THOMAS WOLFE'S "IMAGES OF STRENGTH AND WISDOM": PERSONAL INFLUENCES ON HIS LITERARY PRACTICES

By

WILLIS EARL WEEKS

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Oklahoma City University

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Thesis Approved:

Samuel H. Woods, Jr.
Thesis Adviser

Clinton C Keeler

Lawrence Woodruff
Dean of the Graduate School

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

H. L. Mencken once called Thomas Wolfe "a baby crying in the wilderness" in one of his terse summations of contemporary American authors.[1] Indeed, the reader of Wolfe has little trouble in hearing at least the echoes of this wailing scattered intermittently throughout his voluminous works, and Mencken doubtlessly struck a key note with his wry observation. The lost person's outcry--whether it be from Wolfe himself or his fictitious counterparts (Eugene Gant in Look Homeward, Angel and Of Time and the River and George Webber in The Web and the Rock and You Can't Go Home Again)--provides a pervasive theme in Wolfe's writings.[2] It understandably has been the subject of considerable discussion.

The reader who fails to recognize a kinship with Wolfe's hero often hears the lamentation as a symbol of the author's lack of artistic ability--roughly that of an eternal baby. This person, often in the form of a critic, then proceeds to ravage Wolfe the artist with a voraciousness that would do credit to a famous Gant family attack upon a Gargantuan feast. The contention usually is that Wolfe neither innately possessed nor developed a worthy artistic craftsmanship during his writing career. Conversely, other readers, sympathetic (perhaps to a fault) because of a self-identification with the loneliness of Wolfe's character, are poignantly stirred by this bewildered outcry. Not so demanding as those persons who do not identify with Wolfe's hero, these persons usually like and accept Wolfe despite his conspicuous technical faults and his eccentric practices.

Wolfe the man also was emotionally immature in varying degrees throughout most of his life. This fact is made quite evident in the recently pub-

lished Thomas Wolfe: A Biography,[3] the long-awaited full documentation of Wolfe's life, written by Miss Elizabeth Nowell, his last literary agent. Of deeper significance to this study, though, is the book's indication that Wolfe was rapidly developing in maturity when he died September 15, 1938, less than a month before his 38th birthday.

This somewhat retarded emotional stability would seem to stem basically from his mother's lengthy domination over him. Born October 3, 1900, in Asheville, North Carolina, Thomas Clayton Wolfe was the youngest of eight living children of W. O. and Julia Elizabeth Wolfe. As presented in Miss Nowell's biography and Wolfe's own heavily autobiographical fiction, his mother seemed intent upon keeping him as her "baby" as long as possible. She did not allow his long, curly hair to be cut until he was eight years old, and she further demanded that he sleep in her bed until approximately that same age.[4] Fred W. Wolfe, his brother, tells of Wolfe's difficulties in fitting in with groups of his own age as a youngster.[5] In view of these revelations (and also his own depictions of young Eugene Gant), one can understand Wolfe's prevailing struggle to attain emotional maturity.

Probably as a necessary complement to his belated development as a self-sufficient person, Wolfe invariably turned to others for guidance and support. The following famous passage from "The Story of a Novel"[6] reveals Wolfe's own perception of his problem:

> . . . The deepest search in life, it seemed to me, the thing that in one way or another was central to all living, was man's search to find a father, not merely the father of his flesh, not merely the lost father of his youth, but the image of a strength and wisdom external to his need and superior to his hunger to which the belief and power of his own life could be united.[7]

This passage was written and published in 1935, just three years before Wolfe's death. Surely it is generally agreed that one mark of a mature

man is that man's relative independence from other persons; yet here Wolfe in near middle age admitted that his life had been dominated by the searching for an "image of strength and wisdom"upon which to place his reliance. This statement is a manifestation of Wolfe's long-standing dependence and the resultant immature qualities. Not until the last two years of his life did he become immune to that inner drive to find his "superior beings," as Miss Nowell labels them.[8] His historic quarrel with Maxwell Perkins, his editor and close friend, marked his apparent freedom from this compulsion, and it also had a profound effect upon his artistic career.

If Wolfe appears a lost babe in the wilderness, as Mencken contended, then obviously his plaint is for a father, or more accurately a father-figure. Both "The Story of a Novel" and the biographical data concerning his mother's domination make this fact clear. In his years of physical growth and then young manhood, he was hardly ever without the influence of his mother, since she continued giving him financial support through his three years of graduate school at Harvard.[9] On the other hand, in his adolescent years he had witnessed the deterioration of his previously strong and lively father. The cancer which was ultimately to claim Mr. Wolfe's life, though only after a long period of time, transformed the lusty W. O. Wolfe into an inert, almost spiritless being. The youngest Wolfe was obviously affected by this transformation, and at this period his "deepest search in life" became that of seeking out those persons of superior abilities who could offer him the vitality and inspiration with which to grow, first as a person and later as an artist. After his father had fallen from his imagined pedestal, it seems that Wolfe's brother Ben replaced him for a short time until Ben himself suddenly died in 1918.[10]

In effect, though, Ben probably was the first successor to W. O. Wolfe's vacated position in Thomas Wolfe's egocentric world.

Thus, when the sensitive soul of Thomas Wolfe set for itself such a life's objective as is frankly revealed in "The Story of a Novel," it was certain to be influenced by several people who happened to cross Wolfe's path. To be sure, the extent of these many influences varied greatly. Among the persons effecting notable but not great sway over Wolfe's life were the following: Mrs. Margaret Roberts, his boyhood teacher; Horace Williams and Frederick Koch of the University of North Carolina, who were his philosophy and playwriting professors, respectively; Sinclair Lewis, who greatly aided Wolfe's reputation in 1930 by heralding him as one of America's greatest writers; and Edward C. Aswell, his editor at Harper and Brothers.

Mrs. Roberts, whom Wolfe called the "mother of my spirit," was a source of much inspiration for the youthful Wolfe, and he wrote long, confiding letters to her throughout his life. Her actual influence on his life and writings, however, seems negligible when compared to others in intensity of relationship. Consequently, she will be omitted from this study. It is quite conceivable that she probably did not do so much more for Wolfe than most dedicated persons in her same position would have done for a devoted and impressionable young student. Had she come into his life in a later period when his standards were vastly more demanding, as Aline Bernstein was to do, she surely would not have fared so well in his estimation of her. Also, while Sinclair Lewis unquestionably left an indelible imprint on Wolfe's mind, his actual association with Wolfe was casual and fleeting. After their uninhibited meeting in England in the early 1930's, Wolfe was not nearly so impressed with Lewis as he previously had been.[11] The fact is that it took a special type of

person to fulfill the particular requirements for Wolfe's "image of strength and wisdom."

Who were those persons, then, who were to etch the most lasting imprints on Wolfe's life and art? An estimation of both Miss Nowell's biography and Wolfe's writings shows that four persons played decidedly larger roles in the artistic life of Thomas Wolfe than any others:--his father, W. O. Wolfe; George Pierce Baker, his Harvard playwriting professor; Aline Bernstein, undoubtedly his closest female acquaintance, who both "spiritually and materially" made possible the publishing of his first novel; and finally Maxwell Perkins, his first editor and the "father of my spirit."[12] These persons seem to constitute the purest "images of strength and wisdom" rising from Wolfe's keen, lifelong search. Even though Wolfe's intense scrutiny finally found the tarnished natures of these persons, the mere fact that each one retained a position on Wolfe's seat of exaltation for an extended time testifies to their sterling talents and singular personalities. While each of them was marked by natural imperfections, the usually critical Wolfe required more time in either discovering or admitting the faults in these people than he did in other relationships. In fact, to have lived up to Wolfe's expectations would have required superhuman effort. In The Web and the Rock, Wolfe described George Webber, his alter ego, as follows:

> Perhaps, although he did not know it, there was destruction in him too, for what he loved and got his hands on he squeezed dry, and it could not be otherwise with him. It was something that came from nature, from memory, from inheritance, from the blazing energies of youth, from something outside of him and external to him, yet within him, that drove him forever, and that he could not help.[13]

This passage has much to say concerning Wolfe's own relationship with his four major images of superiority. Beset by what often appeared to be an ugly greediness, Wolfe would suddenly become acutely aware of these

persons' human faults. Then despite the great amount of aid and support they had freely given him, he would unfailingly reject them. In his adolescence, Wolfe became aware of the fact that his father, the gigantic and heroic being of his youth, was lost with no sense of direction. Then Wolfe, from his new viewpoint, resented his weak, senile father's attempts to channel his career into the law.[14] In a somewhat different manner, Wolfe benefited for three years from the superb teaching and guidance of Professor Baker, only to break away as a result of his frustrations as an unsuccessful and overly proud playwright. In his despair, he believed that Baker was largely responsible for his failure.[15] Wolfe's trait became more tragic in his deeper personal involvement with Mrs. Aline Bernstein. Apparently feeling that she was stifling his aspiration to become a pure artist, he deliberately began to catalogue her faults and finally left her a bewildered and heartbroken woman who unsuccessfully attempted suicide.[16] However, Wolfe's mania appears to have reached its depths in his quarrel with Perkins. Embroiled in many personal and professional problems in the mid-1930's, Wolfe blamed Perkins for many of them, when, in fact, he had himself chiefly to blame. Only Perkins' genuine affection for Wolfe kept this matter from being even more damaging than it was.[17] Pathetic and childish as these displays often were, however, each one represented an important step in his development as both man and artist.

There is little doubt that Wolfe was a perpetrator of some bad writing blunders. However, one school of critics tolerates Wolfe's literary atrocities in view of his genius and prodigious writing abilities. On the other hand, Bernard DeVoto, probably Wolfe's most damaging critic, is resolute in holding the opposite view, which is clearly defined in his "Genius Is Not Enough,"[18] written in 1935 following the publication of Of Time and

the River. While almost casually admitting Wolfe's genius, DeVoto proceeded to assert vociferously that Wolfe was not an artist, and he added in a 1950 article[19] that Wolfe not only never achieved the stature of an artist, but he doubtlessly never could have become one. Instead of seeing definite artistic (for DeVoto, objective) evolution in Wolfe's successive books, DeVoto flatly accused Wolfe of exhibiting progressively less craftsmanship. He concluded his first essay as follows:

> . . . however useful genius may be in the writing of novels, it is not enough in itself--it never has been enough, in any art, and it never will be. At the very least it must be supported by an ability to impart shape to material, simple competence in the use of tools. Until Mr. Wolfe develops more craftsmanship, he will not be the important novelist he is now widely accepted as being. In order to be a great novelist, he must also mature his emotions till he can see more profoundly into character than he now does, and he must learn to put a corset on his prose.[20]

Herein are contained many of the main points of criticism that have been leveled at Wolfe's writings. DeVoto's assertion that Wolfe cannot see profoundly into character certainly is a matter of opinion. In On Native Grounds, Alfred Kazin claims, ". . . Wolfe . . . composed a whole gallery of titanic American portraits. . . ."[21] Kazin feels that Wolfe did so because, among other things, he described "his mother's haggard kitchen sourness and scolding old age" along with her better qualities. Of Wolfe's sketches of life, Kazin writes: ". . . he saw them always with great acuteness and wit, and they became, for all their stridency or angularity, as vivid and true as he had seen them in his mind."[22]

However, the most damaging charge that DeVoto aimed is that of failing "to put a corset on his prose." Admittedly, Wolfe made no apparent attempts to reduce his vast materials into perfectly molded novels complete with beginning, middle, and end. To F. Scott Fitzgerald, Wolfe wrote that while books like Madame Bovary are great because of their selected incidents, other books like Tristram Shandy are equally great

because of the "unselected quality of its selection."[23] He also said:

> Well, don't forget, Scott, that a great writer is not only a leaver-outer but also a putter-inner, and that Shakespeare and Cervantes and Dostoievsky were great putter-inners--greater putter-inners, in fact, than taker-outers--and will be remembered for what they put in--remembered, I venture to say, as long as Monsieur Flaubert will be remembered for what he left out.[24]

The "novel of selected incidents" did not fit Wolfe's seeming purpose, then, and in his four completed novels he wrote about the "unselected" happenings and realizations that accompanied his particular journey through life. At the end of his career, though, he had abruptly changed his subject matter in the writing of The Hills Beyond,[25] and this shift might partially be attributed to the scathing criticism regarding his lack of form.

Wolfe's completed works, however, must stand as his principal literary contributions, and they are essentially the depiction of one man's life from the cradle to the grave. The form that his writing took at first was that of life itself--which certainly has a formlessness marked only by the inevitability of death, and You Can't Go Home Again ends on that very note. Both of Wolfe's editors, Maxwell Perkins[26] and Edward C. Aswell,[27] upheld this view of Wolfe's form. DeVoto's criticism actually becomes invalid in that he demands that a writer must live up to the standards of fiction that DeVoto invokes.

Robert Penn Warren, an esteemed novelist himself, brought still another important charge against Wolfe's artistry. In his "A Note on the Hamlet of Thomas Wolfe,"[28] Warren maintained that Wolfe's writing was too autobiographical. He concluded, "And meanwhile it may be well to recollect that Shakespeare merely wrote Hamlet; he was not Hamlet."[29] Contrarily, Thomas Lyle Collins, in his article entitled "Wolfe's Genius,"[30] questioned the relevance of this accusation of too much subjectivity. He pointedly asked, "Would Hamlet, as a play, be . . . less great if Shake-

speare had been a prince of Denmark whose father had been murdered by his uncle? We must look to the art, not the artist. No valid criticism can come from the comparison, explicit or implicit, of the characters of Thomas Wolfe and Eugene Gant."[31]

Besides this point, one might point out that the works of both Miss Nowell and Mabel Wolfe Wheaton, Wolfe's sister who wrote Thomas Wolfe and His Family,[32] reveal that Wolfe was not as autobiographical as many of his critics wish to believe. Of course, at the time of their criticisms, DeVoto and Warren had no access to these documents, and they obviously took a great deal for granted. Especially Wheaton's book makes clear that while Wolfe conceived of Look Homeward, Angel as a result of his youthful experiences, the book is no mere accumulation of factual material.[33] Wolfe himself once contended, perhaps a little untruthfully, that not a single page of his book was the truth.[34] The book appears then to be impregnated with highly imaginative material, if we are to accept Mrs. Wheaton's own personal remembrances of her famous family's behavior. Unless Mrs. Wheaton deliberately tries to deceive her audience, and there is little reason to believe that she should, her book is valuable for offering another view of her brother's relationship with his family.

Therefore, the facts of Wolfe's early life would actually provide only a skeletal structure for Look Homeward, Angel. For example, Wolfe's own infatuation with Clara Paul does have its facsimile in Eugene's love affair with Laura James in the book, but Mrs. Wheaton offers credible proof that the fictional account was only the product of the youthful Wolfe's imagination. Miss Paul's little brother, who was not mentioned in Look Homeward, Angel, purportedly accompanied his sister and young Wolfe at all times.[35] In light of these recent accounts of Wolfe's life,

then, DeVoto's argument that only one-fifth of Look Homeward, Angel is actual fiction loses some strength. Still the criticism concerning Wolfe's autobiographical tendencies has persisted over the years. Wolfe seemed to be one of the most recent examples of the paradox that when a writer uses his own life for his basic subject, he both simplifies and complicates. He is thus faced with the problem of maintaining aesthetic distance, a measure of detachment, from his subject. Wolfe intimately "knew" his material, but he still faced the problem of objectivity, which art does require in some degree.

The final barb flung at him by his detractors is that Wolfe made little if any artistic development in his writing career. One has only to compare You Can't Go Home Again, his last complete novel, with Look Homeward, Angel to realize that this argument has little merit. DeVoto conspicuously never offered a full commentary on Wolfe's last full novel, but he did reiterate in 1950 all his previous claims against Wolfe's art, including that of the retrogressive qualities.[36] If DeVoto could have found it possible to be unbiased, he could not have missed the marked shift in style and the more mature writing in You Can't Go Home Again. Even according to DeVoto's yardstick, this book pretty well measures up to standards. It contains much of the objectivity that both Warren and DeVoto advocate. His large section entitled "The World That Jack Built"[37] is a subtle weaving of portraits and episodes that illuminates the theme of crassness and corruption in America's wealthy society, of which Wolfe definitely was not a member. Another good illustration of his objectivity is the deft, imaginative portrayal of Foxhall Edwards (Maxwell Perkins) and his absorption with the news behind the news, which leads into the absorbing and purely imaginative chapter entitled "The Hollow Men."[38]

In addition, in 1946 Franz Schoenberner, the eminent German scholar who was forced to leave Germany in 1933 because of his anti-Nazi views, hailed Wolfe's depiction of Nazi Germany as the most accurate and most penetrating description of Germany at the strongest point of the Third Reich regime that had then been written.[39] Finally, George Webber's letter to his editor Foxhall Edwards,[40] telling him of Webber's decision to leave both him and his publishing company, reveals a remarkably calm and mature philosophy of life. This indicates that Wolfe was at last beginning to secure a firm grasp on his emotions. In short, only his genius, though much subdued, makes the book bear any great resemblance to Look Homeward, Angel. In his last book Wolfe no longer wrote rhapsodically; rather he was almost coldly analytical, and the substance seems to fit, though bulgingly, into DeVoto's "corset." As for Look Homeward, Angel, perhaps its basic sin is that it does not fit the established characteristics of the novel.

The implication here is that Wolfe definitely made strides forward in both content and form during the period between Look Homeward, Angel and You Can't Go Home Again. In Thomas Wolfe: The Weather of His Youth, Louis Rubin, Jr. takes a contrary view. He asks:

> Why, then, is the "form" of the first novel, involving as it does the progression of the artist toward the first romantic exile from his home, so clearly drawn and firm in its outline, evident in its parts; and the form of the three novels that follow, describing his movement from romantic conflict with life toward objective acceptance and use of it, so often vague, tentative, and stumbling?[41]

First, it could be answered with the simple statement that "this is the way life is." A person's approach to life must necessarily be "vague, tentative, and stumbling," if he is attempting to find the real meaning in life. But what Rubin does not explicitly deal with is Wolfe's early death, which prevented him from revising or polishing his last two books.

As a matter of fact, Wolfe had learned a great deal about shaping his prose. According to Edward C. Aswell, Wolfe's editor at Harper and Brothers, Wolfe had developed some real abilities in the matter of revision.[42] Moreover, Wolfe had attained an objective-subjective combination in his fiction, which is also quite apparent in those last two full-length works.

If Wolfe did make great progress in his writing abilities, then, some quite powerful influences must have affected him. Wolfe himself must be responsible for much of this development, of course, but other basic causes must exist. In fact, a compilation of pressures from innumerable sources must have gone into the evolution of his individual style. A primary one would seem to derive from his obsession with his "images of strength and wisdom." In an attempt to follow Wolfe's developing artistry, this thesis will examine Wolfe's relationship with each of those four superior beings. Each one acted much as a catalyst for Wolfe as both man and artist, speeding him on at length in his artistic endeavors.

In tracing this development, this study will have to rely strongly upon biographical data concerning Wolfe, in addition to Wolfe's fictional works and other persons' views about him and his guiding spirits. Significantly, all four persons to be dealt with in this thesis appear as prominent characters in Wolfe's four completed novels in the corresponding order that he confronted them in real life. Since the sequence of Wolfe's novels followed his own life rather closely, then many of his passages of "autobiographical fiction" will be used in studying Wolfe's dealings with these people. The four persons appeared "fictitiously" in the following novels: W. O. Wolfe (W. O. Gant) in Look Homeward, Angel and Of Time and the River; Professor Baker (Professor Hatcher) in Of Time

and the River; Mrs. Bernstein (Esther Jack) in The Web and the Rock and You Can't Go Home Again; and Maxwell Perkins (Foxhall Edwards) in You Can't Go Home Again.

Even Wolfe's fictional creations from these four personalities, however, reveal his growing capabilities. In Biographia Literaria, Coleridge differentiated between what he termed the fancy and the imagination. The fancy, he claimed, has "no other counters to play with, but fixities and definites," but the imagination "dissolves, diffuses, dissipates in order to recreate."[43] Coleridge, of course, firmly believed the imagination to be the superior artistic quality. In Wolfe's fictional portrayals of W. O. Wolfe, Professor Baker, and Aline Bernstein, he relied chiefly upon the actual facts and features of their real-life counterparts, making them primarily products of Wolfe's fancy. On the other hand, Wolfe used Maxwell Perkins, in the character of Foxhall Edwards, largely as a springboard for entirely imaginative material like the section he called "The Hollow Men." Created by Wolfe late in his career, Foxhall Edwards as a character is not confined to the "fixities and definites" of Maxwell Perkins.

This study will thus attempt to show that Wolfe's turbulent life as a writer was correlative to his associations with these major "images of strength and wisdom," with a view toward considering their respective contributions to Wolfe's career. In a final analysis, an attempt will be made to show that only until Wolfe was able to break free from his compulsion to seek such a personality did he acquire the artistic tools with which to realize fully his talents.

NOTES--CHAPTER I

[1]Charles Angoff, H. L. Mencken: A Portrait from Memory (New York, 1956), p. 108.

[2]I have used first editions of Wolfe's novels as follows: Look Homeward, Angel (New York, 1929); Of Time and the River (New York, 1935); The Web and the Rock (New York, 1939); and You Can't Go Home Again (New York, 1940).

[3]Elizabeth Nowell, Thomas Wolfe: A Biography (Garden City, N. Y., 1960).

[4]Ibid., pp. 23-24.

[5]This information taken from a letter written by Fred W. Wolfe quoted in Kenneth Ricker, "The Theme of Loneliness in Thomas Wolfe" (unpub. M.A. thesis, Oklahoma A&M College, 1952), p. 11.

[6]Wolfe, "The Story of a Novel," Saturday Review of Literature, 13:3-4, 12-16; 3-4, 15; 3-4, 14-16 (December 14, 21, and 28, 1935). For convenience, however, I have used the reprinted version in Saturday Review Treasury (New York, 1957), pp. 54-80.

[7]Ibid., p. 65.

[8]Nowell, p. 24.

[9]Ibid., p. 57.

[10]See Nowell, pp. 42-45, for a factual account of Ben's death. The fictional version appears in Look Homeward, Angel, pp. 537-557.

