923, when he wrote to his mother contemtuously of “those people who shout ‘Progress, Progress, Progress, Progress’, when what they mean is more Ford Automobiles, more Rotary Clubs, more Baptist Ladies Social Unions” (in Holman, 1975: 32). Years spent in Brooklyn during the depths of depression were full of social lessons for Wolfe. “Everywhere around me,” he wrote later, “I saw the evidence of an incalculable ruin and suffering ... universal calamity had somehow struck the life of almost everyone I knew” (in Holman, 1975: 32). In You Can’t Go Home Again, Webber’s close friend Randy Shepperton says that he “got the sack just a week after the bank closed” (1940: 303). Randy worked in a business concern and failed to promote business. Wolfe presents a harsh picture of social reality. He was highly critical of Yankee materialism and the inordinate greed for progress and material gain. The heartlessness of this capitalist system easily expels anybody from any position if he fails to deliver. Wolfe
became convinced that something was basically wrong with such a social order. His letters show that he had wanted to make what he regarded as a Marxist interpretation of the social scene in *Of Time and the River* (1935), although his editor Perkins dissuaded him from doing it. The egalitarianism and essentially middle-class economic radicalism of his native region affected his thinking during the period and found expression in *You Can't Go Home Again* (1940). A sense of primary social injustice in the world is an operative force in *The World that Jack Built*. Mr. Frederick Jack and his wife Esther are beautifully presented in the comfort of their wealth: "They had long since agreed to live their individual lives, but they had joined together in a common effort to maintain the unity of their family" (1940: 156). Esther was violently entangled with Webber, but Mr. Jack did not object to it. And in the lavish party given by Mrs. Jack, Webber is an invitee. And Webber finds the upper class society one of glitter and meaninglessness, symbolized by Piggy Logan and his puppet circus of wire dolls. People put up appearances and make a show of interest to impress others:
The choicest stories which these men told each other had to do with some facet of human chicanery, treachery and dishonesty. They delighted to match anecdotes concerning the delightful knavery of their chauffeurs, maids, cooks, and boot leggers, telling of the way these people cheated them as one would describe the antics of a household pet.

Such stories also had a great success at the dinner table. The ladies would listen with mirth which they made an impressive show of trying to control, and at the conclusion of the tale they would say: "I — think — that — is — simply — priceless!" (uttered slowly and deliberately, as if the humour of the story was almost beyond belief), or: "Isn’t it in-credible!" (spoken with a faint rising scream of laughter), or "Stop! You know he didn’t!" (delivered with a ladylike shriek). They used all the fashionable and stereo-typed phrases of people "responding" to an "amusing" anecdote, for their lives had become so sterile and savorless that laughter had gone out of them. (1940: 154-55)

Juxtaposed to this world of fashion and glitter and affluence is the world of starvation, rags as clothes and no shelter. Webber found them in the streets at night:

Thus, on his nocturnal ramblings about New York, he would observe the homeless men who prowled in the vicinity of restaurants, lifting the lids of garbage cans and searching around inside for morsels of rotten food ... (1940: 321)

Webber found such homeless men huddled together on the cold concrete in a corridor of the subway station, "wrapped up in sheathings of old newspaper":

... “he used to go to the public latrine or ‘comfort station’ which was directly in front of the New York City Hall. ... and on bitter nights he would find the place crowded with homeless men who had sought refuge there ... old men, all rags and bags and long white hair and bushy beards stained dirty yellow, wearing tattered overcoats in the cavernous pockets of which they carefully stored away all the little rubbish they lived on and spent their days collecting in the streets – crusts of bread, old bones with rancid shreds of meat still clinging to them, and dozens of cigarette butts ... They drifted across the land and gathered in the big cities when winter came, hungry, defeated, empty, hopeless, restless, driven by they knew not what, always on the move, looking for work, for the bare crumbs to support their miserable lives, and finding neither work nor crumbs. Here in New York, to this obscene meeting place, these derelicts came, drawn into a common stew of rest and warmth and a little surcease from their desperation.

George had never before witnessed anything to equal the indignity and sheer animal horror of the scene. There was even a kind of devil’s comedy in the sight of all these filthy men squatting upon those open, doorless stools. Arguments and savage disputes and fights would sometimes break out among them over the possession of these stools, which all of them wanted more for rest than for necessity. The sight was revolting, disgusting, enough to render a man forever speechless with very pity.

... The blind injustice of this contrast seemed the most brutal part of the whole experience, for there, all around him in the cold moonlight, only a few blocks away from this abyss of human wretchedness and misery, blazed the pinnacles of power where a large portion of the entire world’s wealth was locked in mighty vaults. (1940: 322-23)
Such a social order contrasts the world of the very wealthy with that of the labour classes who serve them. The only ones to die in the fire at Mr. Jack’s apartment are the liftmen who ferried the rich up and down. And nobody of the upper classes even notice that they are dead, attempting to rescue the tenants from fire. Esther felt that “It was terribly exciting” because “No one got hurt”. (1940: 248)

In *Of Time and the River*, Eugene has an opportunity of entering the world of the fabulously rich Joel Pierce’s family, who go to Broadway shows because “The revue was one of those productions which people were beginning to ‘wear’ as they ‘wore’ books or plays or a dress: people went to the revue more because it was ‘the thing to do’” (1935: 503). Their conversation concerned itself with scandals: “And she really *lived* with him – with this – this *stable-boy*?” (1935: 516); or about going to “Copenhagen and Stockholm and Bucharest and Madrid” (1935: 524) or “the guests discussing politics, ambassadorships, using the names of the great and celebrated people of the earth with the casual and familiar
intimacy of people talking about life-long friends whom they had last seen at dinner Tuesday evening." (1935: 564)

In this world of the economically powerful, Mrs. Joel sent all her maidservants to the barber and had their hair “bobbed”. She beamingly explains:

“— You see, I had the whole house done over this spring — redecorated — I told the decorator the effect I wanted,” she said gushingly — “I told him everything must be done for — for — lightness!” she said triumphantly, “— coolness! ... to do everything in light cool colors ... get that effect ... So last week,” she went on happily, “when we had that spell of frightful hot weather, I noticed suddenly how — how hot — and disagreeable all the girls looked with their long hair — how — how out of place,” she said triumphantly, “they looked in this new scheme of things ... Ugh,” she shuddered with a little gesture of discomfort and distaste, “— the very sight of them made me uncomfortable — I couldn’t bear them! So all of a sudden it occurred to me how nice it would be — how much it would improve the — the — the general atmosphere of the whole house if I made them bob their hair ,...” (1935: 565-66)

Wolfe was disturbed by the racial divide between whites and blacks. In his fiction, there is a note of protest against maltreatment of the Negro. In You Can’t Go Home Again, there is a scathing denunciation of Judge Bland’s ‘business’ — a condition in the South which had kept the Negro in
economic bondage. He excoriates Judge Bland for his business, all of which was derived from the Negro population of the town, and of this business the principal item was usury. Judge Bland is a blind lawyer whose legal skills and knowledge had been used more for the purpose of circumventing the law and defeating justice than in maintaining them. He operated a second-hand furniture store with a "mountainous heap of ill-smelling junk ... taken as brutal tribute from some Negro" (1940: 61). This store was "nothing but a blind for his illegal transactions with the Negroes" (1940: 61). Judge Bland would lend them money and thereafter extract exorbitant interest for the loan. He did not want the principal repaid, but only that the Negroes keep up the interest out of their small wages.

Judge Bland had on his books the names of Negroes who had paid him fifty cents or a dollar a week over a period of years, on an original loan of ten or twenty dollars. Many of these poor and ignorant people were unable to comprehend what had happened to them. They could only feel mournfully, dumbly, with the slavelike submissiveness of their whole training and conditioning, that at some time in the distant past they had got their money, spent it, and had their fling, and that now they must pay perpetual tribute for that privilege. (1940: 62)
Wolfe continues to attack this practice:

... by which unscrupulous white men all over the South feathered their own nests at the expense of an oppressed and ignorant people. The fact that such usury was practiced chiefly against 'a bunch of niggers' to a large degree condoned and pardoned it in the eyes of the law. (1940: 63-64)

It is the loan shark who devours the meagre resources of the Negro that aroused Wolfe to utter his strongest denunciation against the maltreatment of the Negro. In “The Child by Tiger” (1987), Wolfe is scathing in is criticism of Ben Pounders, who was boasting of his heroism in shooting a Negro:

It was Ben Pounders of the ferret face, the furtive and uneasy eye, Ben Pounders of the mongrel mouth, the wiry muscles of the jaw, Ben Pounders, the collector of usurous lendings to the blacks, the nigger hunter. (1987: 346)

Wolfe’s protest on behalf of the Negro against financial exploitation is evident in *The Web and the Rock*, where George reasons that Aunt Maw’s cook had quit because she failed to pay the poor wench on Saturday night the three dollars which was her princely emolument for fourteen hours a day of sweaty drudgery seven days a week. This
underpayment for such long hours rankles in George’s mind when he objects to being sent to find a replacement.

In the vehemence of this attack he approaches the intensity of his slashing comments on other social ills in America not so directly related to the Negro. Here the Negro is treated with a sympathy and an understanding he does not often receive from Wolfe.

In Look Homeward, Angel and Of Time and the River, the Negro is part of Altamont and a portion of Eugene’s experience. His status in society is of the underdog and his community is tolerated as a necessary evil. The status of Negroes is delineated to be second grade citizens, with separate seats assigned to them in street cars: “One of the seats reserved for his race at the back” (1929: 62). A negro drinks: “sensual Negroid rum” (1929: 64) and has “a hot kitchen negress” (1929: 70); these indicate that sensuality and the Negro race were synonymous. For Wolfe, attraction and repulsion go hand in hand. Eugene dreams that “The copper legs of negresses in their dark dens stir” (1929: 138); the sensuality of desire is offset by the animality ascribed to negresses. As the newspaper route boys
deliver newspaper in the dark of early morning, Niggertown is asleep: “Within, May Corpening stirred nakedly, muttering as if doped and moving her heavy copper legs, in the fetid bed-warmth, with the slow noise of silk” (1929: 139). The society looked upon a negress as a sex-symbol, and W.O. Gant’s lewd advances towards the cook, Annie, “a plump, comely negress of thirty-five” (1929: 238) face unexpected stiff opposition: “I ain’t used to no such goings — on. I’se a married woman, I is. I ain’t goin’ to stay in dis house anothah minnit” (1929: 239). Gant accused God for exposing him; he wept because he had been caught. This rare exception excepted, Wolfe’s references to Negroes abound with “all the illicit loves, the casual and innumerable adulteries of Niggertown” (1929: 247). The out-going newspaper route-boy, Jennings, informs Eugene that negresses are par excellence: “There ain’t nothing better” (1929: 248) and this would later culminate in Eugene’s experience with Ella Corpening. In an escapade during University life, Jim Trivett and Eugene find a “black bawd” (1929: 339) playing pimp.