[11]See Mark Schorer, Sinclair Lewis: An American Life (New York, 1961), pp. 558-559. Schorer states that Wolfe's fictional account of the meeting between Wolfe and Lewis (See You Can't Go Home Again, pp. 537-618) is fairly literal. In that account, George Webber (Wolfe) is primarily disillusioned when he sees that fame has meant little for Lloyd McHarg (Lewis).

[12]Cf. Nowell, pp. 27-28. Miss Nowell lists these four persons, plus Mrs. Margaret Roberts, as Wolfe's major "images of strength and wisdom."

[13]The Web and the Rock, p. 405.

[14]Nowell, pp. 33-34.

[15]Ibid., pp. 71-73.

[16]Ibid., p. 195.

[17]Ibid., pp. 308-316.

[18]Bernard DeVoto, "Genius Is Not Enough," Saturday Review of Literature, 13:3-4, 14-15 (April 25, 1936).

[19]DeVoto, The World of Fiction (Boston, 1950), p. 161.

[20]DeVoto, "Genius Is Not Enough," p. 15.

[21]Alfred Kazin, On Native Grounds (New York, 1942), p. 478.

[22]Ibid., p. 479.

[23]The Letters of Thomas Wolfe, ed. Elizabeth Nowell (New York, 1956), p. 643.

[24]Ibid.

[25]Wolfe, The Hills Beyond (New York, 1941). In this book Wolfe began writing about his mother's ancestors in the North Carolina mountains, thus marking a complete departure from his previous novels which concerned his own life story.

[26]See Maxwell Perkins, "Thomas Wolfe," Harvard Library Bulletin, 1:275 (Autumn, 1947): ". . . if Tom had held to his scheme and completed the whole story of his life, . . . I think the accusation that he had no sense of form could not have stood. . . . He had one book to write about a vast, sprawling, turbulent land--America--as perceived by Eugene Gant. . . . If he had not been diverted and had lived to complete it, I think it would have had the form that was suited to the subject."

[27]See Edward C. Aswell, "Introduction," You Can't Go Home Again (New York, 1941), p. xv: ". . . it is only when Thomas Wolfe's work is viewed in the large that one can begin to see still another kind of form which it possesses. . . . Taken as one unit, /the novels/ tell a single story--the story of Eugene Gant who, midway along, changes to George Webber. . . . In its main outline this story has a beginning, a middle, and an end.

[28]Robert Penn Warren, "A Note on the Hamlet of Thomas Wolfe," American Review, 5:191-208 (May, 1935).

[29]Ibid., p. 208.

[30]Thomas Lyle Collins, "Wolfe's Genius Vs. His Critics," The Enigma of Thomas Wolfe, ed. Richard Walser (Cambridge, Mass., 1953), pp. 161-178.

[31]Ibid., p. 168.

[32]Mabel Wolfe Wheaton, Thomas Wolfe and His Family (Garden City, N. Y., 1961).

[33]Primarily, Mrs. Wheaton discounts the popular notion, derived generally from Look Homeward, Angel, that the Wolfe family was always a quarrelsome, disjointed one.

[34]"The Story of a Novel," p. 61.

[35]Floyd C. Watkins, Thomas Wolfe's Characters (Norman, Okla., 1957), p. 15.

[36]DeVoto, The World of Fiction, pp. 161, 261-263.

[37]You Can't Go Home Again, pp. 147-322.

[38]Ibid., pp. 460-482.

[39]Franz Schoenberner, "My Discovery of Thomas Wolfe," The Enigma of Thomas Wolfe, pp. 290-297. This article was originally published as "Wolfe's Genius Seen Afresh," New York Times Book Review, August 4, 1946, pp. 1, 25.

[40]You Can't Go Home Again, pp. 707-743.

[41]Louis D. Rubin, Jr., Thomas Wolfe: The Weather of His Youth (Baton Rouge, La., 1955), p. 27.

[42]Aswell, "Introduction," You Can't Go Home Again, pp. viii-ix.

[43]S. T. Coleridge, Biographia Literaria, ed. J. Shawcross (London, 1939), vol. 1, p. 202.

CHAPTER II

W. O. Wolfe--Father of the Flesh Only?

Appearing in the thinly veiled "fictitious" personage of W. O. Gant in Look Homeward, Angel, W. O. Wolfe became immortalized as a potpourri of human characteristics seldom matched in real life or literature. In no specific order, old Gant is pictured, among other things, as an inveterate drinker, a bellowing hell-raiser, a frustrated actor, a highly skilled stonecutter, a zestful storyteller, a lonely wanderer, a gregarious businessman, an affectionate father, and a prodigious provider. At first in the book he is a man of enormous vitality, but later becomes a pathetic image of futility and frustration.

Evidence that the character Gant is based upon the man W. O. Wolfe is found in a letter from Thomas Wolfe to his mother shortly after Mr. Wolfe's death in 1923:

> Mama, in the name of God, guard Papa's letters to me with your life. Get them all together and watch them like a hawk. I don't know why I saved them but I thank my stars now that I did. There has never been anybody like Papa. I mean to say that all in all, he is the most unique human being I have ever known. I am convinced there is nobody in America today anywhere like him. When I am in the streets of this city /Boston/, among the crowds, I try to burn myself into the "innards" of everyone I see, I listen in on everything I hear, I get their way of talking and looking, and, you know, the amazing thing, is how much alike . . . most people are. With what I know now about them I am convinced that if I had never known my father, and that if one day on Washington Street, Boston, I had passed him, talking to someone, gesturing with his big hands, denouncing the Democratic party, wetting his thumb every now and then on his mouth--I say, if I saw this man, wholly absorbed in his conversation, seeing no one on either side of him, I would . . . try to find /page torn/ about him. So . . . save those letters, and add to them

> any of your own you may have. He is headed straight not for one of my plays, but for a series. He dramatized his emotions to a greater extent than anyone I have ever known--consider his expression of "merciful God"--his habit of talking to himself at or against an imaginary opponent. Save those letters. They are written in his exact conversational tone: I won't have to create imaginary language out of my own brain--I verily believe I can recreate a character that will knock the hearts out of people by its reality.[1]

By allowing the student of Wolfe to take a rather unrestrained license in comparing old Gant with W. O. Wolfe, this letter contains much literary import. Moreover, though, the letter makes manifest Wolfe's deep-seated admiration of his father.

Whether Wolfe's search for his "images of strength and wisdom" began at the time of his father's death, however, is quite debatable. After old Gant finally dies in Of Time and the River, Wolfe described Eugene Gant:

> His father was dead, and now it seemed to him that he had never found him. His father was dead, and yet he sought him everywhere, and could not believe that he was dead, and was sure that he would find him. . . . He thought he heard his great voice ringing in the street again, and that he would see him striding toward him across the Square with his gaunt earth-devouring stride, or find him waiting every time he turned the corner, or lunging toward the house bearing the tremendous provender of his food and meat, bringing to them all the deathless security of his strength and power and passion, bringing to them all again the roaring message of his fires that shook the fire-full chimney throat with their terrific blast, giving to them all again the exultant knowledge that the good days, the magic days, the golden weather of their lives would come again. . . . "Come to us, Father, in the watches of the night, come to us as you always came, bringing to us the invincible sustenance of your strength, the limitless treasure of your bounty, the tremendous structure of your life that will shape all lost and broken things on earth again into a golden pattern of exultancy and joy. Come to us, Father, while the winds howl in the darkness. . . . For we are ruined, lost, and broken if you do not come, and our lives, like rotten chips, are whirled about us onward in darkness to the sea."[2]

It appears here that Wolfe conjured up a semi-religious image of the dead father, who is more godlike than human. Permeating his fiction thereafter is the struggle by both Eugene Gant and George Webber to find a

real person to match this almost superhuman being, which of course proves an impossible task.

His characters' search for a father obviously had its outward beginning here, but one should recall that Mr. Wolfe had a prolonged illness and feebleness from cancer for many years before his death. In discussing Wolfe's use of this theme, Louis D. Rubin, Jr., states: "On most occasions, Gant is obviously unsuitable as a model for this father. Indeed, rather than being external and superior to mortal need, he is in many ways the personification of spent mortality."[3] Unquestionably, W. O. Gant possesses many morally dubious if not downright unsavory qualities. Since W. O. Wolfe provided such a close prototype for Gant, many people wonder why Wolfe was so adulatory toward his father. What actually did the elder Wolfe have to offer his son, and ultimately what was the extent of Wolfe's sense of loss at his father's death? The answers to these questions are most important in understanding Wolfe's initial compulsion to search for his superior beings.

Wolfe's apparent inability to get along well with his family has been documented in several studies.[4] Inevitably the assumption has been made that he held his father in disrespect, especially in the old man's waning years, as is shown fictitiously when Eugene Gant visits his hospitalized father in Of Time and the River:

> In the morning sunlight on a hospital porch . . . an old dying spectre of a man was sitting. . . . He sat there, a rusty, creaking hinge, an almost severed thread of life, a shockingly wasted integument of skin and bone, of which every fibre and sinew was almost utterly rotted out, consumed and honey-combed by the great plant of the cancer which flowered from his entrails and had now spread its fibrous roots to every tissue of his life. Everything was gone: everything was wasted from him: the face was drawn tight and bony as a beak, the skin was clean, tinged with a fatal cancerous yellow, and almost delicately transparent. . . .

> Now, wearily, desperately, the old enfeebled mind was trying to grope with the strange and bitter miracle of life, to get some meaning out of that black, senseless fusion of pain and joy and agony, that web that had known all the hope and joy and wonder of a boy, the fury, passion, drunkenness, and wild desire of youth, the rich adventure and fulfilment of a man, and that had led him to this fatal and abominable end.[5]

Mabel Wolfe Wheaton, who admired and loved her father more than any other of his children, does a convincing job of dispelling the theory that Wolfe disliked his father. She asserts that the young Wolfe literally worshipped him.[6] Of course, this adulation doubtlessly came before cancer attacked Mr. Wolfe, drastically changing him from his earlier, flamboyant self. Look Homeward, Angel offers an express example of the son's recognition of his father's outstanding talents in the form of Eugene Gant's thoughts:

> ". . . this is no common craftsman, but a master, picking up his tools briefly for a chef-d'oeuvre.
>
> "He is better at this than any one in all the world," Eugene thought, and his dark vision burned in him for a moment, as he thought that his father's work would never, as men reckon years, be extinguished, but that when that great skeleton lay powdered in earth, in many a tangled undergrowth, in the rank wilderness of forgotten churchyards, these letters would endure.[7]

Thus, in Eugene's eyes there is an immortal quality about his father, and Wolfe revealed it in the same hospital scene quoted above:

> Nothing was left but the hands. The rest of the man was dead. But the great hands of the stonecutter, on whose sinewy and bony substance there was so little that disease or death could waste, looked as powerful and living as ever. . . .[8]

Of the Gant family's disbelief in Gant's impending death, Wolfe wrote:

> It was hard for them to think of Gant's death as of God's death; it was a great deal harder, because he was more real to them than God, he was more immortal than God, he was God.[9]

In Wolfe's first two novels, one can easily discern the elements of both love and hate that marked Wolfe's ambivalent attitude toward his father.

His letter to his mother, quoted earlier, would indicate that Wolfe's great admiration for his father persisted at least into his young manhood; yet later he was to write somewhat disparagingly of old Gant, though probably in an attempt to capture Gant's human qualities objectively.

In comparing son to father in this instance, one can see a remarkable array of kindred traits. Except for certain superfluous facts, Thomas Wolfe bears a strong similarity to his father, both in material and spiritual aspects. Only the facts that Wolfe never possessed his father's stonecutting talents and that he never married detract from their basic characteristics. For their time, they were both veritable physical giants, stretching nearly six and one-half feet in height. They both persistently thought of themselves as aliens in strange lands; they possessed a like thirst for alcohol; they loved to wander; and they both died with a sense of unfulfillment--to mention only a few of their many likenesses.

The initial spirit of Thomas Wolfe has to be traced back to his actual father, therefore, even further back than Mrs. Margaret Roberts, whom Wolfe called the "mother of my spirit."[10] Mabel Wolfe Wheaton is quite definite in her appraisal of W. O. Wolfe's artistic capabilities in Thomas Wolfe and His Family, though one should remember her almost worshipful attitude toward her father.

> I think that Papa was never meant to be a businessman. I contend that he was a born actor and that he might well have been an able lecturer, a lawyer, or even a great writer. Tom Wolfe was never more able than his father, and certainly I am one of Tom Wolfe's most partial and devoted admirers. The flow of expression from Papa's lips, his unusual way of saying things, his love of the beautiful--good literature, faithful acting, fine music, expressive, well-executed carvings and paintings, his appreciation and enjoyment of the glorious springtimes and au-

> tumns in our mountain country, of a calm blue sky, a quiet, peaceful, drowsing summer day, of heavy snows that in dead of winter glorified our slopes, transforming trees and houses into giant statuary--all these good things were Papa's loves and attested to the artistry within him. This artistry, always fighting for the right to express itself, was never completely able to do so.
>
> Papa would have been all that Tom was, and more, I verily believe, had he had the opportunity.[11]

Even Wolfe apparently was aware of his father's buried ability. Old Gant rather confidently believes that he "could have been a writer" in Look Homeward, Angel. In this same section, too, Gant is shown taking pride in the aptness of his tombstone inscriptions and his general ability with words.[12]

Owning no actual writing heritage, Thomas Wolfe received numerous indispensable artistic traits unwittingly handed to him by his father. Not the least of these elements was W. O.'s extraordinary power of rhetoric, which accounted for Wolfe's entreaty to his mother to save Mr. Wolfe's letters. Sound proof, both of the old man's exquisite ability and of Wolfe's recognition of it, is contained in a passage in Look Homeward, Angel concerning a prohibition election. After his cronies make him the object of many derogatory remarks about his immense drinking habits, a cornered, but pious Gant turns to a group of keenly attentive women:

> "Pay no attention to them, ladies, I beg of you," said Gant scathingly. "They are the lowest of the low, the whisky-besotted dregs of humanity, who deserve to bear not even the name of men, so far have they retrograded backwards."
>
> With a flourishing sweep of his slouch hat he departed into the warehouse.
>
> "By God!" said Ambrose Nethersole approvingly. "It takes W. O. to tie a knot in the tail of the English language. It always did."[13]

Countless times in his writing, Thomas Wolfe also displayed his own knot-tying ability. Whether or not his inheritance of such floridity

should be counted as a virtue or a vice is a matter of debate, with both sides being able to support their arguments. The point is that young Wolfe's sometimes excessive ornamentation in his writing doubtlessly sprang from his father's oratorical skills. Incredibly long and involved sentences appear abundantly in his early books, but they are not so frequent in his last, You Can't Go Home Again.[14] Many times the passages concern W. O. Gant, as in the following in which Gant has been living alone in his own house with a lady boarder, to whom he immediately became attracted, but from whom he soon became disenchanted:

> One evening he returned insanely drunk, routed her out of her chamber and pursued her unfrocked, untoothed, unputtied, with a fluttering length of kimono in her palsied hand, driving her finally into the yard beneath the big cherry tree, which he circled, howling, making frantic lunges for her as she twittered with fear, casting splintered glances all over the listening neighborhood as she put on the crumpled wrapper, hid partially the indecent jiggling of her breasts, and implored succor.[15]

Though assailed at times for this type of bombastic rhetoric, Wolfe's eloquence is often one of his finest qualities, and his youthful attentiveness to his father's prodigious oratorical displays greatly affected the author's natural writing style, particularly in the earlier novels.

Sheer gusto for living was another of W. O. Wolfe's characteristics which he obviously passed on to his son. Basic to this zest was good, plentiful food. It is little wonder, then, that Wolfe wrote almost rapturously about food and eating. One of his best known passages appears in Look Homeward, Angel before W. O. Gant becomes ill and Mrs. Gant buys her boarding house:

> In the morning they rose in a house pungent with breakfast cookery, and they sat at a smoking table loaded with brains and eggs, ham, hot biscuits, fried apples seething in their gummed syrups, honey, golden butter, fried steak, scalding coffee. Or there were stacked battercakes, rum-colored molasses, fragrant brown sausages, a bowl of wet cherries, plums, fat juicy bacon,

> jam. At the mid-day meal, they ate heavily: a huge hot roast of beef, fat buttered lima-beans, tender corn smoking on the cob, thick red slabs of sliced tomatoes, rough savory spinach, hot yellow corn-bread, flaky biscuits, a deep-dish peach and apple cobbler spiced with cinnamon, tender cabbage, deep glass dishes piled with preserved fruits--cherries, pears, peaches. At night they might eat fried steak, hot squares of grits fried in egg and butter, pork-chops, fish, young fried chicken.
>
> For the Thanksgiving and Christmas feasts four heavy turkeys were bought and fattened for weeks. . . . Eliza baked for weeks in advance: the whole energy of the family focused upon the great ritual of the feast. . . . there were glossed sticky dates, cold rich figs, cramped belly to belly in small boxes, dusty raisins, mixed nuts--the almond pecan, the meaty nigger-toe, the walnut, sacks of assorted candies, piles of yellow Florida oranges, tangerines, sharp, acrid, nostalgic odors.
>
> Seated before a roast or fowl, Gant began a heavy clangor on his steel and carving knife, distributing thereafter Gargantuan portions to each plate. Eugene feasted from a high chair by his father's side, filled his distending belly until it was drum-tight, and was permitted to stop eating by his watchful sire only until his stomach was impregnable to the heavy prod of Gant's big finger. . . .
>
> He had a Dutch love of abundance: again and again he described the great stored barns, the groaning plenty of the Pennsylvanians.[16]

Both Wolfe in his fiction and Mabel Wolfe Wheaton in her memoirs make clear that the quantity and quality of the family's meals deteriorated sharply when Mrs. Wolfe purchased the "Old Kentucky Home" in 1906. Her practical and pecuniary self, away from W. O.'s influence, would not allow such extravagance. At least while Mr. Wolfe was in power, the young Wolfes knew and partook of an abundance of food. It is also worthy of mention that the Gant family life in Look Homeward, Angel was no longer full of zest after the partial separation of the mother and father.

While harboring a physical hunger for food, young Wolfe also had an almost insatiable thirst for knowledge. Tales are told of his having read every book in the Asheville library, regardless of merit. At Harvard Eugene Gant is shown greedily reading book after book in Widener Library.

Again this root reaches back to W. O. Wolfe, even though Margaret Roberts was to nourish young Wolfe's craving for literature. In the Wolfe sitting room, a bookcase housed many volumes, and Mrs. Wheaton, though one should consider her family piety, remembers, "He /Mr. Wolfe/ collected a library excellent for that day, and he used it. Books for him were not decoration."[17] In Look Homeward, Angel, Gant watches young Eugene ravenously reading books by the firelight:

> . . . as he watched his brooding face set for hours before a firelit book of pictures, /Gant/ concluded that the boy liked books, more vaguely that he would make a lawyer of him, send him into politics, see him elected to the governorship, the Senate, the presidency.[18]

W. O.'s great love of literature, which was more rhetorical than literary, did not keep him from ultimately attempting to suppress his son's efforts to be a writer. In fact, when Wolfe told his family that he wanted to be a playwright, Mr. Wolfe raved, "Who ever made a living writing plays? Count 'em. Merciful God, count 'em on one hand. But who ever heard of a lawyer starving to death. . . ."[19]

As every student of Wolfe knows, Wolfe's first desire was to become a playwright. He was fascinated by the theatre, and so apparently was his father. Mabel Wolfe Wheaton says, "Papa loved dramatics; he read plays by the hour, and by the hour he could recite passages from Shakespeare's writings. I am quite certain that from him Tom inherited his tremendous love for dramatics."[20] As a young man in Baltimore, W. O. Wolfe is said to have attended numerous theatrical performances where he witnessed some of the most noted actors of the day. Ornamented with elaborate gestures, his colorful orations of such pieces as Hamlet's "To be or not to be" Soliloquy bear out the probability that he had once nourished theatrical ambitions, just as his son envisioned universal success as a playwright.[21] Both men met with failure in these aspirations.

Finally, Mr. Wolfe's unwillingness to be mediocre or to do things halfway probably both helped and hindered his youngest son. If something was worth doing for W. O., it had to be done in the best possible manner. "He was big in everything he thought and did, big in generosity, understanding, appreciation, and sympathy,"[22] contends his daughter Mabel. Wolfe also inherited his father's wholehearted approach toward the task at hand. In fact, it probably had much to do with his future failure as a playwright. With such a flair for details and wholeness, he invariably wrote his plays too long. Then when told of the necessity for cutting the play's length for staging, he would end up by having added even more material. Likewise in his novel writing, his editor would tell him to cut giant portions of his work only to see Wolfe add thousands more words.[23] Although decreasing notably in his late works, this desire for completeness, inherited from his father, stayed with him through his career.

Aside from these more obvious gifts, W. O. Wolfe also provided less tangible qualities which are reflected in Wolfe's writings. In providing thematic materials, these elements are probably more important in understanding Wolfe's art. The burning drive of his main characters, Eugene Gant and George Webber, centers partly on the search for the lost father but, moreover, on their attempts to find a place where they really belong. Wolfe himself confessed that these matters preoccupied a large part of his lifetime. In actuality W. O. Wolfe was a stranger in a strange land, making him basically an alien in a physical sense. On the other hand, his son was at first an alien only in a spiritual manner, which grew from his early identification with his father. Since Wolfe seems to have adopted the basic spirit of his father, the extremely subjective nature of his early novels is partially explained. In those books, Eugene Gant is

struggling with the similar problems that he believed his father faced during his life. Young Gant's world is an egocentric one, then, because Wolfe seemed to be occupied primarily with those difficulties which father and son alike shared.

"I'm a stranger in a strange land,"[24] laments W. O. Gant in Look Homeward, Angel. In essence this is the tragedy of old Gant and, it would seem, W. O. Wolfe as well. While Gant is preparing to marry Eliza Pentland and is visiting her family, he muses that

> . . . he must die a stranger--that all, all but these triumphant Pentlands, who banqueted on death--must die.
>
> And like a man who is perishing in the polar night, he thought of the rich meadows of his youth: the corn, the plum tree, and ripe grain. Why here? O lost![25]

Like his prototype W. O. Wolfe, Gant had migrated from Pennsylvania to Old Catawba (North Carolina). In the above passage, then, Gant associates his adopted home and its people with a kind of enduring sterility, while he remembers his homeland as the epitome of fertility and natural beauty.

To cope with his feelings of alienation, W. O. Wolfe turned to far-ranging travels. On numerous occasions, Mr. Wolfe would depart on trips, and the family was always uncertain when he would return. In Wolfe's short story, "The Web of Earth," Eliza recalls her husband Gant:

> Lord God! I never saw a man like that for wanderin'. I'll vow! a rollin' stone, a wanderer--that's all he'd a been! California, China, anywheres--forever wantin' to be up and gone, who'd never have accumulated a stick of property if I hadn't married him.[26]

W. O.'s mourning about his being a stranger is germane to Thomas Wolfe's own biggest problem, the finding of his true home.

"From childhood on, Thomas Wolfe took the part of his father," Louis Rubin notes, "Like W. O. Gant, Eugene Gant considers himself a stranger

and a wanderer."[27] It is true that few people are ever affected by wanderlust to the extent Wolfe was. Even after he had searched vainly at Harvard and in New York City for the answers to his peculiar problems, he then made several trips abroad and was continuously taking impulsive train trips to widespread locales. While doing so, Wolfe seemed to possess a Whitmanesque feeling of belonging everywhere. Yet, paradoxically, he felt he also belonged nowhere.

Throughout his early life Wolfe was constantly badgered by the gnawing knowledge that he could not remain in his native mountain region. He actually seemed to deny, or at least to attempt to do so, his lifelong surroundings. Substantiating this feeling is the exultation of Eugene Gant in Of Time and the River, as he embarks upon his train journey to Harvard. More importantly, though, he was at last going to the great Northland, his father's place of vitality:

> And now that day had come, and these two images--call them rather lights and weathers of man's soul--of the world-far, lost and lonely South, and the fierce, the splendid, strange and secret North were swarming like a madness through his blood. And just as he had seen a thousand images of the buried and silent South which he had known all his life, so now he had a vision of the proud fierce North with all its shining cities, and its tides of life. He saw the rocky sweetness of its soil and its green loveliness, and he knew its numb soft prescience, its entrail-stirring ecstasy of coming snow, its smell of harbors and the traffic of proud ships.[28]

The place to begin his hunt for "a stone, a leaf, a door" was in his father's native land.

During the gripping scene of Gant's death in Of Time and the River, Wolfe attempted to focus on old Gant's tragic element--his lonely alienation amidst the teeming humanity. Wolfe wrote that not even Mrs. Gant had ever called her husband by his given name, but referred to him always as "Mr. Gant." In fact, only two of the many friends present at his bed-

side had ever called him "W. O."[29] Wolfe then asked, "What was the secret of this strange and bitter mystery of life that had made of Gant a stranger to all men, and most of all a stranger to his wife?" He answered through the mind of Helen Gant, W. O.'s favorite child:

> . . . it was not the loneliness of the dreamer, poet, or the misjudged prophet, it was just the cold and terrible loneliness of man, of every man, and of the lost American who has been brought forth naked under immense and lonely skies, to "shift for himself," to grope his way blindly through the confusion and brutal chaos of a life as naked and unsure as he, to wander blindly down across the continent, to hunt forever for a goal, a wall, a dwelling place of warmth and certitude, a light, a door.[30]

As can be seen, Gant's loneliness is not merely a particular one, but is somehow universal, at least in America.

In like manner, Thomas Wolfe's loneliness compelled him to leave the "prisonlike" South, and his alter ego, Eugene Gant, persists in trying to separate himself from his mother's side of the family. His sister Helen taunts him, however, that he is a Pentland and not a Gant. Even though Eugene refuses to accept this idea, it nonetheless keeps him from "belonging" either to the Gant side or the despised Pentland clan. In order to find his real place, he thinks, he must leave the South. Near the end of Look Homeward, Angel, when Eugene is seeking family aid in going to Harvard, old Gant resignedly says, "Let him do as he likes. I can't pay out any more money on his education. If he wants to go, his mother must send him."[31] At this point comes the final break of father and son; from then on, it "was the beginning of the voyage, the quest of new lands," and

> Gant was dead. Gant was living, death-in-life. In his big back room at Eliza's he waited death, lost and broken in a semi-life of petulant memory. He hung to life by a decayed filament, a corpse lit by infrequent flares of consciousness. The sudden death whose menace they had faced so long that it had lost its meaning, had never come to him.[32]

In Eugene's time of need, his father was no longer there for the support that he so desperately sought, and it was really Pentland money from his mother that would support him. He remained a lonely stranger.

When Eugene is finally ready to leave for Harvard in the beginning of Of Time and the River, the train arrives:

> It was his train and it had come to take him to the strange and secret heart of the great North that he had never known, but whose austere and lonely image, whose frozen heat and glacial fire, and dark stern beauty had blazed in his vision since he was a child. For he had dreamed and hungered for the proud unknown North with that wild ecstasy, that intolerable and wordless joy of longing and desire, which only a Southerner can feel. With a heart of fire, a brain possessed, a spirit haunted by the strange secret and unvisited magic of the proud North, he had always known that some day he should find it--his heart's hope and his father's country, the lost but unforgotten half of his own soul,--and take it for his own. . . .
>
> Then, with a sudden feeling of release, a realization of the incredible escape that now impended for him, he knew that he was waiting for the train, and that the great life of the North, the road to freedom, solitude and the enchanted promise of the golden cities was now before him. Like a dream made real, a magic come to life, he knew that in another hour he would be speeding world-ward, life-ward, North-ward out of the enchanted time-far hills, out of the dark heart and mournful mystery of the South forever.[33]

Here the search for the "lost father" begins in earnest. As he thinks of this, Eugene is aware of the two polar images of the South and the North. Without hesitancy, he (and Thomas Wolfe) chose the North, his father's country.

A painful realization, however, was to come to Eugene on his keenly anticipated Northward journey. This was that even though his father's former image was lost, it still remained in its now miserable condition, and in effect stymied Eugene's attempt to derive meaning from life. He stops in Baltimore to visit his dying father, whose hopeless condition is prophetic of Eugene's early futility in his artistic life:

> He knew in his heart that for the wretched, feeble, whining old man whom he must meet the next day, he felt no love whatever. He knew, indeed, that he felt instead a kind of hate--the wretched kind of hatred that comes from the intolerable pity without love, from suffering and disgust, from the agony of heart and brain and nerves, the poisonous and morbid infection of our own lives, which a man dying of a loathsome disease awakes in us, and from the self-hate, the self-loathing that it makes us feel because of our terrible desire to escape him, to desert him, to blot out the horrible memory we have for him, utterly to forget him.[34]

This passage indicates that Wolfe wrote bitterly about his broken father chiefly through a sense of oppressive self-identification. There is something about Gant that holds Eugene at bay in his quest. Gant, now a mere shadow, symbolizes the bitter, empty destiny of man:

> . . . it had come to this: an old man dying on a porch, staring through the sun-hazed vistas of October towards the lost country of his youth.
>
> This was the end of man, then, end of life, of fury, of hope, and passion, glory, all the strange and bitter miracle of chance, of history, fate, and destiny which even a stonecutter's life could include.[35]

Eugene proceeds to Harvard, hoping doggedly to find a source of strength and wisdom to replace this once-powerful father whose hands are the last tenacious remnants of his former self.

At last, some two years after Eugene (Wolfe) goes to Harvard, old Gant succumbs to cancer. As Eugene returns home with his father near death, Wolfe wrote:

> And he was going home again into the South and to a life that had grown strange as dreams, and to his father who was dying and who had become a ghost and shadow of his father to him, and to the bitter reality of grief and death. And--how, why, for what reason he could not say--all he felt was the tongue-swelling of wild joy.[36]

Thus, Eugene receives a form of release at his father's death, and also he notes with satisfaction that his old life in the South is already strange to him. His life, he feels, is open for him at long last, but he is immediately confronted with the necessity to find his lost father:

> His father was dead, and now it seemed to him that he had never found him. His father was dead, and yet he sought him everywhere, and could not believe that he was dead, and was sure that he would find him.[37]

In his quest, Eugene (Wolfe) is led into New York City. Not only did his father's Pennsylvania birthplace symbolize the land of fulfillment, but the city comes to epitomize this traditional land of his father. The place ultimately comes to represent not only his father, but all the fathers before him:

> And finally he brought to /the city/ the million memories of his fathers who were great men and knew the wilderness, but who had never lived in cities: three hundred of his blood and bone, who sowed their blood and sperm across the continent, walked beneath its broad and lonely lights, . . . who fought like lions with its gigantic strength, its wildness, its limitless savagery and beauty, until with one stroke of its paw it broke their backs and killed them.[38]

Later in Of Time and the River, the importance of the strong, guiding hand of the father is revealed in the question, "For, brother, what are we?" The answer is:

> We are the sons of our fathers, whose face we have never seen, whose voice we have never heard, . . . to whom we have cried for strength and comfort in our agony, whose life like ours was lived in solitude and in the wilderness, to whom only can we speak out the strange, dark burden of our heart and spirit . . . and we shall follow the print of his foot forever.[39]

Following that footprint dauntlessly, Wolfe and his fictitious characters, Eugene Gant and George Webber, are led into many countries seeking to fulfill their needs. Both as man and character, Wolfe failed to find the obscure object of his quest in the city, so he turned to Europe to find the land of his father's tradition. In England, France, and finally Germany (the actual land of W. O. Wolfe's ancestors), the search is made. Both Eugene Gant and George Webber are shown in Germany, the land and people of which they love better than any other except possibly

America. Finally, however, George Webber in You Can't Go Home Again is forced to abandon this hope in face of the Nazi regime.

The only land for the Wolfean hero is America, however, and Eugene Gant makes this discovery near the end of Of Time and the River. As he waits for the ship to take him back to America,

> . . . she /the ship/ came definitely, indubitably, wonderfully from but one place on earth, and in only that one place could she be fully seen and understood, in only that one place could she slide into her appointed and imperial setting.
>
> That place was America. . . . And as the Americans who were now approaching the ship in the puffing little tender saw this mark upon her, they looked at her and knew her instantly; they felt a qualm along their loins, their flesh stirred.[40]

Like the ship, Wolfe the artist then realized that his appointed place where he could be "fully seen and understood" was his native land, and he had made the discovery in his harried search for his "father."

Wolfe's failure to recognize America as his true country until he had left it brings up an interesting parallel in American literature. It has been a long-enduring belief by many American literary figures that they are hampered in their creations because of America's lack of tradition. This problem, in fact, has concerned prominent American writers as far back as the early 19th century.[41] According to Maxwell Perkins, Wolfe also was obsessed by the American writer's big problem:

> He /Wolfe/ often spoke of the artist in America--how the whole color and character of the country was completely new--never interpreted; how in England, for instance, the writer inherited a long accretion of accepted expression from which he could start. But Tom would say--and he had seen the world--"who has ever made you know the color of an American box car?"[42]

Wolfe accepted America, then, and actually wished to be America's spokesman. Ultimately, he even turned back to his native North Carolina mountains in his last novel, the incomplete The Hills Beyond, which concerns

his mother's once-despised mountain people. His wanderings in the novels had led him in a complete circle, and at his career's end he was back writing about his native land.

At any rate, one can get a clear idea of the extremely potent pull which the father image had on Wolfe the writer. It would persist in all his writings until finally at the end of You Can't Go Home Again, George Webber (Wolfe) would break away from Foxhall Edwards (Perkins) and become an independent being. Free from his father's influence, he then turned to the heritage of his mother in The Hills Beyond. Until that time, however, Wolfe the man and the artist remained under the forceful spell of those persons he called "heroic figures."

Meanwhile, because of his father's death, Wolfe's talents found release, as expressed in his letter to Professor Baker in the summer of 1923:

> Last year my unfortunate play returned to let my blood; the springs of creative action froze and in the blackness of my despair I doubted if they would ever return. They returned because my father died, because I was subjected to deeper tragedies of love, hatred, and contempt.[43]

George Webber, Wolfe's alter ego, made the final statement about the influence of the father on the son's artistic life:

> . . . I think /my father/ felt in himself, like a kind of dumb and inarticulate suffering, the unachieved ability to design and shape. Certainly he would have been profoundly disappointed if he could have known the strange forms his own desires for "doing" and for "making" were to achieve in me.[44]

NOTES--CHAPTER II

[1]*Thomas Wolfe's Letters to His Mother*, ed. John Skally Terry (New York, 1944), pp. 46-47.

[2]*Of Time and the River*, pp. 327-333.

[3]Rubin, p. 132.

[4]See Nowell, pp. 21-49; Rubin, pp. 117-139; and Richard Walser, *Thomas Wolfe* (New York, 1961), pp. 12-31.

[5]*Of Time and the River*, pp. 77-78.

[6]Wheaton, pp. 51-53.

[7]*Look Homeward, Angel*, p. 101.

[8]*Of Time and the River*, p. 78.

[9]*Look Homeward, Angel*, p. 484.

[10]Nowell, p. 154.

[11]Wheaton, p. 98.

[12]*Look Homeward, Angel*, pp. 71-74.

[13]Ibid., pp. 284-285.

[14]Critics like Rubin (p. 53) and Walser (p. 106) believe that Wolfe's writing loses some vitality because of his more restrained style of writing in *You Can't Go Home Again*.

[15]*Look Homeward, Angel*, pp. 286-287.

[16]Ibid., pp. 68-69.

[17]Wheaton, p. 51.

[18]*Look Homeward, Angel*, p. 82.

[19]Wheaton, p. 196.

[20]Ibid., p. 33.

[21]Ibid., p. 86.

[22]Ibid., p. 85.

[23]Perkins, p. 273.

[24]*Look Homeward, Angel*, p. 11.

[25]Ibid., p. 15.

[26]Wolfe, "The Web of Earth," From Death to Morning (New York, 1935), p. 250.

[27]Rubin, p. 134.

[28]Of Time and the River, p. 24.

[29]Ibid., pp. 251-252.

[30]Ibid., p. 254.

[31]Look Homeward, Angel, p. 612.

[32]Ibid., p. 604.

[33]Of Time and the River, pp. 23-24.

[34]Ibid., p. 60.

[35]Ibid., p. 83.

[36]Ibid., p. 246.

[37]Ibid., p. 327.

[38]Ibid., p. 413.

[39]Ibid., pp. 869-870.

[40]Ibid., p. 907.

[41]For a classical statement on this point see Henry James, Hawthorne (Ithaca, N. Y., 1879), pp. 34-35: ". . . one might enumerate the items of high civilisation, as it exists in other countries, which are absent from the texture of American life, until it should become a wonder to know what was left. No State, in the European sense of the word, and indeed barely a specific national name. No sovereign, no court, no personal loyalty, no aristocracy, no church, no clergy, no army, no diplomatic service, no country gentlemen, . . . no great Universities, nor public schools--no Oxford, nor Eton, nor Harrow; no literature, no novels, no museums, no pictures, no political society. . . . Some such list as that might be drawn up of the absent things in American life--especially in the American life of forty years ago, the effect of which, upon an English or a French imagination, would probably, as a general thing, be appalling. The natural remark in the almost lurid light of such an indictment, would be that if these things are left out, everything is left out. The American knows that a great deal remains; what it is that remains--that is his secret, his joke, as one might say.

[42]Perkins, p. 276.

[43]The Letters of Thomas Wolfe, p. 47.

[44]You Can't Go Home Again, p. 717.

CHAPTER III

George Pierce Baker--An Idol into Sawdust

As a playwright, Thomas Wolfe the novelist would seem as incongruous as a brawny blacksmith plying the trade of watchmaker. Yet only a thin line apparently stood between Wolfe and theatrical fame. This assumption is made credible by the views of George Pierce Baker, certainly one of the greatest of all playwriting teachers.[1] The innovator of the renowned Harvard 47 Workshop who directed Eugene O'Neill's artistry into acclaim, Baker guided Wolfe's early talents for nearly three years in 1920-23. This esteemed professor-critic had a high regard for Wolfe's writing abilities and went so far as to label some of his dramatic work as rivaling and possibly surpassing any done in the Workshop since its inception in 1905.[2]

With the emaciated W. O. Wolfe moving slowly toward death, Baker became the next powerful influence on Wolfe's literary life. Of Time and the River, in which W. O. Gant finally dies, deals with a young man's quest for a spiritual father. In this book Baker is characterized in the person of Professor Hatcher, but the section concerning him and his class comprises only a small portion of the entire work. In view of the magnetism which clearly drew Wolfe under Baker's dominance throughout most of the period, one tends to wonder why Baker does not play a larger role in this novel. The probable answer is simply this: In the titanic task of shaping this sprawling work in 1934, Maxwell Perkins almost certainly deleted large sections dealing with Hatcher and the playwriting class. At any rate, what remains is not a wholly attractive portrait; indeed, Wolfe acutely satirized members of the class itself. His final conclusion about the Workshop probably appears in Of Time and the River:

> False, trivial, glib, dishonest, empty, without substance, lacking faith--is it any wonder that among Professor Hatcher's young men few birds sang?[3]

In his book, George Pierce Baker and the American Theatre, however, Wisner Payne Kinne notes that if people could see the more than half a million words which Perkins pruned from the novel, "they would . . . /gain/ a warmer and more generous picture." He further writes: "One /person/ who read an early form of the 'Professor Hatcher' material at Wolfe's request believes that the editing of the manuscript heightened the satiric materials at the expense of an initial warmth of affection."[4] Much as in his writing about his father, Wolfe incurred some criticism here by keeping himself from total adulation. If the book's intention was to have depicted the youthful artist's search for a spiritual father, though, Perkins seems to have subtracted from the theme's effectiveness since Baker quite probably took over, for a while, W. O. Wolfe's former place in Wolfe's life. In one of the unpublished parts of Of Time and the River, Wolfe wrote regarding Eugene Gant's feelings about Professor Hatcher: (Note the use of first person here, which was later changed to third person by Perkins).

> I worshipped him for almost a year. He was the great man, the prophet, the infinitely wise and strong and gentle spirit who knew all, had seen all, could solve all problems by a word, release us of all the anguish, grief, and error of our lives by a wave of his benevolent hand.[5]

Needless to say, Baker could not possibly live up to these expectations, and Wolfe's disillusionment with him was only a matter of time.

Wolfe's Harvard interlude--in which he was suspended between life and death as a writer--is not to be underemphasized, because it constitutes a most essential period in his artistic development. Even though Wolfe's failure as a playwright was probably inevitable, Baker did a

remarkable, though surely impossible job of cutting down his pupil's vast writing dimensions to the minute limitations of the stage. But as Kinne remarks, "Wolfe's story at Harvard suggests that perhaps Baker's greatest work was not with the successful playwrights, but with those who came to be playwrights and went away to be something else."[6] Baker was often forced to apply the "cure" to students' aspirations to write plays, and few people have ever had a worse itch than did Wolfe.[7] Of Eugene Gant, Wolfe wrote:

> It now seemed to him that there was only one work in life which he could possibly do, and that this work was writing plays, and that if he could not succeed in this work he had better die, since any other life than the life of the playwright and the theatre was not to be endured. Accordingly, every interest and energy of his life was now fastened on this work with a madman's passion; he thought, felt, breathed, ate, drank, slept, and lived completely in terms of plays.[8]

Wolfe had contacted this raging fever while at the University of North Carolina in the playwriting course under Professor Koch, himself a former pupil of Baker. At the helm of the 47 Workshop, which was "the rudder of /Eugene's/ destiny," was Baker, who came close to achieving the now almost inconceivable.

It is perhaps unfortunate that Wolfe spent these years in the futile attempt to reduce his talents to the extremely narrow limitations of the theatre, but the period was certainly not spent in vain. Wolfe was able, of course, to incorporate his experiences into some of his finest fiction, and he also expanded his already immense range of knowledge through his prodigious reading in the Harvard Widener Library, his graduate course work, and his association with Baker and the artistically inclined persons he met there. The prospect of going to Harvard had been of the first magnitude for Wolfe, of course, but ultimately the final shock, when he found that his talents were little short of hopeless for the stage, marked his

gradual turning toward other forms of expression.

Wolfe actually did not find it simple to gain admittance into the Workshop, which was limited to 12 carefully selected and promising playwrights. Not knowing that he definitely would attend Harvard until the 1920-21 academic year had almost begun, Wolfe belatedly applied for admission into the class whose membership had supposedly already been determined.[9] Only the fact that Professor Koch had been a particular favorite of Baker allowed Wolfe into the "sacred circle," as Wolfe told his mother:

> He /Baker/ thawed out immediately when I told him I was under Koch at Chapel Hill for two years and he commented enthusiastically on the work Koch was doing. . . . He asked me if Koch had produced any of my plays and I told him two. . . . he was familiar with their titles, as he has kept up with their work. So he's letting me into the sacred circle . . . and even suggested that we might put on a couple of the Chapel Hill plays, one of mine included, "To show these people here what you're doing down there."[10]

From the beginning, however, Baker's promises to Wolfe were on a qualified basis: "When you come into my course it is with the intention of eventually being a playwright. If you have the ability I'll make one out of you,"[11] he told Wolfe. Writing about Professor Hatcher (Baker), Wolfe said:

> He did not predict a successful career in the professional theatre for every student who had been a member of his class. He did not even say he could teach a student how to write plays. No. He made, in fact, no claims at all. . . . it was impossible to quarrel with /what he said/.
>
> All Professor Hatcher said about his course was that . . . a man . . . might be able to derive from the course a technical and critical guidance which it would be hard for him to get elsewhere, and which he might find for himself only after years of painful and even wasteful experiment.[12]

Wolfe had ability, of course, but it was destined for another genre. Nevertheless, Kinne believes that Wolfe's eventual failure was a keen disappointment for the hopeful Baker.[13]

Compared with the almost devastating satire of his fellow Workshop students in Of Time and the River, Wolfe's depiction of Professor Hatcher is quite benign:

> His appearance was imposing: a well set-up figure of a man of fifty-five, somewhat above the middle height, strongly built and verging toward stockiness, with an air of vital driving energy that was always filled with authority and a sense of sure purpose, and that never degenerated into the cheap exuberance of the professional hustler. His voice, like his manner, was quiet, distinguished, and controlled, but always touched with suggestions of great latent power, with reserves of passion, eloquence, and resonant sonority.
>
> . . . he had a strong but kindly-looking face touched keenly, quietly by humor; his eyes, beneath his glasses, were also keen, observant, sharply humorous, his mouth was wide and his nose was large and strong, his forehead shapely and able-looking, and he had neat wings of hair cut short and sparse and lying flat against the skull.
>
> He wore eye-glasses of the pince-nez variety, and they dangled in a fashionable manner from a black silk cord: it was better than going to a show to see him put them on, his manner was so urbane, casual, and distinguished when he did so. His humor, although suave, was also quick and rich and gave an engaging warmth and humanity to a personality that sometimes needed them. Even in his display of humor, however, he never lost his urbane, distinguished manner. . . .[14]

Kinne, who knew Baker quite well, has hailed Wolfe's description of Baker's sense of humor and especially his chuckle as a masterpiece:

> The Hatcherian chuckle was just exactly what the word connotes: A movement of spontaneous mirth that shook his stocky shoulders and strong well-set torso with a sudden hearty tremor. And although he could utter rich and sonorous throat-sounds indicative of hearty mirth while this chuckling process was going on, an even more characteristic form was completely soundless, the tight lips firmly compressed, the edges turned up with the convulsive inclination to strong laughter, the fine distinguished head thrown back, while all the rest of him, throat, shoulders, torso, belly, arms--the whole man--shook in the silent tremors of the chuckle.[15]

"The Mountains," a one-act play which Wolfe had begun at Chapel Hill, was Wolfe's first work in the class which became the "rock to which his life was anchored, the rudder of his destiny, the sole and all-sufficient

reason for his being here."[16] Baker had suggested that Wolfe continue his play and had also declared that the Workshop might stage a couple of the Chapel Hill plays. Ironically enough, Wolfe thus continued writing about that life from which he had so recently fled, but Baker undoubtedly knew that he must instill confidence into the unpolished mountain youth.