Wolfe’s attitude is usually ambivalent. In Virginia, Eugene comes to witness a group of Negroes who desperately want to go to war: “all Texas
darkies, had come away from camp without a clean bill of health: they were venereals and had not been cured” (1929: 438). But their whoop of joy when their white officer influenced the doctor to give them a clean bill is arresting.

The Negro’s place in society is strongly emphasized in Wolfe’s description of Negro community which is invariably “Niggertown”, that is constantly set forth as a reeking slum of shabby dwellings, glutted with disease, strewn with filth, hot with lust and infested with evil — over which hangs an aura of witch-magic and mystery. Further, the Negro is the ex-slave living in the land of his former owners. In Negro-White relationships the place of the Negro in society is that of an inferior race. He is the object of prejudice and is subjected to scorn, indignity and sometimes even a patronizing affection. His behaviour is judged by the white neighbours in accordance with his conformity to customs and traditions developed for him and imposed on him.

In “The Face of the War” (1987), a Negro at Langley Field is “beaten to a bloody pulp” (1987: 229) by a slouchy, shambling figure of a
Southern White — a gang boss or an overseer. In this "nausea of horror" (1987: 230), Wolfe’s sympathies are with the victim. His handling of the incident in the context of this piece transcends that effort merely to show the brutality and sordidness resulting from war. Here Wolfe is on the black man’s side in the continual struggle between the races.

Early in *The Web and the Rock*, Wolfe depicts the treatment of the Negro as the suffering innocent. This is occasioned by the dogfight between the Potterham’s bulldog and the mastiff belonging to Simpson Simms. The Negro’s dog is the object of an unprovoked attack by the Potterham’s bulldog. Thus, not only is Simms innocent but his dog is innocent too. When the mastiff reacts, and kills the bulldog, a white-man’s dog has been killed by a Negro’s. Society encroaches into the world of animal justice. The big dog is abused. Potterham denounces the Negro’s dog to the policeman, who serves Simms a court notice.

*The Child by Tiger* (in *The Web and the Rock*, 1939), the story of Dick Prosser is undeniably the most memorable and the sole instance in his novels where Wolfe devotes an entire chapter to a Negro. Completed in
the spring of 1937, just about a year before his death — it is one of his most mature writings on the Negro and merits special scrutiny.

The narrator recalls the harrowing experiences of Dick Prosser, the faithful, meek and amiable family retainer who ran amuck and committed multiple murders before he was hunted down by a posse and killed. Dick becomes the symbol of his race. He was a model of the conduct expected of Negro servants by the White citizenry of Ashville of that day. He was deeply religious and went to Church three times a week. He read his Bible every night, believed “de Armageddon day’s a-comin’” (1939: 135), and sang hymns while he worked.

The presentation of the Negro in The Child by Tiger is in keeping with the traditional Southern attitude of the time. Niggertown has its typical connotations of evil. Standards of social and personal morality among Negroes were supposedly lower and more open than among Whites. Liaisons without legal sanction were common and were accepted. The term “wench” is used to describe a Negro woman with loose morals. The typical Southern belief that the Negro was less of a human being and
more of an animal than the White man is subtly insinuated in reference to Dick Prosser’s “great black paw” (1939: 132).

Dick’s death by lynching is an example not of the White man’s power but of barbarity. The white men visiting their fury on the Negro after his ammunition has run out, and thereafter riddling the dead body with almost three hundred bullets, the triumphal return, the display of the mutilated carcass are all elements of lynching that Wolfe chooses to describe, for he wants to protest. In *The Web and the Rock*, Wolfe describes the way they go out to lynch a nigger in South Carolina. His description indicates strong distaste. In the death of Dick Prosser, by his very handling of the narrative, leaving the cause of Dick’s fury unknown, inspite of Dick’s guilt and mad-dog tactics, Wolfe seems, like Nebraska Crane, to spit contemptuously at the whole bloody business of lynching. Dick the Negro emerges as a symbol of the dark side of man’s soul, a symbol of the power of primeval passion.

Dick possessed the stealth and cunning of an animal of the jungle that could appear and disappear almost at will, an animal of prey that was
seen crouching ready to spring but did not, and would merely slink away. Hence the allusion is made to the tiger having stealth, cunning and ferocious power, dangerous to kin and prey alike.

Like his race, Dick was the innocent sufferer at the hands of the White man. After Lon Pilcher drove into the car Dick was driving and struck Dick viciously on the face, not once but twice, Dick took the painful indignity without flinching, with the same stoic calm with which his race accepted the innumerable indignities heaped upon it by the White man for generations although his hands twitched and his eyes became red like an animal’s. But when, on that fateful day, his long pent-up feelings broke loose, they erupted like a volcano. His wild sweep through Libya Hill was like a maddened animal’s prowl through the jungle clawing at every other animal in reach. Like an avenging angel of doom, he precipitated his own personal Armageddon and swept through the town dealing out vengeance and death indiscriminately.