The general sophistication of the Workshop members was indeed difficult for Wolfe to accept. It is a matter of record that Wolfe felt ill at ease and quite out of place within the circle, but Baker's own easy personality enabled him to remain. Soon after he began work in the class, Wolfe wrote to his old playwriting teacher Koch:

> Imagine a raw Tar Heel who, with native simplicity has been accustomed to wade into a play with "that's great stuff" or "rotten"--simple and concise. Why, one man the other day made a criticism of a play as follows: "That situation seems to be a perfect illustration of the Freudian complex"; and it gladdened me when Mr. Baker, the most courteous of men under very trying circumstances, replied: "I don't know about the Freudian complex; what we are discussing now are the simple human values of this play."[17]

In retrospect we can see that Baker would one day be called upon to squelch some of Wolfe's own judgments.

Although Wolfe was later to lampoon the other aspiring playwrights in the Workshop, some of their airs inevitably rubbed off on him, even though his were in a defensive manner. In his own words, Wolfe took on an "arrogant and very high tone with people who, it seemed to me, doubted my ability to do the thing I wanted to do."[18] He admitted that it was

> a form of whistling to keep one's courage up. This was a time I am afraid, in which I talked a great deal more about "beauty" and "art" than I created it; expended a great deal more time in scorning and ridiculing "the bourgeoisie" than in trying to find out who they were and what they were like.[19]

Obviously taking a genuine liking to the North Carolina youth, Baker offered him many things, not the least of which was friendship. In let-

ters Wolfe made frequent references to having spent certain occasions at Baker's home. At these times Baker as the father image glows brightly for Wolfe, or Eugene Gant, who, "like most people who hug loneliness to them like a lover, the need of occasional companionship, forever tender and forever true, which might be summoned or dismissed at will, cut through him like a sword."[20] Wolfe wrote to his mother after Thanksgiving in 1922:

> I spent the day at Professor Baker's and fared extremely well on turkey, cranberry sauce, and all the rest. . . . Last night (Thanksgiving) Prof. Baker took me down to see "The Beggar's Opera"--the first musical comedy--. . . . We went back after the show and met the company--rosy faced English girls all the way from London.[21]

He again reported that he had visited Baker's New Hampshire home in May, 1923: "We had a good time up at his Silver Lake Home and I got a day's rest. He wants me to go up there June 1 and finish writing my new play but I think I'll be here until June 15 since I need the library."[22] Written just before Wolfe was to leave Harvard and Baker forever, this letter indicates the still existing affection Wolfe held for his teacher. Baker's secretary also went so far as to present Wolfe a typewriter so that he could speed up his writing. Wolfe commented, "I'll have to learn [to type] sometime and its [sic] better now."[23] Even though Wolfe never learned to type, Baker seemingly had gone out of his way to make the transplanted Southerner feel at home.

Why, one might wonder, did Baker do so much for young Wolfe? Wisner Payne Kinne believes that since Baker had become so used to an annual discovery of a gifted playwright in his class, he was always nearly as hopeful as the student of success. At the time of Wolfe's arrival at Harvard, Baker had been working hopefully with two promising men, Kenneth Raisbeck (who became Francis Starwick in Of Time and the River) and Philip Barry.

This pair, however, apparently had not developed as well as their teacher had anticipated, and Baker buoyed up his spirits by the evident genius of Wolfe.[24] Baker persisted in acknowledging Wolfe as one of his most promising students even though "The Mountains" proved to be a painful failure with the audience. As a result of this early praise, Wolfe probably built his own hopes too high, and this was a prime factor in his final disillusionment with Baker. Kinne concludes that if Baker "erred anywhere it was probably his generous spirit"[25] which worked well on nearly all his pupils except Wolfe, who later was to say, "Alas, the generous enthusiasm of Baker."[26] At any rate, Baker retained a sincere faith in Wolfe's abilities until actual staging fatally proved that his talent lay in other directions.

Through this steadfast belief, Wolfe had a rare opportunity to attain that immediate fame of which he dreamed so fervently. Encouraging Wolfe to write plays built on his Southern experiences, Baker never seemed to prod his student unduly. To Koch, Wolfe wrote:

> He /Baker/ asked me this morning what kind of plays I wanted to write and I told him promptly that what I didn't want to write were those blase, high society dramas (a la Oscar Wilde). . . . I hit the bullseye, for he "'gins to be aweary of the puns" and tells me he has too many "high society" plays now by authors who know nothing of high society.[27]

Of course, this conviction that a writer can only write truthfully from his own experiences was to provide the basis for all of Wolfe's later novels. He scornfully wrote in Of Time and the River:

> Few of the people in Professor Hatcher's class possessed this power /to derive literature from personal experience/. Few of them had anything of their own to say. Their lives seemed to have grown from a stony and a fruitless soil and, as a consequence, the plays they wrote did not reflect that life, save by a curious and . . . illuminating indirection.[28]

He described most of the plays written there as "unreal, sterile, imitative, and derivative."[29] The impulse of his classmates was "not to em-

brace life, but to escape from it,"[30] the antithesis of Wolfe's own dynamic outlook.

Notwithstanding a good reception in class, the bulky and wordy "Mountains" was a flop on stage, to judge from the audience's reaction. At this point Wolfe was confronted by one of Baker's pet tools, criticism by the audience. Always one to be hurt deeply by any type of adverse judgment, Wolfe was understandably upset by his first acquaintance with it. In an impassioned letter composed to Professor Baker soon after the play's production on October 21-22, 1921, Wolfe countered:

> After reading the numerous remarks, euphemistically called criticism, on my play, and some few criticisms which I consider worthy the dignity of that title, I feel compelled to make some rejoinder in defense of my play. It is useless, of course, to try to argue my play into popular favor; if the people didn't like it I shall play the man and swallow the pill, bitter as it may be. . . .
>
> My play is wordy, I admit, /but I/ take it they didn't mean exactly this. The play itself, the theme, more than the manner and the execution, depressed them. . . .
>
> All I have to do to please these people is to change the ending slightly. . . .
>
> If the audience is depressed over my play, I am depressed over my audience. . . .
>
> Thank God that the far-reaching wisdom of the founders /of the Workshop/ saw fit to remove the names from the criticisms, for if I knew who wrote /one criticism/, I would no longer be responsible for my actions.[31]

Nearly two years later, when Wolfe catalogued his complaints against Baker, he remarked:

> I admit the virtue of being able to stand criticism. Unfortunately it is a virtue I do not happen to possess.
>
> The ability to take such criticism you said not long ago might make the difference between a second-rate artist and a great artist. I do not believe this. . . . You, or no man else, can make me a great artist. . . . That is a matter which was settled in my mother's womb. . . .[32]

Wolfe quite likely could have misinterpreted Baker's remarks on the subject, but later criticism did threaten to stymie Wolfe's career.

A despondent Wolfe did apply for a teaching position near the close of his second year at Harvard, and in a letter dated March, 1922, he expressed a feeling of failure to Baker:

> The conviction has grown on me that I shall never express myself dramatically. I am therefore ending the agony by the shortest way; I would not be a foolish drifter promising myself the big things.
>
> I cannot find words to express the gratitude I bear toward you, not only for your kindness and encouragement, but for the inestimable benefits I know I have derived from your course. I shall never forget nor cease to be grateful to you.[33]

At this time some of Baker's sympathy must have issued forth because almost immediately Wolfe remedied the decision, completing the three-act version of "The Mountains" (on which he had spent most of the second year) and submitting it to Baker in April or May, 1922. When W. O. Wolfe finally died in the summer of 1922, Wolfe used his inheritance so that he could attend Harvard for a third year.[34]

The oft-injured soul of Wolfe was the recipient of much support and encouragement from Baker. After the expansion of "The Mountains," Baker read the prologue to the class and thereupon pronounced it "the best prolog /sic/ever written here."[35] Even the class, "harshly critical as they usually are, were unanimous in praising it." Perplexed, Wolfe told his mother:

> This circumstance bewilders as well as pleases me. I am absolutely no judge of my work. At times the work over which I expend the most labor and care will fail to impress while other work, which I have written swiftly, and almost without revision, will score. Such was the case with my prolog /sic/; a thing of the utmost simplicity. Professor Baker is especially anxious for me to finish my other play, the first act of which he had last year, and liked. This is the play of the decayed Southern aristocracy.[36]

This same inability to appraise his own work would cause Maxwell Perkins countless anxious periods in the editing of Wolfe's manuscripts. Still another lift supplied by Baker came in the winter of 1921, after Wolfe had written a one-act play. To Mrs. Wolfe, Wolfe wrote:

> /Baker/ told the class it had done in one act what he had seen three act plays fail to do and he told me afterwards he was proud of it. He is the greatest authority on drama in America and in the last six years he has developed in this class some of the best dramatists in the country, several of whom have plays on Broadway now. I was in the depths of despair at the time but his talk has lifted me up again.[37]

The peak of Wolfe's spirits at Harvard seems to have come after Baker went in Wolfe's behalf to see the Theatre Guild in New York in May, 1923. In highly optimistic words, Wolfe wrote his mother:

> He is a wonderful friend and he believes in me. I know this now: I am inevitable. I sincerely believe the only thing that can stop me now is insanity, disease, or death. The plays I am going to write may not be suited to the tender bellies of old maids, sweet young girls, or Baptist Ministers, but they will be true and honest and courageous, and the rest doesn't matter.[38]

He went on to say that he wanted to know, understand, and interpret life without fear or favor, that he would not be dishonestly optimistic about life, that he would know America someday like the palm of his hand, and that he would "step on toes."[39] Not more than six months later, though, Wolfe was a defeated, bitter person, and Professor Baker became "half-filled with sawdust."[40]

Yokes of any shape or size were never suited for Wolfe, or vice versa. His undoing as a playwright actually came about as a result of his mania against discipline of any kind. It is an interesting paradox that Baker also felt that a free hand should be given his students. One of his maxims about the Workshop was that "its very breath of life should be rebellious experimentation."[41] Yet Baker was finally compelled, in

spite of his own wishes, to apply the bitter pill of discipline to Wolfe's epidemic plays. Try as he might, Baker could not keep from blue penciling Wolfe's last play--and his last hope--"Welcome to Our City." Baker must have been the first to state in explicit terms what Maxwell Perkins was to find years later, "Your gift is not selection, but profusion,"[42] which succinctly sums up Wolfe's problems as a playwright.

In his article, "Tom Wolfe Writes a Play,"[43] Philip W. Barber vividly depicts Wolfe's rebellion against revision of "Welcome to Our City," which was to be entered in competition with other Workshop plays, with the winner being assured of Broadway production. Barber, a member of the Workshop during Wolfe's last two years there, states that initially the play was an hour-and-a-half too long, but Wolfe had failed to follow Baker's reasonable dictum that it must be cut. Insisting that it be shortened, Baker had nonetheless left it up to Wolfe, who he thought would surely see the evident advisability of drastic revision as soon as the play was "on its feet." For unknown reasons, Wolfe failed to do so, and Baker reluctantly set about the task. Barber recalls:

> As he went about the cleaning away, a second drama was played in the rehearsal room.
>
> About a week after rehearsals had begun, and the actors were moving about in the scenes, Baker stopped the rehearsal, turned to Tom, and suggested that he would like to make such and such cuts, or at least to have the actors replay the scene with the cuts to see whether anything was gained. Tom made a gesture of agreement, promptly followed by reasons why he felt the lines in question should be left in. Baker listened politely, then turned to the actors and read them the cuts. As he read, Tom, now sitting erect, began weaving back and forth in his chair like a polar bear suffering from the heat, and as Baker finished giving the cuts to the actors, Tom sprang to his feet with a tortured yell, and rushed out into the night.[44]

Later Wolfe reappeared as if nothing had happened, and the scene remained as Baker had suggested. Barber remembers that at every new cut, however, the same scene recurred throughout the course of the production.

Even though the Belmont Prize was worth only five hundred dollars in cash, its most attractive feature was its promise of Broadway production for the winning play. The previous year's prize-winning play, "You and I," by Philip Barry, who thereby fulfilled his early promise in the course, had been a hit on Broadway. Young Barry had made a great deal of money, something that meant nearly everything for the long dependent Wolfe.[45] Thus, his golden opportunity for recognition is outlined in a letter to Mrs. Wolfe in the spring of 1923:

> Mama, get down and pray for me. Prof. Baker is having Richard Herndon, the New York producer, up here to see the play when it goes on. Of course, this means nothing more than that he's sufficiently interested to come and look it over with an eye to New York production. . . . I try not to build my hopes too high, but I can't help feeling I have a good chance.[46]

While contending that Wolfe's play stood a fine chance of winning, Baker clearly insisted that it was still in need of much cutting. Wolfe told his mother that "Welcome to Our City" was "the most ambitious thing--in size, at any rate--the Workshop has ever attempted: there are ten scenes, over thirty people, and seven changes of setting."[47] Baker did not want to tamper with the general outline of the play, for the work had already been written up by Oliver M. Sayler in his book, Our American Theatre, as "a play as radical in form and treatment as the contemporary stage has yet acquired."[48] He also had praised the Workshop for doing the play, and Baker was justifiably proud of Wolfe's work. What he wanted taken out were several digressions having little if anything to do with the play's theme. Baker had been so optimistic about the play's possibilities that he took the original uncut version to New York to show the Guild, fully confident that it would be cut to size.[49] Near the height of his optimism now, Wolfe made the statement, "I am inevitable."

Running from 8 p. m. until midnight (even with Baker's cutting), the play did not win the prize but was quite well received by the audience.

Theresa Helburn of the Guild attended it, reportedly liked it despite the length, and invited Wolfe to send the script to the Guild for consideration. She requested, however, that Wolfe revise it to two and one-half hours before submitting it. Philip Barber supplies the next significant details of the unsuccessful venture. The following fall while Barber was sitting in Baker's office, Baker, who was reading a letter, said:

> Listen to this from Tom Wolfe:
>
> "I have been having "Welcome to Our City" copied to submit to the Guild. The young stenographer who is copying it for me has just come to the first cut you made. She broke into laughter at the comedy lines. Needless to say, I am putting back everything in the play that you cut out, so it will be exactly as it was before production."[50]

Barber says that Baker then "sat quietly for a few minutes with a rather grim look. Then the sardonic smile triumphed, though there was an unaccustomed weariness on his face."[51] It is altogether possible that but for the sake of a few lines of comedy, then, Thomas Wolfe might have realized his most cherished dream. All that Baker could do was not enough, it seemed, to guide the headstrong Wolfe to that elusive goal.

On the other hand, Philip Barry had learned to profit from criticism, and he attained success after he obediently met the requirements. As Kinne notes, though, in Wolfe's case,

> There was no question of what Baker called "truckling to one's audience," of sacrificing the integrity of the play for a cheap and easy success. Baker did not readily understand that Wolfe was incapable of discipline. Failures which taught Barry only enraged Wolfe. He blamed Baker and the whole premise of training in Baker's workshop. The course could not make him a playwright.[52]

While waiting for the shortened "Welcome to Our City" before the final Workshop production, Baker's secretary had said of Wolfe, "Absolutely nothing makes an impression on him, threats, tears of rage, or smiles of kindness."[53] This indicates the impossibility of Baker's task.

Revision was always virtually impossible for Wolfe until very late in his career, but he had nourished hopes of being able to accomplish it. After "Welcome to Our City" had been chosen for Workshop presentation, Wolfe wrote to Baker:

> Anyone, I think, is a little dubious about the matter of revision. . . . I know of only one rule and think it covers the whole business. Revise with the sole purpose of writing a better play. This means, if possible, the making of each scene better, briefer, more direct, and more economical in the use of people. That I can do this in time I have not the slightest doubt: of doing it in twenty-four hours, or two days, or half a week, I am not so sure. . . .
>
> I have written this play with thirty-odd named characters because it required it, not because I didn't know how to save paint. Some day I'm going to write a play with fifty, eighty, a hundred people--a whole town, a whole race, a whole epoch--for my soul's ease and comfort. No one may want to produce it but it will make an interesting play.[54]

He hastened to add, however, that "the next I do will have eight, ten, certainly no more than a dozen." He evidently saw the need for condensation in plays, and later turned to the novel to attempt his work about a "whole race and epoch."

By lengthening "Welcome to Our City," Wolfe had spelled his own doom as a playwright. After several months, the Guild returned the play, but he still nursed hopes in a letter to Mrs. Wolfe:

> . . . but they first told me I was the best man the Workshop had yet turned out and the coming young man in the theatre. . . . He /the Guild playreader/ told me . . . that Langner /a Guild director/ . . . was "crazy about my play" and wanted to see me. . . . I talked to /Langner/ two hours. . . . The sum total was this: If I would . . . work a week on the play--cutting it down thirty minutes, and from ten scenes to eight, and "tightening" it up--that is, making the main thread of the story . . . more plain in every scene--he would . . . put it before the Guild for me, and if they couldn't produce it next season he knew other producers here that he felt would . . . give it production. Well, I will take one more chance and give him what he wants, in spite of the fact that Prof. Baker will throw up his hands and say that I have "prostituted my art," and so on, when I see him. Well, my "art" has kept me ragged, and driven me half mad;--I will see now if prostitution can put a few decent garments on my back and keep me housed.[55]

Lacking Baker's unhappy experience with Wolfe's ability to revise, the Guild did not know of the illogical nature of its request.

By now the rift between Wolfe and Baker had become broad, and the matter of drastically changing the play for commercial reasons increased it even further. Wolfe told Mrs. Roberts that

> Professor Baker was properly horrified when I communicated the evil tidings. Not only, he said, would the proposed revision greatly cheapen the play, but it was also impossible, since my play had been hailed as a new departure in American drama; its fate was on the rails. . . .
>
> . . . my heart is assuming a flinty cast, and the sound of the shekel is not unpleasing. I told Professor Baker as much. . . and he accused me of having allowed New York to "commercialize" me in my six weeks' stay. . . It was not a question of desiring cake and wine, I told him; it was a question of naked need. . . .[56]

The need to which Wolfe refers is, of course, money, a touchy subject for Wolfe throughout all his schooling. He had been put through college, both Harvard and North Carolina, at his family's expense and somewhat to the jealousy of his brothers and sisters. He now felt the intense need to become self-sufficient.

Monetary support, it seems, was the one thing that Baker either could not or would not offer Wolfe. At the heart of their breakup stood the matter of money, even though other problems contributed. Wolfe, almost frantic in that he had finished his work at Harvard with no immediate means of support, told Baker during the summer of 1923 that Baker had "the fate and destiny of 190 pounds of blood, bone, marrow, passion, and feeling" to deal with and that

> There is a chagrin . . . threatening my happiness, making me bitter, morose. The brute is Money. With money I'll throttle the beast-blind world between my fingers. Without it I am strapped. . . .
>
> It is difficult for me to escape the reflection that while you have been able to provide some tangible opportunity for everyone who has needed it . . . you have been generous to me only in words. . . .

> . . . my complaint against you . . . is that all of it /advice/ has been beautifully indefinite, amazingly lacking in substance. . . . Really I despair of ever knowing you any better. You get so far with an individual and then you come up against a wall, and you can't get over it. You impress me at times as a man who is trying hard to get over his own wall, but who has never succeeded. Well, then, to get back to the point, you have told me the things I ought not to do, but you left me adrift in the void as to the method of doing these things that I ought to do. . . .
>
> My energy--at one time vast, sustained, seemingly inexhaustible--is waning fast into its Indian Summer. It has proved no match for the mongrel sneer, the apathetic attention, or the misguided efforts of my friends who, honestly desirous to preserve and enhance the worth in me, tried to discipline, to subdue, to take those things which were not consistent with their notions of balance and respectability.[57]

Wolfe told Mrs. Roberts that each time he would question Baker about his future, the answer was always,"Write! Do nothing else."[58] At Wolfe's suggestion of teaching in order to provide himself money until he sold his play, Baker "looked as if he were being rent limb from limb."[59] It was Baker's opinion that teaching duties would deprive Wolfe of his writing opportunities. Finally, Wolfe reported,

> /Baker/ confided that, after mature consideration, it seemed to him that a year abroad was the very thing I needed most. The full humor of this is apparent when I tell you that no later than August he had descended on me in his wrath when I suggested this very thing. . . .
>
> At any rate, I began to understand--a bitter draught it was--that Professor Baker was an excellent friend, a true critic, but a bad counsellor. I knew that, from this time on, the disposition of my life was mainly in my own hands; that one profits, no matter how good the intention, not by the experience of others, but only by such experience as touches him.[60]

Of course, Wolfe's future was far from being in his own hands. From this superior being, he would go in desperate search for others who would guide his destiny. Throughout all the difficulties, Baker maintained that if Wolfe had taken his advice (to submit the play as Baker had cut it) four months earlier, he believed that it would have been sold almost immediately.