Wolfe makes no attempt to resolve the conflict in the enigmatic symbol of Dick Prosser, who is an embodiment of the perpetually
conflicting forces of good and evil. The Negro was an abiding paradox to Wolfe, capable of the finest qualities of humanity, a friend, a brother, but equally representative of the worst — a mortal enemy, an unknown demon. In the Negro two opposing worlds join, for he is both a tiger and a child.

Although Wolfe was deeply concerned with racial discrimination he was somehow uneasy with the Jews. He has been vigorously denounced as anti-Semitic and just as stoutly defended. Wolfe had an amazing ambivalence towards Jews — what Leo Gurko calls a perpetual alternation of hate and love.

In *Look Homeward, Angel*, before Eugene entered school, Eugene, Max and Harry “spat joyously upon the Jews” (1929: 79), and render their sentiments: “Drown a Jew and hit a nigger” (1929: 79). These boys took delight in ridiculing Jews and chasing Jewish children over the neighbourhood. There is Edward Michalove, a Jewish student in the Altamont Fitting School, who was called Miss Michalove. The son of a jeweller, the boy’s life at the school was desperately unhappy and tormented for he was the object of ridicule from teachers and students
alike. The cause of abuse is, however, not juvenile anti-Semitism but Edward’s effeminacy that brings persecution and hatred.

Anti-Semitism encourages Wolfe’s Jew student Abraham Jones to change his name to A. Alfred Jones. This common practice of name-changing is roundly condemned by Wolfe, who heaps ridicule upon “the bravado, the effrontery, and the absurdity of the attempt” (1935: 457) of Abe’s attempted disguise: “That he should hope actually to palm himself off as a Gentile was unthinkable, because one look at him revealed instantly the whole story of his race and origin” (1935: 457).

In *The Web and the Rock*, Wolfe places the ridicule in the mouth of Esther Jack, who glories in her Jewish heritage in “Penelope’s Web”:

“I should like to tell about Jews and Christians, and about Jews who change their names. There’s this fellow Burke! Doesn’t it make you want to laugh? Nathaniel Burke my eye! ... Can you beat it? His real name is Nathan Berkovich, I’ve known his people all my life.

The nerve of the fellow! I got so tired of his goings on that I said to him once: ‘Look here, Burke. You’d just better be glad you *are* a Jew. Where would you be if it weren’t for the Jews, I’d like to know? It’s too bad about you.’

His mother and father were such nice old people. The old fellow had a store on Grand Street. He wore a beard and a derby hat, and washed his hands in a certain way they have
before eating. There’s something awfully nice about old Jews like that. ... Isn’t it a shame — to throw that wonderful thing away in order to become an imitation Christian?

We’re fine people. They sneer at us and mock us, but we’re fine people just the same. ‘Many a time and oft in the Rialto you have rated me ... and spit upon my Jewish gaberdine.’” (1939: 431-32)

Wolfe condemns name changing as indicative of a basic falsity, an attempt to disguise racial origin. The older brothers of Abraham Jones had a small zine business in Boston, and gangsters came regularly demanding money, which the merchants of the district paid “meekly and regularly for protection” (1935: 496). But Barney refused and although his shop had been frequently robbed, he fought the gangsters with tooth and claw. Barney’s survival under such conditions is a success in itself and arouses Eugene’s sympathy and admiration. Abe’s childhood had been replete with instances of racial hatred.

He told Eugene many stories of bloody fights waged back and forth across these pavements, of young boys maimed, crippled, or blinded in these savage fights, of one boy who had his eye torn out of his head by his enemy’s gouging thumb in a fight to a finish on one of the piers, and of another whose brains had been smashed out on the pavement below the elevated structure by a rock ... (1935: 495-96)
Abe's sister Sylvia had been thrown on her own resources since childhood. Her unhappy romance had left her with an illegitimate son who never called her 'mother':

... in the physical presence of the boy she saw the visible proof and living evidence of her folly, the bitter fruit of the days of innocence, love, and guileless belief, and as if she was conscious that a joke had been played on both her and her child. (1935: 461)

Yet Sylvia's failures in life had not impeded her drive to succeed in business. Beginning as a salesgirl she then worked in a millinery shop and finally had her own thriving hat-shop on Second Avenue. Sylvia represents the penniless immigrant woman who by her own shrewdness and drive achieved considerable success in business.