Taking the position as English instructor at New York University in January, 1924, Wolfe never sold "Welcome to Our City," but he did complete

another play call "Mannerhouse" during his first year of teaching. At the end of his first year at New York University, he went to Europe and wrote a letter (possibly unmailed) to Baker telling him that he might send the play to Baker for his criticism.[61] He obviously never did this; one reason is that because of his "selling out" on "Welcome to Our City," he felt that Baker had deserted him. In a letter dated April, 1925, to Professor Watt at New York University, he confided that because of his going into teaching, "I lost, I fear, the friendship of a man who had stood by me for two years: at any rate, I have never heard from him."[62] He also told Watt that

> I have a horror of becoming like those wretched little rats at Harvard who are at the mercy of their pangs and quivers, who whine about their "art," who whine that the world has not given them a living. I'll be damned if I'll become a "chronic unemployable." It was this that Professor Baker could not understand; he protested that I was making a serious blunder in coming to the university . . . with sublime disregard for circumstances.[63]

Another portion of Of Time and the River, which was cut before publication, clearly reveals Wolfe's customary attitude toward those images found to be something less than he thought them to be:

> And then I saw that half the man was sawdust--that he was lacking in warmth, in greatness and humanity. He knew a great deal and understood almost nothing. He was unable to see the genuine quality in a man, and he lavished his benefits on buffoons, aesthetes, feeble weaklings, and let most of the good people--the people with a spark of life and talent--go to hell.[64]

However, in the letter from shipboard cited earlier, Wolfe probably stated his true feeling: "I think you know how I really feel toward you. You are just about the best friend I ever had, and no year passes that does not compel renewed and increased affection for your character and courage."[65]

It is quite apparent that Wolfe was a confused person at this time in his career. His first bid for acclaim had fallen short, and in his

blindness he struck out against one of his most helpful supporters. His novel, Of Time and the River, which covers this period of his life, is significantly a sprawling, often confused work, which correlates with his own troubled stay at Harvard. His sojourn there reminds one something of Wordsworth's third stage in his concept of the artist's development. After the artist has received simple sensations and has then developed simple ideas in his first two developmental stages, he then comes upon the third level--that of complex ideas. Wolfe was not wholly able to cope with all his swirling ideas during that period of his life, and not even the genius of Baker could unravel them in Wolfe's turbulent mind. Baker nevertheless accomplished a great deal in developing his student's writing powers, even though they were hopelessly lost in misdirected playwriting.

NOTES--CHAPTER III

[1]*Thomas Wolfe's Letters to His Mother*, p. 36.

[2]John Mason Brown, "Introduction" to Wisner Payne Kinne, *George Pierce Baker and the American Theatre* (Cambridge, Mass., 1954), pp. xi-xiv.

[3]*Of Time and the River*, p. 135.

[4]Kinne, *George Pierce Baker and the American Theatre*, p. 238.

[5]Nowell, p. 52.

[6]Kinne, p. 228.

[7]Ibid.

[8]*Of Time and the River*, p. 130.

[9]*Thomas Wolfe's Letters to His Mother*, pp. 10-11.

[10]Ibid., p. 10.

[11]Ibid., p. 11.

[12]*Of Time and the River*, p. 168.

[13]Kinne, p. 238.

[14]*Of Time and the River*, pp. 130-131.

[15]Ibid., p. 131.

[16]Ibid., p. 130.

[17]*The Letters of Thomas Wolfe*, p. 10.

[18]Nowell, p. 53.

[19]Ibid.

[20]*Of Time and the River*, p. 113.

[21]*Thomas Wolfe's Letters to His Mother*, p. 38.

[22]Ibid., p. 48.

[23]Ibid., p. 41.

[24]Kinne, pp. 230-231.

[25]Ibid., p. 230.

[26]Ibid.

[27]The Letters of Thomas Wolfe, p. 11.

[28]Of Time and the River, p. 170.

[29]Ibid.

[30]Ibid.

[31]The Letters of Thomas Wolfe, pp. 19-21.

[32]Ibid., p. 47.

[33]Ibid., p. 31.

[34]Nowell, pp. 65-67.

[35]Thomas Wolfe's Letters to His Mother, p. 25.

[36]Ibid., pp. 25-26.

[37]Ibid., p. 36.

[38]Ibid., p. 49.

[39]Ibid., p. 50.

[40]Nowell, p. 73.

[41]Kinne, p. 218.

[42]Ibid., p. 229.

[43]Philip W. Barber, "Thomas Wolfe Writes a Play," Harpers, 216:71-76 (May, 1958).

[44]Ibid., pp. 73-74.

[45]Thomas Wolfe's Letters to His Mother, p. 45.

[46]Ibid.

[47]Ibid.

[48]Oliver M. Sayler, Our American Theatre (New York, 1923), p. 128.

[49]Kinne, p. 235.

[50]Barber, p. 74.

[51]Ibid.

[52]Kinne, p. 236.

[53]Nowell, p. 69.

[54]The Letters of Thomas Wolfe, pp. 40-41.

[55]Thomas Wolfe's Letters to His Mother, pp. 60-61.

[56]The Letters of Thomas Wolfe, pp. 58-59.

[57]Ibid., pp. 49-52.

[58]Ibid., p. 59.

[59]Ibid.

[60]Ibid.

[61]Ibid., p. 70.

[62]Ibid., p. 98.

[63]Ibid.

[64]Nowell, p. 73.

[65]The Letters of Thomas Wolfe, p. 71.

CHAPTER IV

Aline Bernstein--Material and Spiritual Relief

To A. B.

> Then, as all my soules bee,
> Emparadis'd in you, (in whom alone
> I understand, and grow and see,)
> The rafters of my body, bone
> Being still with you, the Muscle, Sinew, and Veine,
> Which tile this house, will come againe.[1]

This fifth stanza of John Donne's "A Valediction: Of His Name in the Window," serves as Thomas Wolfe's dedication of Look Homeward, Angel to A[line] B[ernstein]. The warmth of the passage reveals Wolfe's affection for her (at that time), and the dedication itself is indicative of his indebtedness to her for the book's existence. Published in 1929, the book marked the first publication for Wolfe after many years of fruitless work. As he himself later said, Mrs. Bernstein made it possible, both spiritually and materially, for him to succeed in his writing endeavors, even though the novel was far removed from his previous attempt to write plays.

Professor Baker's influence had waned rapidly, until in 1923 it had largely disappeared. Aline Bernstein, a quite successful stage designer for the New York Neighborhood Theatre,[2] became Wolfe's next selection to fit the role of his ideal person. Unlike Professor Baker's story, which was largely deleted from Of Time and the River, Mrs. Bernstein's relationship became the central story in The Web and the Rock and also was a significant element in You Can't Go Home Again. In short, Wolfe's autobiographical fiction helped immortalize the affair. Besides Wolfe's novels, we also gain additional insight into their life together through actual

happenings, his letters, and her own attempts at fiction in Three Blue Suits and The Journey Down. From these sources, one finds that from an ecstatically romantic beginning to its near-tragic ending, theirs was an intriguing life, which included many important literary details. The novelist Thomas Wolfe, much different from the ill-fated young playwright of 1923, arose from the tumult of this period.

In his sometimes puzzling outlook on world civilization, the artistic personality has often been allowed his eccentricities by the public, which often expects different behavior on his part. At any rate, the Wolfe-Bernstein relationship from 1925-31 easily rates as one of the strangest and most fascinating ties in literary circles. Mrs. Bernstein was Jewish, married with two nearly grown children, and almost twenty years older than Wolfe. Equipped with a fine sense of humor, she also immodestly stated that she was in "full blossom" and beautiful when she and Wolfe met.[3] She also could get to the heart of a matter promptly and efficiently, whereas Wolfe was often confused and indecisive about important matters.[4] To be sure, Wolfe's own dynamic personality provided many interesting aspects to the affair.

After having taught at New York University through the summer of 1924, Wolfe then left for his first trip abroad. It was on his journey home that he first met Mrs. Bernstein, and there followed some six years of intermittent intense happiness and heartbreak for the pair. The meeting, a supremely meaningful one for both parties, occurred early in 1925 on the ship The Olympic. This fact is confirmed, though with somewhat different versions, in both persons' fiction. Wolfe's biographer, Miss Nowell, believes that Wolfe did not actually meet Mrs. Bernstein, however, until the ship had reached New York.[5]

Mrs. Bernstein, under the pseudonym of Esther, makes her initial "fictitious" appearance at the end of Of Time and the River. While on the ship sailing into New York, Eugene Gant carefully studies the woman whom her companion calls Esther. After observing her lively actions, Gant is then described:

> He turned, and saw her then, and so finding her, was lost, and so losing self, was found, and so seeing her, saw for a fading moment only the pleasant image of the woman that perhaps she was, and that life saw. He never knew: he only knew that from that moment his spirit was impaled upon the knife of love. From that moment on he never was again to lose her utterly, never to wholly re-possess unto himself the lonely, wild integrity of youth that had been his. . . .
>
> After all the blind, tormented wanderings of youth, that woman would become his heart's centre and the target of his life, the image of the immortal one-ness that again collected him to one, and hurled the whole collected passion, power, and might of his own life into the certitude, the immortal governance and unity, of love.[6]

This passage provides the book's conclusion, and Esther does not make her next appearance (this time with the added surname Jack) until about one-third of the way through The Web and the Rock. The reason for this fact is that Maxwell Perkins had arbitrarily ended Of Time and the River, even though Wolfe's manuscript had originally included that section which was to become the last part of The Web and the Rock.

In this next book, possibly for the sake of appearing more fictional (since he had been stingingly criticised for his autobiographical tendencies), Wolfe showed George Webber (Wolfe's new mask) meeting Esther Jack en route and thereby beginning a friendship which is eventually fulfilled in New York. Webber was so shaken by this encounter that

> From that night on, Monk [his nickname] was never able again to see that woman as perhaps she really was, as she must have looked to many other people, as she had even looked to him the first moment that he saw her. He was never able thereafter to see her as a matronly figure of middle age, a creature with a warm and jolly little face, a wholesome and indomitable energy

> for every day, a shrewd, able, and immensely talented creature of action, able to hold her own in a man's world. These things he knew or found out about her later, but this picture of her, which was perhaps the one by which the world best knew her, was gone forever.
>
> She became the most beautiful woman that ever lived . . . with all the blazing, literal, and mad concreteness of his imagination. She became the creature of incomparable loveliness to whom all the other women of the world must be compared, the creature with whose image he would for years walk the city's swarming streets, looking into the face of every woman he passed with a feeling of disgust, muttering:
>
> "No, no good. Bad . . . coarse . . . meager . . . thin . . . sterile. There's no one like her--no one in the whole world can touch her!"[7]

Mrs. Bernstein described their first meeting in her novel, The Journey Down, which is basically the telling of their story from her viewpoint. They also meet on board in her book, and he (no names are used in the novel) casts a powerful spell on her from the start. She becomes immediately emotionally attached even though she cannot quite understand him. Revealing Wolfe's distaste for the theatre at that time, Mrs. Bernstein had the male character ranting in this first encounter:

> Where did you get your face, raised in that dung heap, the theatre, among evil and rotten people, people bloated and foul and vile, people without the decency to keep in their own homes, strutting and showing their bodies; answer me, where did you get your eyes of love, your mouth of love, your flower face, did your mother cheat and lie with an angel? Answer me![8]

She quickly made apparent here one of the basic causes of their impending conflicts.

In retrospect it can be surmised that if they had not met on the ship, then they quite possibly might have met later since Mrs. Bernstein was a prominent figure in New York's Neighborhood Playhouse. In fact, she had read "Welcome to Our City" before having left for Europe and had even taken it along to recommend to Miss Alice Lewischn, one of her theatre's directors. Wolfe had never heard of Mrs. Bernstein, however,

and always felt that the fact that he had sailed home with her was a "miracle of fate."[9] One might assume that she would have been quite interested in meeting the young author of the play, and that their paths eventually would have crossed.

By the time of his acquaintance with her, Wolfe was near his lowest spiritual ebb over the repeated failures to sell his plays. From his momentous acquaintance with Mrs. Bernstein, however, Wolfe was provided with the inspiration that broke loose a torrent of words in the following dozen years seldom matched by other significant writers. At first, in his acquaintance with Mrs. Bernstein, Wolfe quite probably saw a slight possibility of finally selling his work. Too, Mrs. Bernstein, a person with shrewd judgment concerning dramatic matters, could offer him invaluable advice about playwriting, and she also was almost certainly the first person to tell Wolfe directly that he should find some other type of expression. Finally, she gave her unrestrained love and affection, which obviously meant so much to his incessant loneliness.

When The Letters of Thomas Wolfe was published in 1956, however, the fact was evident that the one major gap in his true life story (which corresponds so closely with those of Eugene Gant and George "Monk" Webber) was most of his relationship with Mrs. Bernstein. She once promised to edit the rest of his letters to her, but she died in 1953 before the job was done.[10] If the letters ever are printed, then the whole Wolfe story can be fairly well known. The scattered bit of information that is known--taken from his letters, her own statements, portions of their fiction, and reports from mutual acquaintances--can and does present a moderately plausible record.

Soon after Wolfe returned to New York, he visited his hometown of Asheville and once more watched the land-hungry townspeople, his mother

included, eagerly buying and selling property with abandon. That he was not overly upset by this boom town atmosphere at this time marks the change which came over Wolfe after he had met Mrs. Bernstein. In one of his early letters to her, dated September, 1925, he said: "I am no longer so arrogant, cruel, and so contemptuous of all this as I was a year ago: I think I like people a great deal better than ever before."[11] He evidently had written Mrs. Bernstein after they landed in New York; they met, and thus began their drawn-out relationship.

In reading the collected letters of Wolfe, one can find relatively few outright references to Mrs. Bernstein. Those which are made are generally of an obscure nature such as his first recorded mention of her, which came in a letter to his mother after he was back in New York:

> . . . a very beautiful and wealthy lady, who was extremely kind to me on the boat, and who designs scenery and costumes for the best theatres in New York, and supports another with her money, has seen me daily and entertained me extensively. In addition three theatres have sent to me for my plays. . . .[12]

Apparently through Mrs. Bernstein's aid, Wolfe began receiving more requests for his plays. One of her efforts was to take him to literary parties in order to meet prominent theatrical people, but his continued shyness and frequent arrogance did nothing for his success. To Mrs. Roberts, he wrote:

> I have no power to peddle my wares, and I strike patronage a blow in the face. The other day word reached me that a rich woman who has supported a famous little theatre here for years /Miss Lewisohn of the Neighborhood Playhouse/ had told one of the directors last year that she would have done my play /"Welcome to Our City"/ but that I was the most arrogant young man she had ever known. The news gave me pleasure . . . and I felt that I had acted well--I who will never be dandled into reputation by wealth.[13]

After his meeting with Mrs. Bernstein, Wolfe began working on Look Homeward, Angel. Because she well knew the close restrictions of the stage and because she perhaps understood his writing needs as well as

anyone else, she must have been a primary cause for his turning to the novel. Besides this, she also offered him the one thing that Baker was unable to give--financial support. Breaking free from the "odious bondage of teaching," he was able to pour his entire efforts into writing. Later he said, "In 1926 I found it, /expression in novel form/,--and another cycle has been passed, another period of development begun."[14]

Wolfe and Mrs. Bernstein made their first trip abroad together in 1926. She was in England for the production of the play The Dybbuk in Manchester. They lived together there for a time, and Elizabeth Nowell states that he first began writing Look Homeward, Angel there with Mrs. Bernstein alongside him: "It was a time of intense and solemn inspiration for him, and he told her that he would be a great writer and that long after she was dead people would know about her because she would be 'entombed in my work'."[15] After their few months there, she sailed for home, and Wolfe was left to continue his book. She had undertaken to finance his stay, and it was a golden chance for him to write without the burdens of teaching and constantly worrying about money.[16]

A portion of The Journey Down is devoted to the couple's short time in England.[17] The female character is extremely happy most of this time except for an instance when some of her wealthy New York friends visit them. She then senses that he is uncomfortable and unhappy about the visit. Mrs. Bernstein, who published the book in 1938, doubtlessly included this episode to show another of the accumulating reasons for their ultimate separation. Wolfe could never quite accept her friends. Out of this occurrence in the book, the male pleads, "Dearest, don't leave me ever, stay with me, dearest, and love me forever." She tells him that never, so long as there is life in her body, will she stop loving him.[18]

Both in the book and in their real life, the truth was that in the end, he, rather than she, would sever their relationship.

During this early period of their acquaintance and his novel writing, Wolfe became a much happier person than he probably had ever been, and anyone who reads Look Homeward, Angel cannot help being moved by the intense feeling with which the book was written. It certainly is one of the most passionate books ever written in America, and Mrs. Bernstein can take much credit for this quality. Following the acceptance of the book for publication, Wolfe wrote to Mrs. Roberts:

> . . . Because I was penniless and took one ship instead of another, I met the great and beautiful friend who has stood by me through all the torture, struggle, and madness of my nature for over three years, and who has been here to share my happiness for these past ten days.[19]

Wolfe wrote to Henry Fisk Carlton, a fellow New York University instructor, about Mrs. Bernstein's departure from England:

> The best friend, I believe, that I ever had went home almost two weeks ago. We came here from Glasgow two weeks ago yesterday. . . . She is a very exceptional person--the grit, determination and executive capacity that men are mistakenly supposed to have, but good-humored and kindly always.[20]

Without Mrs. Bernstein by his side during their temporary separation, however, he fell back to his old brooding and self-pitying ways. To her, he wrote a most despondent note at this time concerning his difficulties with the novel: "At 23, hundreds of people thought I'd do something. Now no one does--not even myself. I really don't care very much. All my energy has gone into my book."[21] Regardless of the downcast tone of this note, however, Wolfe still expected to be finished with the book by the time he came back to New York, but his old nemesis, time, easily subdued him. He did not finish it until March, 1928.

Upon his arrival in New York, Mrs. Bernstein was once more ready with the material aid. She continued to sustain him financially so that

he would not have to resume his tedious and time-consuming teaching chores at New York University. After renting a large loft for him for a time, she then found them an entire floor of a huge house which they shared in their work.[22] He reported this fact in a letter to his mother October 9, 1927; it was his second mention of Mrs. Bernstein to his mother, and read:

> He /the landlord/ cut off several hundred dollars. I now get the place for about $135 a month, half of which is paid by Mrs. Bernstein /he had never before used her name in writing to his mother/. . . . Mrs. B. is going to use the big front room as a studio and room where she can meet her business associates in the theatre. She has had to find a place--she has more work this year than ever before, and my garret was too dirty to bring people to.[23]

James Mandel, a New York University student during this time, visited this place several times while employed as a typist during the writing of Look Homeward, Angel. He notes that Mrs. Bernstein "seemed to come and go as she pleased," though Wolfe never mentioned her to him. Mandel also reports that she worked on her designs near a window a short distance from Wolfe and him:

> They seemed to take each other for granted in those days. Tom told me that Aline Bernstein was paying him for the use of the room. This was apparently an excuse to explain her presence in the apartment.[24]

When Wolfe finally finished the lengthy novel in 1928, Mrs. Bernstein took over the sale of the manuscript. Due primarily to its tremendous length, her first attempts were unsuccessful, but at last she showed it to Mrs. Ernest Boyd, who had recently opened a new literary agency. Mrs. Boyd thought it was an outstanding work, but she also found selling it a difficult task. This period became one of great harassment for Wolfe, who began to feel that the publishers were united against him, and, more importantly, that the book was no good.[25] He fell back to the moodiness of his playwriting years, and his almost savage cruelty toward life and Mrs. Bernstein is revealingly told in The Web and the Rock. Once again

finding that his figure of imagined perfection could not supply all the answers, he now began thinking seriously about making a break with her. This problem only added to his already harrowing anxieties whether his first novel would be published.

Their first major quarrel occurred at this point with the result that Wolfe left once more for Europe, this time without her. Shocking and almost shameful in their intensity, the scenes from this time of quarreling are frankly revealed in The Web and the Rock. Although Wolfe said in a foreword to this work that it was given to "satiric exaggeration," the actual squabble must have been of mammoth proportions. The episode begins innocently enough with George Webber telling Esther of experiences from his profligate youth. Hurt by the tales he told, she emphatically denounces his family background for allowing such things to happen. Her words sharply jolt Webber, and he immediately retaliates by verbally attacking her and her Jewish relatives and friends. She counters with still more abuse for Webber's family (though here the Webber family tree sharply differs from that of the Gants in his first two novels). Now in a frenzy, Webber cruelly reverses their basic situation with this ludicrous, half-crazed utterance:

> What have you done to this nice, sweet, female American maid who hardly knows the difference between sodomy and rape, she is so pure and innocent! What did you mean, you depraved scoundrel, by seducing this pure, sweet girl of forty when you were all of twenty-four at the time, and should have been ashamed to rob the Broadway milkmaid of her fair virginity. Shame on you, you big country slicker.[26]

He continues to lash out against her by accusing her of having wrecked his life and causing people to laugh at him. Understanding that he is half-mad, she tries to console him, but he forcefully pushes her out the door and then locks it. Following this event, Webber departs for Europe in an

attempt to forget. In real life, Wolfe also took what he termed the "Grand Tour of Renunciation" to Europe.[27]

This trip was to be one of the most eventful of his life. An embittered and vastly confused young man because of the book and his love affair, Wolfe described this first real parting from Mrs. Bernstein as having followed "a long and bitter war of separation."[28] Obviously, their previously serene and happy idyl had steadily led toward the animosity of the parting. She also traveled abroad during this same time, but they never saw each other. Wolfe later was badly beaten in a drunken brawl at a German fair and spent several days in a hospital. He also suffered agonies from thinking he had possibly killed a man in the fight, and he related the story to Aline Bernstein in a letter. He also wrote to her promising to get a paying job and maybe "we can have some kind of life together again. . . ."[29] Capping the trip's happenings was a letter from Maxwell Perkins saying that Scribners would like to discuss his manuscript with him as soon as possible.[30] To be sure, Wolfe was an excited person on his way home.

First of all, there came a tearful reconciliation with Mrs. Bernstein. The episodes from his trip comprise the ending of The Web and the Rock, with George Webber going back to his former existence in New York, still entangled in the web of Mrs. Jack. To show the great change in his mental outlook, though, Wolfe wrote a confiding letter to Perkins, even though he had never met him. This was a much different person from the haughty, proud, and embittered one who had left New York. To Wolfe's happy surprise, Scribners signed him to a contract for the book, and here began one of the most trouble-free periods of his life. He and Mrs. Bernstein went to Maine, read Proust and Donne together, chose the dedication to Mrs. Bernstein, and triumphantly came back to New York.[31] His exalted

attitude toward Mrs. Bernstein is shown in a letter to Mrs. Roberts about this time:

> That another person, to whom success and greater success is constant and habitual, should get such happiness and joy from my own modest beginning is only another of the miracles of life. . . . All the Theatre Guild people, whom I know through my dear friend, have called her up and sent congratulations.[32]

Still humble, he also wrote an apology for the book's length and its autobiographical nature.

Wolfe's application for a Guggenheim Fellowship, for study and work abroad, ignited the second and final separation. At this point Maxwell Perkins became involved in their quarrel, with Mrs. Bernstein believing that Perkins advised Wolfe to leave her. Perkins' admitted advice to Wolfe was that his relationship with a woman twenty years older than himself would eventually have to end, but he claims that is as far as he went. Mrs. Bernstein turned against the editor when Wolfe seemed to encourage her mistaken belief about Perkins. When another person allegedly advised Wolfe to break off with her for her own sake, since Wolfe had treated her terribly, Wolfe jumped at the chance.[33]

Mrs. Bernstein must take credit for describing the second quarrel; she did so in her first book, Three Blue Suits, in which Wolfe is portrayed as "Eugene Lyons." The final section of the book is devoted to Eugene and his announcement that he has applied for a Guggenheim Fellowship and is planning to leave for Europe. One of the few communications from Wolfe to Mrs. Bernstein between 1931-35 is a letter[34] to her after she had sent him a copy of her book. Both congratulatory and remonstrative, the letter first praised her for her ability to put down things the first time the way that she wanted them; then it reproved her for her portrayal of both her husband and Wolfe. In the book Eugene says that he is acting on the advice of his editor, and she claims that he is sell-

ing her out for $2,500 (amount of the fellowship). Wolfe's letter waxed longest on her unjust treatment of himself, saying first of all that she should not identify a living person so exactly with "even a kind of paraphrase of my name." This is ironical in that Wolfe himself was at least as guilty of this same thing, if not more so. He went on in the letter to say that the heroine in the story does not mention all the other complications involved--that she is married and a mother and that he (Lyons) desperately needs money. If she had to write the story at all, Wolfe said, then she should have presented the whole unbiased picture. He quickly told her, though, that he was not condemning her, but only trying to help her in her future writing.

Wolfe received the fellowship, and sailed for Paris in 1931. Mrs. Bernstein still persisted in writing him while he was on the ship, and he finally had to cut off all communications with her. But even in Paris he was not free from her, because one of her wealthy female friends looked him up. Throughout this turbulent time, Wolfe was having much difficulty in beginning to write Of Time and the River. Abruptly he fled to Switzerland, and one of his notebook entries pleaded for "silence and to not let them see you."[35] An air of finality to their affair came during this time in this note to Mrs. Bernstein:

> . . . I am unable to say very much to you. I have tried to write you, but the letter I started had too much bitterness in it about our life together, and about your friends, so I destroyed it. I no longer want to say these things to you because they do no good, and most of them have been said before. . . . I can never forget you, nothing else to equal my feelings for you in intensity and passion will ever happen to me. But we are at the end of the rope . . . life has been smashed by this thing . . . just one thing ahead of me:--work. . . . I can only say that you should give yourself completely to those things that you have. . . .[36]

It was not until 1935 that Wolfe saw and talked with Mrs. Bernstein again. The meeting, coming just after Wolfe had once more returned from

Europe, had a strikingly dramatic quality, and occurred in a Broadway bar where Perkins and Wolfe frequently stopped to drink after work. Miss Nowell speculates that this meeting was no accident, that Mrs. Bernstein probably planned it after receiving a sentimental note from Wolfe while he was aboard ship.[37] She had written him, congratulating him for finishing Of Time and the River. His return note read:

> When I got your letter I wept with joy and pride. I have kept silence, have not spoken to you in over five years . . . my heart is full of affection and loyalty for you--it has always been: I am devoted to the memory of everything you ever said to me, of every kind or generous thing you ever did for me . . . you are the best, the highest. . . .[38]

Their tearful reunion is included in The Journey Down, but what Mrs. Bernstein did not record was the near-tragic element in the matter. Soon after their meeting, they were on the fifth floor of Scribners when he saw her put a vial of sleeping pills to her mouth at the drinking fountain. He knocked them away from her, and she fainted. Until the doctor checked the prescription and said that none had been taken, Wolfe was certain that she had attempted suicide.[39]

Remaining friends, the pair nevertheless gradually drifted apart again. Their break became complete when she threatened to sue him if he published The October Fair, which was later to become part of The Web and the Rock. This threat probably postponed publication of this book, and of course it was not published until after Wolfe's death.[40] Wolfe's last known correspondence to her was dated December 5, 1937, in a letter written for him by Miss Nowell, which assured Mrs. Bernstein that she was one of his true friends and that Wolfe was "hard at work with little money."[41]

Underneath this basic account of a frustrated love affair lie many factors which influenced Wolfe as a writer, besides the effect it had on

him as a human being. Mrs. Bernstein's contributions to his literary efforts are in some respects as great as any other person's. Even the reasons for their separation carry literary impact.

First, an already stated fact was that she allowed him to become financially independent of his family, particularly his mother. As Miss Nowell notes, Mrs. Wolfe had retained a strong influence on his life through her financial support, and in his struggle for maturity, Wolfe undoubtedly longed to tear himself away from this lifelong domination by his mother, particularly because of their different values. Mrs. Bernstein enabled him to do this with her monetary assistance during the writing of Look Homeward, Angel. As a result of this aid, Wolfe even drew up a will in 1930 naming his mother and Mrs. Bernstein as co-beneficiaries.[42] Remembering that he had mentioned Mrs. Bernstein to Mrs. Wolfe only twice before, one can imagine Mrs. Wolfe's puzzled brow when she received the following:

> . . . In case anything should happen to me, I have left whatever money I have or that may come in from any royalties or manuscript, to be divided equally between you and my dear friend, Aline Bernstein. She is a very fine and lovely woman, and the best friend I have ever had, and you may depend on her to look after everything with the utmost ability and integrity.[43]

The likely reason for his doing this was so that his debts to Mrs. Bernstein would be assured of payment someday. He did draw another will in 1937, this time with only Mrs. Wolfe as beneficiary. His initial act, however, indicates his growing independence. But apparently he also later found himself under similar domination by Mrs. Bernstein. At any rate, her part in Wolfe's life was never accepted by his family, as is evident in the fact that Mrs. Wheaton never once mentions her in Thomas Wolfe and His Family. Of course, this book was primarily occupied with Wolfe's immediate family, not his friends.

His continuous struggle to become a true artist is also seen in the love affair, basically in his last full-length novel, You Can't Go Home Again. Esther and George are shown during their first reconciliation in this book, and during the time that she is not at work or at her own home, they live together peacefully for some time. But at last a party given at the Jacks' house makes George Webber realize that their life could not continue as it had been. After the party, Esther confidently sighs, "Ah, dearest, that's the story. In the whole world there's nothing more. Love is enough." Almost as sure about the limitations of love as DeVoto was of those of genius, Webber is not convinced. For him this does not seem the answer. Finally he decides for himself, ". . . love is not enough. . . . it all boiled down to this: honesty, sincerity, and no compromise with truth--those were the essentials with any art--and a writer, no matter what else he had, was just a hack without them."[44]

Obviously, Webber (Wolfe) did not think that he could retain these essential elements of the artist while continuing his relationship with Mrs. Jack (Bernstein). Thus, even though Mrs. Bernstein had perhaps provided the basic components (outside his own talents) in his attaining his dream of publication, she now evidently stood in his mind between him and his ultimate artistic fulfillment. A spirit that had to be unencumbered at all costs, Wolfe saw in Mrs. Bernstein's world the hypocrisy so antithetic to his ideals. On the other hand, Wolfe also shunted aside other women, who were young and unmarried, for his art's sake. This fact, it seems, was the tragedy of Thomas Wolfe the man, as it was with numerous artists before him. An inevitable artist, he was always forced to choose his work over those he loved before pursuing his goals. Having admittedly fallen in love with Mrs. Bernstein, he was faced with his most monumental decision up to this time, and perhaps in his entire life. In a letter to

Perkins in 1931, he said, "Then, without knowing how, when or why, I was desperately in love with the woman; then the thought of her began to possess and dominate every moment of my life."[45] One of his fellow instructors at New York University remembered that Wolfe once paced up and down the faculty room, shouting, "I'm in love! I'm in love!"[46]

Mrs. Bernstein provided, then, the one great love story contained in Wolfe's novels. Surely, Eugene Gant's infatuation with Laura James in Look Homeward, Angel is touchingly portrayed, but this fails in most respects to reach any kind of consummation, besides having no factual basis. The deck is stacked against young Gant all along, but in his inexperience he is unable to decipher this fact. Later on, Eugene also falls blindly in love with Ann in Of Time and the River, but his love is not reciprocated. Elsewhere, scattered throughout his fiction, are found brief, usually frustrated love affairs of Eugene and George Webber. From the moment of their meeting, however, the story of Esther and George is sustained through more than half of The Web and the Rock and about one-third of You Can't Go Home Again. Some most penetrating writing about a man's feeling toward a woman and what she means to him is embodied in the first book, in which the biggest portion of their affair is told. Certainly, The Web and the Rock would be a more complete and satisfying book had it begun with the lover's initial meeting and concluded after Esther's party, which does not appear until well into You Can't Go Home Again. Of course, the books were not edited and published until after Wolfe's death, but their story, as witnessed by Wolfe, does include almost every level of emotion from sublime joy to absolute pathos.

More important from a literary standpoint, though, is the fact that Wolfe came partially out of his egoistic shell as a result of the love affair. James Mandel, the student typist mentioned earlier, remembers

Wolfe as one of the most egocentric persons he ever knew, and this would account for the extreme subjectivism of Look Homeward, Angel and most of Of Time and the River. Until Mrs. Bernstein came into his life, it seems that in his mind the world revolved around himself. In The Web and the Rock, however, he was no longer totally concerned with himself alone, though to be sure the concern still overshadowed all else. He devoted many chapters in this book to Esther's remembrances of her childhood and her own feelings about life. In a foreword to this book, he said that it was the most objective one he had ever written, but it still clings largely to the inevitable subjectivity of Thomas Wolfe's own little world. Nonetheless, his very attachment to Mrs. Bernstein would seem to be a turning point in his outlook as reflected in the books. Later, You Can't Go Home Again would stray even further from the romantic "self" of the early books to involvements with other persons' lives. In this way he was able to achieve greater objectivity in his writing at his life's end, and The Hills Beyond in its incomplete form gives every indication that Wolfe had almost mastered the objective style of writing.

In yet another way Mrs. Bernstein provided Wolfe with subject matter--what he saw as the falsity of her sophisticated world, including his once-idealized theatre. Although Wolfe despised the crassness and corruption of this world, he usually failed to associate Mrs. Bernstein with it. His dissociation of her from her usual surroundings can be seen in a letter to his sister Mabel in 1929:

> They /theatre people/ are ignorant and dull and unhappy; they don't know what to do with it. Only a few of them--none that I know of--have either the intelligence of Mrs. B. who saw long ago that there's no joy in life unless we can find work we love and are fitted for. She therefore works like a Trojan in the theatre, and has made a fine reputation for herself, solely through her own abilities.[47]

But later when he would witness Mrs. Bernstein in her true environment, he could then realize that she was really inextricably a part of it. His

depiction of the party at her home in You Can't Go Home Again is a most effective lampoon, and an ever-present feeling that America, like his own characters, was lost pervades his last two novels.

The very indifference of Mr. Bernstein toward their love affair also rankled Wolfe. Mr. Jack (Bernstein) is therefore the object of a subtly vicious section of You Can't Go Home Again entitled "The World That Jack Built." Outwardly, of course, this refers to Esther Jack's rich Jewish husband, but the word "Jack" also means money in the colloquial sense. Wolfe obviously disliked the materialistic aspect of Esther's (Mrs. Bernstein's) life, and this entire section deals with the meaningless and carefree existence in such a world, built in Wolfe's eyes solely on the basis of money. George Webber especially finds detestable the serenity with which Mr. Jack views the Webber-Mrs. Jack affair. In real life, Mr. Bernstein reportedly also merely looked the other way while his wife and Wolfe carried on their association. In the book, Wolfe wrote:

> Yes, Mr. Frederick Jack was kind and temperate. He had found life pleasant, and had won from it the secret of wise living. And the secret of wise living was founded in a graceful compromise, a tolerant acceptance. . . .
>
> Therefore, he was not a man to rip the sheets in darkness or beat his knuckles raw against a wall. . . . love's bitter mystery had broken no bones for Mr. Jack, and, so far as he was concerned, it could not murder sleep the way an injudicious wiener schnitzel could, or that young Gentile fool, drunk again, probably, ringing the telephone at one A. M. to ask to speak to Esther.[48]

Mr. Jack possessed none of George Webber's romantic ideals,and George probably would have been much happier if Mr. Jack had "ripped some sheets," thus clearing the air in some concrete manner. After the party, Mr. Jack is shown leaving Webber and Esther alone:

> Mr. Jack was obviously ready for his bed. He kissed his wife lightly on the cheek, said good night casually to George, and went to his room. Young men could come, and young men could go, but Mr. Jack was going to get his sleep.[49]

In Wolfe's third search for his perfect guiding spirit, then, he came to see the flaws in Mrs. Bernstein's character, but only after a most intense and searching examination of her. Just as in Professor Baker's case, Wolfe was unable to accept her imperfections, and as Miss Nowell remarks, "The Heroic figure, stronger and wiser than himself, from whom he now sought guidance toward that destiny, was no longer she, but Perkins."[50]

Looking back at the relationship in 1950, Mrs. Bernstein (who died in 1953) had this to say:

> It was a supreme experience, the most wonderful thing in the world. The most important thing between us was our feeling for each other; it was a deep, passionate love, added to a clear, fine relationship. Personal things were always coming between us, his intense jealousy of me, one thing and another. Our real companionship was beyond anything anyone can imagine, often so gay and filled with laughter. We shared a sense of beauty in poetry and painting that enriched our lives, brought everything to twice its value. This is what remains to me of Tom.[51]

Mrs. Bernstein had had an indispensable role in transforming the frustrated and eccentric youth of 25 into a fairly stable man of 31. Finally, no statement could better show what Aline Bernstein meant to Thomas Wolfe than his longhand inscription in the copy of Look Homeward, Angel which he presented her. It stated:

> This book was written because of her, and is dedicated to her. At a time when my life seemed desolate, and when I had little faith in myself, I met her. She brought me friendship, material and spiritual relief, and love such as I had never had before. . . .[52]

NOTES--CHAPTER IV

[1]*Look Homeward, Angel*, p. v.

[2]Nowell, p. 98.

[3]Ibid., p. 100.

[4]Ibid.

[5]Ibid., p. 96.

[6]*Of Time and the River*, pp. 911-912.

[7]*The Web and the Rock*, pp. 313-314.

[8]Aline Bernstein, *The Journey Down* (New York, 1938), p. 15.

[9]Nowell, p. 96.

[10]See George Reeves, Jr., "A Note on the Life and Letters of Thomas Wolfe," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 57:217 (Spring, 1958): "There is one major lacuna /in *The Letters of Thomas Wolfe*/: the intimate letters to Aline Bernstein, which she herself intended to edit." Presumably, these letters remain in the possession of Mrs. Bernstein's heirs since no student of Wolfe has commented on them.

[11]*The Letters of Thomas Wolfe*, pp. 101-102.

[12]*Thomas Wolfe's Letters to His Mother*, pp. 123-124.

[13]*The Letters of Thomas Wolfe*, pp. 121-122.

[14]Nowell, p. 103.

[15]Ibid.

[16]Ibid., p. 105.

[17]*The Journey Down*, pp. 41-68.

[18]Ibid., p. 68.

[19]*The Letters of Thomas Wolfe*, p. 165.

[20]Ibid., p. 113.

[21]Ibid., p. 114.

[22]Nowell, p. 107.

[23]*Thomas Wolfe's Letters to His Mother*, p. 151.

[24]James Mandel, "Thomas Wolfe, A Reminiscence," *Thomas Wolfe at Washington Square* (New York, 1954), p. 101.

[25]Nowell, pp. 112-114.

[26]*The Web and the Rock*, p. 567.

[27]Nowell, p. 114.

[28]Ibid.

[29]Ibid., pp. 125-126.

[30]*Editor to Author: The Letters of Maxwell E. Perkins*, ed. John Hall Wheelock (New York, 1950), p. 61.

[31]Nowell, pp. 139-140.

[32]*The Letters of Thomas Wolfe*, p. 165.

[33]Nowell, pp. 163-164.

[34]*The Letters of Thomas Wolfe*, pp. 391-397.

[35]Nowell, p. 173.

[36]*The Letters of Thomas Wolfe*, pp. 251-252.

[37]Nowell, p. 283.

[38]*The Letters of Thomas Wolfe*, p. 432.

[39]Nowell, p. 284.

[40]Ibid., p. 279.

[41]*The Letters of Thomas Wolfe*, p. 684.

[42]Nowell, p. 166.

[43]*Thomas Wolfe's Letters to His Mother*, p. 199.

[44]*You Can't Go Home Again*, pp. 320-321.

[45]Nowell, p. 189.

[46]Ibid., p. 53.

[47]*The Letters of Thomas Wolfe*, p. 174.

[48]*You Can't Go Home Again*, p. 160.

[49]Ibid., p. 316.

[50]Nowell, p. 162.

[51]Ibid., p. 103.

[52]Ibid., p. 166.

CHAPTER V

Maxwell Perkins--The Final "Heroic Figure"

"The first time I heard of Thomas Wolfe I had a sense of foreboding," wrote Maxwell Perkins just before his own death in 1947, "I who loved the man say this. Every good thing that comes is accompanied by trouble."[1] His apprehension proved to be well grounded. The association of Perkins, long-time chief editor at Scribners, and Wolfe, the inevitable yet unborn writer whom Perkins "delivered" into the world, today is looked upon generally as a classic example of editor-author communion. Each without the other probably would not have been so well known to the general public, but together their names occupy a solid niche in the publishing world. In both its ups and downs, their chapter in literary history offers engrossing insights into the realm of publishing. Their relationship was a richly rewarding but agonizing and often bitter struggle of wills that produced countless obstacles to their friendship. In the end, the writer severed all publishing connections with his editor-friend because of the demands of Wolfe's own literary conscience. Still they remained staunch friends right up to Wolfe's death in 1938, and Perkins easily came closest to filling the requirements for Wolfe's self-manufactured ideal.

For several years, the eminent Scribners editor lived up to those many qualifications which Wolfe required in his superior beings. Perkins was the last of those images, though, and his toppling from the pinnacle marked a fundamental change in Wolfe's life and artistry alike, for they went hand in hand. Wolfe's disassociation from Perkins was an express

"spiritual and artistic" change which is revealed in his last books, which were edited by Edward C. Aswell and published by Harper and Brothers. Because of all the occurrences in his long affiliation with Perkins, however, Wolfe's writing was undoubtedly more influenced by him than by any other person. The comprehension of his works as a whole depends largely upon an understanding of this last segment of Wolfe's life. His separation from Perkins not only marked a change in publishers, but also signified a final, successful effort to shrug off the search for the "lost father" and to attain independence.

Actually, Wolfe seemed to become self-consciously aware of his images of strength and wisdom in his early relationship with Perkins. After Look Homeward, Angel had finally been published, an elated and grateful Wolfe wrote to his editor on December 24, 1929:

> Young men sometimes believe in the existence of heroic figures, stronger and wiser than themselves, to whom they can turn for an answer to all their vexation and grief. Later, they must discover that such answers have to come out of their own hearts; but the powerful desire to believe in such figures persists. You are for me such a figure: you are one of the rocks to which my life is anchored.[2]

The essence of this passage, in somewhat different form, later became famous in Wolfe's "The Story of a Novel,"[3] of course, but the item about finding the answers within his own heart points to Wolfe's later independent approach to his problems. While this same short work, "The Story of a Novel," was to pay Wolfe's finest public tributes to his editor, at the same time it inadvertently was to steer Wolfe from his natural course as a novelist.

As previously noted, Wolfe was on the verge of his break from Mrs. Bernstein at the time of the consequential letter from Perkins stating that Scribners wished to discuss his book with him at his earliest convenience. Wolfe was, in fact, preparing to return to America for his

first reconciliation with her.[4] For the wretched, recently beaten[5] Wolfe, who had nearly lost all hope of ever finding a publisher, this was amazingly good news. It is little wonder he looked upon Perkins as a godsend. Stating that it was possible Look Homeward, Angel could be worked into publishable form, Perkins also told Wolfe that "it is a very remarkable thing, and . . . no editor could read it without being excited by it and filled with admiration by many passages in it and sections of it."[6] Greatly excited, Wolfe replied intimately to this message, saying he realized the problem of the book's length and the fact that he was "not able to practically criticize it" himself. Further, he wrote, "I want the direct criticism and advice of an older and more critical person. I wonder if at Scribners I can find someone who is interested enough to talk over the whole huge Monster with me--part by part."[7] Perkins himself freely gave him that much-sought assistance.