The climactic incident in Wolfe's life was his contact with the Jew lady – Mrs. Aline Bernstein. She is the Esther Jack of the novels. She tried her best to promote George Webber's literary ambitions by introducing him to an elite society. The social world into which Esther Jack introduced George is presented in "The World that Jack Built" in You Can't Go Home Again. The Jew as a member of this society is revealed by the guests at
Mrs. Jack’s party. Wolfe places this party just prior to the stock market crash to dramatize the weaknesses of America immediately preceding that catastrophe. Mrs. Jack’s circle of friends is wide and heterogenous. Miss Lily Mandell is a beautiful heiress of Midas wealth, whose sensual charms are incarnate in the word “voluptuous”. She likes to assume a pose of superior intellectualism by displaying an interest in such an unlikely subject as Thomas Lovell Beddoes — a writer. George Webber observes the eternal chase re-enacted by Lawrence Hirsch, a banker of huge wealth, who untiringly followed Lily Mandell. Among the guests, there is another dissolute heiress, Amy Carlton, who “had surpassed the ultimate limits of notoriety, even for New York” (1940: 194). Margaret Ettinger comes to the party with her profligate husband John, who had brought his current mistress along. The aged rake, Jake Abramson, upon whom the mark of the fleshpots was plain, is old, subtle, sensual, weary and “had the face of a vulture” (1940: 186:87). Jake’s stroking of Esther’s arm was “a gesture frankly old and sensual, jaded, and yet strangely fatherly and gentle” (1940: 187). He humorously regales Esther and Miss Heilprinn with an account of the horrors of being on a diet at Carlsbad, the Czechoslovakian
spa, and the food of an English ship. The ship’s food, he informs them with “cynic humor in his weary eyes” was “fit for nothing but a bunch of goys!” (1940: 188). The use of this Yiddish term of derision for Gentiles and the mirth it provoked reveals to Webber in a flash the unifying bonds of Jewry and its ancient and proud separateness from the Christian world.

The view of an elite society represented by these Jews is definitely an upper, privileged group whose qualifications rest on either wealth or successful personal attainment, but above all it includes the urban polish and pretence at intellectualism that the 1920s made a cultural and social shibboleth.

Esther defends her race vigorously in verbal battle with George even to the point of equating it with probity and faithfulness indicating Christians as the equivalence of perfidy and disloyalty: “My people are loyal! ... With us, love is a thing that lasts!” and adds sarcastically, “We’re not like you fine and noble Christians ... these great and wonderful Gentiles.” (1939: 502-3). After this outburst harmony is restored for a time but the racial question remains a touchy point which flares up in their
violent clash: "The Quarrel" in *The Web and the Rock*. When Esther inquires whom George saw at the publishing firm and he replies "A Jew", she instantly recoils. With the spiritual and mental deterioration that George undergoes, a madness compounded of many elements took possession of him, and his mind concocts a fantastic idea: he sees Esther as the nucleus of a sinister Jewish scheme to entrap him. In his feverish imagination Webber sees the entrapment by Esther as a gigantic plot of Jewry, which imperils every Christian man of genius.

But Wolfe's ambivalence is ever-present. By allusion to Einstein Wolfe reminds his readers that the most outstanding single contribution made in the twentieth century in the realm of pure intellect was made by a Jew. The "Jew boy" (1940: 393) as a symbol is thus a tribute to the Jewish race, and it is highly significant that the Jewish seeker strives in the intellectual instead of the financial realm and follows in the footsteps of Einstein rather than those of Otto Kahn.

A harrowing instance of the Jew as a symbol occurs in "I Have a Thing to Tell You" in *You Can't Go Home Again*. Here Wolfe gives a
straightforward eye-witness account of a Jewish lawyer’s attempt in 1936 to escape from Nazi Germany and his miserable capture at the border. This man, whom Wolfe dubs “Old Fuss-and-Fidget” and gives no other name, is a symbol of Nazi brutality, but in a general sense he is representative of man’s inhumanity to man. This man’s personal tragedy is not only that of a Jew enmeshed in the cruel Nazi net; he becomes the larger symbol of man victimized by evil:

And the little man — he, too, paused once from his feverish effort to explain. As the car in which he had been riding slid by, he lifted his pasty face and terror-stricken eyes, and for a moment his lips were stilled of their anxious pleading. He looked once, directly and steadfastly, at his former companions, and they at him. And in that gaze there was all the unmeasured weight of man’s mortal anguish. George and the others felt somehow naked and ashamed, and somehow guilty. They all felt that they were saying farewell, not to a man, but to humanity; not to some pathetic stranger, some chance acquaintance of the voyage, but to mankind; not to some nameless cipher out of life, but to the fading image of a brother’s face.

The train swept out and gathered speed — and so they lost him. (1940: 540)

In You Can’t Go Home Again (1940), Foxhall Edwards reads in the newspaper that an unknown person has leaped to death from the Admiral
Drake Hotel. Wolfe presents a realistic description of this gruesome suicide that exposes the hollowness of passers-by. Not one person is sympathetic towards C. Green, who jumped to death from a high-rise. No one tries to understand the frustration and alienation behind his desperate action.

So here Green lies, on the concrete sidewalk all disjected. No head is left, the head is gone now, head's exploded; only brains are left. The brains are pink, and almost bloodless ... a few fragments of the skull are scattered round — but of the face, the features, forehead — nothing! They have all been blown out, as by some inner explosion. (1940: 366)

C. Green is accused of lack of consideration for others. People vie with each other in giving a more startling eye-witness account of the suicide jump. Wolfe notes that C. Green, in the end, has succeeded in acquiring special status from being "life's nameless cipher" (1940: 363), to a real "man" who at least for once has taken decisive action and done something different from the mundane. Green liked the news and now, becomes a bit of news himself: nine lines of print in *Times*.