Wolfe was rather puzzled by the mere fact that Scribners, of all publishers, was willing to publish Look Homeward, Angel, which he knew was bound to be somewhat controversial, and he remarked, "I had always thought vaguely /that Scribners/ was a solid and somewhat conservative house. But it may be that I am a conservative and at bottom very correct person."[8] Nothing of the sort was true about Wolfe, of course; it was primarily Perkins' own influence in his publishing house that caused the manuscript to be considered. As Harrison Smith has noted, "Perkins took Scribners out of Victorianism into the full stream of modern American literature."[9] Indeed, since Perkins had taken a position at Charles Scribner's Sons in 1911, he had been largely responsible for publishing such modern American writers as Hemingway and Fitzgerald. John Hall Wheelock, Perkins' colleague at Scribners, says in the introduction to Editor to Author: The Letters of Maxwell Perkins that Perkins was always

torn between the opposing traits of the "Puritan and the Cavalier, the shrewd Yankee and the generous and disarming artist"[10] that warred continuously within him. Most of all, though, he was daring, Wheelock recalls, and daring is what it took to attempt publication of Wolfe's "Monster."

Not only was the book a tremendously long one, but it also contained passages that even Wolfe himself squirmed over. For the sake of getting published, however, Wolfe was ready to acquiesce to almost anything at first, often creating humorous moments. Early in their discussion of the manuscript, Perkins mentioned the section later published as a short story entitled "An Angel on the Porch,"[11] which concerned W. O. Gant's selling of a stone angel to the madam of the town's house of prostitution. It was to be used as a tombstone for the grave of one of her lately deceased girls. Wolfe wrote Mrs. Roberts that when Perkins mentioned this part, he (Wolfe) burst out, "I know you can't print that! I'll take it out at once, Mr. Perkins." "Take it out,"Perkins said, "It's one of the greatest short stories I have ever read."[12] This story was then published in the August, 1929, issue of Scribner's Magazine. At other times Perkins had to be quick to tell the super-sensitive Wolfe about certain parts, "No, no--you must let that stay word for word--that scene's simply magnificent."[13] Wolfe went on to tell Mrs. Roberts:

> It became apparent at once that these people were willing to go far farther than I had dared hope--that, in fact, they were afraid I would injure the book by doing too much to it. . . . Then he /Perkins/ went over the book scene by scene--I found he was more familiar with the scenes and the names of the characters than I was--I had not looked at the thing in over six months. For the first time in my life, I was getting criticism I could really use. The scenes he wanted cut or changed were invariably the least essential and the least interesting; all the scenes that I had thought too coarse, vulgar, profane, or obscure for publication he forbade me to touch save for a word or two. . . . He said the book was new and original, and because of its form could have no formal and orthodox unity, but

> that what unity it did have came from the eyes of a strange wild people--the family--it wrote about, as seen through the eyes of a strange wild boy.[14]

Besides this encouragement, Perkins also advanced Wolfe some money, which provided still more relief for the impoverished Wolfe.

The remainder of the publishing history of Look Homeward, Angel is fairly well known. After considerable cutting, the book was published in 1929, becoming an almost instant success, that elusive goal that had thwarted Wolfe for years. Now he tasted it for the first time, reveled in it, and soon thereafter wrote the previously quoted adulatory letter to Perkins, telling him:

> You are now mixed with my book in such a way that I can never separate the two of you. I can no longer think clearly of the time I wrote it, but rather of the time when you first talked to me about it, and when you worked upon it. . . . you are chiefly Scribners to me: you have done what I had ceased to believe one person could do for another--you have created liberty and hope for me.[15]

In Perkins' editing of that first novel, however, one can find the seed of much future perplexity for Wolfe. It came in Perkins' first major step, the deletion of the opening episode of some 100 pages about W. O. Gant as a boy. Perkins said in his 1947 article in the Harvard Library Bulletin, "It seemed to me, and he agreed, that the whole tale should be unfolded through the memories and senses of the boy. We both thought that the story was compassed by that child's realization; that it was life and the world as he came to realize them."[16] Perkins admitted, though, that "for years it was on my conscience that I had persuaded Tom to cut out that first scene of the two little boys on the roadside with Gettysburg impending."[17] After this scene reappeared in the Of Time and the River manuscript, however, Perkins reported that he was eased considerably because "I came then to realize that nothing Wolfe wrote was ever lost, that omissions from one book were restored in a later one."[18]

At any rate, here was a problem for Wolfe--should he confine all his writing only to the observations of the boy Eugene Gant? Obviously, Perkins thought so, as would later be evident in their work on Of Time and the River. If Perkins had had his way, Wolfe's works conceivably might have been more "autobiographical" than they were.

Outraged cries of protest arose from his hometown of Asheville because of that very autobiographical quality. Perkins said that after he had worked on the book for some time, it suddenly became apparent to him that the characters were based on real people, but he had heedlessly gone ahead with its publication.[19] Perkins firmly believed that a good writer must necessarily write from his own experiences, and his favorite example of autobiographical fiction was War and Peace. Wolfe contended, and Perkins agreed, that

> . . . it is impossible for a man who has the stuff of creation in him to make a literal transcription of his own experiences. Everything in a work of art is changed and transfigured by the personality of the artist. And as far as my own first book is concerned, I can truthfully say that I do not believe that there is a single page of it that is true to fact. And from this circumstance, also, I learned another curious thing about writing. For although my book was not true to fact, it was true to the general experience of the town I came from and I hope, of course, to the general experience of all men living.[20]

Perkins described Wolfe's artistry as the creating of "something new and something meaningful through a transmutation of what he saw, heard, and realized."[21] Butregardless of the contentions of the two persons most intimately connected with the book, Wolfe became labeled as an autobiographical writer upon the appearance of Look Homeward, Angel, and this image grew hugely after Of Time and the River.

This second novel probably gave Wolfe the most anguish in all his tormented writing career. He received the Guggenheim Fellowship in 1930, went to Europe to begin writing the book, experienced many difficulties (mostly connected with Aline Bernstein), and ended his year with little

concrete accomplishment.[22] He had "three or four thousand words of material" when he came back home in the spring of 1931, but "nothing that could be published as a book."[23] When people began making inquiry about his next book, he became admittedly perturbed. Retiring to a sort of exile in Brooklyn to write incessantly, he said:

> . . . I realized finally that what I had to deal with was material which covered almost 150 years in history, demanded the action of more than 2,000 characters, and would in its final design include almost every racial type and social class of American life, . . . I realized that even the pages of a book of 200,000 words were wholly inadequate for the purpose.[24]

"The Story of a Novel" tells of Wolfe's "state of naked need and utter isolation which every artist has got to meet and conquer if he is to survive at all."[25] Knowing that he must "conquer now or be destroyed and that no one could help me with it now no matter how anyone might wish to help,"[26] Wolfe nonetheless declared:

> During this time, however, I was sustained by one piece of inestimable good fortune. I had for a friend a man who is, I believe, not only the greatest editor of his time, but a man of immense and patient wisdom and a gentle but unyielding fortitude. I think that if I was not destroyed at this time by a sense of hopelessness which these gigantic labors had awakened in me, it was largely because of the courage and patience of this man. I did not give in because he would not let me give in, and I think it is also true that at this time he had the advantage of being in the position of a skilled observer at a battle. I was myself engaged in that battle, covered by its dust and sweat and exhausted by its struggle, and I understood far less clearly than my friend the nature and the progress of the struggle in which I was engaged. At this time there was little that this man could do except observe, and in one way or another keep me at my task, and in many quiet and marvelous ways he succeeded in doing this.[27]

On Thanksgiving, 1933, Wolfe brought a huge stack of typescript to Perkins, saying that he could no longer go on without Perkins' aid. And help Perkins did. Whether all that he did was good is questionable, but it seems a probable fact that Wolfe might never have published Of Time and the River without Perkins. At a point when Wolfe admitted that he

felt he had arrived at the "final doom of an abysmal failure," when he felt that the book was too big for him and that he could not possibly finish it, Perkins called Wolfe to his home in December, 1933, and told him (with qualifications) that his book was basically finished. Greatly stunned by this disclosure, Wolfe was incredulous at first, but later admitted that Perkins was right,[28] though even later he became convinced that his editor had erred.

The immediate task at hand for the editor was bringing order out of the chaos which had completely subdued Wolfe. Perkins quickly cut the first scene in the book (Eugene's train trip to Harvard) from 30,000 to 10,000 words, with Wolfe's approval. Then solving the problem of the book's length, Perkins decided first of all that it described two complete and separate cycles, to which Wolfe also agreed. Originally, the manuscript included not only the ultimate span of Of Time and the River, but also nearly the final two-thirds of The Web and the Rock, which deals with the love affair of George Webber and Esther Jack (though Webber was still Eugene Gant in that early version). Anyway, Perkins logically chose the first part of the manuscript to work on first, and the pair began more than a year of long night sessions, which Perkins freely gave in addition to his regular full-time duties at Scribners.[29] Perkins planned to publish the last part of the manuscript as a separate book to be called The October Fair, but it was destined to be published several years later by another publishing house, Harper and Brothers. In the interim the character Eugene Gant became the George Webber of the later novels. Meanwhile Wolfe was convinced that this love story of Esther Jack and George Webber should have been a part of Of Time and the River. Working on the book throughout 1934 and until it was printed in March, 1935, Perkins likened his job to that of a "man who is trying to hang on to the fin of a plung-

ing whale."[30] Wolfe kept writing thousands of words, and it was Perkins' unenviable chore during those nights to shape these passages into publishable pieces. Wolfe wrote how his "spirit quivered at the bloody execution"[31] of long sections. But finally acquiring a kind of ruthlessness of his own, Wolfe sometimes "did more cutting than /Perkins/ was willing to allow."[32]

In an article on Perkins entitled "Midwife to Literature," Harrison Smith discusses some of Perkins' difficulties with Wolfe and his writings. He points out that one of Perkins' techniques was the use of informal conversation through which he "slowly brought the writer to see his own errors," a sort of "editing by osmosis."[33] To be sure, conversation flowed endlessly between Wolfe and his editor, and many of their problems were ironed out in just such a manner. Smith also maintains that Perkins was not an overly demanding editor, but generally adhered to the following rules of editing (in Smith's words):

> . . . When an author is sure of himself, the manuscript may go to the printer without a single comma shifted. Leave a writer's style alone, even if you do not approve of it. Make definite suggestions that are in the spirit of the author's intentions. Do not indulge your own suppressed creative instincts by changing the structure and meaning of other people's books. In a long, involved manuscript, try to bring order out of confusion. You must not be too meticulous.[34]

Of course, Wolfe was anything but sure of himself, and in nearly all of these editing criteria, Perkins had special problems with Of Time and the River and its author.

John Hall Wheelock has noted that Perkins' first ambition had been to be a writer, and in Wolfe he obviously saw the embodiment of most of his own creative urges.[35] He once told Wolfe, ". . . your work has been the foremost interest in my life,"[36] and that Wolfe was "the writer I have most greatly admired."[37] Coming from a man who had edited the works

of such writers as Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and other noteworthy American authors, these statements are high praise indeed. Perkins surely understood the creative soul of Wolfe better than almost any other person, and he had a difficult task to keep his own suppressed writing instincts under control. There is little doubt, however, that Wolfe was the sole writer of his books. Perkins once said, "Editors aren't much, and can't be. They can only help a writer realize himself, and they can ruin him if he's pliable, as Tom was not."[38] Without his deep insight into the mind of Wolfe, though, Perkins would never have been able to bring about the things that he did.

One definite suggestion that Perkins made, and upheld, in their work on Of Time and the River was concerned with what has been labeled as Wolfe's Marxist tendency during this period. Disillusioned by such things as the Depression and various social injustices he had witnessed, Wolfe wanted to write these newly formed economic ideas into his book, which largely dealt with the Eugene Gant, or Thomas Wolfe, of the 1920's. Perkins' denial of his wish became one of the many sore points between them, and in answer to Wolfe's famous 27-page letter of severance in 1937, Perkins in part replied:

> I did try to keep you from injecting radical, or Marxian, beliefs into Time and the River, because they were your beliefs in 1934 and 1935, and not those of Eugene at the time of the book. So it did not seem that they could rightly belong in the book. If they could have, then the times could not be rightly pictured, I thought. It must be so.[39]

The validity of Perkins' contention here can hardly be argued. As he said, even though Wolfe, in his awareness of social wrongs in the mid-1930's, wanted to be a Communist at that time, he was anything but that as expressed in his long letter of separation to Perkins which listed reasons for his breaking away. Wolfe nevertheless always felt that the

expression of those beliefs would have made a better book. It might be significant, though, to note that he never later included them in any great degree in his other books. Surely his literary reputation has been none the worse, and probably better, for Perkins' discretion.

But this incident was a rare one in the Wolfe-Perkins relationship while Of Time and the River was being prepared. The pair became dedicated friends despite (or possibly because of) their many arguments. Elizabeth Nowell describes Perkins as virtually a father to Wolfe,[40] enabling Perkins to become almost the true supreme individual after whom Wolfe had long sought. Their friendship was so strong that it persisted even after Wolfe's dissolution of his Scribner ties. Wolfe's devotion was proved in many ways, and perhaps climaxed by his naming Perkins as executor of his estate. The door of the Perkins home was always open to Wolfe, and he spent many hours there.[41] In Wolfe's need for companionship, guidance, and support, then, Perkins had become, for a while, the "image of strength and wisdom."

Of their work on the second book, Perkins claimed that "every cut, change, and interpolation was argued about and about."[42] He also said, "There never was any cutting that Tom did not agree to. He knew that cutting was necessary. His whole impulse was to utter what he felt and he had no time to revise and compress. . . . The principle that I was working on was that this book, too, /like Look Homeward, Angel/, got its unity and form through the senses of Eugene. . . ."[43] This principle, as Perkins noted, almost stripped the book of one of Wolfe's greatest episodes, the death of W. O. Gant.

This portion, of course, presents the reminiscent mind of Gant on his deathbed. Entering here was Wolfe's old problem of writing even more when asked either to cut or quit. One night during their work on the

book, Wolfe presented Perkins with about five thousand additional words about Helen Gant in Asheville as her father lay near death. "Tom, this is all outside the story, and you know it," Perkins said, "Eugene was not there, he was in Cambridge; all of this was outside his perception and knowledge at the time."[44] Though agreeing with Perkins, Wolfe brought another five thousand words delving into the mind of the dying Gant. "And then I realized I was wrong, even if right in theory. What he was doing was too good to let any rule of form impede him,"[45] said Perkins, who obviously was not a ruthless ogre in the cutting and shaping of the book, as described by some critics. One unknown person, alleging that Wolfe had been the helpless victim of his editors who had done both Wolfe and his book serious injury, received a blunt reply from Perkins, who stated that almost nothing of what Wolfe wrote had been destroyed, that in one way or another most of it had been published. He also claimed that "Tom demanded help. He had to have it."[46]

Disregarding Perkins' claim, some persons persist in finding indications in "The Story of a Novel" that Wolfe was at the mercy of his editor. This presumption must be considered invalid on the basis of this unusual literary document which at all times freely admits the general wisdom of Perkins in his decisions. At the same time, though, one cannot be entirely sure that Wolfe was always wrong in their debates. One should remember that "The Story of a Novel" was written during a period of great exultation on Wolfe's part, and in later periods of dejection he would just as firmly denounce Perkins for such things as the ending of the book and the leaving out of his Marxist philosophy. Perkins' infinite strength was displayed always, however, in the tedious and demanding production of the book. Both men admit in their own ways that possibly Wolfe could never have completed the novel without the help of Perkins. Moreover,

Wolfe doubtlessly would never have allowed Perkins as free a rein had he not been Wolfe's "perfect person" at the time.

Finished with the huge work at long last, Wolfe wrote a flowery, three-page dedication to Perkins, which was later expanded into "The Story of a Novel." John Hall Wheelock persuaded Wolfe to condense the first attempt to the following brief statement:

To Maxwell Evarts Perkins

> A great editor and a brave and honest man, who stuck to the writer of this book through times of bitter hopelessness and doubt and would not let him give in to his own despair, a work to be known as Of Time and the River is dedicated with the hope that all of it may be in some way worthy of the loyal devotion and the patient care which a dauntless and unshaken friend has given to each part of it, and without which none of it could have been written.[47]

Coupled with "The Story of a Novel," which appeared shortly thereafter, this dedication put the critics on the scent leading to their claim that Wolfe's genius "was not enough," that the editor was actually a greater creator than the author in this instance. The brunt of the charge is that Wolfe had little sense of form and organization in his own mind. Perkins believed that the dedication was the thing that threw Wolfe "off his stride and broke the magnificent scheme."[48] This scheme, which Perkins so heartily approved, was the telling of Wolfe's own life "through the transmutation of his amazing imagination." The distortion of Eugene Gant of the first two novels into George Webber of the latter two was called a "horrible mistake"[49] by Perkins.

Because of the ruthless nature of some criticisms about his autobiographical fiction and his inability to see anything objectively, Wolfe told Perkins that he wanted to write a completely objective, unautobiographical book, showing how different everything is from what a person expects it to be.[50] For the theme, Wolfe chose some lines from War and

Peace (a Perkins favorite), "Prince Andrei looked at the stars and sighed; everything was so different from what he thought it was going to be."[51] Perkins decided it would be good for Wolfe to attempt this work, 100,000 words or so, within a year, and he said, "It was this that turned him to George Webber, but once he began on that he really and irristible resumed the one story he was destined to write, which was that of himself, or Eugene Gant."[52] Diverted from his initial purpose, and encouraged by his editor, Wolfe then wrote most of the first part of The Web and the Rock, which largely resembles Look Homeward, Angel without the Gant family. Finally, of course, Wolfe tied this section with what was to have been the last part of Of Time and the River. Together these formed The Web and the Rock, probably Wolfe's least satisfactory novel. Perkins wrote, "If Tom had held to his scheme and completed the whole story of his life as transmuted into fiction through his imagination, I think the accusation that he had no sense of form could not have stood."[53] His obvious point here is that just as life has no real form, then Wolfe's total work would have had a natural formlessness about it that actually presented a lifelike picture.

At any rate, Wolfe soon realized the unsuitable nature of his projected work, and the first notion of a split from Scribners and Perkins must already have occurred to him. People began saying that Wolfe could not write without Perkins. "He had to prove to himself and to the world that this was not so," wrote Perkins, "And this was the fundamental reason that he turned to another publisher."[54] Thus, Wolfe's pride forced him to turn away from his close friend and editor. As Elizabeth Nowell comments, ". . . the irony of it was that Wolfe had started the whole thing himself, out of sheer goodhearted gratitude to Perkins."[55]

Wolfe's turning away from Scribners, however, was a long, slowly evolving process. Its origins must have occurred during the editing of the second book. In a letter to Perkins from Europe after receiving reviews of Of Time and the River, Wolfe said that his full intention in the book was not realized, that another six months would have made the book whole and perfect, leaving no room for criticism of its episodic nature. Then Wolfe wrote:

> Max, Max, I cannot go on, but I am sick at heart--we should have waited six months longer--the book, like Caesar, was from its mother's womb untimely ripped--like King Richard, brought into the world "scarce half made up." . . . I fear we have played directly into /my enemies'/ hands by our carelessness and by our frenzied haste--our failure to complete just when completion was in our grasp.[56]

Wolfe also harbored a grudge against Perkins for having kept the Marxist views out of the novel. In the letter of separation, he said, "Had I given full expression to these convictions in Of Time and the River I believe it would have been a better book."[57] What Wolfe was really getting at here was Perkins' conservative political and economic beliefs which Wolfe believed had kept Perkins from approving his ideas.

There were numerous other reasons for Wolfe's break. One involved his many legal difficulties, which he felt Scribners had handled quite poorly, making him have to deplete his savings considerably. Also, in his writing scheme--the telling of his life story--he inevitably came to the point of writing about Scribners itself, and Perkins viewed this matter with much regret. He was therefore slow in offering Wolfe a contract for his next book because he feared that Scribners might not be able to publish it due to its subject matter. Further, their arguments over economics and politics had gone on endlessly since 1934, and Wolfe's romantic nature rebelled against Perkins' innate conservatism. Of course, this last reason was the basic one included in George Webber's long letter

to his editor Foxhall Edwards which concludes You Can't Go Home Again. Finally, however, Miss Nowell accurately notes that like Wolfe's other superior beings, Perkins simply had failed to live up always to Wolfe's image of perfection.[58]

After all Perkins had done for Wolfe, it was a great shock in the literary world when Wolfe left Scribners. Perkins must have been slightly incredulous, then, when he received Wolfe's lengthy letter in 1937 revealing his decision to find another publisher, though a long string of events before this should have warned him of the possibility. While admitting the bountiful help and invaluable friendship Perkins had given him, Wolfe wrote:

> . . . The whole natural impulse of creation--and with me, creation is a natural impulse, it has got to flow, it has got to realize itself through the process of torrential production--is checked and hampered at every place. In spite of this, I have finally and at last, during these past two months, broken through into the greatest imaginative conquest of my life--the only complete and whole one I have ever had. And now I dare not bring it to you, I dare not show it to you, for fear that this thing which I cannot trifle with, which may come to a man but once in his whole life, may be killed at its inception by cold caution, by indifference, by the growing apprehensiveness and dogmatism of your own conservatism.[59]

While Wolfe does not reveal what this conquest actually was, it is likely that it had something to do with his "you can't go home again" theory, that a person's home is in the unknowable future. If so, then his reliance upon the "images of strength and wisdom" had also come to an end, which it literally did with his departure from Scribners. After Perkins, no other person attained the peculiar position of esteem in Wolfe's life that his father, Professor Baker, Mrs. Bernstein, and Perkins had. Edward C. Aswell, his new editor at Harper and Brothers, came closest, but he was the same age as Wolfe. Both he and Wolfe seemed to regard their friendship as a "brotherly" one.