A war time sketch — "The Face of War" presents vignettes of social life of which a scene in a "house of pleasure" (1987: 232) frequented by
soldiers arrests attention in its ambiguity and ambivalence. Contrasted to ribaldry and bawdy activity, a tall and slender young prostitute “lay extended at full length on the untidy bed, with one arm thrust out in a gesture of complete exhaustion” (1987: 235). Discovering Margaret in this condition, the harsh, rasping voice of another woman, Fay, instantly becomes low and tender and bedewed with womanly sympathy. As Margaret regains control, the young man accompanying Fay recognizes Margaret as a decent girl from Pulpit Hill who had disappeared two years ago. She enquires after her people, and “as she spoke, she put her slender hand lightly on his arm, with the swift, unconscious tenderness of people in a world of strangers who suddenly meet someone they know from home.” (1987: 236)

“Dark in the Forest, Strange as Time” (1987) describes a parting scene between a husband and wife, and the subsequent death of the husband on a train as witnessed by a young fellow-passenger. The parting scene is full of tenderness and love, and the wife, young and vivacious, tearfully bids her old and decaying husband farewell. The young co-passenger of the husband, however, happens to witness another scene as
the train moves away: a young man approaches the wife on the platform, and they are locked in a passionate embrace. The young co-passenger is not sure whether the husband, too, has witnessed the scene. Further into the journey, the spectre-like old man dies silently.

The husband’s silent end jars the reader, particularly after the wife’s double role on the platform. But Wolfe’s ambivalent attitude leaves enough room for sympathy for the young wife, who deserves better than her lot, and has a right to life.

Eugene’s experiences in Professor Hatcher’s celebrated course for would-be dramatists is a scalding depiction of falseness, triviality and aping of fashions. Their jargon formed a pattern by which they could be recognized:

“Barrie?” began Mr. Scoville, an elegant and wealthy young dawdler ... “Barrie?” he continued regretfully, in answer to a question. For a moment, he drew deeply on his cigarette, then raised sad, languid eyes. “I’m sorry”, he said gently, with a slight regretful movement of his head — “I can’t read him. I’ve tried it — but it simply can’t be done.” They laughed, greatly pleased. (1935: 114)
In Hatcher’s class, the manner counted for wit. They felt that Galsworthy wrote something that looked like a play once, and Shaw might have made a dramatist if he had ever known anything about writing a play.

Professor Hatcher impressed his students by an urbane worldliness, regaling them with gay anecdotes about famous persons he had known and with whom he was on familiar terms — told always casually, apropos of some discussion:

The last time I was in London, Pinero and I were having lunch together one day at the Savoy. (1935: 133)

His students thus developed into “disloyal apes of fashion and the arts” (1935: 135), having nothing but a feeling of amused superiority at such posturings. Wolfe comments:

False, trivial, glib, dishonest, empty, without substance, lacking faith — is it any wonder that among Professor Hatcher’s young men few birds sang? (1935: 135)

The multifarious facets of society attracted Wolfe in their diversity. His keen sensibility took note of aspects of human behaviour and transmuted them into art. In Look Homeward, Angel, Eugene notes the false show of grief at the funeral of Ben, and the hurry to escape. The mourning women
“wept behind their heavy veils, and looked to see if the town was watching.” (1929: 480)

The women moaned loudly when they saw the raw open ditch ... The sobs of the women rose to sharp screams as the coffin slid down upon the bands into the earth ... Then the mourners got back into their carriages and were driven briskly away. There was a fast indecent hurry about their escape. (1929: 480)

Later, in the chilly October dusk, only Eugene and Mrs. Pert are at Ben’s grave. Mrs. Pert muses: “Old Ben will turn into lovely flowers. Roses. I think.” (1929: 484)

After Ben’s death, Gant is on his death-bed. In anticipation of his property, his son Luke and son-in-law Hugh plot to disinherit Eugene because he had received money in excess of what others had ever had. They want Eugene to sign a document: “It’s a release” (1929: 511) says Luke. This haggling for the property of a man not yet dead and the unfair intention to deprive him infuriate Eugene into signing it: “That’s my release, not yours.” (1929: 511)

During Gant’s life-time, he had been a furious drinker, and alcohol was the root cause of his cleavage with Eliza. But when Libya Hill went to
polls on becoming “dry”, Gant marched up with the white silk scrap for teetotalers! He declared “With far-seeing statesmanship” –

“Licker”, he said, “is a curse and a care. It has caused the sufferings of untold millions —” …

— it has brought poverty, disease, and suffering to hundreds of thousands of homes, broken the hearts of wives and mothers, and taken bread from the mouths of little orphaned children. (1929: 235)

To this ludicrously hypocritical oratory, Major Nethersole of the “wet” battalion responds: “Go on, W.O., but for God’s sake, don’t belch!” (1929: 235).

In You Can’t Go Home Again, Wolfe presents the society of New York which hankered for the company of successful artists. George Webber is lionized by many after his first book gets published. These are the “lion hunters” —

They are a peculiar race of people who inhabit the upper jungles of Cosmopolis and subsist entirely on some rarefied and ambrosial ectoplasm that seems to emanate from the arts. They love art dearly — in fact, they dote on it — and they love the artists even more. So they spend their whole lives running after them, and their favourite sport is trapping literary lions. (1940: 266)
Wolfe could critically appraise as well as enjoy flashes of social life. In “The World that Jack Built” (*You Can’t Go Home Again*, 1940), Esther Jack admires herself in front of a mirror in the privacy of her bedroom:

She lifted her arm again and with hand extended, the other hand upon her hip, she turned about once more in her orbit of self-worship. Slowly she turned, still rapt in contemplation of her loveliness, then she gasped suddenly with surprise and fright, and uttered a little scream. Her hand flew to her throat in a gesture of alarm as she realized that she was not alone and, looking up, saw her daughter standing there. (1940: 181)

The daughter had caught the mother in the act. The mother went crimson with guilt, while the daughter luxuriated in the irony of mirth. “Then something quick and instant passed between them in their glance” — and they shook with helpless laughter. There was nothing more to say: “Thus was enacted the whole tremendous comedy of womankind. No words were needed.” (1940: 181)

In the selective instances discussed in this section, we find Wolfe having a keen sense of observation of the society around him. There are strikingly realistic and sensitive presentations of social life. As a social critic, Wolfe exposes callousness, hard heartedness, materialistic greed, hypocrisy and social imbalances and racial prejudice. However, he is
undoubtedly post-modern in his attitude of plural possibilities. The life of
the city fascinated him, and fascinates us through his writings, forcing us
to see all that we usually overlook, be it through the various associations
of death, or adulterous love strangely culminating in death and release, as
in “Dark in the Forest, Strange as Time”; social hypocrisy draws flak from
Wolfe, yet he is human enough to enjoy the humour in the scandal
connecting a respectable middle-aged Church officer to a young actress.
Similarly, the young wife in “Dark in the Forest, Strange as Time” is
presented so ambivalently that while we criticize her union with her lover
the moment after she bids her ageing and decaying husband a tearful
farewell, we cannot help feeling sympathetic for her when she gains a
young and handsome lover. Wolfe never takes sides, but leaves situations
open-ended. This is the peculiar attraction of Wolfe. He justifies animal
rivalry and animal justice, while accepting the unfair encroachment of
society with reservations. While Wolfe in no way condones the killings by
the Negro Dick in “The Child by Tiger”, he also does not justify the man-
hunt launched against him by the Whites, and remembers the gentleness of
Dick in dealing with children. Similarly, Wolfe’s attitude towards Jews is
ambivalent. Social behaviour leading to alienation is variously treated and his fictions present society in its myriad interactions, which are stamped by Wolfean humanism and ambivalence.

**NATION**

This section brings into focus those writings of Wolfe where a national vision is apparent. Wolfe's dream was to record the American experience in its entirety, where the self and the social world could be merged in an expression of a racial idealism. There are instances where his sentiments are directly national, be it nationalistic pride, or the collective experience of a national movement or a criticism of national tendencies. When Walt Whitman said that he sings for America in *The Leaves of Grass*, it was an attempt to subsume all linguistic, racial and cultural differences within America. In Wolfe's case, it is a dream rising above closures or levels of differences. He visualized himself as a representative writer of the American people, and this feeling of responsibility has been part of his authorial mission.
A Prologue to America (1987) depicts the indecision and vacuity that affect modern life in America. People are dazzled by the glitter, but Wolfe implies, it is empty of worth on value. Wolfe has placed opposites together—indecision, poverty, joblessness, lawlessness, cruelty, human indifference vis-à-vis fashion, pomp, luxury, foreign trips, gossip, etc. — all which go together to indicate a deterioration of moral standards. This is not the America of Wolfe’s dreams, but the reality he is forced to acknowledge and vent his criticism upon.

Polyphemus (1987) is a highly inspired critical piece recording the pillage of adventurers and fortune-seekers like the Spaniard, who found no gold and emeralds as fabled. He was one-eyed, and could not discover the real wealth of America — her natural wealth and wonders.

Wolfe’s biting satire in the story “On Leprechauns” points at the American attitude towards young and aspiring native writers. Obviously, his own bitter struggle to establish himself as a writer is reflected here. In contrast, the warmth and patronage extended to Irish writers, a veiled reference to foreign writers in general, draws Wolfe’s ire.
*The Names of the Nation* (1987) is an inspired patriotic outburst in vindication of nationalistic pride. In response to the sneer of some British and French writers, the speaker gradually compares and contrasts the people, the names of places, the mighty rivers, etc., to demonstrate the superiority of America.

*The Plumed Knight* (1987) records the transformation of Theodore Joyner, who failed at everything, into Colonel Joyner, an honoured, grizzled specimen of the Confederacy. Joyner, facing failure after failure, started a military academy, for he had nothing better to do. The outbreak of the Civil War saw Joyner marching out at the head of his students. Defeat and return followed. But strangely, Joyner rapidly became the stock type of the Southern Colonel — a plumed knight. The more he imagined himself to be so, the more he looked the part — the grizzled warrior with a mane of graying hair, vaunting war-like epithets. He became a symbol — a romantic embodiment of the spirit of the South. It seemed to him in some strange and transcendental way that the South had been gloriously triumphant even in defeat, and that he himself was instrumental in
bringing about this transcendental victory. Under its soothing spell, the South turned away from harsh realities, and escaped into the soft dream of vanished, imagined glories that had never been.

The North-South divide is a historical truth which Wolfe never tried to camouflage. He always felt that the South was the romantic land of his dreams, and the North promoted Yankee materialism. But the North was the hub of social, political, cultural and literary activity, and it was the North that accorded him literary acclaim, while his own South flooded him with threats and hate-mail after publication of *Look Homeward, Angel* (1929).

The existence of a schism, but a gradual smothering of contradictions to a condition of acceptable America within a broad framework finds literary expression in Wolfe’s fiction.