The key to Wolfe's artistry seems to rest with his breaking away from Perkins. His actual letter of separation, with several modifications, concludes You Can't Go Home Again. In an interpolation before this last section entitled "A Wind Is Rising and the Rivers Flow," it is noted that that final summer's experiences (in Germany) had had

> . . . a profound effect upon George Webber. He had come face to face with something old and genuinely evil in the spirit of man which he had never known before, and it shook his inner world to its foundations. Not that it produced a sudden revolution in his way of thinking. For years his conception of the world and of his own place in it had been gradually changing, and the German adventure merely brought this process to its climax. . . .
>
> But this spirit was not confined to Germany. It belonged to no one race. It was a terrible part of the universal heritage of man.[60]

Webber wrestled with the earth-shaking problem he had discovered, and Wolfe wrote that then the idea that "you can't go home again" fell fully upon Webber. After discussing and arguing the problem with his editor, Foxhall Edwards (Perkins), Webber finally realized the time had come to leave Edwards, but "George knew that whatever happened, Fox would always remain his friend" and would understand.[61] This letter which Webber then composed to Edwards deals basically with the two friends' different economic and philosophic outlooks on life as the compelling reasons for his departure. The psychological reason for Wolfe's real-life decision, though, seems to have been that he merely had to prove conclusively that he could write without Perkins alongside him.

The important point of concern here regarding Webber's letter to Edwards in the novel, however, is the evident maturing of Webber's (Wolfe's) philosophy of life. It must be granted that this same viewpoint surely applied to Wolfe in a very large measure. For the first time in his life, Webber (and Wolfe) had made the decision to become

entirely independent. This, of course, destroyed the long-standing impulse to find the "lost father" for both personalities. Webber, Wolfe wrote, had discovered that a man could not go "back to the father /he has/ lost and been looking for, back home to someone who can help /him/, save /him/, ease the burden for /him/."[62] The letter is somewhat of a summarization of Webber's life story, and included is the section telling of the importance of the father to him. Implying that as an individual he was lost because of a lack of a father, Webber tells Edwards:

> . . . Perhaps that is one reason, Fox, why for so long I needed you so desperately. For I was lost, and was looking for someone older and wiser to show me the way, and I found you, and you took the place of my father who had died. In our nine years together you did help me find the way, though you could hardly have been aware just how you did it, and the road now leads off in a direction contrary to your intent. For the fact is that I no longer feel lost. . . .[63]

While this appears in the novel, it seems to state quite well Wolfe's own feelings at the time of his separation from Perkins, by summing up his newly discovered self-sufficience. The letter concludes with George Webber's highly optimistic creed. Holding that Edwards does not believe in the ability of man to improve himself, Webber says that no matter what happens man must try to improve his lot.

But right at this point when Webber no longer feels lost and is independent, he tells of the premonition that his earthly life is about to end. His letter ends thus:

> Something has spoken to me in the night, burning the tapers of the waning years; something has spoken in the night, and told me I shall die, I know not where. Saying:
>
> "To lose the earth you know, for greater knowing; to lose the life you have, for greater life; to leave the friends you loved, for greater loving; to find a land more kind than home, more large than earth--
>
> "--Whereon the pillars of this earth are founded, toward which the conscience of the world is tending--a wind is rising, and the rivers flow."[64]

At last, from all his endless searching, Webber has reached a definite belief about his world. In real life, too, Wolfe revealed his hopeful philosophy to Perkins. It seems that just when he was prepared to write about life as he wished, he suddenly lost his own life.

Lying near death in Seattle in 1938, Wolfe did his last writing--a letter to Perkins which also hinted at Wolfe's impending death. Besides telling Perkins of his lasting gratitude for the help and friendship, it said:

> I'm sneaking this against orders--but "I've got a hunch"--and I wanted to write these words to you.
>
> I've made a long voyage and been to a strange country, and I've seen the dark man very close; and I don't think I was too much afraid of him, but so much of mortality still clings to me--I wanted most desperately to live and still do . . . and there was the impossible anguish and regret of all the work I had not done, of all the work I had to do--and I know now I'm just a grain of dust, and I feel as if a great window has been opened on life I did not know about before--and if I come through this, I hope to God I am a better man, and in some strange way I can't explain I know I am a deeper and a wiser one. . . . if I get on my feet, I'll come back.[65]

Surely it is literature's loss that Wolfe did not recover, for he might have written about death as few other writers had before him.

At any rate, Wolfe remained truly perturbed about his having to leave Scribners and, more importantly, Perkins. In a letter dated November 17, 1937, he told Perkins:

> Like you, I am puzzled and bewildered about what has happened, but in conclusion can offer this: that maybe for me the editor and the friend got too close together and perhaps I got the two relations mixed. I don't know how it was with you, but maybe something like this happened to you, too. I don't know. If this is true, it is a fault in both of us. . . .[66]

Wolfe might just as well have said that he got his "image of strength and wisdom" and his career too inextricably mixed, and it was sheer necessity on his part that he change publishers.

NOTES--CHAPTER V

[1]Perkins, p. 270.

[2]*The Letters of Thomas Wolfe*, p. 213.

[3]"The Story of a Novel," pp. 71-79.

[4]Nowell, pp. 125-129.

[5]See Chapter IV, p. 69. Wolfe had been badly beaten in a drunken brawl at a German fair.

[6]*Editor to Author*, p. 61.

[7]*The Letters of Thomas Wolfe*, p. 159.

[8]Ibid.

[9]Harrison Smith, "Midwife to Literature," *Saturday Review*, 30:15 (July 12, 1947).

[10]Wheelock, "Introduction" to *Editor to Author*, p. 6.

[11]*Look Homeward, Angel*, pp. 262-269.

[12]*The Letters of Thomas Wolfe*, p. 168.

[13]Ibid., p. 169.

[14]Ibid.

[15]Ibid., p. 213.

[16]Perkins, p. 271.

[17]Ibid.

[18]Ibid.

[19]Ibid., p. 272.

[20]"The Story of a Novel," p. 61.

[21]Perkins, p. 275.

[22]Nowell, pp.158-192.

[23]"The Story of a Novel," p. 69.

[24]Ibid., pp. 70-71.

[25]Ibid., p. 71.

[26]Ibid.

[27]Ibid., pp. 71-72.

[28]Ibid., pp. 73-74.

[29]Nowell, p. 233.

[30]"The Story of a Novel," p. 72.

[31]Ibid., p. 76.

[32]Ibid.

[33]Harrison Smith, p. 16.

[34]Ibid.

[35]Wheelock, p. 2.

[36]_Editor to Author_, p. 116.

[37]Ibid., p. 99.

[38]Ibid., pp. 229-230.

[39]Ibid., p. 122.

[40]Nowell, p. 292.

[41]Ibid.

[42]Perkins, p. 272.

[43]Ibid.

[44]Ibid., p. 273.

[45]Ibid.

[46]_Editor to Author_, p. 228.

[47]_Of Time and the River_, dedicatory page.

[48]Perkins, p. 273.

[49]Ibid.

[50]Ibid., p. 274.

[51]Ibid.

[52]Ibid.

[53]Ibid., p. 275.

[54]Ibid., p. 273.

[55]Nowell, p. 247.

[56]The Letters of Thomas Wolfe, pp. 446-447.

[57]Ibid., p. 581.

[58]Nowell, pp. 312-316.

[59]The Letters of Thomas Wolfe, p. 580.

[60]You Can't Go Home Again, p. 705.

[61]Ibid., p. 706.

[62]Ibid.

[63]Ibid., p. 716.

[64]Ibid., p. 743.

[65]The Letters of Thomas Wolfe, p. 777.

[66]Ibid., p. 676.

CHAPTER VI

Conclusion

With Perkins, then, Wolfe's search for the all-knowing, guiding spirit had come full circle. When Wolfe became aware that even Perkins, his former nonpareil adviser, could not provide unerring guidance for his literary career, he obviously believed that the time had come for him to strike out on his own. Wolfe had finally realized his independence, it would seem, and more importantly he put it into effect. He now must have felt that he was able to write as he wished, relatively free from any significant outward influence.

Nothwithstanding his leaving Perkins, however, The Web and the Rock and You Can't Go Home Again show, both directly and indirectly, the immense influence which his association with Perkins had upon Wolfe's writing practices. This fact exists even though these two books were edited by Edward C. Aswell and posthumously published by Harper and Brothers. In fact, Perkins' probable influence on these two books ranges all the way from their sometimes confusing styles to actual subject matter.

In the preface to The Web and the Rock, Wolfe called it the "most objective"[1] book he had ever written, which it was in most respects. Perkins, of course, had encouraged Wolfe to try temporarily a more objective style of writing, and the first part of this book is a sample of the result. The difficulty which most readers find with the book, in fact, is that it has two distinctly different parts, which were basically written separately. This fact accounts largely for the dual objective-

subjective nature of the novel. The last half, basically the love story of Esther Jack and George Webber, had originally been intended as part of Of Time and the River, of course, while the first part marks Wolfe's shift in style from the "lyrical and identifiable personal autobiography" of his earlier works to the "free creation" that was to be, according to Wolfe, simultaneously the most objective and most autobiographical of all his writing.

This latter style, showing ever more detachment, thus dominates the early part of The Web and the Rock and all of You Can't Go Home Again. Much of this work was done after his break with Perkins, but the beginning must be placed during the latter part of his career with Scribners. In fact, it seems most likely that Wolfe made those changes actually because of his split with Perkins and Scribners. Early in his association with Aswell, he wrote him telling of his new method of writing. (Note the extremely formal tone of his early relationship with Aswell):

> . . . Here is what the author has in mind:
>
> He intends to use his own experience absolutely--to pour it in, to squeeze it, to get everything out of it that it is worth. He intends for this to be the most objective book that he has ever written, and he also intends, by the same token, for it to be the most autobiographical. . . . Out of his experiences he has derived some new characters who are now compacted not much from specific recollection as from the whole amalgram and consonance of seeing, feeling, thinking, living, and knowing many people. . . .
>
> As the author has told his editor, this book marks not only a turning away from the books he has written in the past, but a genuine spiritual and artistic change. In other words, he feels that he is done with lyrical and identifiable personal autobiography; he is also seeking, and hopes now to obtain, through free creation, a release of his inventive power which the more shackling limitations of identifiable autobiography do not permit.[2]

Aswell comments that "it is important to remember this in any evaluation of [Wolfe], because it shows that before he died he had reached a new

stage of growth."[3] It is no accident, then, that Wolfe's last two novels differ so greatly from the first pair; moreover, his entire association (including the quarrel) with Perkins was probably the major cause.

Examples of genuine objectivity, generally lacking in the early novels, in The Web and the Rock have been uncovered by many critics, including Aswell, who seems a staunch but fair backer of Wolfe. Aswell has noted that Wolfe's character of Nebraska Crane, the boyhood companion of George Webber in this book, is such a creation.[4] Nebraska Crane goes on to become a big-league baseball star and appears as such in You Can't Go Home Again. None of Wolfe's family remembers any boyhood acquaintance of Wolfe who could have sat for this portrait. Since Wolfe's youth was primarily a lonely one, Aswell contends that Nebraska was created from Wolfe's boyhood image of the perfect companion.[5]

Still another example of Wolfe's newly stimulated ability at objectivity is "The Child by Tiger,"[6] a gripping short story included in that first part of The Web and the Rock. Probably the best example of Wolfe's developing artistry, it is the story of Dick Prosser, the benign and quiet Negro who befriended George Webber and his friends. Later he went on a wild shooting rampage in which he killed several persons. This story is an excellent study of Wolfe's free creation taken from a real-life episode, since a similar event had occurred in Asheville before Wolfe's birth.[7] Wolfe's imagination then recreated his own fascinating story, and he included it in George Webber's boyhood.

Perhaps the best evidence of Wolfe's changing style, however, is You Can't Go Home Again. In this novel, Randy Shepperton provides an objective character who cannot be compared truly with any real-life person, though some people have said that Ralph Wheaton, Mabel Wolfe Wheaton's

husband, provided his actual counterpart. Anyway, Shepperton is the only hometown person in You Can't Go Home Again who stands faithfully beside George Webber after Webber's first novel is published. Edward Aswell remarks that here again Wolfe conjured up an imaginary friend of his own age who could serve as his confidant and supporter, a person who did not then exist in Wolfe's own life as much as he desired.[8]

In addition, this last book includes purely imagined scenes such as "The Hollow Men"[9] chapter in which Foxhall Edwards (Maxwell Perkins) reads a newspaper account of a suicide case. From this initial setting, Wolfe developed a penetrating and absorbing story about both the suicide and its surrounding events, which is an indictment against a man's empty life. Because of such material, though, Louis Rubin, Jr., called the book "simply a collection of scenes interspersed with sermons, and followed by a long letter to Foxhall Edwards . . . in which all the pretenses of fiction are discarded and the first person singular is utilized."[10] In a footnote, though, Rubin admits that this is not an entirely fair appraisal since Wolfe died without any chance to revise or rewrite his last two complete works. He also says that some day the necessity might arise to re-edit the final two novels into a "single, much more tightly pruned volume,"[11] one that might more closely approximate Wolfe's plans for the material.

According to Aswell, Wolfe had in fact become a "tireless reviser and rewriter"[12] in his last years, thereby lending much support for the belief that had Wolfe been able to polish those last two books, they doubtlessly would have been much different. Wolfe's new-found capacity for revision and rewriting must simply be attributed to Perkins as a result of their years of close communion in the editing of the first two

novels. At any rate, Aswell reveals that almost every scene included in the posthumously published novels had at least two different versions, and some had four or five. "It was fascinating to see how the thing had changed and grown under /Wolfe's/ hand."[13] Aswell says. In view of other statements by Aswell, his use of "grown" undoubtedly means "increased in artistry." If Wolfe had arrived at a new plateau in his writing as thereby indicated, then it is indeed unfortunate, from a critical standpoint, that he is to be forever judged upon the merits of his unpolished last two books. This is not to say that they do not have merits; rather that they could surely have been much more universally successful after their author had had his own opportunity to improve upon their form and style.

His last complete book, however, must provide the best example of the new style of writing that Wolfe had hit upon, and it is a matter of taste whether Look Homeward, Angel or You Can't Go Home Again is the better work. For sheer passion and intensity, the first cannot be touched by the latter, for Look Homeward, Angel epitomizes that "naked autobiographical" nature of Wolfe's early writings. The general critical opinion agrees with this judgment. Richard Walser, in his recently written Thomas Wolfe: An Introduction and Interpretation, notes that the "lessening of self-concentration" in You Can't Go Home Again "was accompanied by a diminishing of lyric exuberance in style."[14] He points out that You Can't Go Home Again was finally the book which fulfilled Wolfe's "promise of objectivity." In Thomas Wolfe: The Weather of His Youth, Louis Rubin, Jr., says that after Look Homeward, Angel, Wolfe's books exhibited a "sharp decline in the quality of the recall. With a few exceptions the individual scenes are not as vivid, the characters not nearly as believable."[15] Rubin therefore thinks that Wolfe's first book was his most

successful. Likewise, Herbert J. Muller, in Thomas Wolfe, believes that Look Homeward, Angel is the best novel. He adds, "Even as we appreciate his growth to maturity we must add that it did not mean a steady enrichment of his art."[16] Contrarily, in Hungry Gulliver, Pamela Johnson claims that Of Time and the River is the best work, while Look Homeward, Angel is the most complete.[17] As can be seen, You Can't Go Home Again is seldom seen as Wolfe's greatest book, and usually the absorbing intensity of Look Homeward, Angel is the deciding factor in its favor.

But aside from the feeling that is noticeably absent when it is compared with Look Homeward, Angel, You Can't Go Home Again, in the total picture, still seems to be a generally superior work. This claim is made because of Wolfe's more mature style and more penetrating mind. More basically, Wolfe really had a "thing to say" in his last novel, whereas the first one was more or less an intriguing picture of a Southern family and community, with the development of the artist as a young man providing the focal point. On the other hand, the theme that "you can't go home again" has significance for almost every person. Besides this, the book and its theme are especially important in the maturing process of that same, though vastly different, young artist of Look Homeward, Angel. It would seem that still another criterion for judging a literary work is that book's endurability; that is, how successful is the book on second or subsequent readings? In this respect, on multiple readings Look Homeward, Angel clearly loses much of its initial impact upon the reader, while You Can't Go Home Again, which has little passion to lose in the first place, endures because of its probing search into the real meaning of life.

Through his hero George Webber's experiences (which are still essentially the same as Wolfe's), Wolfe delved into life's meaning, and

came up with the idea that it is fruitless for a person to try to return to a former station in life. From this idea, though, arises George Webber's optimism about man's need to look to the future and to try always to improve life around him. First of all, George Webber realizes the fact that his hometown bears little resemblance to the one he remembered from his youth. The townspeople are all bitter over George's recently published novel, which concerned that town of his youth, and George's only alternative is never to return to his hometown again--it is now buried in the past. That nothing is ever quite the same as before is a sharply poignant revelation to Webber, and one that nearly everyone experiences when he tries to revive the past as it had been. This is a part of the persistent time theme of Wolfe's.

Next Webber finds the same sad truth in his love affair with Esther Jack. Estranged by a violent quarrel near the end of The Web and the Rock, Esther and George resume their relationship in the beginning of You Can't Go Home Again, but only after George had taken his "Grand Tour of Renunciation" to Europe. Developing the futility of their love affair, Wolfe led Webber to the conclusion that "love is not enough" and that he cannot return to the previous rapture of their life together. Webber also finds that the elusive fame he had so rapidly sought means nothing when he finally attains it. Wolfe wrote of the social "lion-hunters" who descended upon Webber--the new literary celebrity--and he revealed the general emptiness which accompanied these situations. His point is brought to a brilliant conclusion with Webber's episodic adventure with the celebrated author Lloyd McHarg (for whom Sinclair Lewis was the prototype), whose prestige has nevertheless left him with little more than an empty life.[18] Finally, Wolfe's theme takes on universal scope when George Webber slowly becomes aware of the Nazi menace in his beloved

Germany. Even there in that land where he had known such great popularity, he is unable to keep that which had previously been his, this time because of political corruption. Of course, all of Webber's realizations culminated in his long letter to Foxhall Edwards which concludes the book.

Thus, even in its unpolished form, You Can't Go Home Again reveals the lasting effects which Wolfe's images of strength and wisdom, especially Perkins in this instance, had upon his life and art. He had spent over fifteen years of his life relying generally upon his appointed leaders, and he never fully developed his writing talents while under their domination. This is not to say that he did so even in his last complete book, but he did seem to realize his true creative self more fully in this book than in any other. Each superior person of his, however, had definite indispensable qualities to offer Wolfe in his striving toward perfection in his art, and Wolfe realized this fact. They had freely given their talents in the making of Thomas Wolfe the artist, and in the meantime they also had aided him in becoming a more mature individual.

In summation, one can see the gradual shaping of Wolfe's life and writing career through his associations with his preeminent persons. W. O. Wolfe provided his son with not only an innate spirit, but also so much thematic material that it carried, in varying degrees, throughout all four of his novels. Professor Baker, in spite of his position as a playwriting teacher, indirectly turned Wolfe toward the genre of the novel. Aline Bernstein gave him both the spiritual and financial support that enabled him to write his first novel. Finally, Maxwell Perkins was responsible for publishing that first novel, and in addition he buoyed up Wolfe's depleted spirit so that he could complete, revise, and then publish the overwhelming (for Wolfe) Of Time and the River. This help

was subsequently the cause of his turning to his new methods of writing. If he had not continued his search for artistic form to the end, his art probably would have been quite different.

Before condemning Wolfe for turning away from his devoted friends, however, one should realize the problem created by Wolfe's dependence upon these "superior beings." So long as Wolfe settled for the image of strength and wisdom, he was prevented from seeing that the reality of strength and wisdom lay in his own artistic independence. All these people had helped him to develop his writing talents, but mostly because of his own particular nature he allowed them to hinder him also--though the hindering was probably more of his making than theirs. Until his late attempt at independence, he continually confused the image with the real person. In Look Homeward, Angel, this problem also faces Eugene Gant:

> In the cruel volcano of the boy's mind, the little brier moths of his idolatry wavered in to their strange marriage and were consumed. One by one the merciless years reaped down his gods and captains. What had lived up to hope? What had withstood the scourge of growth and memory? Why had the gold become so dim? All his life, it seemed, his blazing loyalties began with men and ended with images; the life he leaned on melted below his weight, and looking down, he saw he clasped a statue. . . ."[19]

Since the artist or writer is usually preoccupied with reality, or at least with its representation, Wolfe was troubled by these "images of strength and wisdom" in his writing. As a young artist, Wolfe seemed concerned too often with the "image." After he had learned to see reality more clearly, he was able to understand himself and life much better. You Can't Go Home Again, for all its problems of form, crystallizes those realizations and Wolfe's subsequent beliefs.

NOTES--CHAPTER VI

[1]*The Web and the Rock*, p. xxi.

[2]Aswell, pp. xi-xii.

[3]Ibid., p. xii.

[4]Ibid., p. x.

[5]Ibid., p. xi.

[6]*The Web and the Rock*, pp. 132-156.

[7]Watkins, p. 104.

[8]Aswell, p. xi.

[9]*You Can't Go Home Again*, pp. 460-482.

[10]Rubin, p. 53.

[11]Ibid., pp. 170-171.

[12]Aswell, p. viii.

[13]Ibid., p. ix.

[14]Walser, p. 106.

[15]Rubin, p. 53.

[16]Herbert J. Muller, *Thomas Wolfe* (Norfolk, Conn., 1947), pp. 20-21.

[17]Pamela H. Johnson, *Hungry Gulliver* (New York, 1948), p. 120.

[18]See Chapter I, footnote 11.

[19]*Look Homeward, Angel*, p. 216.

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VITA

Willis Earl Weeks

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Arts

Thesis: THOMAS WOLFE'S "IMAGES OF STRENGTH AND WISDOM": PERSONAL INFLUENCES ON HIS LITERARY PRACTICES

Major Field: English

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born in Putnam, Oklahoma, September 14, 1937, the son of Othello E. and Almeta Weeks.

Education: Attended grade school in Putnam and Mutual, Oklahoma; graduated from Gate High School, Gate, Oklahoma, in 1955; received the Bachelor of Arts degree from Oklahoma City University in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, with a major in Journalism, in June, 1959; completed requirements for the Master of Arts degree in August, 1962.

Professional Experience: Worked as a reporter for the Miami, Oklahoma, News-Record from September, 1959, to February, 1960, and for the Stillwater, Oklahoma, News-Press from February, 1960, to May, 1960; since September, 1960, has taught as a graduate assistant in the Department of English and Foreign Languages, Oklahoma State University.