*The Dark Messiah* (1987) is almost the same as *The Spanish Letter* (1987), where Wolfe witnesses the brutality and repression of Fascism with the horror of an American. Wolfe’s fascination for Germany was rudely shaken on his second visit in 1936. The order and discipline in
organizing the Olympic Games astounded him. But he realized gradually that the Games were a means of demonstrating to the world the collective might of the Germans. The protagonist George Webber did not see any of the ugly things whispered about. He did not see anyone beaten, imprisoned, or put to death. He saw neither any concentration camp, nor the physical manifestations of a brutal and compulsive force. But very gradually, George starts sensing that all this was an appearance. The arrest of the Jew “Old Fuss-and-Fidget” (1940: 538) has already been mentioned in the section “Society”; “One Big Fool” depicts the plight of Heilig, a renowned librarian in Berlin, being harassed by the police. He must prove that he is Aryan and no Jew. And Heilig faced severe moral hesitation:

“Gott! She is such a fool! Zis poor lady”, he said, a trifle contemptuously, “luffed my fazzer very much – so much, in fact, zat she did not go to ze trouble to marry him. So zese people come and ask me all zese questions, and say, “Vhere is your fazzer!” And of gourse I cannot tell zem. Because, alas, my dear old shap, I am zis bastard.” (1940: 499)

So Heilig may lose his prestigious job. He may lose his girl. He may be killed:

All ze Chews haf been taken from zier vork, zey haf nozzing to do any more. Zese people come around – some stupid
people in zeir uniform ... and zey say zat everyone must be an Aryan man — (1940: 498)

The reality was that the entire nation was infested with the contagion of ever-present fear — as if a paralysis had twisted and blighted all human relations, an infamous compulsion had silenced the whole people into a sweltering and malignant secrecy.

In America, all is not well as it appears. Racial discrimination existed on the lines of colour discrimination. Wolfe was vociferous about the plight of the Negro, particularly in the South. Wolfe was well aware that the Negro constituted about one-third of the population of his native state. He was also conscious of the fact that one-third of the American people were disfranchised because they were black. They were also denied of the opportunity for higher education. Wolfe’s criticism of the violation of the Negro’s civil rights is found in the context of a larger indictment of Pine Rock College:

In fact, inspite of all this high-sounding talk about ‘service’, ‘ideals of leadership’, and ‘democracy’, one could not see that it made much actual difference in the way things were. Children still worked fourteen hours a day in the cotton mills of the state. Tens of thousands of men and women and children were born, suffered, lived, and died in damnable
poverty, bondage, and the exploitation of the tenant farm. One million black inhabitants of the state, about a third of the entire population, were still denied the rights of free suffrage ... One million black inhabitants of the state were denied the right to the blessings of the higher education. (in Reeves, 1968: 25)

Beside his remarks about disenfranchisement and denial of opportunity for highest education, there is no other evidence that Wolfe had in mind institutional change; he was not a reformer like George W. Cable. Perhaps this is only a manifestation of Wolfe's humanitarianism, a desire for more humane treatment of all the oppressed — the Negro in the South or the Jew in Germany. Wolfe recognized something amiss in the total pattern of mankind and made a protest against discrimination and maltreatment which was growing more and more visible at the time of his death.

In You Can't Go Home Again, Wolfe expresses what to him is "The Promise of America". It depicts his nationalistic pride. He feels that it is only in America that one can achieve anything — for the nation as a whole is full of potentiality and the desire for progress: ... "You will find us burning in the night." (1940: 392)

Here, as you pass through the brutal sprawl, the twenty miles of rails and rickets, of the South Chicago slums — here, in an
unpainted shack, is a Negro boy, and seeker, he is burning in the night. Behind him is a memory of the cotton fields, the flat and mournful pineland barrens of the lost and buried South, and at the fringes of the pine another nigger shack with mammy and eleven little niggers. Farther still behind, the slave-driver's whip the slave ship, and, far off, the jungle dirge of Africa. And before him, what? A roped-in ring, a blaze of lights, across from him a white champion; the bell, the opening, and all around the vast sea-roaring of the crowd. Then the lightning feint and stroke, the black panther's paw — the hot rotating presses, and the rivers of sheeted print! O seeker, where is the slave ship now? (1940: 392)

In the America of Wolfe's desire, the Negro, the Cherokee, the Jew — all get enough opportunity to actualize their ambition and blaze across the darkness of the world. America is a blazing torch to the world, where democracy and equality have offered equal rights to all:

... to every man his chance — to every man, regardless of his birth, his shining, golden opportunity — to every man the right to live, to work, to be himself, and to become whatever thing his manhood and his vision can combined to make him — this, seeker, is the promise of America. (1940: 393)

In the fictional works discussed above, Wolfe's sentiments are not always of pride and appreciation. Some are critical of the American attitude, implying that Wolfe would rather have it otherwise. He is proud of America's wealth — be it natural of spiritual. He is proud of the beauty
of America, and refers with caustic criticism to the looting of America by outside settlers. However, deterioration in moral values and human standards pain him, as does the attitude of adulating foreign writers to the exclusion of native ones. His horror at the suppression of people in Nazi Germany comes out, the critical attitude implying the admiration and pride he feels for American democracy. Taken as a whole, these stories reflect the illusory image of America in Wolfe's wish-fulfilment dream.

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